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Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to

the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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June 2024

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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This action research project seeks to resolve the problem of marketplace discipleship superseding relational discipleship among the millennials connected to New Life Community, a house church ministry in Hilliard, Ohio. For ministry gatherings at New Life Community, such as worship services, there was a noticeable decline in overall participation from the largest demographic of the ministry, the millennial generation. However, when there were ministry gatherings specific to marketplace initiatives that focused on career and entrepreneurship, most, if not all, of the millennials participated. This selective participation by millennials resulted from ministry gatherings that were too infrequent and needed more opportunities to establish relationships, including intergenerational ones. The purpose of this action research study is to increase the incidence of gatherings and establish intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship among millennials. Themes were extrapolated from contemporary literature, which provided insight into how to disciple millennials who will play a significant and influential role in the body of Christ and the marketplace. An eight-week intervention was designed, which included more frequent ministry gatherings, fellowship opportunities, intergenerational interaction, and an emphasis on teaching biblical discipleship. Nine millennials that met specific criteria participated in the project. Qualitative data was obtained through questionnaires and interviews, and quantitative data was obtained through surveys. The results of this project indicated success in transitioning millennials from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship, which also showed an improvement in their spiritual formation, discipline, and growth.

Keywords: millennials, marketplace, discipleship, relational discipleship, Christian community, small group, spiritual growth

Acknowledgments

First, I acknowledge my loving wife and best friend, Regina, who has been my biggest cheerleader. Your support, encouragement, and educational achievements motivated me when I lost motivation. I am thankful to God for you every day. When He blessed me with you, I truly obtained a double portion of favor. This accomplishment is ours together in Christ. I love you very much, and I look forward to our partnership for life as we continue to minister together and wherever God calls us.

I want to acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Danny Allen, whose support and wise counsel have been instrumental in this research journey. I am thankful for your support and encouragement in completing this thesis. Your prayers for me, with me, along with your advice, have been immeasurable. I also want to acknowledge the significant contribution of Dr. David Barnett as the faculty reader. I want to recognize the faculty and administration of Liberty University and The Rawlings School of Divinity for this incredible opportunity.

Finally, I thank the New Life Community family for your support as I completed this endeavor. Even through moments of uncertainty and unknowingness, you remained faithful and committed, and for this, I am deeply appreciative. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I love you all, and it is my prayer that God continues to bless each and every one of you, your families, and all of your endeavors.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to God, my Heavenly Father, Creator and Keeper of all things seen and unseen; my Lord and Savior, King Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit, who leads, guides, helps, and comforts me in all truth. I thank You, my God, for Your love and for choosing me to carry out the purpose that You have for me. All the glory belongs to You alone. I also dedicate this work to the memory of my parents, Donny Dampeer and Jennifer L. Steele, for being the inspiration I needed to move forward with my education when I did not want to. Finally, I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandmothers, Ruthie M. Steele and Elizabeth McCombs, for their prayers for me, of which I know I have benefited.

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Abbreviations

DBA   *Doctor of Business Administration*

DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

DWS   *Doctor of Worship Studies*

EDD   *Doctor of Education*

ESV   *English Standard Version*

IRB   *Institutional Review Board*

NKJV   *New King James Version*

NLC   *New Life Community*

PHD   *Doctor of Philosophy*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Much research and analysis has been given to the millennial generation and the church.

Researchers continue to inquire as to why millennials leave the church and how to retain them.

The shift in faith on the part of the millennial generation has captured the minds of experts and

produced a significant amount of research from psychologists to student pastors alike in seeking

answers to explain the decline of Christianity among millennials.[1] Giving attention to bringing

them back to church, their spiritual development, and their discipleship is essential because they

are critical to the continuation of the church. Millennials represent a substantial but somewhat

misunderstood age group for the church, and they are possibly the most strategic age cohort for

the church's future.[2]

However, there is a situation where millennials are open to the church as long as it is a

good use of their time. They do not consider themselves to have left the church in terms of the

body of Christ, yet they are not committed to a local fellowship. These millennials have no

thoughts about the long-term viability of the church just as long as the church is there when

needed, as their current participation in church activities is selective and marginal. The church is

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[1] Alex McFarland, and Jason Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 2017), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[2] Rick Richardson and Ed Stetzer, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 79, ProQuest Ebook Central.

not fighting a disillusionment and desertion of millennials but rather a more nuanced issue that combines many factors.[3] This thesis project will address this unique situation among millennials.

In this introductory chapter, the researcher will discuss several parts of this thesis project. First, a ministry context provides a connection between this thesis project and ministry. Next, the problem and the purpose statements of the ministry are given. In the sections that follow, basic assumptions regarding the research process, definitions, delimitations, and limitations of this research project are all addressed. The last section is where the thesis statement is presented.

Ministry Context

New Life Community, located in Hilliard, Ohio, is a non-denominational ministry established in 2020 by the researcher and his wife, who both serve as senior pastors. There were two other couples, six people in total, including the senior pastors, when the ministry began. The ministry currently has approximately thirty-five adults and sixteen minors, including teenagers and children. The membership ethnicity comprises approximately 86 percent Black, 11 percent Latino, and 3 percent Asian Americans. Women make up about 90 percent of the New Life Community membership, which is consistent with the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study that measured the religious attendance for males and females and found that females are more religious than males.[4]

Before establishing New Life Community, the researcher, and his wife previously served as young adult pastors. In 2017, the couple was installed as pastors of the Young Adult Ministry of Life Changers Church located near Cincinnati, OH, where they were active members.

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[3] Richardson and Stetzer, *You Found Me*, 80.

[4] Katherine Parrish, "Bringing Millennials Back to Church" (DMin thesis, Drew University, 2021), 66, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Initially, the couple was reluctant because although they were active members of Life Changers Church, they resided near Columbus, OH, a three-hour and thirty-minute roundtrip commute. There was uncertainty on behalf of the couple as to how they would effectively serve as pastors of young adults and lead the young adult small group when they lived far away. The senior pastor of Life Changers Church was aware of the ministerial background of the couple, recognized their grace for young adults, and expressed that his request for the couple to serve as pastors for the young adult ministry was through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

With the couple accepting the pastoral call, the young adult ministry flourished in many ways. The ministry experienced an immediate increase from twelve to twenty-five young adult participants. The ministry's peak had thirty-two members and twelve non-member participants. The young adult ministry at Life Changers Church consisted of members and non-members born between 1985 and 1999. As a result of the ministry's popularity, slightly older adults and teenagers tried to become involved in ministry activities. However, they were referred to their respective peer group ministries.

The growth and popularity experienced by the ministry were a result of the new activities that the new pastors introduced. Young adult small group meetings were held bi-weekly at the pastors' home near Columbus, OH, where the young adults would carpool for the three-hour and thirty-minute roundtrip commute. Many young adults would invite their friends from the Columbus area, who became frequent attendees of activities sponsored by the young adult ministry. Impact Sundays, where Sunday morning worship services were led by the young adults and the message provided by one of the young adult pastors, was established for every fifth

Sunday of the calendar year. The ministry also conducted 'Pop Up' small group meetings at local

college campuses, for which there was high participation from college students.[5]

After two years of leading the young adult ministry, it became clear that it was time for

the pastors to move on to new endeavors. The pastors believed the Holy Spirit led them to leave

Life Changers Church to establish a ministry in Columbus. Likewise, the senior pastor of Life

Changers Church encouraged the pastors to plant a church in Columbus. The senior pastor

advised that the pastors were ready and that it was also the will of God to do so. After much

prayer, along with the support of their senior pastor, the researcher and his wife left Life

Changers Church to begin a new ministry in Columbus. A married couple in their early 30s, who

were a part of the young adult ministry, believed they were being called to assist with the new

ministry and relocated to Columbus.

In 2020, the New Life Fellowship was established during unexpected events that would

have immediate and adverse impacts. The ministry began as a small group of six people;

however, two members, who were in their mid-30s and married, relocated to North Carolina

because of a career opportunity for the husband. Shortly afterward, the ministry experienced

immediate challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic had a global impact. With the COVID-19

mask and lockdown mandates, there were few opportunities for outreach or fellowship. The

ministry during that time now consisted of four people and experienced forced inactivity due to

the global pandemic.

The researcher and his wife received three prophetic words that changed the direction of

New Life Fellowship. The first occurred in early 2021 while attending worship at a local church.

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[5] Pop-up small group meetings occurred once or twice yearly on different college campuses and were established as an outreach event for the young adults' peer group. These events included food, games, and an interactive Bible-study lesson by one of the young adult pastors.

During a time of prayer, a gentleman unknown to the researcher or his wife proclaimed through the leading of the Holy Spirit that the researcher and his wife were to steward the young adults that God brings to them. Later, in 2021, during worship services, a lady unknown to the researcher and his wife proclaimed that she saw in a vision that the researcher and his wife were surrounded by many young adults seeking godly guidance. The third prophetic word occurred in late 2021 when an apostle the researcher and his wife knew well proclaimed that it was time to restart the ministry with an initial focus on young adults. The apostle, who served as a spiritual authority and covering, instructed the researcher and his wife to revise the ministry's mission and vision prayerfully and move forward as led by the Holy Spirit. As part of the revision, the ministry was renamed to New Life Community. The researcher and his wife were convinced and agreed that all the prophetic words received were from the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

New Life Community initially experienced growth through marketplace evangelism. While the researcher worked from home and had no physical interactions with others, his wife initially worked at a local community center that provided social services to families with various challenges. Throughout his wife's tenure at the community center, his wife would speak words of knowledge, share the love of Christ, and have prayers with clients and co-workers alike. Also, when his wife began a new vocation, a life coaching practice, the same type of evangelism would occur with life coaching clients. The researcher and his wife often engaged with individuals in marketplace venues such as restaurants, grocery stores, and beauty shops. As led by the Holy Spirit, the researcher and his wife would share their faith and establish personal relationships with those they would encounter frequently. Through these relationships, New Life Community began to grow, and it was primarily young adults who desired to be connected.

Currently, at New Life Community, young adults, specifically millennials, make up most of the ministry's membership. The millennial generation, born between 1981 and 1996, makes up approximately 72 percent of the membership. Generation X, born between 1966 and 1980, and baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1965, each comprise approximately 6 percent of the membership, respectively. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, comprises approximately 16 percent of the membership. Two members are considered 'Cuspers', a term that references individuals born on the cusp of two different generations.[6] These two members were born in 1997 and 1998 respectively, making them part of Generation Z. However, these members have been observed to share the values and traits of the millennial generation, so they are considered part of New Life Community's millennial population.

Worship services, prayer meetings, Bible study, and other gatherings are conducted in the home of the senior pastors (1 Cor 16:19, Phlm 1:2). The ministry modeled this after the early church, where the gathering of Christian believers in private homes continued to be the norm until the reign of Constantine when Christians began erecting the first basilicas.[7] Primary worship services are held bi-weekly on Saturday evenings, and other gatherings are scheduled. For Saturday evening services, emphasis is placed on freedom of worship and submission to the Holy Spirit. Millennial members, in particular, have embraced the free worship style of the ministry. They appear to want an authentic experience of worship, an encounter with God that has life-changing results, and not phony or dead ritualistic worship.[8] Within worship services and

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[6] Scott Zimmer, "On the Cusp: Understanding Those Caught Between Two Generations." *Bridgeworks*, https://www.generations.com/insights/on-the-cusp-understanding-those-caught-between-two-generations.

[7] Phillip Stevens, "The Acts Model Designed to Make Disciples" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2020), 63–64, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[8] Clifford Lambert, "Experiential Truth in Contemporary Worship Environments: The Role of Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Century Worship Music in the Spiritual Formation of Millennials" (DWS diss., Liberty University, 2023), 3, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

Bible study meetings, space is given for questions, open dialogue, and scriptural references about what is being taught. The senior pastors have taken the position that it is essential to help believers and non-believers find answers to their particular issues, questions, and felt needs in the Bible.[9] Also, it is normal for spiritual gifts to be in demonstration within any given worship service, Bible study meeting, or other gatherings (1 Cor 12:4–11). The current schedule and frequency of ministry gatherings continue to carry over from the schedule followed during COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the limited engagement is insufficient for nurturing relationships, building a Christian community, or discipleship for members and frequent attendees.

New Life Community is governed through a Presbyterian form of governance where local elders lead the ministry.[10] The ministry has established a plurality of elders that govern and choose leaders to provide relational accountability (Acts 14:23; 15:4; 20:17). The four existing founding members comprise the ministry's eldership, and the researcher serves as the first among equals or the presiding elder. The senior pastors have a great relationship with all the members and most of them affectionately refer to the senior pastors as "pop" and "mom" within informal settings. The other founding members are the oldest of the millennial members and have the respect of the other members. While New Life Community has no legal affiliation with a governing ecclesiological organization, there is a trans-local influence, an apostolic covering, that holds the ministry accountable through regular interaction with the senior pastors (Acts 15:1–2).

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[9] Evelyn Hibbert, and Richard Hibbert, *Walking Together on the Jesus Road: Discipling in Intercultural Contexts* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 216, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[10] Presbyterian governance is not related to the Presbyterian denomination. The word presbyterian stems from the Greek word *presbuteros*, meaning that local elders govern the church or ministry.

While a governance model has been established for the ministry, the senior pastors recognize a lack of leaders within the membership. The researcher realizes that this dilemma is not a result of a lack of leaders among the current membership. It is, however, the result of a need for more development and opportunity amongst the membership. The ministry eldership can identify potential leaders; however, there needs to be more opportunities to develop potential leaders and give them a platform to lead. Consequently, the ministry cannot maintain the same level of organization in the current leaders' absence and the ineffective execution of tasks by lay leaders due to a lack of experience, which leads to stagnation in growth and longevity.[11]

New Life Community's vision includes carrying out the Great Commission through reconciling the lost back to God, reconnecting the remnant, confirming a believer's faith and God-given purpose, and validating the reality and practicality of the kingdom of God. The lost refers to people who have not yet accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. They may consider themselves spiritual, claim to know Jesus, believe in a higher power, or reject the notion of God altogether; however, not being a follower of Christ with the Holy Spirit living within them makes them lost. Through individual discussions, the senior pastors have found that most millennial non-members who attend ministry gatherings consider themselves spiritual or believe in a higher power. However, their spirituality and beliefs are not necessarily related to the teachings of Christ because they are not familiar with His teachings, they do not understand how Christ's teachings apply to their lives, or their understanding of Christ's teachings is contrary to their current lifestyles.

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[11] Marlon Robinson, "Shared Leadership: A Rediscovery of an Old Paradigm and Its Historical Context," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, (2018): 1, https://jacl.andrews.edu/shared-leadership-a-rediscovery-of-an-old-paradigm-and-its-historical-context/.

The remnant can be defined as believers of Christ who are not connected to religious culture, do not regularly attend church services, or are not committed to a local church because of perceived hypocrisy by church leaders. At New Life Community, many of the members and non-members that visit, fit the definition of the remnant. The researcher has found that church hurt, a traumatic experience from a previous local church, is the primary reason young adults were not connected to a church before New Life Community. Church hurt can be attributed to God missing from the church, moral failures of church leadership, the church's stance on homosexuality, the church being judgmental, and the church members being hypocritical.[12] While no known church hurt nor hypocrisy has been caused by the New Life Community ministry, there is still a residue from prior church experiences that causes many of the millennials to be apprehensive about fully connecting with the ministry.

Another area of focus is to establish believers in their faith and their God-given purpose. Despite a person's past or present, New Life Community believes that once a person accepts Christ as Lord and Savior, they become a new creature. Believers, especially, should be comfortable and assured in their faith regardless of their current situation. The researcher has observed, through pastoral counseling, that many millennials have begun to question their faith as related to their everyday life situation. Some have wondered if their faith is flawed because of their lack of finances and unmet career goals. Others are having a hard time believing in their faith because they cannot control their vices, such as fornication, recreational drug use, and placing a higher priority on personal pursuits. Several visitors, also millennials, have expressed that they have not committed to the ministry because they need to get their lives together.

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[12] Denise Page, "Black Protestant Millennials: Attracting, Engaging, Discipling, and Retaining the Next Generation" (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2020), 33, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Additionally, the researcher has found that most members need help understanding their God-given purpose. New Life Community believes it is essential for them to identify their purpose and be equipped to carry that purpose out as God intended. However, there is not enough engagement to help them identify what that may be.

The ministry strives to teach and demonstrate the reality and practicality of the kingdom of God by the authority and power of Christ. Saturday evening messages and other gatherings are geared towards equipping believers on applying kingdom principles to everyday living. The researcher has found that some millennials, in particular, do not understand what the kingdom of God is and how it applies to their lives. These millennials tend to be those who attend ministry gatherings infrequently, even though they still consider themselves a member of the ministry. For the senior pastors, reaffirming kingdom principles has been challenging when ministry gatherings are not as consistent as they need to be.

New Life Community will need to change its approach to be in a better position to make disciples. With the ministry's grace for millennials, more disciples and leaders should be produced. Most of the millennials have been exposed and brought into the ministry through marketplace evangelism, which has resulted in them becoming marketplace disciples. Since there has yet to be enough progress in transitioning the millennial members and attendees to leaders and disciples who are equipped to carry out their God-given purpose, the ministry has become stagnant. Relational discipleship, exampled by Christ, is the only way New Life Community will be able to establish a community of believers and improve the spiritual growth of the millennials.

Problem Presented

For ministry gatherings at New Life Community, there has been a noticeable decline in overall participation from the largest demographic of the ministry, the millennial generation.

However, when there are gatherings that focus on marketplace initiatives such as investing workshops and small business mixers, most, if not all, the millennials participate. These marketplace-focused gatherings also attract a high number of visitors, typically millennials as well. The millennials do participate in worship and other gatherings, although at a lower level of participation than what is experienced for marketplace-focused gatherings.

Current members of New Life Community invited most of those who attended the marketplace-focused gatherings. The attendees are believers, although most are not connected to a local church fellowship, nor do they regularly attend church. While most still believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior, they do not have a Christian community they are connected to. Members of New Life Community have been successful in evangelizing in the marketplace, which has resulted in establishing relationships. However, outside of the personal friendships that may have been established, those marketplace-established relationships are based more on networking and maneuvering within the marketplace as a follower of Christ.

Most of the millennial members were attracted to New Life Community due to the evangelism in the marketplace that they experienced. They do well with establishing and nurturing relationships in the marketplace, sometimes while sharing their Christian faith. However, there needs to be more establishing and nurturing personal relationships within the Christian community at New Life Community, which is needed for discipleship. The problem, therefore, is that marketplace discipleship has displaced relational discipleship among the millennial members and frequent attendees at New Life Community in Hilliard, Ohio.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to increase the incidence of group gatherings and intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship among

millennials. This objective will be accomplished first by increasing the frequency of group gatherings so that there will be at least one weekly gathering. The current schedule for ministry gatherings is too infrequent and needs to provide more fellowship and relationship building opportunities, as well as more leadership development. For worship services and small group gatherings, an emphasis will be placed on teaching about discipleship. Community-oriented gatherings for members, frequent attendees, and visitors will be added. Existing gatherings specific to certain topics, such as life and stewardship coaching, marriage and couples counseling, biblical truths, and marketplace initiatives, will continue a planned schedule.

Second, there will be intentionality in ensuring that all group gatherings are intergenerational. This means that all ministry gatherings will have the participation of older adults in addition to the younger ones. The goal is to have older adults who are spiritually mature and have more life experience provide wisdom and words of encouragement to younger members of the ministry. Also, mentoring will be provided to those who desire further guidance outside of spiritual matters such as parenting, career, and investing.

For these objectives to be accomplished, it will be essential to train current members and evangelize older believers for the work of the ministry. The present church leadership cannot take on this burden alone, which would only result in burnout. Therefore, leaders will be identified among active members to equip and train to assist with the work of the ministry. With most of the membership comprising millennials, a focus will be placed on older and spiritually mature members who can function as leaders. Additionally, while New Life Community primarily attracts those in the millennial generation, there will be a concentrated effort in evangelizing and attracting believers older than millennials. First and foremost, the leadership team will pray for direction from the Holy Spirit on how to accomplish this (Matt 9:37–38).

Accomplishing these objectives will directly impact the New Life Community ministry. The current ministry leadership, especially the senior pastors, will not feel overwhelmed because there will be shared leadership in completing ministry tasks, which promotes disciple-making. Existing members will be provided more opportunities to have an active role within the ministry and be prepared for their God-given purpose. Frequent attendees will see a healthy community of believers that they will be more inclined to be a part of and committed to.

Basic Assumptions

There are several assumptions for the research project. The first assumption is that all participants will complete the research. Second, they will understand questions, prompt for clarifications as needed, and provide truthful responses to the anonymous surveys and interviews. The third assumption is that New Life Community will have all the resources, including personnel needed for the study. This also assumes older believers will respond to New Life Community's evangelistic message. Fourth, it is assumed that all millennial members and frequent attendees will consistently attend worship services, small group bible study, and other gatherings based on the new ministry schedule. Last, it is assumed that with all the changes implemented within the ministry, there will be a measurable increase in relational discipleship.

Definitions

This research project primarily concerns the discipleship of millennials at New Life Community. Throughout this project, some terms are used, often interchangeably, to capture the essence of what relational discipleship, Christian community, and spiritual formation mean at New Life Community. Key terms used in this project include community, discipleship, gatherings, intergenerational, marketplace, millennials, relational discipleship, spiritual growth,

and other terms significant to the conduct of this research project. It will become evident that each of these terms has some overlap and points to one another in some form or another.

Christian Community. A Christian Community is a group of disciples that share their lives. Within the Christian Community, a disciple can find instruction on God's ways from the Bible, belonging and helping others feel part of God's family; a social structure that is trustworthy, sustainable, and feels secure; empowerment to live for God and overcome sin and Satan; opportunities to serve God's people and the broader community.[13] The terms 'Christian Community' and 'community' will be used interchangeably. Part of New Life Community's vision is to establish a community of believers with genuine, interpersonal relationships.

Discipleship. The gospel narrative itself is shaped by the process of discipleship and transmission to succeeding generations. For New Life Community, discipleship is the practice of following Christ, being transformed by His teachings, loving, and serving others, and making other disciples.[14] The terms 'discipleship', 'discipling', and 'disciple-making' will be used interchangeably to describe the process of becoming a committed follower and learner of Christ.

Gatherings. Group meetings that are focused on a common theme that is reflective of kingdom principles. Gatherings are an evangelistic tool is different from worship services and Bible study meetings where specific biblical teaching is provided. They are relational, and space is created for people to feel more comfortable and less guarded as those who attend typically have shared goals and values, although with ambiguity and fluidity.[15]

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[13] Hibbert, and Hibbert, *Walking Together on the Jesus Road*, 189.

[14] Andrew Hayes, and Stephen Cherry, *The Meanings of Discipleship: Being Disciples Then and Now* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[15] Dunn, Alton C., "Moving from Transactional Action to Relational Gathering: Towards Mobilizing Communities for the Common Good" (DMin thesis, Drew University, 2021), 2, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Intergenerational. This term describes the interpersonal relationships of individuals in different generations, such as baby boomers, Generation X, and millennials. Intergenerational groups connect millennials and people in the next stages of life or "those who were further down the road in life and could provide some mentorship and advice, or at least commiserate because they had been there."[16] New Life Community sees a need for more intergenerational interactions and relationships.

Marketplace Discipleship. This is where discipleship takes place in a marketplace setting, wherever a person earns a salary, pays employees, or receives or provides goods and services. The marketplace is one of the most untapped mission fields that the body of Christ must equip and empower.[17] This type of discipleship is based on transactional engagement in the marketplace. This means that all engagements are conducted within the marketplace environment, and relationships are nurtured only during the time of marketplace transactions.

Marketplace Evangelism. The sharing of a compelling message of the gospel along with one's faith to those outside the community of believers. However, this type of evangelism takes place in a marketplace setting and involves consistent outreach to individuals encountered regularly.

Millennials. There are varying identifiers for the age range of the millennial generation. While there is unanimity that millennials were born beginning in 1981, there are differences as to the end year that they were born. Pew Research identifies a millennial as anyone born between

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[16] Jessica H. Schafer, "Faith Leaders' Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement" (Dba diss., Walden University, 2020), 156, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[17] Cristine Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace: A Marketplace-Based Discipleship Program for the United Methodist Young Adults of the Zambales District" (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2021), 6, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

1981 and 1996.[18] For purposes of this research project, millennials are identified as members and non-members born between 1981 and 1996. Millennials are the focus of this research project as this group makes up the majority of the membership at New Life Community.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. The term Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) was coined by Christian Smith in 2005. MTD consists of a set of beliefs that have been adopted by many millennials that challenge their spiritual growth. These beliefs include the following: God exists, and He created and orders the world and watches over human life. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other; and the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem, and good people go to heaven when they die.[19] Several millennial non-members share these beliefs when first visiting New Life Community. Addressing MTD with biblical truths will need to be a higher priority for the ministry.

Relational Discipleship. This type of discipleship is based on meaningful, interpersonal relationships and takes place within a Christian community. Rooted in a relationship of love and authenticity, a disciple has an accountable relationship with someone or a group of people who are intentionally investing in their spiritual maturity in Christ. This is discipleship that requires a relational investment, enduring the good and bad while doing life together. This research project concerns itself with establishing relational discipleship among millennials at New Life Community. Millennials are looking for meaningful relationships to sustain their faith at a

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[18] Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," *Pew Research Center*, (2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/.

[19] Peter M. Phillips, *The Bible, Social Media and Digital Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019), 93.

vulnerable life stage, and they want deep relationships rather than just meeting at specific church functions.[20]

Spiritual Formation. The transformative work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life toward the character and life of Jesus Christ. This is a lifelong process where the believer surrenders and participates in being conformed to the image of Christ within the context of a community.

Spiritual Growth. The gradual process of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Biblical teaching, discipleship, and community all contribute to the growth of a believer.

Limitations

Several limitations will affect this research project. While it is initially assumed that all participants will complete the research to its' conclusion, there is a chance that they will discontinue the research prematurely. This may be due to a loss of interest or commitment, or a participant may no longer be available to participate. Second, because of the close relationship that many of the participants have with the researcher, participants may be apprehensive about responding candidly to questions about the ministry. This research project will focus on those born between 1981 and 1996 at New Life Community, excluding others born outside of this range. This is the age range selected for the ministry's millennial population. Due to the small number of older believers born before 1981, there may be limited intergenerational interaction for gatherings. Also, because of the duration of this research project, the number of older believers may be limited, which will impact intergenerational interaction.

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[20] Ruth Perrin, *Changing Shape: The Faith Lives of Millennials* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2020), 30, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Limitations related to sample size will also have an effect. This research project has access to twenty-seven millennials who are considered connected with New Life Community. All members may not participate for various reasons. Frequent attendees may not be willing to participate in the research due to their comfort level. The ratio of women to men associated with New Life Community is that most of the participants are women. Consequently, the results of this research may not sufficiently reflect the perspective of millennial men as this demographic will have the smallest sample size. Last, limited participation in the completion of surveys may distort the qualitative data collected. While efforts will be made to encourage all participants to complete all the surveys, likely, everyone will not.

Delimitations

Delimitations regarding this research center on discipleship with a focus on millennials. Another delimitation for this research project is the biblically-based methods of improving discipleship within the ministry. The researcher can help others within the ministry recognize the necessity of regularly bringing friends and families to gatherings. The amount of communication released to the ministry regarding this research can be controlled. For this research, qualitative and quantitative data collection will be limited to members and frequent attendees of New Life Community ministry gatherings. The project research includes three ministry leaders who are required to participate. Two of the ministry leaders are millennials, and one is part of Generation X.

Thesis Statement

Although it appears that increasing numbers of Millennials are leaving the church due to rebellion or disinterest, it comes down to the church needing to change the methods of retaining and discipling them. Many millennials are experiencing life transitions as they are exploring their identity, finding jobs and careers, starting families, and seeking companionship. Their spirituality is important to them; however, they seek a church experience where leaders are not overbearing, where they can receive answers to their spiritual and socio-economical questions with compassion, and where they can be included in a Christian community where they feel like they belong. They want God but do not want the way the church has given them God. They desire authentic relationships and to develop spiritually. In other words, they want to be discipled. Hence, if relational discipleship is established through small groups, personal connections, and biblical life application, there will be an improvement in millennials' spiritual formation, discipline, and growth.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The millennial generation has often been criticized, misunderstood, and rarely acknowledged for their importance to the church, outside of the desire for their attendance, volunteering, and tithes. Yet, with all the criticisms and misunderstandings of millennials, there is an apparent disconnect with the modern-day church because, as a generation, they seem to be walking away from it. The Barna Group found that a shocking 59 percent of millennial Christians who grew up in the church are no longer attending church, and less than half of all millennials (47 percent) have attended church in the last six months.[1] Not only are the millennials significant to the church, but they are also significant to the marketplace. More than one in three American labor force participants (35 percent) are millennials, making them the largest generation in the U.S. labor force, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.[2] Thus, the importance of this generation to the church, the Great Commission (cf. Matt 28:18–20), and their spiritual growth cannot be ignored nor underestimated.

This chapter will include a review of literature that is relevant to establishing relational discipleship with the millennial generation. The themes extrapolated from the literature provide insight into how to disciple millennials who will play a significant and influential role in the body of Christ as well as the marketplace. The researcher utilized literature that expands the understanding of millennials, the influence of social media on their lives, their ministry

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[1] Grant Skeldon, *The Passion Generation: The Seemingly Reckless, Definitely Disruptive, but Far from Hopeless Millennial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 29.

[2] Richard Fry, "Millennials Are the Largest Generation in the U.S. Labor Force," *Pew Research Center*, April 11, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/11/millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/.

disposition or tendencies, and the importance of community to them, which all play a part in spiritual growth and equipping them for their God-given purpose, including in the marketplace.

Literature Review

The Millennial generation is different, though they have been presented with a different world than previous generations and the church have been accustomed to. Each new generation progresses further than the prior generation, just as Generation Z will progress further than millennials. However, if the church will be relevant to future generations, the church must address the disconnect between millennials and relational discipleship. Millennial spirituality, impacted by cultural and societal challenges, seems more detached from the church.[3] The literature review covers the generational culture of millennials and reconnecting them to the church through relational discipleship.

Understanding Millennials

The millennial generation has become one of the most misunderstood generations because of the perception that they have all the luxuries, resources, and technical advances that previous generations did not have. Often branded as "entitled," it is not uncommon to hear comments from those born in previous generations that "these millennials do not know how good they have it." While it is true that millennials do benefit from many advantages that previous generations did not have, it does not mean that they are exempt from challenges that are equal to or more complex than the challenges of their forefathers. Far too often, older generations formulate their view of millennials through the eyes of their own experiences.

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[3] Ravan Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church." (DMin thesis, Alliance Theological Seminary, 2021), 84, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

In *The Twentysomething Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults*, authors Tim Clydesdale and Kathleen Garces-Foley make the case that to rightly understand millennials requires seeing the world that they inherited: a place where global economics have made secure careers elusive, family life is often unstable, marriage and parenthood is a matter of convenience, and spiritual growth is promoted outside organized religions as well as inside.[4] Hence, millennial behavior is a direct result of the world they were presented with, which is formed by the decisions of their forefathers.

While previous generations can make the same claim, cultural and spiritual differences set millennials apart from their forefathers. Perrin asserts that millennials are exposed to a far more comprehensive range of worldviews than any previous generation.[5] With this being the case, it should not be a surprise that previous generations do not have a good understanding of millennials, even though they may claim otherwise. Thus, to fully understand millennials, the church must understand the cultural and societal pressures they face and the marketplace and social justice ambitions they pursue unapologetically.

Cultural and Societal Challenges

Millennials generally face the same challenges that other generations had to deal with. Similar to Baby Boomers and Generation X, the generations that are most likely to be the generation of their parents, millennials are liable for the same type of misguided behaviors, social problems, moral confusion, recreational fornication, adultery, access to unlimited technology of the time, routine intoxication, a severe addiction to alcohol and drugs, and massive

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[4] Tim Clydesdale, and Kathleen Garces-Foley, *The Twentysomething Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[5] Perrin, *Changing Shape*, 114.

consumerism.[6] The negative perceptions placed upon the millennials differ from similar negative perceptions that previous generations had to endure. Tony Beard, author of *Let No One Despise You: Emerging Christians in a Post-Christian Society,* makes the case that the church has not prepared emerging adults, including millennials, for adulthood and leadership roles in the church and, as a result, they are walking away from the church. Beard points out that while it may be true that millennials demand instant gratification, spend too much time online, are narcissistic, and grew up with participation trophies, the truth is that every generation has its negative stereotypes.[7] Millennials, like their parents before them, are not immune to generational criticisms.

Millennials, however, are also faced with challenges that previous generations did not have to endure. John Dere, the author of "Effective Church Engagement with Young Adults: An Organizational Case Study," conducted research that identifies action steps that can be taken to bring back young adults, including millennials, to the church. These steps are centered around establishing relationships and speaking to the life experiences of young adults. Dere maintains that millennials live and relate in a challenging conversational landscape: more diversity, religion, more empowered atheism, more insulating tribalism, more social media, more pontificating, and less listening.[8] They live in a world where divisiveness and isolation are more prevalent. Many come from a background where their parents are divorced and have remarried, often more than once. This is supported by Perrin, who points out that millennials are

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[6] Beth Seversen, *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[7] Tony Beard, *Let No One Despise You: Emerging Christians in a Post-Christian Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[8] John Dere, "Effective Church Engagement with Young Adults: An Organizational Case Study." (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2021), 31, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

geographically distant from their support system and have a difficult time establishing one, and even though they have the advantages of technological advances, social media in particular, loneliness and poor mental health are significant problems for them.[9]

A significant challenge that millennials must deal with is the issues related to finances. While there have always been financial issues that each generation has had to endure, millennials are uniquely impacted in a way unfamiliar to previous generations. In utilizing statistics from the Pew Research Center, Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez point out that millennials are the first generation in the modern era to have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than Baby Boomers or Generation X.[10] Their situation is unique because they were presented with opportunities for financial success and security that their parents may have yet to have. However, taking advantage of those opportunities did not produce the expected results for many.

Despite having more opportunities than previous generations, millennials became the victims of unfortunate economic times. They were born and raised in a time when educational and career goals were not only more attainable than their parents but were expected to be reached. Stella Rouse and Ashley Ross, authors of *The Politics of Millennials: Political Beliefs and Policy Preferences of America's Most Diverse Generation*, investigate the socio-economic factors that form the millennial generation's identity, choices, and how their diversity informs their political attitudes and beliefs. The authors point out that economic hardship has been complex, protracted, and unexpected for millennials at a time when they are the best-educated generation in American history, with a third of older millennials having a four-year college

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[9] Perrin, *Changing Shape*, 30.

[10] McFarland, and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 93.

degree or better.[11] Being the best-educated generation, however, has served them poorly economically.

With millennials already facing a competitive job market in the United States, a global pandemic struck and worsened things. The COVID-19 pandemic was not predictable, and the likelihood of this kind of phenomenon occurring, along with the worldwide response, was unexpected by almost everyone.[12] The pandemic impacted the global economy, and every generation was affected. Unfortunately for millennials, especially the youngest of the generation, they found themselves entering the workforce during one of the worst economic downturns in U.S. history, which resulted in lower-paying jobs if they could find one, which put them in a problematic situation when student loan payments came due six months after graduation."[13] As a result of the financial challenges they have been presented with, along with a strong desire to control their destiny, millennials are determined to fulfill their marketplace ambitions.

Marketplace Warriors

Whether it is because their college degree cannot get them a job that can support payments on their student loans debt and their living expenses or because they want to control their time and money, millennials are aggressive in supporting themselves financially. The financial challenges experienced by millennials are heightened by the fact that many of them are new to "adulting."[14]. Considering the impacts of inflation, they are making less than what their

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[11] Stella M. Rouse, and Ashley D. Ross, *The Politics of Millennials: Political Beliefs and Policy Preferences of America's Most Diverse Generation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 2. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9526877.

[12] Parrish, "Bringing Millennials Back to Church," 49.

[13] Page, "Black Protestant Millennials."

[14] The term "adulting" is often used by Millennials to describe behavior that is seen as responsible and grown-up, such as paying bills, running errands, and dealing with life's challenges without the assistance of parents.

parents and grandparents made. However, they are faced with the challenges of higher student loan debt and increased housing costs with fewer resources, all while they are also in the beginning stages of learning to manage their time and money.[15]

Consequently, millennials spend a significant amount of their time seeking new and innovative avenues of income. They are okay with working multiple jobs to earn money. It is common for millennials to work various jobs, including gig jobs like Uber, Door Dash, and other temporary jobs, to make extra cash. They also are okay with living resourcefully to save on expenses, starting businesses, and saving carefully to pay down debt and prepare for the future.[16]

Millennials will work a regular shift job, especially if the pay suits their lifestyle and financial needs or if the job provides a pathway to their career goals. For millennials, a regular shift job must have a level of freedom that accommodates their personal pursuits. Lanisha Brown, Author of "Millennials and Work-life Balance: Comparisons Across Generations," researched how millennials view work-life balance compared to older generations. In the study, the author confirmed that millennials value work-life balance more than Baby Boomers or Generation X. Brown found that work-life balance for millennials is not solely about going home and managing family time; it's also about the balance of life within the workplace.[17]

Millennials want their employer to provide mentorship opportunities and support for professional special interest groups based on heritage, gender, or lifestyle. According to Daniel Clark, author of *Kingdom Millennials Infiltrating Culture: Reaching in Toward Generation Y to Reach Out to the World,* millennials are compelled to seek careers or projects that are enjoyable

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[15] Robert Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials: An Exploration of Best Practices for Crosspoint Church" (DMin thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2020), 82, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[16] McFarland and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 99.

[17] Lanisha Brown, "Millennials and Work-Life Balance: Comparisons Across Generations" (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2023), 69, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

or captivating, they have a quest for fun, have little tolerance for boredom, and seek jobs that are interesting and fun.[18] Millennials are more likely to look for employment elsewhere if an employer fails to meet their work-life balance expectations and requirements, which can be absurd to older generations.

Most millennials ultimately seek to be entrepreneurs. They desire flexibility and freedom in executing their work and are willing to sacrifice their working time to maintain their personal life.[19] This level of freedom typically comes with being one's own boss. Since they are tech-savvy, they can find innovative ways of producing income-making opportunities that only require an internet connection and reliable transportation. Millennials may eventually be known as the side-hustle generation, using whatever creative means are necessary to sell products and services to various clients online and offline, providing paying opportunities unavailable in a downward economy.[20] Whether working a regular job, a gig, or the preferred entrepreneurship pursuit, millennials are courageous in their marketplace pursuits and will use every resource available to obtain their goals.

Social Justice Champions

Like the Baby Boomer Generation, millennials are strong social justice advocates. Rouse and Ross contend that the millennial generation is best known for, politically speaking, liberalness and tolerance on social issues.[21] The Baby Boomers championed marches and sit-ins for the Civil Rights Movement, protests the Vietnam War, and the promotion of Free Love.

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[18] Daniel Clark, "Kingdom Millennials Infiltrating Culture: Reaching in Toward Generation Y to Reach Out to the World" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 93. Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[19] Brown, "Millennials and Work-Life Balance," 69.

[20] McFarland and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 100.

[21] Rouse and Ross, *The Politics of Millennials*, 173.

Likewise, millennials have social justice endeavors their generation is championing, such as racial equality, climate change, and LGBTQA+ rights.[22]

In research conducted by Kristen Bialik and Richard Fry, it was found that millennials are the second-largest generation in the U.S. electorate (after Baby Boomers); thus, they can shape the country's politics given their more liberal leanings compared to older generations.[23] Based on their large population size, any rally, riot, protest, or boycott against a perceived injustice will substantially impact society. Injustices related to Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter, abortion, climate change, and equality rights for those who choose alternative lifestyles are evident on the political stage, in businesses and schools, and the nation's churches.[24]

While the social justice efforts of millennials are commendable as they fight against perceived injustices, there are times when their social justice efforts are misguided. Most of their social justice endeavors are driven by emotion and political motivation, especially regarding race, socioeconomics, and gender. Millennials have taken the position that their social justice ambitions are based on being "woke."[25] However, being woke or "wokeism" perpetuates tipping the scales of partiality and justice in favor of those who are considered to be oppressed, which is not actual impartiality or justice. Unfortunately, not only are millennial stances on contemporary social issues liberal, but their overall political outlook also skews to the political left.[26]

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[22] LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and the plus sign for genders that cannot be described.

[23] Kristen Bialik and Richard Fry. "Millennial Life: How Young Adulthood Today Compares with Prior Generations." Pew Research Center, February 14, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/02/14/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations–2/

[24] Brenda Widger, "Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as Demonstrated Through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students." (PhD. diss., Southeastern University, 2020), 1. Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[25] The term "woke" was initially used in the Black American community and refers to someone who is informed, educated, and conscious of social injustice and racial inequality.

[26] Rouse and Ross, *The Politics of Millennials*, 173.

Lucas Miles, author of *Woke Jesus: The False Messiah Destroying Christianity*, makes the case that progressive or politically left-leaning Christianity is a radical alternative that opposes traditional biblical interpretation and is against the teachings of Christ. Miles argues that liberalism, which includes political correctness and the masquerade of justice and equality, is favorable only to the preferred narrative or agenda. The author supports this view by questioning policy examples such as establishing different requirements for patrons based on vaccination status, lowering academic performance demands for students based on ethnicity, and championing women's rights but applauding transgender women (biological males) for competing in female sports.[27]

Millennials take pride in fighting against social injustices, though their fight is usually misguided, primarily partial, and rarely based on biblical principles. However, that same social justice energy should be shifted towards ministry causes that serve people. Beth Seversen, author of *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults*, establishes a model for engaging and retaining millennials and Generation Z in local churches. Seversen contends that emerging adults, including millennials, will likely experience spiritual transformation when they are part of a community. The author's research reveals that an essential consideration for reaching and keeping millennials is that they are attracted to churches that are engaged culturally, and they admire churches' attention to compassion ministries, injustice, and racial righteousness.[28] While this notion is encouraging, the challenge is convincing millennials to advocate for local causes that align with the teaching of Christ (Matt 25:34–40). Many of the causes they like to advocate for, such as same-sex marriage (Eph 5:33) and the legalization of

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[27] Lucas Miles, *Woke Jesus: The False Messiah Destroying Christianity* (West Palm Beach, FL: Humanix Books, 2023), 151, Kindle.

[28] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 156.

marijuana (1 Pet 5:8), directly oppose what is written in the scriptures. Unfortunately, millennials will continue to advocate for misguided social causes as they are influenced and aided by the information received from social media.[29]

<div align="center">The Influence of Social Media</div>

No other generation has been affected more by the "Internet of Things."[30], specifically concerning social media, than the millennial generation. Internet access and connectivity have become a necessity for them, as evidenced by the priority given to checking text messages, email, and social media accounts. In *The Bible and Digital Millennials*, the authors David Ford, David Joshua, and Peter Phillips make the case that online content is influential in communicating with millennials. According to the authors, millennials consume a lot of information through social media as they browse materials, view advertisements, read posts, and surf timelines; as a result, they give their undivided attention to their screens.[31]

Millennials can be accurately described as the world's most connected generation in history, as 41% of this generation believe that losing their cell phones would have a more significant negative impact on their daily routines than losing their cars or laptops.[32] With this type of dependency by millennials on being constantly connected to the internet, they will undoubtedly be influenced by what they see and hear when connected. This dependency also means that they are constantly distracted. Seeing someone walking or driving while on their cell

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[29] Michelle I. Seelig, "Social Activism: Engaging Millennials in Social Causes", *First Monday* 23, no. 2 (February 5, 2018). https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/8125/6642.

[30] The Internet of Things (IoT) describes the growing network of devices or "things," such as cell phones, tablets, laptops, household products, and automobiles, that connect over the internet.

[31] David G. Ford, Joshua L. Mann, and Peter M. Phillips. *The Bible and Digital Millennials* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019), 48, Taylor & Francis Group.

[32] McFarland and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 111.

phone is not unusual. They are continually looking for information and gratification. Using their

cell phones to find out how to live a good Christian life has not crossed their minds. Instead, they

are watching how-to videos on YouTube, binging streaming content such as "Fool Me Once,"

"Echo," "Reacher," and "Power Book III: Raising Kanan," or accessing other sites with morally

questionable content. Even though digital streaming channels and video games are popular, no

other form of internet media impacts their worldviews and personal interactions than social

media.

Impact on Worldviews

Most of what millennials believe and trust in the world today is determined by the access

to information or online content received from their devices and social media. Past generations

put their trust in diverse mediums such as magazines, newspapers, and radio and television

broadcasts. However, the millennial generation is the first generation to feel the full impact of

the digital revolution on everyday American life.[33] They were born in the digital age, and their

lives are impacted by it. Through tablets, personal computers, the internet, mobile phones, and

social media, this generation has experienced global human connectivity in ways unimagined by

the generations before them.[34]

Unfortunately, the digital revolution has also made way for digital delusion. Perceptions

and mindsets can be altered with the constant barrage of breaking news, social media posts, and

videos. As a result, and by the intent of the content providers, the truth becomes subjective.

David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, the authors of *Faith for Exiles: 5 Proven Ways to Help a

New Generation Follow Jesus and Thrive in Digital Babylon*, provide solutions for making

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[33] Page, "Black Protestant Millennials," 31.

[34] Ibid.

disciples in a society where social media is a significant influence and often blurs the line between truth and falsehood. The authors believe that in this digital society, what is real is up for grabs, which has led to the creation of new terms such as truthiness, fake news, post-truth, and alternative fact.[35] It would be unfair to suggest that all millennials cannot determine what is true and accurate with social media content. However, it has been found that some millennials believe the social media world feels more real than the real world.[36]

Regardless of the truthfulness of online content, millennials are still influenced by what they take in via social media. Regrettably, this also means they are taking in harmful and unhealthy content. Social media provides far greater access to sexual incitement, violence, and social engineering than the access to cable television, VCR tapes, and DVDs made available to their parents. Despite the perversion, vanity, and ideological and political influences social media provides, 86 percent of millennials continue to use social media.[37] This statistic suggests that morality has little influence when it comes to millennials and social media.

With most millennials faithfully accessing social media content despite all the negative and worldly stimuli, it is unreasonable to believe their worldview is not being influenced. They are looking to their devices to make sense of the world around them, and as a result, they are using the screens in their pockets as their counselors, their entertainers, their instructors, and even their sex educators.[38] In most cases, the content in social media is geared towards everything worldly and ungodly. Through social media, millennials and other generations are

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[35] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Proven Ways to Help a New Generation Follow Jesus and Thrive in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[36] Schafer, "Faith Leaders' Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement," 26.

[37] Emily A. Vogels, "Millennials Stand Out for Their Technology Use, but Older Generations Also Embrace Digital Life," Pew Research Center, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/.

[38] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 46.

exposed to everything the apostle John warned against in his first epistle: "the desires of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16, New King James Version). Unfortunately, not only has social media influenced how millennials perceive the real world, but social media also influences how millennials interact with their peers.[39] Unfortunately, this has caused millennials to become more connected online and disconnected in person.

Impact on Personal Interactions

For millennials, social media has become the most relied-upon substitute and often the replacement for personal interactions. Most people, especially young adults, cling to their cell phones and are addicted to social media rather than having a personal conversation or in-person opinion.[40] Social media provides millennials with the interactions they desire while they go about their busy lifestyles. The convenience of accessing content, including mobile-friendly websites, on cell phones is indispensable because millennials want to be interactive while they are constantly on the go. Additionally, having some type of social media presence is essential to most millennials. Not having a presence on social media can impact a millennial's career and networking capabilities, the number of friends and followers, their brand, and overall relevancy.

Social media has become the primary way for millennials to stay in contact with people they may have never met in person but are connected to virtually. Meeting someone in person is not a requirement for being a friend. Personal privacy is disregarded if the relationship is virtual and promotes the millennial's social media relevancy. Jacob Al Hassan, author of "The Pauline Concept of Discipleship as a Model for Addressing the Youth Dropout in the Twenty-First Century United States of America Church," makes the case that young adults are leaving the

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[39] Schafer, "Faith Leaders' Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement," 52.

[40] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 52.

church because of a lack of interpersonal relationships which is needed for discipleship. One of the challenges to establishing interpersonal relationships that the author points out is the importance of social media to young adults. As for millennials, they want to share their stories for all to see, and they are blunt, irreverent, and sometimes crude when they do.[41] Social media is the coveted platform that allows them to introduce themselves to the world. In a no-privacy, socially networked world, this bare-all impulse tempts them to share anything with anyone who clicks through.[42] With social media, there are very few restrictions, and no personal interactions are required.

With all social media's perceived benefits, unfavorable symptoms point to more significant issues for millennials. Researcher William Lile III, author of "Relational Discipleship: The Science and Practice of Spiritual Formation," states that churches need to transition to relational discipleship, which is biblical discipleship, in their discipleship strategies. In doing so, churches will see increased spiritual formation and growth among those being discipled. However, the author also points out that experts on this subject matter believe that the priority of social media hinders the development of the necessary social skills to develop meaningful real-life relationships, which, as a result, brings about experiences of loneliness.[43] In many cases, millennials measure their self-worth based on social media visibility. They spend much time seeking online validation for their lifestyle, experiences, and personal brand.

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[41] Jacob Al Hassan, "The Pauline Concept of Discipleship as a Model for Addressing the Youth Dropout in the Twenty-First Century United States of America Church." (DMin thesis, Southeastern University, 2020). 199 ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[42] Ibid.

[43] William W. Lile III, "Relational Discipleship: The Science and Practice of Spiritual Formation." (DMin thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 2022), 283. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Investing so much time in social media is bound to have drawbacks. Laurie Lyter Bright, the author of *Vagabonding: In Defense and Praise of Millennial Faith,* wrote that millennials spend much of their lives online seeking confirmation.[44] The confirmation that they are seeking is from individuals whom they have not met or barely interacted with. Bright points out that millennials tend to doubt their lovability unless externally confirmed through likes and retweets, feel invisible if they lack constant validation that they are being seen, and mistrust their relationships if there's a decrease in responses to their snap-stories."[45]

Consequently, this type of behavior points to mental health concerns. It has been found that for every additional hour that adults spend on social media, the severity of depressive symptoms they experience goes up as well.[46] Although a good portion of today's social interaction is through screens, be it social media or texting, millennials are becoming more depressed, and the digital socializing they prefer has become detrimental to their mental health. They unknowingly created a digital prison for themselves, which limits them from the physical interaction and interpersonal relationships God intended (Heb 10:24–25).

<div align="center">Ministry Dispositions of Millennials</div>

To draw the millennial generation into fellowship for discipleship, one must understand what they prefer regarding ministry. Far too often, churches have established a ministry format that requires everyone to accept and conform. For most believers, particularly those within the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations, this is not a problem because most churches have traditionally operated the same way, with minimal changes, over a long period. However,

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[44] Laurie Lyter Bright, *Vagabonding: In Defense and Praise of Millennial Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 40, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[45] Ibid, 41.

[46] Beard, Let No One Despise You, 24.

millennials are not as willing to go with the flow that has been presented to them by their parents.

Some millennials who were raised in the church have formed the viewpoint that the church offers an old-fashioned, exclusive, and judgmental form of Christianity with a chip on its shoulder.[47] Hence, they will leave a church if they view the church leaders negatively or feel like a church has nothing to offer them outside of being judgmental. Understanding what millennials prefer regarding ministry and implementing those preferences will serve a church well. Understanding what they do not like regarding ministry is beneficial, as well, as a ministry can avoid implementing strategies that will continue to keep millennials away.

Criticisms of the Traditional Church

A significant reason why millennials are not attending or leaving the church is because of the opposing views they have about the traditional church. Alongside their opinions of other conventional institutions, millennials tend to be wary of Christian churches and suspicious of what they represent.[48] For some millennials, the church has lost their respect. This loss of respect is based on criticisms that God is missing from the church, reoccurring moral failures of church leadership, the church's stance on homosexuality, and older church members being too judgmental and hypocritical.[49] It has become a lot of work, along with a lot of rules, for millennials to attend church with little rewards in return. Thus, many millennials believe they can stay at home and worship God.

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[47] McFarland and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 74.

[48] Dere, "Effective Church Engagement with Young Adults", 41.

[49] Page, "Black Protestant Millennials," 33.

Many millennials attended church when they were younger and left the church when they became older because of hypocrisy. Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez, authors of *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home*, have identified specific reasons, based on research, why millennials are leaving the church. The authors discovered that hypocrisy and compromise in the church play a significant role in why millennials perceive the church as more concerned about money and membership than about teaching the Bible.[50] This perspective reflects negatively on church leadership due to the politics of attracting more members and bringing in more tithes and offerings to cover operating expenses. However, this perspective becomes less negative regarding seeker-friendly churches due to the amenities that seeker-friendly churches provide.[51] Millennials see the hypocrisy in abuse scandals and the failure of hypocritical members to live up to the values they purport to hold, especially concerning nurturing relationships, stewarding finances, and supporting people experiencing poverty.[52] For millennials, churches, in general, are the most hypocritical institutions outside of the government.

Another criticism millennials have of the traditional church is that the church is a corrupt, money-seeking institution, just like other secular institutions. From their viewpoint, like secular institutions, modern-day churches cover up disgraceful scandals, consistently seek ways to obtain more money, and continually shame those who do not constantly give all their time and resources. Cicely Jefferson, the author of "The Church and African American Millennials,"

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[50] McFarland and Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith*, 28-29.

[51] The term "seeker-friendly" refers to a church, usually a megachurch, that generally offers amenities such as coffee shops, bookstores, game rooms, and various ministry offerings to attract a multitude of people. The majority of resources, staffing, and preaching content is spent on creating an environment where a high volume of people will attend every week.

[52] Perrin, *Changing Shape*, 17.

provides research on strategies that attract, connect, and integrate African American millennials

back into the church and the obstacles. Jefferson points out that the perception of the church and

Christians by African American millennials is not only due to what they have experienced but

also due to the images they have been fed from the media that characterized the church and its

leaders as uninformed, dishonest, materialistic, and stagnant.[53] They are convinced that money

and undisputed obedience are more important to churches than strengthening their faith.

According to Jefferson's research, too much of the focus has been on drawing people, along with

their time and money, to the church building, but ministry to millennials must begin outside of

the building through intentional efforts to meet them where they are and draw them through

intentional discipleship and the cultivation of life-giving relationships.[54]

A criticism often overlooked is that millennials believe there is nothing for them to do in

the church besides menial tasks. Kathleen Parrish's research, "Bringing Millennials Back to

Church," focused on reconnecting millennials back to the church by identifying the reasons why

they are leaving, having better communication, and improving their discipleship. Parrish's

research revealed that many millennials felt they needed something for them; no events or small

groups were designed specifically for them, and their generation seemed to get overlooked.[55] The

author's study suggests that millennials have become the least-used demographic within a typical

church. The church is one of the least demanding environments for them regarding what they are

asked to do and what is expected of them, although they are more willing to be challenged than

the church is willing to challenge them.[56]

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[53] Cicely S. Jefferson, "The Church and African American Millennials." (DMin thesis, Dallas Baptist University, 2020), 30, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[54] Ibid., 141.

[55] Parrish, "Bringing Millennials Back to Church," 82.

[56] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 35.

Author Charles Sumpter uncovered other criticisms supporting why millennials are unaffiliated with a church. Sumpter's research, "Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why millennials have Stopped Attending Church," reviews why the millennial generation's church attendance has consistently declined. The author extrapolated five top reasons by utilizing data from research organizations and surveys of unchurched millennials. Two additional criticisms the millennials indicated are that they do not like church and that church leaders are not adequately trained in the knowledge of God.[57] Based on Sumpter's research, one could conclude that millennials may not like attending church because they are not getting anything out of attending, especially if they view the pastor as a novice. These criticisms cause millennials to leave the church and never return. However, to keep them actively engaged and avoid them leaving, it is essential to understand what they are looking for in a ministry.

Another criticism that needs to be addressed concerns the millennials, who are not associated with religion. While not exclusive to the millennial generation, they are referred to as "Nones," those who do not attend church or consider themselves associated with any religious organization. Acquenetta Thompson, the author of "Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church," researched why emerging adults have abandoned church and how they can be brought back to the church through discipleship mentoring. Thompson's research identified that while "Nones" choose not to identify with any specific religion or church organization, the "Dones" are those who are just done with church and have left the church for various reasons.[58]

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[57] Charles Sumpter, "Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church." (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 72. Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[58] Acquenetta Thompson, "Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 141, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

Millennials that are "Nones", may consider themselves atheists, agnostics, or unaffiliated. Richardson and Stetzer found that those who consider themselves unaffiliated or "nothing in particular", value spirituality, believe in God, pray, and are open to being influenced by others in their spiritual convictions.[59] Likewise, the "Dones" share the same characteristics as "Nones"; however, they will not attend a church service under any circumstance. However, they may be willing to participate in a house church or small group meeting if they are not reminded why they left the church. As written the ministry's vision statement, the millennials that consider themselves unaffiliated or are categorized as "Dones" are deemed to be the remnants that New Life Community aims to reconnect with.

Ministry Preferences

To make church attractive and more engaging to millennials, the church needs to understand the features of ministry that are attractive to them. This endeavor does not mean a ministry should provide their preferred amenities just to lure them in and satisfy them. However, it does mean that a ministry should work towards meeting their spiritual needs in a customized way. The one-size-fits-all ministry approach that may have been sufficient for Baby Boomers and Generation X is not likely to be acceptable for millennials. This notion has been proven by several studies on why millennials are leaving the church.

Millennials do not want to be forced into the church mold that previous generations adhered to; instead, they want to be a part of a new and innovative ministry without being bound by traditions. Robert Chartrand, the author of "Spiritual Formation of Millennials: An Exploration of Best Practices for Crosspoint Church," researched new strategies for discipling

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[59] Richardson and Stetzer, *You Found Me,* 93.

millennials. One strategy provided by the author is related to spiritual disciplines. Chartrand found that helping millennials develop personal spiritual rhythms that include, but are not limited to, prayer, Bible study, and worship.[60] They do not want just to pray and sing hymns; they want to incorporate art, such as poetry, painting, drama, and rap music, into their worship.

Chartrand also found that millennials want to be challenged with biblical truths directly impacting their lives. Many millennials want the church to provide more in-depth, gospel-centered content that probes deeper into theology while confronting tough topics such as sexuality, gender roles, and divorce, which were typically taboo in previous generations.[61] They do not want to be shielded from the truth for their own good; they want the truth so that they are empowered to know what is for their own good. Millennials want to celebrate life through radically inclusive, socially progressive, artistic, and intellectual worship, with a commitment to biblical truth with love delivered by great preaching and caring and charismatic teachers.[62] The challenge with Chartrand's point is that, in most cases, biblical truths conflict with some of the social stances that millennials fiercely defend, such as LGBTQ+ and economic equality.

Authenticity is a primary feature that millennials prefer in a ministry. Denis Page, author of "Black Protestant Millennials: Attracting, Engaging, Discipling, and Retaining the Next Generation," conducts research that explicitly addresses the discipleship of Black American millennials, which is the predominant ethnicity at New Life Community. Page points out that Black American millennials are suspicious of ministries they perceive as trying to sell them something, be it a product or an ideology, but they want an authentic experience that transcends

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[60] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 160.

[61] Ibid., 77.

[62] Clydesdale, and Garces-Foley, *The Twentysomething Soul,* 95.

their everyday lives through worship, prayer, and teaching.[63] When millennials do not observe authenticity, they leave. They do not want to spend their time or money on an inauthentic ministry that does not provide anything that will impact their everyday lives.

For millennials, diversity is a measurement of a ministry's authenticity. Many millennials are strong proponents of diversity in ethnicity, gender, and religion. Page points out that their ease of accepting differences, their willingness to try new experiences in food, music, and travel, and their sense of their place in a global, more secular world differ significantly from the earlier generations.[64] They want to avoid the appearance of diversity; they want interaction between older, loving Christians and other millennials with different cultural backgrounds. In support of this viewpoint, Jefferson asserts that a ministry must be prepared to embrace diverse cultures and engage in various viewpoints if the ministry wants to develop relationships with millennials.[65]

Intergenerational relationships are also meaningful to millennials. Successful churches relate to millennials by engaging older generations to help meet their needs.[66] Holly Allen and Christine Lawton, authors of *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*, provide insight into how spiritual formation is better accomplished when done within intergenerational contexts, where older, more experienced believers worship, learn, and serve with younger believers, including millennials. Allen and Lawton contend that bringing generations together enables the whole church to benefit from each individual's God-given gifts and enables believers to fully live out being the body of

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[63] Page, "Black Protestant Millennials," 35.

[64] Ibid., 32.

[65] Jefferson, "The Church and African American Millennials," 36.

[66] Schafer, "Faith Leaders' Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement," 77

Christ and the family of faith.[67] In this case, not only is spiritual formation enhanced when groups are intergenerational, but the same groups will also have diverse people and relationships, which millennials prefer.

Establishing interpersonal relationships with older adults who have more life, career, financial, and spiritual experience is highly valued by millennials. Kinnaman and Matlock state that each young disciple needs champions outside their immediate family who follow Jesus and can sponsor their spiritual development for which other adults can shape them, speak into their lives, and help them develop.[68] Millennials highly seek intergenerational relationships in the marketplace. Cicely Jefferson asserts that millennials seek vocational and relational discipleship because their careers and relationships are at the top of their priority list.[69]

Millennials prefer a ministry with something to offer them value while supporting what is important to them. Grant Skeldon, author of *The Passion Generation: The Seemingly Reckless, Definitely Disruptive, but Far from Hopeless Millennials*, declares that the church does not have a millennial problem; the church has a discipleship problem. According to Skeldon, millennials want to change the world with a cause to fight for and a community to belong to.[70] Millennials are more comfortable working with like-minded individuals to achieve a goal. In their marketplace pursuits, they may tend to be more individualistic; however, this is different regarding ministry pursuits. Authors Clydesdale and Garces-Foley point out that they are not likely to join a church or ministry unless it provides something too amazing to pass up: a

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[67] Allen, Holly Catterton, and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2023), 58, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[68] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 88.

[69] Jefferson, "The Church and African American Millennials," 90.

[70] Skeldon, *The Passion Generation*, 34.

community with a visible cohort of other millennials and young adults dedicated to transforming society.[71] Intergenerational relationships are not one-sided; the older and younger generations can learn from one another. Tony Beard warns that if the church wants to reach millennials, they will need to listen to them because they know the ins and outs of their generation."

Millennials are not content with being spectators in ministry endeavors and social justice; they want to be participators. They have great ideas, though they prefer to work as part of a team for a common cause bigger than themselves. Robert Chartrand affirms that because they are very cause-oriented and want to make a difference in the world through social justice endeavors, millennials are likelier to demonstrate the gospel than declare it.[72] To expect millennials to volunteer every Sunday, in the confines of the church building, and remain content is a flawed expectation.

<center>The Importance of Community</center>

Based on their ministry preferences, it is clear that millennials do not want church as usual. To commit to a ministry, millennials want authenticity and support in their life and career goals. They want the freedom to worship corporately through different mediums without being criticized. Millennials want to understand the Word of God by asking questions without being judged. They want diversity, social justice, and relationships beyond weekly services.

Everything valuable to millennials can be found within a ministry that has established a community of believers. Clyde Headley, the author of "Discipleship: Following the Model of Jesus in the Local Church," makes the case that the discipleship strategies of churches are flawed because of a lack of following the model Jesus provided in the Scriptures. Headley refers to the

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[71] Clydesdale, and Garces-Foley, *The Twentysomething Soul,* 95.

[72] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 157.

interdependence of a community. In a Christian community, each person relies on others to help them grow; the growth rate is directly proportional to the amount of time spent with other believers, providing opportunities for instruction, encouragement, correction, and discipline.[73] This same viewpoint is made in the journal article "Barriers to Leading Small Groups among Generation Z and Younger millennials: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Implications for Recruitment and Training." The authors assert that a Christian community provides the best context for spiritual growth because so much of what Christ calls us to do involves relationships, such as loving one another (John 13:34–35, NKJV) and serving one another (1 Pet 4:10, NKJV).[74] Hence, when the church establishes a community, it is no longer a place where millennials go for a specific time; it becomes a place where they do life together as they become more like Christ.

A community will provide millennials with a space for interpersonal relationships and spiritual growth to develop, especially in smaller group settings. Anthony McKee, author of "Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern," researches the discipleship program of local churches to see if the programs align with the twelve best practices found in the discipleship models of Jesus and the apostle Paul. McKee highlights that Jesus demonstrated the model for Christians living in community with other believers as he ministered in homes and developed his disciples for service, and the small group element of individual mentoring easily fits within this model.[75] It is through relationships and community that Jesus intended

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[73] Clyde Headley, "Discipleship: Following the Model of Jesus in the Local Church" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 55, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[74] David R. Dunaetz, et al., "Barriers to Leading Small Groups among Generation Z and Younger Millennials: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Implications for Recruitment and Training." *Christian Education Journal* 19, no. 1 (April 2022): 152–169. Accessed February 28, 2023. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2660580277/B25025F4815F4AABPQ/1.

[75] Anthony McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make It According to the Pattern" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2021), 57. Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

discipleship to occur. Within the community context, millennials can retrieve instruction and guidance from ministry leaders and mentors, have a sense of belonging with those in their peer group, be a part of a secure social structure, and be empowered to carry out their God-given purpose.

Theological Foundations

The biblical principles of making disciples are at the core of this research project. Thus, the theological foundations of this research project are supported by Scripture, as confirmed by the apostle Paul in his second epistle to Timothy. Paul affirms that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, NKJV). Following Paul's proclamation, this research project is purposeful in utilizing Scripture as a foundation for marketplace discipleship and critical aspects of establishing relational discipleship.

Making Disciples

The church's mission to make disciples has been given by Christ, who is the "head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18, NKJV). Christ mandates: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18–20, NKJV). As Christ mandates, making disciples is the scorecard by which all churches and ministries should be measured. "The central command is to make disciples. At the heart of our mission is the reproduction in others of what Jesus has produced in us: faith, obedience, growth,

authority, compassion, love, and a bold, truthful message as his witnesses. They were learners commanded to produce more learners."[76] Before giving His Great Commission, Christ provided the best example for making disciples, as written in the Gospels. However, His work is not the only instance of discipleship where an individual or group follows a teacher, or the teachings and doctrines taught by that teacher. The Scriptures provide numerous examples of the concept of discipleship before and after the time of Christ.

Discipleship Before Christ

In the Old Testament, when prophets were the spokespersons for God, the term discipleship is not used. However, the context of making disciples is supported. In 1 Sam 19:18–23, a company of prophets prevented David from being arrested by messengers of Saul. "This group of individuals was comprised of people who were following the ways of Prophet Samuel and were his disciples. Saul's men 'saw' (not 'heard') Samuel's disciples 'prophesying' (v.20) … Each such group of prophets had a 'leader' (as here, v.20) or 'father' (1 Sam 10:12; 2 Kgs 2:12), in this case Samuel."[77] The Prophet Isaiah had disciples as well. In Isaiah 8:16, Isaiah entrusted his writings, the messages God has given to Isaiah as Holy Scriptures, to his disciples for preservation. "He devoted his time to teaching his students. He had faith in the words he had uttered and wanted them preserved for a day when they would be heeded. God provided faithful disciples who took the first step in canonizing Isaiah's prophecy."[78] In both examples, each

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[76] Max Anders *and Stu Weber, Holman New Testament Commentary – Matthew,* Holman Old Testament Commentary, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 86, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[77] Ronald F. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel" in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, vol. 3, Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Temper Longman, III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 4x, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[78] Anders and Butler, *Isaiah*, vol. 15, Holman Old Testament Commentary, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 78, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Prophet had disciples who were not only learners but also contributed generously to the success of their respective ministries.

Discipleship After Christ

After the demonstration of making disciples by Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, the New Testament continues to provide additional examples of discipleship. In Acts 16, the apostle Paul resumed his discipleship of Timothy on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). Paul calls him "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:17, NKJV), a description that suggests that Timothy was one of his converts during Paul's previous visit to the town of Lystra (Acts 14:21–23).[79] Timothy, already a disciple of Paul, was chosen by the apostle to accompany him on his missionary travel as a form of leadership training. "Paul's attention was drawn to the young man by the good report given of him by the Christians in the neighborhood, both in Lystra and Iconium. A good reputation of this kind was an indispensable qualification for Christian leadership as a good reputation among people generally is a requirement in a church leader."[80] In following Paul and learning from him, Timothy was being trained as a future leader equipped to make disciples.

When Timothy became the pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3), the apostle Paul wrote a letter that provided instructions to Timothy on continuing the mission of making disciples. Paul emphasizes to Timothy that "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2, NKJV). The mission started by Paul was at risk due to a lack of discipled leaders, and the

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[79] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008), 204, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[80] Ibid.

command is to ensure the continuation of the mission of the church, for which entrusting the gospel to disciples would require Timothy to teach and to model the faith (1:11– 12; 3:10–17).[81] Paul not only discipled Timothy, but he also trained Timothy for leadership and subsequently sent him out to make disciples by appointing him as pastor of a local church.

The apostle Paul's discipleship of Titus was like that of Timothy. Titus was also a disciple of Paul, addressing him as "my true child in the faith" (Titus 1:4; 1 Tim 1:2, English Standard Version). He also accompanied Paul to Jerusalem after his first missionary journey (Gal 2:1, 3), and Paul assured his credibility as a minister (2 Cor 8:23). As his disciple, Paul established Titus as the church's pastor on the island of Crete to set in order the things that were lacking (Titus 1:5). Titus is to complete specific projects (appointing elders, teaching) and reform or correct other developments (confronting opposing teachers and those influenced by them and adjusting doctrine and community behavior).[82] Paul's letter to Titus demonstrates that he was confident that his disciple could carry out the mission of appointing elders, preaching, and correcting heresy that impacted the church (Titus 1:5; 2:1, 15; 3:9–10).

The concept of disciple-making in the Scriptures consists of teachers and learners who have a lifelong commitment to the faith. Being a teacher means more than just equipping learners; it also means identifying and training leaders from among their followers and providing opportunities for their followers to apply what has been learned. Samuel, Isaiah, and Paul all demonstrated these attributes as teachers. The leadership at New Life Community will need to take on these responsibilities if the ministry is to be successful in making disciples. Similarly, being a learner means more than just being a student; it also means defending the faith, being

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[81] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[82] Ibid., 475.

willing to function as a servant leader, and applying what has been learned. Followers of Samuel and Isaiah, Timothy, and Titus all demonstrated these attributes as disciples. With millennials making up most of the members at New Life Community, they must become disciples that make disciples. They must be equipped to go, baptize, teach, and train new disciples to be a part of God's family and kingdom as Jesus did with His disciples.[83] For the millennials to become disciples, all who are connected to New Life Community must be called to discipleship by the ministry leadership as Christ called His disciples. In all His preaching, He gave a standard call to all the country, but in this, He gave a unique and particular call to those that the Father gave Him.[84] For the senior pastors of New Life Community, the calling of millennials to discipleship begins in the marketplace.

<div align="center">Marketplace Discipleship</div>

As provided in the Scripture, God will use the marketplace as a source for calling believers to discipleship. The Holy Spirit is at work in all spheres of life, and the marketplace is one of the spheres where believers join God in His effort to reconcile all things to Himself.[85] In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah was directed by God to go to the Wilderness of Damascus and anoint his successor, Elisha, as prophet (1 Kgs 19:15–16). Elijah finds Elisha plowing with twelve teams of oxen, which was his marketplace vocation (1 Kgs 19:19). "The number of oxen plowing signifies that Elisha comes from a family of some means. A surrender to ministry would

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[83] Thompson, "Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church", 63.

[84] Matthew Henry, *The Gospel of Matthew - Complete Bible Commentary Verse by Verse,* vol. 14, Bible Commentaries of Matthew Henry Series (Balneário Rincão, Brazil: Grupo Oxigênio Ltda-ME, 2016), 1697p-q, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[85] Kim Martinez, "The Integrated Life: Cultivating Discipleship in the Marketplace" (DMin thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2018), 36, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

mean counting the cost."[86] Afterward, Elisha left his career and family and followed Elijah to become his disciple. Elijah taught and mentored Elisha, who, in turn, followed, served, learned, received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, replaced him, and continued the ministry where he left off (2 Kgs 2:9–11, 15).

Similarly, when Jesus first went to make disciples, as stated in His Great Commission, He started within the marketplace. He calls the first disciples in a situation where they had experienced their helplessness as professional fishermen who had not caught any fish (Luke 5:4–5), and through His guidance, they subsequently witnessed the miracle of a massive catch of fish (Luke 5:6–9).[87] There are two points to consider in this scenario. First, Simon Peter was already familiar with Jesus and His authority as he was previously introduced to Jesus as being the Messiah (John 1:40–42); thus, he addressed Him as "Master" (Luke 5:5, NKJV). Although Jesus was not a fisherman by vocation (Matt 13:55), He had the revelatory insight to assist them. The fish harvest is immense, the fish catch is so large that their nets begin to tear, and Simon Peter's crew signals for help from their partners, indicating that Peter's business is thriving and that he is relatively prosperous.[88] Second, after this event, Jesus calls Simon Peter and Andrew to follow Him, and they immediately accept, leaving their fishing business behind (Matt 4:19–20; Mark 1:17–18; Luke 5:10–11).

There are two other occasions where Jesus engages His disciples in the marketplace. James and John, being fishermen themselves, accepted the calling of Jesus. Luke 5:11 clarifies

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[86] Richard D. Patterson, "1 and 2 Kings" in *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, vol. 3, Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Temper Longman, III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 212, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[87] Joel B. Green, et al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, The IVP Bible Dictionary Series, eds. Joel B. Green, et al., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2013), 36.

[88] Iain M. Duguid, et al., *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 8): Matthew–Luke,* ESV Expository Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 1074–75, ProQuest Ebook Central.

that this calling is not restricted to Simon, Peter, and Andrew but includes James and John as well (Matt 4:21–22). Similarly, they leave their prosperous business behind to be a disciple of Jesus.[89] Likewise, Levi, also known as Matthew (Matt 9:9; Luke 5:27), was a tax collector and an employee for the state who immediately accepted the call of Jesus while on the job. The Scripture does not indicate whether or not Levi already knew Jesus. However, he discerned that he should accept Jesus' calling, as he probably was aware of the Scriptures and was mindful of the miracles Jesus had performed. The description of Levi "sitting at the customs booth" parallels "casting a net into the sea" in the description of the call of Simon and Andrew, which results in him leaving his livelihood just as Simon, Andrew, James, and John did.[90] While discipleship can have its origins in the marketplace, there is no biblical support for discipleship to remain within the marketplace.

Elisha, Simon, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew abandoned their vocation to follow Elijah and Jesus, respectively. "In terms of discipleship, the call to these fishermen to leave their livelihood emphasizes the cost of following Jesus. It is also telling that Jesus, as a teacher or rabbi, initiates the relationship of discipleship; typically, a would-be disciple would approach a rabbi to study with him."[91] While it is not practical for modern-day believers to leave the vocation that provides for their livelihood to make disciples successfully, there needs to be a shift from marketplace to relational discipleship.

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[89] Duguid, et al., *Matthew–Luke,* 1075–76.

[90] Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 126–27, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[91] Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 54, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Relational Discipleship

Biblical discipleship reflects intentional interpersonal relationships that involve life situations and are supported through spiritual disciplines. True discipleship cannot occur from a distance or afar; it is an in-person, life-sharing experience requiring a relational environment. An Old Testament example of this can be found in the book of Exodus with Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. Moses sat to judge the people's disputes from morning to evening (Exod 18:13). When questioned by Jethro, Moses clearly states that he takes on the responsibility of discipleship for the entire nation of Israel by saying that he makes known the statutes of God.[92] Jethro then provided Moses with intergenerational advice came with age, experience, and wisdom (Exod 18:19–23). "Both men are now great chiefs in their own right, and behave accordingly. For the respect shown by Moses to his father-in-law, compare his readiness to accept Jethro's advice about judicial structures (verse 24). Such humility and respect for age is commended in the Scriptures (Lev 19:32), if not popular today."[93] Jethro would not have been able to provide this guidance had he not been in person to see what was happening in Moses' life.

Moses, in turn, heeded his father-in-law's advice by finding others to train in the Word of God so that they could resolve the people's disagreements (Acts 18:20). As Jethro advised, Moses was to select "men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain" who are capable of serving as judges over either a group of a thousand, a hundred, fifty, or ten (Acts 18:21, NKJV). Jethro's advice allowed Moses to identify and train fellow believers of the faith for leadership. Their leadership course was to include instruction in 'decrees' (i.e., specific

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[92] Headley, "Discipleship", 45.

[93] R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 145–46, ProQuest Ebook Central.

enactments), 'laws' (i.e., general rulings), the 'way to live' (i.e., lifestyle and the path of duty),

and the 'duties' (or jobs) each was to perform.[94] Having an established leader mentoring those

who show promise as a leader or actively serve in leadership is part of relational discipleship.

Jesus' style of discipleship emphasizes interpersonal relationships. He did not meet with

His disciples weekly to give a lesson, only to send them into the world. Jesus lived among them

for three full years, doing life with them while teaching them valuable skills to allow them to go

out into the world and make disciples. The disciples' relationship with Jesus involved living with

Him (John 1:39, 3:22), following Him wherever He went, making inquiries, engaging in

extended dialogue with Him, and performing acts of service (John 4:8; 6:5, 10, 12).[95] Jesus'

disciples were called as individuals, and they were being prepared as a community. They were

to, above all, be with Him in fellowship, which reinforces the call to discipleship where they

would be transformed into credible and holistic witnesses, and with the time spent with Him,

they were being prepared so that He might send them out.[96] Jesus' disciples experienced spiritual

growth from following Him throughout His ministry. Spiritual growth is progressively learning

to let Christ live His life through us, and that only happens through a relationship with Him and

other believers.[97]

In the book of Acts, the early church engaged in relational discipleship under the

leadership of the apostles whom Christ commissioned. Four aspects of relational discipleship led

to the church's spiritual formation and growth. First was the apostles teaching (Acts 2:42). The

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[94] Kenneth L. Barker, et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, eds. Kenneth L. Barker, et al., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2017), Credo Books.

[95] Green, et al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 1.

[96] Duguid, et al., *Matthew–Luke,* 704.

[97] Tony Evans, *Kingdom Living: The Essentials of Spiritual Growth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 15, ProQuest Ebook Central.

first Christians were enamored of truth. They cared deeply about theological understanding, especially in the areas of Christology, Old Testament fulfillment, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of God would all have been carefully explained, as would ecclesiology, the people of God as Israel and then the church.[98]

Next is the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:44). With fellowship (the meaning of *koinōnia*), sharing or holding things in common, the early church began as an 'assembly' (the meaning of *ekklēsia*), transitioned into a community, and then became a family where sharing and caring were the watchwords for relationships with one another.[99] Relational discipleship is the disposition towards others that derives from faith, is formed in the community, and sees love as more than attraction or attachment.[100] It should be noted that the fellowship of believers also includes intergenerational relationships. The church honors the Lord when a process is set up for older members to share their knowledge and experiences with younger people and for younger members to learn from what their elders do.[101]

Third is the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46). Meals (the core theme of fellowship that expanded to include every area of life) were viewed as sharing, first with God (they prayed at the beginning and end of meals) and then with one another.[102] Breaking bread together was such an intimate moment that believers were discouraged from sharing a meal with a person claiming to be a Christian but were involved in a sinful lifestyle (1 Cor 5:11–12). While it is understood that

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[98] Grant R. Osborne, *Acts Verse by Verse,* Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 62, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Hayes, and Cherry, *The Meanings of Discipleship,* 162.

[101] David Sampson, "Intergenerational Model of Discipleship," (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 38, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[102] Ibid.

no one is perfect, this meant that even best friends within a community could not have a meal together if one of the friends knew that the other was living a life of intentional sinfulness with no desire to repent and do away with that sinful lifestyle. "Eating together connoted more than friendliness in ancient culture; it created a social bond. When Christians ate together, it reinforced and confirmed the solidarity established by their shared confession of faith in Christ. Refusing to eat with fellow Christians guilty of such acts breaks all social ties with them as well as excludes them from the Lord's Supper."[103] With such importance on Christians guarding against whom they break bread or share any other aspect of their lives, there is an emphasis on being intimately engaged with one's community for accountability.

Fourth is prayer (Acts 3:1; 4:23– 31; 6:4). Being a point of significant emphasis, a third of all the references to prayer in the New Testament are in Luke-Acts. Since God's people depend on Him in everything they do, they must involve and invoke him in every area of their lives.[104] Without consistent prayer, there will be no way the leadership of New Life Community will know God's will and specific instructions for ministering to the millennials and building a community of believers. These four aspects of relational discipleship should not only be applied by New Life Community but should align with what other researchers have done to disciple millennials.

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[103] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 166, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[104] Osborne, *Acts Verse by Verse*, 62.

Theoretical Foundations

The topic of transitioning millennials from marketplace discipleship to relational

discipleship has yet to be specifically addressed. However, there has been a great deal of focus

on why millennials are leaving the church and what can be done to bring them back. For

example, according to Charles Sumpter's research, millennials are less likely to belong to a

church compared to other generations at the same age.[105] This notion points to a need for more

dedication by millennials. According to Jonette Camp, the fact that the church has placed more

focus on evangelizing those outside of the church to the detriment of the church's millennial

members provides insight into why young adults may feel disconnected.[106] Hence, millennials

feel ignored and taken for granted. Journalist May King, a millennial, makes a case that the

church used to be a vehicle for social and political change; however, since the church is no

longer the cornerstone of the community and civil rights, millennials have disengaged.[107] This

perspective suggests that millennials believe the church has become powerless and unwilling to

challenge socio-political oppression.

Existing Research

There needs to be more research addressing the context of millennials in the marketplace

and relational discipleship; however, there is adequate research on their behavior and modern-

day response to religion. David G. Ford, Joshua L. Mann, and Peter M. Phillips address them as

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[105] Charles Sumpter, "Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church" (DMin thesis., Liberty University, 2019), 47, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[106] Camp, Jonette, "An Assessment of the Millennial Body and Its Place in the Local Church" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 18, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[107] Maya King, "The Black Church Can Engage More Black Millennials by Bringing Politics Back into the Pulpit," *Black Youth Project,* (2017), accessed September 9, 2023, http://blackyouthproject.com/the-black-church-can-engage-more-black-millennials-by-bringing-politics-back-into-the-pulpit/.

"Digital Millennials."[108] This research focuses on how digital technology has become so increasingly pervasive in society that it significantly affects millennials' engagement with religion and the Bible. Rick Richardson and Eric Stetzer focus on discipling 'Nones', a title that describes millennials who have no preference for any particular religion and no allegiance to any religious group or organization.[109] Michael Cunningham addresses millennials in the context of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, as they are comfortable with their individualistic views. In other words, while millennials may embrace a distant God, they still reserve the right to have God intervene when the individual has a need.[110] Cunningham contends that millennials bristle at the thought of uniformity and seek a religion and culture that allows them to feel connected to their fellow humankind while retaining their individuality.[111] While all of these points are valid and play a part in identifying the challenges the generation presents, specific research for transitioning millennials from the marketplace to relational discipleship still needs to be addressed.

Existing research that speaks to the discipleship of millennials within the marketplace is available. Researcher Christine Carnate Atrero addresses millennials in the marketplace in the context of creating a program for making disciples in the marketplace. Carnate Atrero argues that a Marketplace-based Discipleship Program would help young adults continue to serve and live their Christian lives in the marketplace.[112] Researcher Kim Martinez focuses on creating an

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[108] David G. Ford, et al., *The Bible and Digital Millennials* (London, UK: Routledge, 2019), 12, T&F eBooks.

[109] Richardson and Stetzer, *You Found Me,* 11.

[110] Michael Cunningham, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism: A Classical Critique," *Eleutheria 7*, no. 1 (June 2023): 41, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu/vol7/iss1/.

[111] Ibid., 42.

[112] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 102.

integrated discipleship model implemented in the marketplace. Martinez argues that to meet the reality in which congregants live, including millennials, the church needs to present an integrated discipleship model that shows God's activity and the appropriate Christian response in the marketplace.[113] Both researchers address the need for marketplace discipleship, especially as millennials and most believers spend most of their time in the marketplace. However, while biblical discipleship may start in the marketplace, it was not meant to stay confined to the marketplace.

What needs to be addressed is how to disciple and foster interpersonal relationships with millennials in the marketplace outside of the marketplace when it is an essential aspect of their lives. The church, in general, has sent a message that millennials are best served by being active in traditional church activities. However, for the typical millennial in the marketplace, especially those who have been discipled in the marketplace, traditional church activities amount to perhaps about 1 percent of their lives. In comparison, the other 99 percent does not count as ministry is subtly implied.[114] The church has not just put millennials in a box, which they despise; the church has isolated and quarantined them until they comply, which they will not.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Ministry Needs of Millennials</h2>

While existing research does not explicitly address how to transition millennials from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship, there is value in existing research on ministering to and reconciling millennials to the body of Christ. First, a ministry must maintain the frequency of fellowship and connecting opportunities. Millennials need to have opportunities to meet at least once a week outside of weekly worship services. Lile encourages churches and

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[113] Martinez, "The Integrated Life," 4.

[114] Ibid., 56.

ministry groups to meet weekly for one hour to an hour and fifteen minutes maximum and

encourages their millennials to attend group activities as much as possible.[115] Group activities

include worship services, Bible studies, life groups, marketplace-related groups, and other

fellowship opportunities outside the ministry. The more they begin to connect, the more they

often talk about meeting regularly, sometimes daily, with their church friends or community

members to share meals, go to movies, play sports, or otherwise hang out and do life together.[116]

Millennials need a ministry that will meet their lifestyle and spiritual needs. This type of

ministry includes being prepared for office and non-office working millennials who may be self-

employed and full-time parents in small groups, worship, home visitations, marital and pre-

marital counseling, and even family camps.[117] Millennials also need solutions for the current

economic conditions they find themselves in. Denis Page finds that millennials are focused on

stewarding the resources that they have and that ministries should offer a holistic, faith-based

lifestyle Christian discipleship program that should include discussions and ministries related to

good stewardship of the available resources and the role of faith in personal economic matters,

including money and debt.[118] Jacob Armstrong has found that small group meetings are effective

for fellowship and connecting opportunities. "The fellowship experienced in a small group is

different from the feeling in a business setting or even a church meeting. It is more akin to a

family gathering. It involves light conversation and sharing of the deepest parts of your life."[119]

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[115] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 340.

[116] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 82.

[117] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 156.

[118] Page, "Black Protestant Millennials," 148.

[119] Jacob Armstrong and Rachel Armstrong, *The Connected Life: Small Groups That Create Community* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The Value of Small Groups

Small group meetings can play a significant role in discipling millennials. When millennials join small groups, organic gatherings of friends, or young-adult programs early in their church experience, they gain a place to ask questions, familiarize themselves with Scripture, examine and reconsider their preconceptions about God and the Church, and get to know what Christianity looks like and means.[120] There should also be flexibility in when groups meet. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert suggest making learning opportunities occur at times and places convenient to their learning, such as in their homes or other sites where they naturally gather and when they can engage and concentrate.[121]

At Oak Ridge Church in Salisbury, MD, small group and Bible study meetings are conducted in homes, and small group meetings closely follow the school year for semesters. Pastor Brian Moss explains that doing groups this way allows the groups to refresh and reinvigorate, gives the group host's home a much-needed break, and offers new attendees a precise time for jumping into the group.[122] Closely following the school year for semesters is a good approach for two reasons. First, many millennials are accustomed to a school schedule as many are active in post-graduate and collegiate education or have attended college as undergraduates. Second, many millennials have school-aged children, so they are familiar with starting fresh with semesters after breaks. Giving a host's home a break is good; however, having a rotation of small group meeting locations would have the same effect. This includes having

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[120] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 78.

[121] Hibbert, and Hibbert, *Walking Together on the Jesus Road*, 232.

[122] Brian Moss, "12 Keys to a Thriving Small Groups Ministry," 2020, accessed October 5, 2020, https://pastorbrianmoss.com/12-keys-to-a-thriving-small-groups-ministry/.

small group meetings at places other than someone's home, such as cafes, coffee houses, and libraries.

Small groups help promote spiritual growth. Raven Young makes the point that for spiritual growth to occur, learning should be intimate and personal, and millennials will be encouraged to engage the truth and examine their lives, for which small groups can be a catalyst.[123] Spiritual growth occurs when biblical principles apply to the lives of millennials. This approach requires churches and ministries to adapt their approach to teaching the Bible in the light of the culture and needs of disciples, which would be millennials.[124] Also required for the spiritual growth of millennials is providing an opportunity for them to get answers to their questions.

Millennials have proven that they want to know why they should believe what the Bible says and how what the Bible says applies to their lives. In the research conducted by Michael Dewease, all the small group participants desired more time allotted for biblical discussion.[125] Providence Church in Mt. Juliet, TN, the church that Dewease attends, has incorporated this in their small group meetings. Their small groups have a time when the Bible is read and discussed, time is allotted for teaching, questions, and exploration, different perspectives are heard, life stories are shared, and a life application is found.[126] This is a robust approach, especially since millennials do not respond well to being lectured with no opportunity for dialogue. Open dialogue and biblical discussions will help establish trust among the group and form interpersonal relationships. In utilizing this approach, it is essential to refrain from having the

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[123] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 56.

[124] Hibbert, and Hibbert, *Walking Together on the Jesus Road,* 215.

[125] William Dewease, "The Necessity of Small-Group Ministries," (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2021), 96. Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[126] Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Connected Life,* 16–17.

conversations go off on tangents due to ongoing questions that lead away from the topic and emotional responses based on personal socio-political positions.

Spiritual disciplines can be practiced and reaffirmed within small groups. Spiritual practices such as reading the Scriptures, prayer, solitude, silence, fasting, etc., are all means to place us in greater relational dependence on God to replace our habitual reliance on the flesh or sinful substitutes.[127] With the busy lifestyle of millennials, spiritual disciplines may become a lower priority. At Crosspoint Church, Chartrand's research revealed that many of the millennials in the church were busy, distracted, and tired, and with work, school, and family schedules, they find it very difficult to carve out time for personal spiritual disciplines such as prayer or Bible study.[128] As a result, it is fundamental to incorporate spiritual disciplines within small groups.

College Park Church in Indianapolis, IN, emphasizes the practice of spiritual disciplines within their small groups. It is the church's position that a pattern or a 'cycle' can be followed for how Christians cannot just be individualistic in their spiritual practices but truly practice them in the community.[129] Small group leaders are provided with ten spiritual disciplines that can be practiced within their small groups. The small group leader is to be led by God as to which of the spiritual disciplines will be the focus of their small group for two to three months at a time. According to Pastor Bob Martin of College Park Church, small groups are great communities, especially to practice these things together and/or to talk about how they went and what can be learned.[130]

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[127] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 269–70.

[128] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 155–56.

[129] Bob Martin, "Spiritual Disciplines: Growing Together in Community." 2023, accessed January 24, 2024, https://www.yourchurch.com/spiritual-disciplines-in-community/.

[130] Ibid.

An approach like College Park Church would expose millennials to spiritual disciplines they may not have had otherwise. This is especially true for the millennials who do not regularly attend corporate worship services. For the millennials who regularly participate in corporate worship services and small group meetings, spiritual disciplines will play a pertinent part in their spiritual formation. While there may be ten spiritual disciplines that a small group leader can choose from, small groups should not be limited to just one every two to three months. There should be spiritual disciplines that are consistently utilized for each small group meeting. Small group attendees should also be taught about other disciplines; however, it should be an individual choice as to which spiritual disciplines they will practice individually.

Small groups are influential in teaching biblical principles that apply to the lives of millennials. However, millennials still look to leadership, including small group leaders, for guidance. In a study by researcher Wendell Jackson, discipleship-making proficiency is improved when small groups use a curriculum prescribed by leadership to ensure content is well-balanced and strategically focused to facilitate spiritual formation.[131] Based on the study, guidance, balance, and life application are essential to discipling millennials.

Real Life Ministries in Coeur D'Alene, ID, follow a unique curriculum based on Bible storytelling for their small group meetings. Small group leaders will learn a story within the Bible to tell. Once told, the leader will select a storyteller within the group to tell the story in their own words. Other attendees within the small group will follow along, using the Bible, to ensure the storyteller is telling the story accurately, although not scripturally word for word. The small group leader will then ask the group questions, which prompts dialogue amongst the

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[131] Wendell Jackson, "Maximizing Discipleship Via an Adult Small Group Ministry" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 99–100, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

attendees. The curriculum is set for a thirty-four-week study, which includes stories from all the Gospels in the order they occurred.

Having a curriculum for small group meetings is a good approach when discipling millennials. A curriculum provides the guidance that millennials desire and allows the small group leader to have a planned approach for teaching biblical principles. As used by Real Life Ministries, Biblical storytelling is a good way to ensure the biblical content is well-balanced and understandable. Listeners may not necessarily remember the biblical passage word-for-word. However, they will remember the story and concepts identified through dialogue. This approach will only be viable for millennials if the curriculum and biblical storytelling apply to their lives. They must be able to apply what they learned to their own lives and relationships with others. Senior Pastor Nate Holdridge explains that Bible teachings are not the only things needed for transformation to occur; people need to live out the Bible with other Christians, and in a small group, they will interact with Christians whose lives will back up the message.[132] As millennials learn together, they will also promote relationships with others.

Establishing Relationships

Fostering interpersonal relationships is significant for relational discipleship. To disciple millennials effectively, a ministry should recognize the power of relational connectedness. The best motivators in the workplace for millennials are relationships, the best connectors in religious institutions are relationships, and the best way to get a millennial involved in service, activity, or ministry is through relationships.[133] Relationships with others outside the marketplace and in the

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[132] Nate Holdridge, "6 Lessons I've Learned About Small Group Ministry," 2020, accessed October 7, 2023, https://calvarychapel.com/posts/6-lessons-ive-learned-about-small-group-ministry/.

[133] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 78.

body of Christ are just as essential as relationships established in the marketplace. Keisha Spivey asserts that all believers must learn to love and to become a loving presence, to love God and others, just as Jesus did, as true biblical spirituality will result in healthy relationships.[134] Establishing healthy relationships among their peers is essential to millennials within and outside the marketplace.

Just as meaningful are the intergenerational relationships that millennials desire. Chartrand finds that millennials gravitate to intergenerational relationships because they want the wisdom that comes from the life experiences of the older generation, as well as their seasoned prayers and meaningful words of encouragement.[135] Parkway Baptist Church in Fort Oglethorpe, GA, has committed to promoting intergenerational interaction that establishes intergenerational relationships. The ministry established a rotation of small group teachers of varying ages who have participated in leading discipleship where the students may hear the experienced advice of the elders and the fresh perspectives of the younger generation.[136]

Parkway also incorporated a hybrid model of discipleship. This hybrid model blends the church's valued history, respected culture, and spiritual traditions with contemporary Christian discipleship methods where members of all groups are actively engaged.[137] From young adults to seniors, the church's hybrid model discontinued ministries and education separated by age. With more opportunities to nurture and establish intergenerational relationships, there is an improvement in relational discipleship. What is necessary for biblical discipleship is a relational discipleship paradigm that integrates rationalistic instruction with the development of reparative

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[134] Keisha Spivey, "Creating a Multiplying Micro Group Discipleship Model Beyond the Church Building" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2022), 17, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[135] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 80.

[136] Sampson, "Intergenerational Model of Discipleship," 120.

[137] Ibid., 122.

human relationships and the formation of a new group identity within the local church as an extension of the kingdom of God.[138]

Parkway Baptist Church's intentionality in promoting intergenerational relationships should be modeled within other ministries seeking to disciple millennials. Far too often, there typically are not enough older adults, other than Young Adult Pastors, willing to commit themselves to establishing relationships with millennials. However, millennials appreciate it when people further along in life's journey take the time to invest in them and share their experience and wisdom within the context of mutually respectful and engaging relationships.[139] Additionally, having an older, experienced resource that can guide them in their marketplace endeavors is highly sought. Spiritual discipleship and vocational discipleship serve as a catalyst for attracting and retaining millennials in faith communities.[140] For this approach to work, there must be intentionality by a ministry and a commitment from older, more experienced adults.

A significant challenge with establishing intergenerational relationships is the challenge of hierarchy. This means intergenerational relationships should not be only a top-down, older-to-younger process; they should be a mutual friendship rather than a hierarchical one.[141] Millennials and older adults should be able to share wisdom. For example, older adults may have more life experience; however, millennials are more knowledgeable of emerging technologies that provide better access to data. Millennials do not want a dictatorial relationship; they want a reciprocal relationship.

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[138] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 6.

[139] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 110.

[140] Jefferson, "The Church and African American Millennials," 48.

[141] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 111.

Conclusion

The researcher provides data that addresses the ministry context problem, identifies the purpose of this action research project, and defends the thesis statement for the research. The problem is that marketplace discipleship has displaced relational discipleship among the millennial members and attendees at New Life Community in Hilliard, Ohio. The purpose of this action research project is to increase the incidence of gatherings and intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship among millennials. Last, the thesis statement for this research is that if relational discipleship is established through small groups, personal connections, and biblical life application, there will be an improvement in millennials' spiritual formation, discipline, and growth.

In this chapter, an evaluation was made of the importance of the millennial generation despite them being criticized and misunderstood by previous generations. This evaluation addresses the review of literature highlighted by scholarly research relevant to establishing relational discipleship with millennials. An examination of the cultural and societal challenges of millennials, as well as their marketplace tenacity, was conducted to get a better understanding of this generation. The influence of social media on millennials was investigated to see how it impacts their worldview and personal relationships. There was an extensive review of the ministry dispositions of millennials where criticisms of the traditional churches and the ministry preferences of millennials were identified. Additionally, the importance of a Christian community for millennials was examined.

Also, in this chapter, theological and theoretical foundations for this research project were provided. The theological foundation for making disciples, marketplace discipleship, and relational discipleship were reviewed with corresponding scriptural foundations. Bible commentaries from theological resources were observed and extrapolated. Furthermore, a

theoretical foundation that aligns with the theological foundation for the ministry needs of

millennials, the value of small groups, and the significance of nurturing relationships were all

reviewed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This action research project seeks to resolve the problem of marketplace discipleship superseding relational discipleship among the millennials connected to NLC in Hilliard, Ohio. The purpose of this action research study is to increase the occurrence of gatherings along with the establishment of intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship among millennials, who have placed more importance on maintaining relationships established in the marketplace than the relationships at NLC. It is different from the expectation of this research project that increasing the frequency of gatherings for millennials will automatically improve relational discipleship at NLC. However, it is expected that by increasing the frequency of gatherings, relational discipleship among the millennials will be enhanced with intergenerational engagement, focusing on teaching biblical discipleship, and incorporating the ministry preferences of millennials. It is also expected that spiritual growth will occur within a community atmosphere where millennials will experience authentic relationships and freedom of worship and receive Scriptural guidance for their everyday living.

The researcher expects to learn if increasing gatherings that promote discipleship and interpersonal relationships will positively impact transitioning marketplace disciples to relational disciples. More than one in three American labor force participants (thirty-five percent) are millennials, making them the largest generation in the US labor force.[1] Included are Christian millennials who are career-focused, entrepreneurial, and income-driven and are the largest

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[1] Richard Fry, "Millennials Are the Largest Generation in the US Labor Force," *Pew Research Center* (2018), accessed March 24, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/11/Millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/.

generation at NLC. Most millennials connected to NLC have become more focused on marketplace-focused initiatives. For NLC to be successful in making disciples, the ministry will execute an action-oriented intervention that will shift millennials from focusing on relationships and personal advancement in a marketplace community to relationships and spiritual growth in a Christian Community that promotes relational discipleship.

Intervention Design

The research project will be conducted primarily in Hilliard, OH, for seven weeks. NLC is a 'house church' ministry where worship services are conducted in the home of the researcher and his wife. The book of Acts teaches that the early church utilized homes for prayer meetings (Acts 2:42, 12:12), communion (Acts 2:42; 46), fellowship (Acts 2:42), evangelism (Acts 2:47), and teaching (Acts 2:42; 5:42).[2] Gatherings and small groups will be conducted by the ministry in locations in the nearby cities of Dublin, Westerville, and Columbus, OH, including homes of current members of NLC. In tandem with this research, participants will be empowered and encouraged to meet at a local Starbucks, park, etc., to discuss the Bible and fellowship while forming a circle of accountability.[3]

Participants and Groups

Four groups will be included in the research project, as illustrated in figure 1. The first group will be the NLC ministry leaders, who will also serve as the project stakeholders (PS). This group consists of three ministry leaders of NLC. As a ministry leader, the researcher will be excluded from this group and function as the project facilitator (PF). The PS group will partner

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[2] Steven Adams, "Metamorphosis of the Traditional Church: The Hybrid Church Model" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2023), 29-30, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

[3] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 112.

with the PF in the planning and executing the intervention. The second group is millennials, who are NLC members (MM). These participants were born between 1981 and 1996, have accepted and acknowledged membership, and regularly attend ministry gatherings and worship services. The third group consists of those born between 1981 and 1996 who regularly attend NLC gatherings and worship services but have yet to accept membership into the ministry (MA). The final group is those who are either not part of the millennial population or are not considered NLC members or attendees. This group is deemed as other attendees (OA), and while their attendance will be counted and their feedback reviewed, this group is not the focus of this research project.

Researcher	Ministry Leaders	NLC Members	NLC Attendees	Others
Project Facilitator (PF)	Project Stakeholder (PS)	Millennial Members (MM)	Millennial Attendees (MA)	Other Attendees (OA)

Figure 1. Research project group

MM and MA make up the NLC demographic experiencing the need for more relational discipleship. NLC has an internal database that provides the birthdate and age of all members and attendees who provided the information. The MM has a pool of seventeen potential participants, and the MA group has a potential pool of six participants. There are also two millennials in the PS group, which means that a total of twenty-five millennials will be recruited to participate in the research project. Members not within the millennial generation or millennials who do not attend any NLC gatherings at least once a month are not eligible to participate in the project. For the research project to be viable, there will need to be at least seven participants, with at least two from the MA group. Seven participants make up approximately 25 percent of the targeted demographic at NLC.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher will be the lead and primary recruiter for the research project. Recruitment can begin at the leading of the researcher as IRB approval has been secured.[4] Preliminary recruiting will begin with the PS group, consisting of NLC ministry leaders. The researcher will discuss the project as part of the agenda during NLC Leadership meetings. With each verbal invitation extended to ministry leaders, the researcher will explain the research project, how the project will benefit the ministry, their role and expectations as project stakeholders, and how their participation is essential. The researcher will also advise the ministry leaders that they would be required to complete a specific consent form for ministry leaders and an anonymous questionnaire for which the researcher will share the results with the group.

The researcher will initiate preliminary planning with the MM and MA groups. The researcher will make verbal announcements about the research project in all NLC gatherings, and personal verbal invitations will be made as opportunities are presented. With each personal invitation, the researcher will provide details of the research project, how it will benefit the ministry, and how their participation is encouraged. The researcher will also advise the potential participants about a participant consent form required to participate, along with an initial anonymous survey.

Data Collection

The action-oriented intervention will use a mixed-method approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research, which the researcher will use throughout the intervention. Qualitative data will be obtained through questionnaires and interviews. The researcher will

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[4] See IRB approval.

receive quantitative data through surveys. The PS group will be required to complete one

anonymous questionnaire specific to ministry leaders. The MM and MA groups will be required

to complete three anonymous surveys, an anonymous questionnaire for each gathering a

participant attends, and a private recorded interview with the researcher. Figure 2 illustrates the

data the project team will collect from each group. The project team will only ask those in the

OA group to complete an anonymous questionnaire for the attended gathering voluntarily.

Questionnaires completed by the OA group and those completed by the MM and MA groups will

be marked with a code to indicate that the feedback is from a non-participant and will be utilized

upon intervention evaluation.
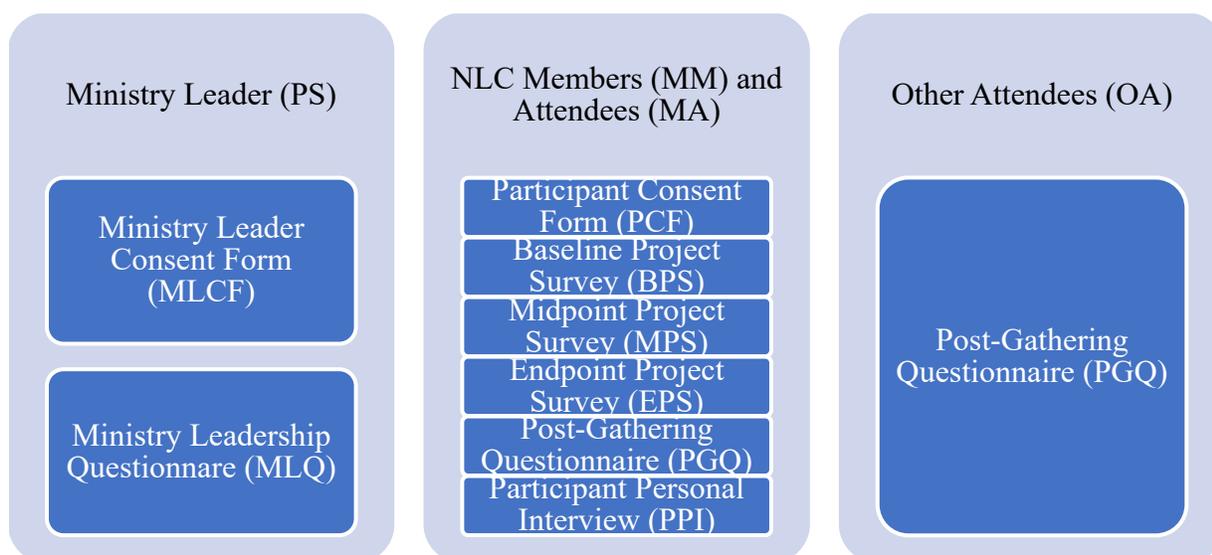
Figure 2. Data collection per project group

The researcher will keep the data collected in this study private and stored securely. Also,

the researcher will store the electronic data on a password-locked computer, and the researcher

will store the hardcopy data in a locked file cabinet. After three years, the researcher will delete

all electronic records and shred all hardcopy records. The researcher will store all recordings on a

password-locked computer for three years and then delete them. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Research Ethics

As PF, the researcher also serves as the senior pastor of NLC and has a pastoral relationship with all participants. To limit the potential or perceived conflicts or bias among participants, all data collected will be anonymous so that the researcher cannot link the collected data to the specific participants who provided or are associated with the data. Disclosure has been provided so that each participant can decide if this relationship will affect their willingness to participate in this study. The researcher or the project team will take no action against an individual based on their decision to participate or not participate in this study. Also, minimal risks to participants are expected by participating in this study.

Planning

The planning phase of the research project will begin before the implementation of the intervention. As senior pastor, the researcher will announce and provide research project details during the NLC Leadership meeting. During this time, the researcher will obtain the support of the ministry leadership to move forward with the research project. As PF, the researcher will provide the ministry leadership with a hard copy of the Ministry Leader Consent Form (MLCF)[5] to be completed and submitted to the researcher by the conclusion of an NLC Leadership meeting. Upon completion of the MLCF, the ministry leadership will become the PS group. The PF will countersign, scan, and store the MLCF. Within 24 hours, a scanned copy of the countersigned MLCF will be emailed by the researcher to each respective PS along with a link to

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[5] See Appendix A.

the Ministry Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)[6] to be completed online within forty-eight hours. The MLQ will be an anonymous online survey. The PF will extrapolate the results of the MLQ and prepare a report to be reviewed by the PS group. Participant recruitment will also continue throughout the planning phase. Potential participants will continue to be recruited verbally,[7] with participant emails,[8] and follow-up emails.[9] Participant and follow-up emails will continue to be sent to potential participants until two days before the intervention begins.

The emails sent to potential participants will contain a link to the Participant Consent Form (PCF).[10] Once the PCF has been completed and submitted online, within twenty-four hours, the researcher will provide participants with the Baseline Participant Survey (BPS)[11] which can also be submitted online. The researcher will make available hard copies of the PCF and BPS upon request. Also, the PF will access all submitted documents through an online survey database and download the responses to a local database only accessible by the PF. Hard copies of all documents submitted will be manually entered into the local database so that all data is in one place and can be used for accurate reporting.

The researcher will schedule a project kickoff meeting one week before the intervention, where weekly planning meetings will be scheduled. Within the project kickoff meeting, the researcher will assign project tasks, resources, and tools needed, and the project budget will be reviewed and confirmed, as illustrated in tables 3.1 and 3.2. Also, during the project kickoff meeting, the results of the MLQ will be reviewed by the research project team. MLQ responses

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[6] See Appendix B.

[7] See Appendix C.

[8] See Appendix D.

[9] See Appendix E.

[10] See Appendix F.

[11] See Appendix G.

that are similar and consistent will be adopted as a change to be made and assigned to a PS to implement. Likewise, other MLQ responses that may not be consistent among the PS group but receive consensus when discussing will also be adopted as a change and assigned to a PS to implement. All changes resulting from the MLQ will be targeted as part of the overall ministry changes initiated in the intervention to address identified problem areas.

Table 3.1. Project team assignments

Project Team	Project Team Tasks/Responsibilities
Facilitator	Recruit potential participants by announcements at ministry gatherings and personal invites. Send recruitment emails to potential participants twice weekly before the intervention begins. Collect Participant Consent Form from participants. Conduct participant surveys before the intervention starts, during weeks four and seven. Conduct research project meetings bi-weekly, beginning in week two of the intervention. Lead Small Group Meetings where the teaching will be focused on discipleship.
Stakeholder 1	Lead Supportive Engagement Groups (Life Coaching, Marriage Counseling). Co-lead Small Group Meetings. Participate in Research Project Meetings. Administer and collect Participant Post-Gathering Questionnaires.

	Establish an interpersonal relationship with a project participant or frequent attendee who is not a participant.
Stakeholder 2	Lead Fellowship Gatherings. Assist with gatherings as needed. Participate in Research Project Meetings. Administer and collect Participant Post-Gathering Questionnaires. Establish an interpersonal relationship with a project participant or frequent attendee who is not a participant.
Stakeholder 3	Assist with gatherings as needed. Participate in Research Project Meetings. Administer and collect Participant Post-Gathering Questionnaires. Establish an interpersonal relationship with a project participant or frequent attendee who is not a participant.

Table 3.2. Project resource needs and budget

Project Resource	Project Need	Budget	Purpose/Comments
NLC Member's Home to be determined	Weekly Small Group Meetings.	$700	Light snacks are to be provided by the ministry.
Columbus and Westerville Metropolitan Libraries	Meeting room for Supportive Engagement Groups.	$0	Reserved meeting rooms free of charge. Must reserve in advance.

Marketplace Locations to be determined	Meeting space for NLC Fellowship Gatherings and Weekly Small Group Meetings.	$700	Marketplace locations include Cafes, Food Halls, and other public venues. Light snacks are to be provided by the ministry.

Schedule

Before week one, the project team will establish the dates of all NLC gatherings on the ministry calendar. The PS group will have all their assignments and utilize other NLC members to assist with their tasks. During this time, the PF will stay neutral and engage when needed, specifically to address issues that may threaten the integrity of the research. Also, during this time, the senior pastors will focus on the theme of discipleship for worship services and Bible study unless directed otherwise by the Holy Spirit. Focusing on the theme of discipleship includes formal, biblical teaching but with a greater emphasis on informal methods to develop Christian attitudes, values, behaviors, and skills.[12]

Each week of the intervention, every gathering except for worship services and prayer group will conclude with a request for the MM, MA, and OA groups to complete a Post-Gathering Questionnaire (PGQ).[13] A resource from the PS group will administer the PGQ and provide it to the PF. The PF will then record the data in the project repository. PGQs are not being requested at worship services and prayer groups as these gatherings focus more on spiritual formation and disciplines, even though these gatherings can fortify relationships with and among millennials.

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[12] McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship," 31.

[13] See Appendix H.

The purpose of the PGQ is three-fold. First, it is intended to evaluate if the attendee learned biblical truths and if the attendee could apply those truths to their lives. If biblical truths are not understood and applicable to millennials, there will be minimal participation in future gatherings. Second, it is intended to help determine if the gathering promotes interpersonal relationships necessary for discipleship. Third, it is designed to receive feedback about the quality of the gathering and identify if any immediate changes are needed for future gatherings. All three purposes will help determine if NLC gatherings are effective for millennials. As the PGQs are accumulated throughout the intervention, the PF will be able to identify any deficiencies related to a lack of leadership, teaching, or discipling skills by the NLC ministry leaders.

Throughout the seven weeks of the intervention, the PF will execute tasks to monitor the research project's progress. First, the PF will facilitate a bi-weekly project update meeting where, along with the PS group, a review will be conducted on how each ministry gathering is progressing regarding attendance, extrapolating visible trends from the results of completed PGQs, and addressing any issues. The researcher will review the number of interpersonal relationships established by NLC ministry leaders will also be reviewed. Ministry leaders are to develop interpersonal relationships that will grow into relational discipleship.

Next, beginning week five, the PF will conduct Participant Personal Interviews (PPI). The PPIs will be informal, verbal interviews between the PF and individuals in the MM and MA groups. The PF will record the interviews, and the goal is to receive additional insight into how participants view the ministry changes. Last, the PF will also administer the Midpoint Participant

Survey (MPS)[14] during week four, as well as the Endpoint Participant Survey (EPS)[15] at the during seven. These surveys and the BPS will measure any progress made due to the intervention. The overall intervention design is illustrated in table 3.3.

Once the intervention is completed, the PF will gather all the data collected and provide a report on the results. Along with the PS group, the PF will analyze the data collected to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. First, the researcher will use triangulation to gain similar perspectives from the different data sources. The three methods utilized for data triangulation will be the results of all the participant surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. Using data triangulation will help ensure the data collected is credible.

Next, the researcher will measure the intervention plan and the previous approach against the ministry's discipleship plan. David Bempong reiterates that discipleship can only be seen as complete once new disciples make more disciples.[16] While it is not expected that this action research will result in making and sending disciples within the seven weeks of the intervention, the researcher does expect to be able to determine if the NLC Discipleship Plan, provided in figure 3, has improved with the intervention's implementation. If improvements are not determined, plausible conclusions can be attributed to shortcomings in the intervention design or NLC ministry leadership proficiency.

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[14] See Appendix I.

[15] See Appendix J.

[16] David Bempong, "Obeying the Commission: A Model for Equipping Christians to Make Disciples" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2021), 43, Liberty University Scholars Crossing.

Table 3.3. Project overview and intervention design for each participant group

Schedule	Tasks Per Project Group
Recruiting and Preparation	**PF**: Obtain MLCF and MLQ from PS. Obtain PCF and BPS from MM and MA groups. Incorporate intervention adjustments. **PS**: Complete MLQ. Receive project assignments. **MM, MA**: Complete BPS.
Week 1	***Intervention Begins*** **PF**: Establish baseline data based on submitted BPS. **PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings except for Worship Service and Prayer Group. **MM, MA, OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ
Week 2	**PF**: Facilitate project update meetings with the PS group to review intervention progress. **PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings. **MM, MA, OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ.
Week 3	**PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings. **MM, MA, OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ.
Week 4	**PF**: Administer MPS to MA and MA groups. **PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings. **MM, MA**: Complete MPS. Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ. **OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ.

|	
Week 5	**PF**: Facilitate project update meetings with the PS group to review intervention progress. Begin conducting PPI with MM and MA groups. **PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings. Participate in project update meetings with PF. **MM, MA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ. Begin participating in PPI with PF. **OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ
Week 6	**PF**: Conduct PPI with MM and MA groups. **PS**: Administer PGQ for all ministry gatherings. **MM, MA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ. Participate in PPI with PF. **OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ.
Week 7	**PF**: Facilitate the final project update meeting with the PS group to review intervention progress. Complete the PPI with the MM and MA groups. Distribute the EPS to the MM and MA groups. **PS**: Administer final PGQ for all ministry gatherings. Participate in project update meetings with PF. **MM, MA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ. Complete PPI with PF. Complete EPS administered by PF. **OA**: Attend ministry gatherings and complete PGQ. ***Intervention Ends***
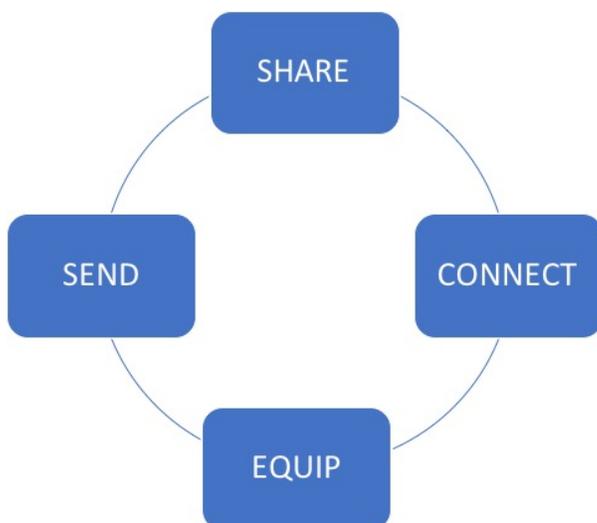
Figure 3. NLC discipleship plan[17]

There will be a comparison between current data and the data from this research project to determine if the intervention made a difference in establishing relational discipleship. Data resulting from the ministry's previous approach, which the researcher currently has for the prior year, has been measured against the ministry's discipleship plan, where the gaps in the strategy were identifiable. The gaps occur in the 'Connect' and 'Equip' phases due to irregular gatherings and a lack of interpersonal relationships. Results from the intervention will be measured against the ministry's discipleship plan to determine if the previous gaps, based on the prior ministry approach, have been improved. These comparisons will complete the conclusion presented in Chapter 5.

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[17] The goal of NLC's strategy is to develop Christians to maturity so that they can make disciples of others. For NLC, the steps that the ministry will take to reach the ministry's goal can be summarized as SHARE, the first entry point where the Gospel of Christ is shared with those who are spiritually dead, infants, or dormant and responds to the call to live for Christ; CONNECT, the second entry point where a person is in the discipleship process and establishes interpersonal relationships with other disciples as they are fully engaged in ministry gatherings; EQUIP, where a disciples is educated, trained, and coached for their God-given calling within the context of a community; and SEND, the final step where disciples are fully mature and will be released to disciple others with the help of a mentor. This process is designed to be repeatable and not dependent on any particular individual or church.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This section provides a comprehensive account of the implementation of the action-oriented intervention design for this research project. The researcher will identify details regarding recruitment efforts, tools utilized, and the implementation of NLC gatherings. The intervention design aims to address the decline in participation and lack of interpersonal relationships by the millennial demographic at NLC by increasing the frequency of gatherings focusing on relational discipleship. Each phase of the intervention, beginning with recruitment, is essential to the research project's success, especially as participation by millennials at NLC continues to decline.

Recruiting

The recruitment phase of the project began on October 28, 2023, beginning with NLC ministry leadership. While the ministry leadership team was already aware of the research project, the researcher discussed the research project during the bi-weekly ministry leadership meetings. The researcher provided ample time for the ministry leaders to ask questions and communicate objections and suggestions about the project. Once there was an understanding of the research project, ministry leaders' expected role as stakeholders, and how the research project will benefit the ministry, the researcher received consensus and support to move forward on November 18, 2023.

The researcher provided the NLC ministry leadership team with the IRB-approved forms for ministry leaders. First, the researcher provided an online version of the Ministry Leader Consent Form[18] as partially illustrated in figure 4. The researcher created all online forms for the

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[18] See Appendix A.

research project with Google Forms, where the researcher can track and download all responses. The researcher emailed each ministry leader with a link to the online form. Once a ministry leader signed the online form, the researcher then provided another email with a link that directed the ministry leader to an online version of the Ministry Leadership Questionnaire[19] as partially illustrated in figure 5. Completing the online Ministry Consent Form and the online Ministry Leadership Questionnaire led to the recruitment of project participants.

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[19] See Appendix B.

MINISTRY LEADER CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

Principal Investigator: Marcus Steele, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study   *

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be in a leadership role at New Life Community. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the Millennial population at New Life Community.

Figure 4. Online ministry leadership consent form

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

We would love to hear your thoughts or feedback on how we can improve your experience!

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

1. What changes do you believe are needed at New Life Community?

Your answer

2. What inconsistencies do you believe are negatively impacting the ministry? *

Your answer

3. What are some of the things you believe attendees like the most about ministry gatherings?

Your answer

Figure 5. Online ministry leadership questionnaire

Recruiting for project participants began on December 2, 2023. The researcher made announcements based on the IRB-approved verbiage[20] in all NLC gatherings, including worship services, prayer meetings, Bible study, and other gatherings. In each announcement, the

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[20] See Appendix C.

researcher encouraged and addressed all questions regarding the project. After each gathering, the researcher intentionally discussed the project with at least one person individually, encouraging that person to consider participating in the project. The researcher personally invited eighteen millennials connected to the ministry to participate in the project.

The researcher encountered two obstacles that would impact the research project. First, while the ministry had access to twenty-seven millennials connected to NLC, it became clear to the researcher that participation in the different gatherings, including worship services, was falling. The researcher discussed with the NLC Leadership Team, and the group agreed that the number of regular adult and young adult attendees, including members and non-members, was declining. Some of the regular attendees relocated to other cities for better career opportunities. Also, it was found that other regular attendees were frequently visiting a larger, seeker-friendly church that was new to the area. As a result of reviewing attendance trends, the researcher determined that the ministry experienced a 20 percent decrease in regular millennial attendance, as illustrated in figure 6. Recruiting the twenty-seven eligible millennials was pursued to ensure the research project reached the 25 percent participant efficacy threshold, although attendance declined.

The researcher also observed that participation among older adult believers was declining. The review of attendance trends also identified a 67 percent decrease in regular baby boomer attendance, also illustrated in figure 6. Two of the three adults, a married couple from the baby boomer generation, decided to join another ministry. With only three older adults connected to the ministry, including the researcher and his wife, opportunities for intergenerational interactions are expected to be more limited than previously planned.

The researcher began sending recruitment emails on December 8, 2023. IRB approved Participant Recruitment Email[21] was sent to the 27 eligible millennials to participate in the research project. The recruitment emails contained a link that directed the potential participant to an online version of the IRB-approved Participant Consent Form[22] as partially illustrated in figure 7. Once the participant signed the Participant Consent Form, a link directed the participant to an online version of the IRB-approved Baseline Participant Survey, as partially illustrated in figure 8.

The recruiter sent follow-up emails to potential participants who had yet to respond to the initial recruitment email. The researcher sent the IRB-approved Participant Recruitment Follow-Up Email[23] twice weekly. Similar to the initial recruitment email, the follow-up emails contained a link that directed the potential participant to the online version of the Participant Consent Form. Likewise, once the participant signs the Participant Consent Form, a link directs the participant to an online version of the Baseline Participant Survey to be completed.
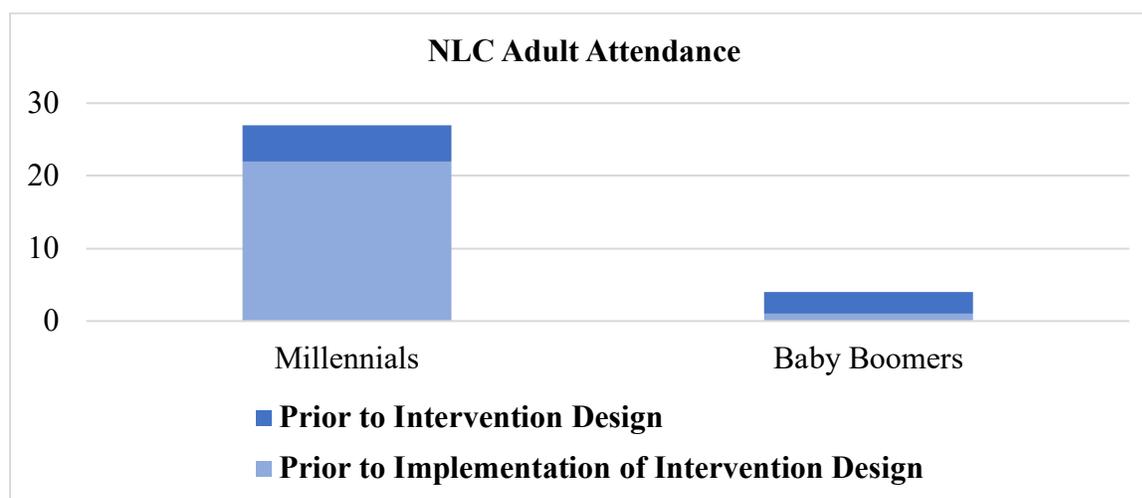

Figure 6. NLC adult attendance

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[21] See Appendix D.

[22] See Appendix F.

[23] See Appendix E.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

Principal Investigator: Marcus Steele, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study *

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member or a frequent attendee of New Life Community and must be born between the years of 1981 and 1999. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the Millennial population at New Life Community.

Figure 7. Online participant consent form

The recruitment of project participants continued until February 10, 2024. Despite the project team's best recruitment efforts, most millennials connected to NLC were unwilling to participate in the project. Most of the recruited millennials were either unresponsive or did not want to commit. However, nine millennials connected to NLC, including two millennials who

are regular attendees of NLC gatherings, agreed to participate and completed both the PCF and BPS.

Figure 8. Online baseline participant survey

Participants

All confirmed participants were millennials who became connected to NLC through the marketplace. Three of the participants were individuals who provided business services for the recruiter's wife. Also, one participant was a Life Coaching customer of his wife, and that participant's wife decided to participate. Two of the participants were Stewardship Coaching customers of the researcher. Lastly, the final two participants, in a dating relationship, were actively going through Couples Pastoral Counseling with the researcher and his wife. All participants were self-employed or worked for a company and had a side hustle or second job. With nine confirmed project participants, the required efficacy threshold was obtained, and the researcher moved forward with the intervention preparation with the PS group.

Preparation

Preparation for the intervention began with the Project Kickoff Meeting. This meeting was conducted on February 11, 2024, by the researcher, as PF, and attended by the PS group, all of whom serve as the research project team. The focus of this meeting was to prepare for the intervention, which was scheduled to begin on February 18, 2024. During the meeting, tasks for the research project were assigned, which included procuring the needed resources and tools and planning the budget for the intervention.

The researcher also reviewed the results of the MLQ within the Project Kickoff Meeting. While the questionnaire responses from the NLC ministry leaders varied, there were specific questions where the responses were consistent among the group, as shown in table 3.4. The consistent responses by the ministry leaders proved to be confirmation for the researcher regarding both the current strengths and weaknesses of the ministry. Based on the responses, the ministry gatherings are well received by attendees and provide a communal atmosphere.

However, the gatherings could be more frequent, gathering locations need to be more centralized, and there needs to be improvement in developing interpersonal relationships.

Based on the review and discussion of the MLQ, the researcher, along with input from the PS group, decided to adjust the intervention plan. First, all gatherings, including worship services and small group meetings, will be conducted in Westerville and Columbus, which are centrally located for the millennials connected to NLC. Second, the location for small group meetings will rotate bi-weekly, and they will be conducted in the home of a millennial connected to NLC. Finally, the NLC ministry leaders will be responsible for following up with at least one attendee from each gathering by phone or in person.

The researcher adopted two additional adjustments under the advisement of the PS group. First, ministry gatherings will be promoted online at Eventbrite.com to reach others interested in attending. The second adjustment is to kick off the intervention in week one with a fellowship gathering of fun, games, and food to re-spark interest in the ministry. With the addition of the fellowship gathering, the researcher extended the intervention design by one week for a total of eight weeks. There was consensus within the research project team that these additional changes would benefit both the ministry and the intervention.

<center>Evaluation</center>

Data triangulation was used to evaluate the intervention, utilizing a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data. By using data triangulation, the researcher was able to cross-check the data collected from different sources and subsequently compare and contrast the different results to produce balanced and trustworthy research.[24] The

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[24] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 72.

data sources used for data triangulation were surveys, questionnaires, and interviews provided by project participants; questionnaire responses provided by attendees not connected to the ministry; and field notes from the researcher as an observer. Each data source provided distinct perspectives and unique angles of evaluation.[25]

Table 3.4. MLQ questions with consistent responses

Q1. What changes do you believe are needed at New Life Community?	
Ministry Leader 1	Regular meetings and events at a central location; more evangelism
Ministry Leader 2	A central location would be beneficial.
Ministry Leader 3	Different meeting locations
Q3. What are some of the things you believe attendees like the most about ministry gatherings?	
Ministry Leader 1	Gathering with a like-minded community
Ministry Leader 2	Gathering to hear the Word of God amongst like-minded believers
Ministry Leader 3	The round table [interactive] discussions and teachings among like-minded believers
Q4. What are some of the things you believe attendees like the least about ministry gatherings?	
Ministry Leader 1	The far travel to meet
Ministry Leader 2	Not having a space to be social with others, not being seen or acknowledged as a person
Ministry Leader 3	Not meeting in different locations
Q6. Describe the interaction between older and younger attendees who are connected to the ministry.	
Ministry Leader 1	Respectful, pleasant, and nurturing
Ministry Leader 2	Everyone communicates as if it were a community. Young and old interact and help each other.
Ministry Leader 3	Very communal
Q10. What do you believe is needed to create more of a sense of community within the ministry?	
Ministry Leader 1	Consistent and regular meetings, regular communication, and outreach.
Ministry Leader 2	Seeing about the needs of others, giving them life skills to help them be successful, being available
Ministry Leader 3	Being a resource, further outreach

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[25] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 77.

Collection

There was a sequence and method in how the project team collected the intervention data. First, the researcher strategically administered the participant surveys at specific points throughout the intervention. The BPS was administered before the beginning of the intervention to establish a starting point for measuring progress. An online version of the MPS was administered during week four, on March 16, 2024, as partially illustrated in figure 9. Likewise, an online version of the EPS was administered on April 20, 2024, during week eight. All three participant surveys measured any progress made during the intervention. Each participant survey was completed online by project participants. After completing the online surveys, the researcher downloaded each participant's survey to the researcher's computer. Once downloaded, the researcher loaded the results to the local project database, which was used for analysis and reporting. Project participants were allowed to complete paper versions of all the surveys; however, none chose this option.

Questionnaires were administered every week of the intervention. Feedback from the questionnaires provided a consistent inflow of data about the effectiveness of the gathering, including the teaching and the development of interpersonal relationships. The PGQ was distributed, by paper, to each attendee at the end of each gathering. Once the attendees completed the questionnaires, a project stakeholder (PS) collected the questionnaires, marked the questionnaires completed by those within the OA group with a code, and then provided all questionnaires to the researcher. Afterward, the researcher entered the data into a local database for the research project was used for analysis and reporting. The questionnaires were then filed in a secure file cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

MIDPOINT PARTICIPANT SURVEY

The second of three participant surveys

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

I consider myself a member of New Life Community. *

◯ Yes

◯ No

I attend New Life Community ministry gatherings regularly. *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month. *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Figure 9. Online midpoint participant survey

For each gathering the researcher attended, the researcher conducted participant observations. The researcher entered observations in a note application on the researcher's mobile device to capture field notes. The researcher observed participants and other attendees as

they engaged in their routine activities of worship, small meetings, service, and fellowship.[26]

After each gathering, the researcher transferred the field notes from the researcher's mobile

device to the local project database, which was used for analysis and reporting.

ENDPOINT PARTICIPANT SURVEY

The third of three participant surveys

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

I consider myself a member of New Life Community. *

○ Yes

○ No

I attend New Life Community ministry gatherings regularly. *

○ Yes

○ No

Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month. *

○ Yes

○ No

Figure 10. Online endpoint participant survey

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[26] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 93.

Beginning in week five of the intervention and continuing weekly through the end of the intervention, the researcher conducted personal interviews (PPI). At the end of each scheduled gathering, the researcher approached one to two participants to conduct the PPI. The personal interviews allowed the participants to describe their situations and put words to their feelings, opinions, and experiences that the researcher may not have recognized by observation.[27] The researcher recorded the interviews on a recording device that translates speech recorded in mp4 format to text format. This device allowed the researcher to download the text of the personal interviews to the local project database. The researcher then downloaded the recordings to the researcher's computer for secure storage, and the copy of the recordings on the researcher's recording device was deleted. All PPIs were completed by the end of the intervention.

Analysis

Data analysis identified trends in interpersonal relationships due to increased incidences of group gatherings and an emphasis on discipleship. The results from the participant surveys provided trends related to participants establishing relationships at NLC gatherings and their spiritual growth. Questionnaires completed by project participants provided trends that reflect the effectiveness of the gatherings from an insider's perspective. Conversely, the questionnaires completed by other attendees provided trends that reflect the effectiveness of the gatherings from an outsider's angle. Lastly, results from the personal interviews offered additional insight from participants that were not captured from the surveys or questionnaires. In analyzing all the individual interviews, the participants shared similar perspectives regarding the ministry changes made as part of the intervention. The researcher and the project stakeholders reviewed the data

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[27] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 103.

biweekly during project update meetings. Also, the researcher completed a final summary of the analyzed data when the intervention was completed on April 20, 2024.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the action-oriented intervention design and implementation to shift the millennials connected to NLC from primarily focusing on relationships and personal advancement in the marketplace community to focusing on relationships and spiritual growth in a Christian Community that promotes relational discipleship. For the intervention design, details were provided regarding the role of the researcher and project participants and how they were grouped. A synopsis of recruiting, data collection, research ethics, planning, and the intervention schedule was also provided.

The researcher also provided a comprehensive account of the steps taken to implement the intervention design. Included are the details concerning the obstacles encountered by the researcher concerning potential participants and intergenerational engagement, as well as how the researcher addressed those obstacles. The researcher provided the specifics regarding preparation and the adjustments made to the intervention based on feedback provided by ministry leaders. Lastly, the researcher provided a synopsis of details involving collecting and analyzing the data from the implementation of the intervention. The researcher will explain the results of the analysis in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter of the action research project includes the results and findings extrapolated from the data collected during the project's intervention. The purpose of this action research study is to increase the occurrence of ministry gatherings along with the establishment of intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship and develop a sense of Christian community among the millennials at NLC. In addition to increasing the occurrence of gatherings, some of the ministry preferences of millennials, as identified by other researchers, were also incorporated into the gatherings. Intentionality was placed on providing time for relationships to grow by eating together, holding social gatherings, meeting at more convenient locations, and having more interactive Bible study and prayer.[1] After analyzing the collective results, the researcher expected to identify the changes needed within NLC's overall ministry and discipleship plan to transition millennials from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship.

Collective Results

The action-oriented intervention's results consisted of data from participant surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. The researcher used surveys to measure the intervention's progress, with consistent questions administered to participants at specific points throughout the intervention. Questionnaires were used for feedback that addressed the effectiveness of the

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[1] Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Connected Life,* 39.

weekly gatherings. Interviews allowed participants to voice their opinions and feelings regarding NLC and the changes incorporated in the intervention.

Participant Surveys

Participant surveys, which consisted of Yes/No and Likert Scale questions, were administered during specific weeks throughout the intervention. To establish a starting point, the BPS was administered before the start of the intervention. During week four of the intervention, which was the midpoint, the MPS was administered to observe potential trends. Lastly, during week eight of the intervention, the EPS was administered to obtain the final results.

The first set of questions of the participant surveys were Yes/No questions designed to capture each participant's ministry engagement, expectations, and relationships. In terms of membership, the researcher expected that only the participants in the MM group would consider themselves members of NLC. However, participants in the MA group also considered themselves members of NLC, as seen in figure 11. The participants in the MA group attend NLC gatherings frequently but are hesitant to commit to and express their membership. In figure 12, more participants began to participate in ministry gatherings more regularly throughout the intervention, increasing from 57 percent to 93 percent of participants. This rise correlates with the increase in ministry gatherings throughout the month, as supported in figure 13.

Participants were asked questions that inquired if NLC gatherings were meeting participants' expectations. During the weeks of the intervention, participants could attend worship services, prayer meetings, small group, and life group meetings weekly. The researcher focused small group meetings on studying biblical discipleship. Life group meetings included dating and marriage counseling groups and Life and Stewardship coaching.
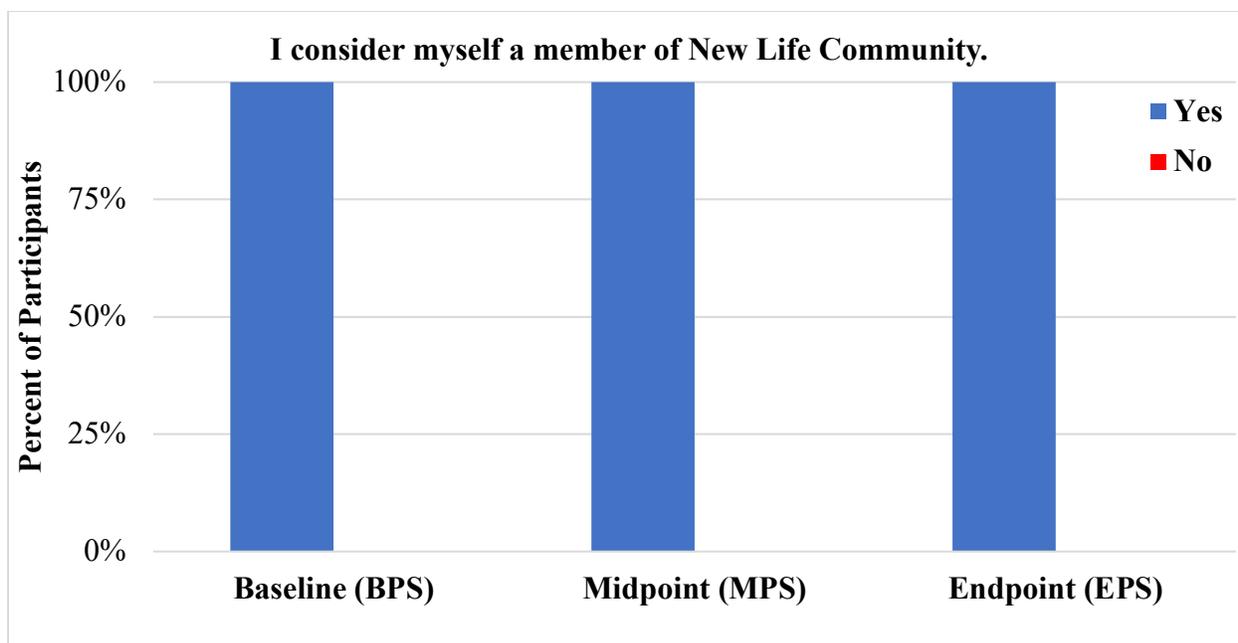
Figure 11. Participant surveys: NLC membership
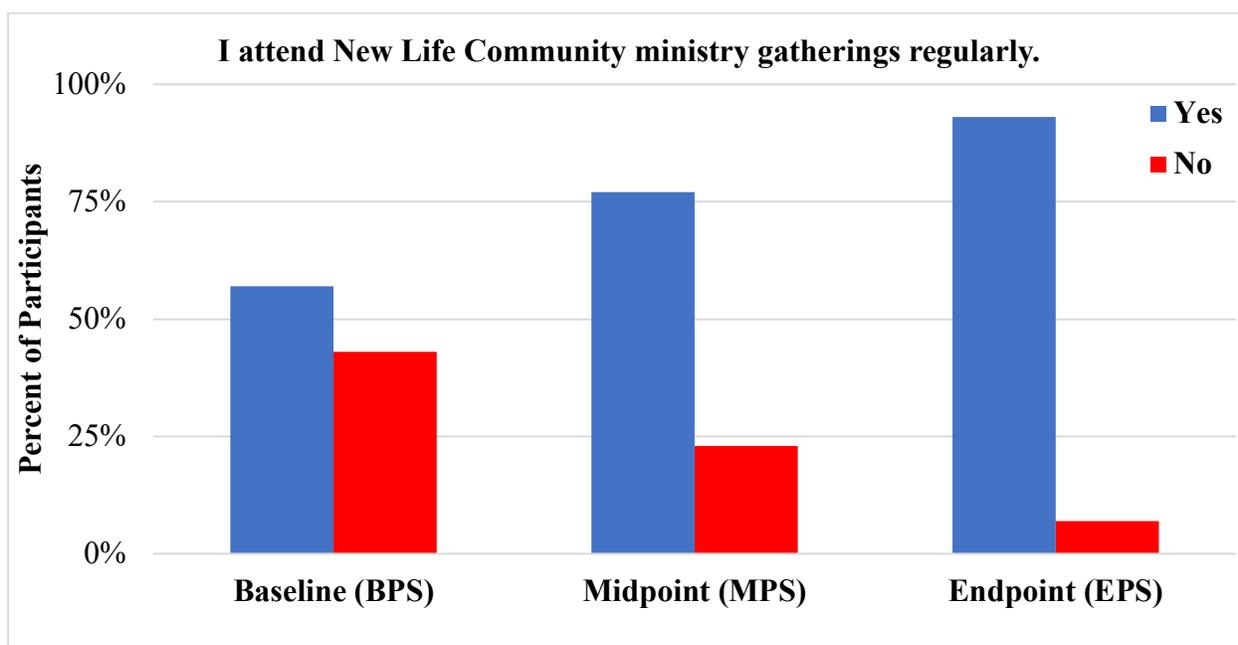
Figure 12. Participant surveys: gathering attendance

Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month.
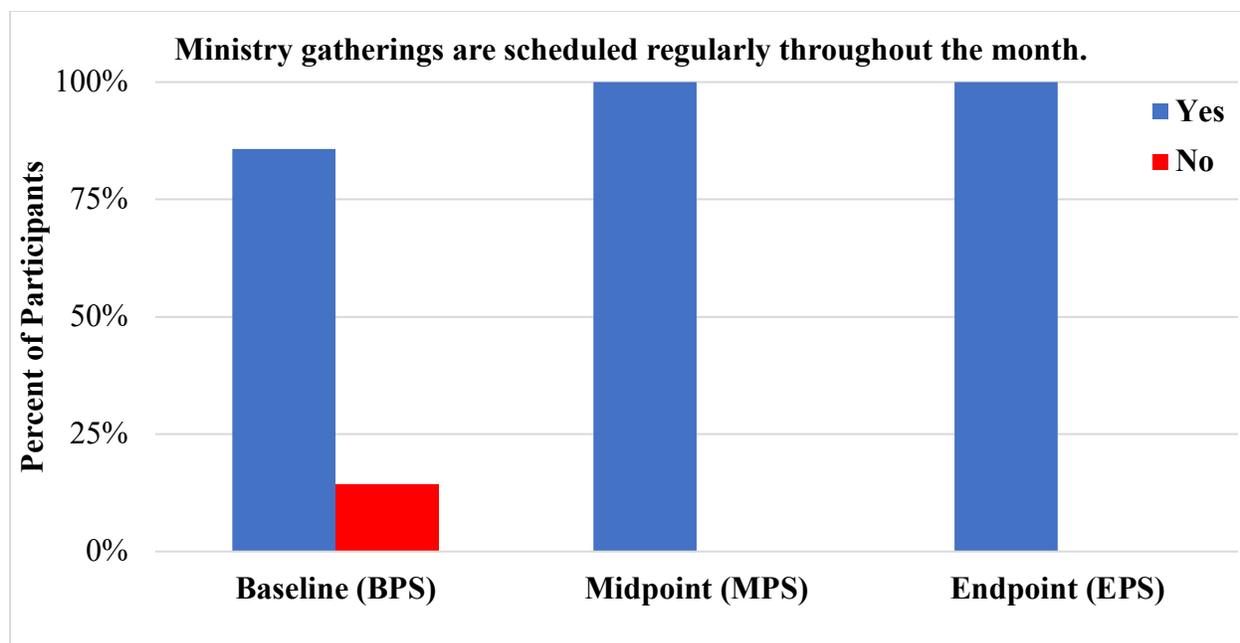
Figure 13. Participant surveys: NLC engagement opportunities

All participants responded that NLC gatherings met their expectations, as seen in figures 14, 15, 16, and 17. As planned by the researcher, none of the gatherings during the intervention focused on marketplace initiatives, including career and entrepreneurial pursuits. Instead, the researcher decided to focus on discipleship, spiritual growth, building relationships, and community intentionally.
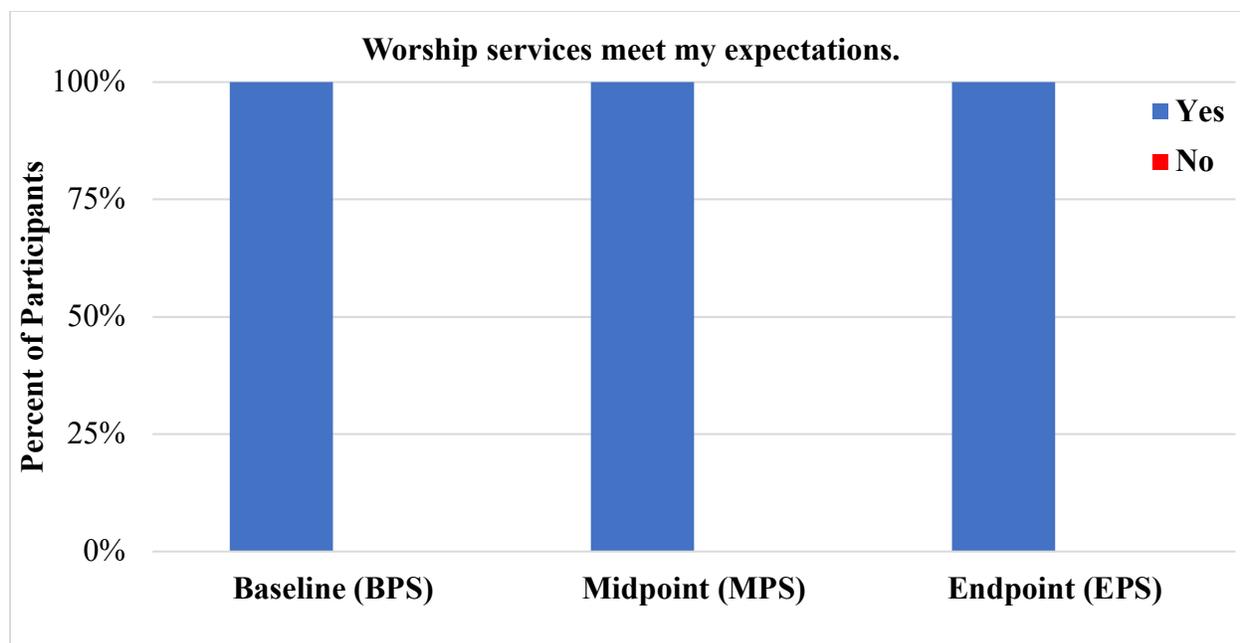
Figure 14. Participant surveys: worship experience
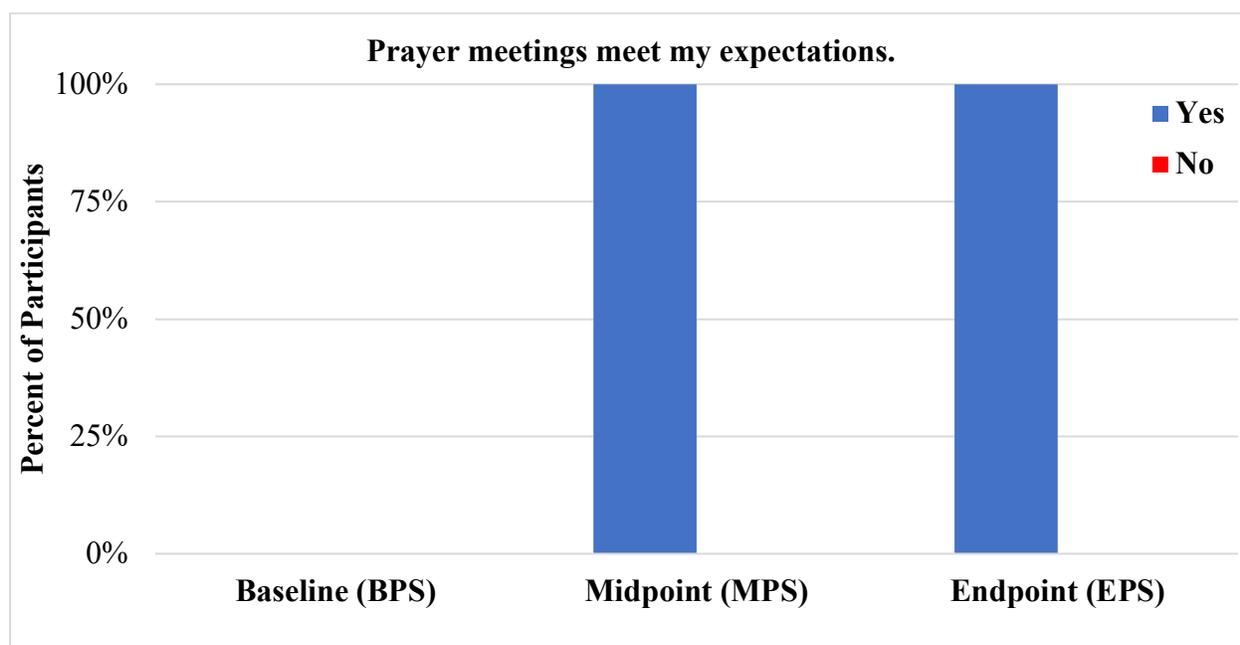
Figure 15. Participant surveys: prayer meetings
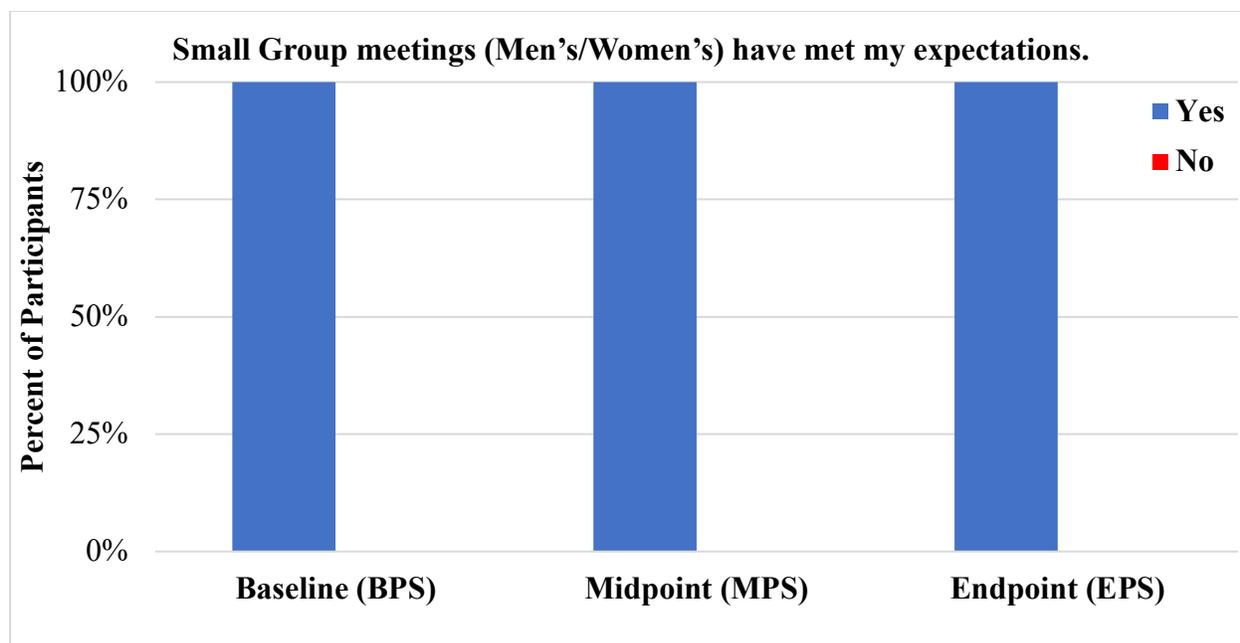
Figure 16. Participant surveys: small group meetings
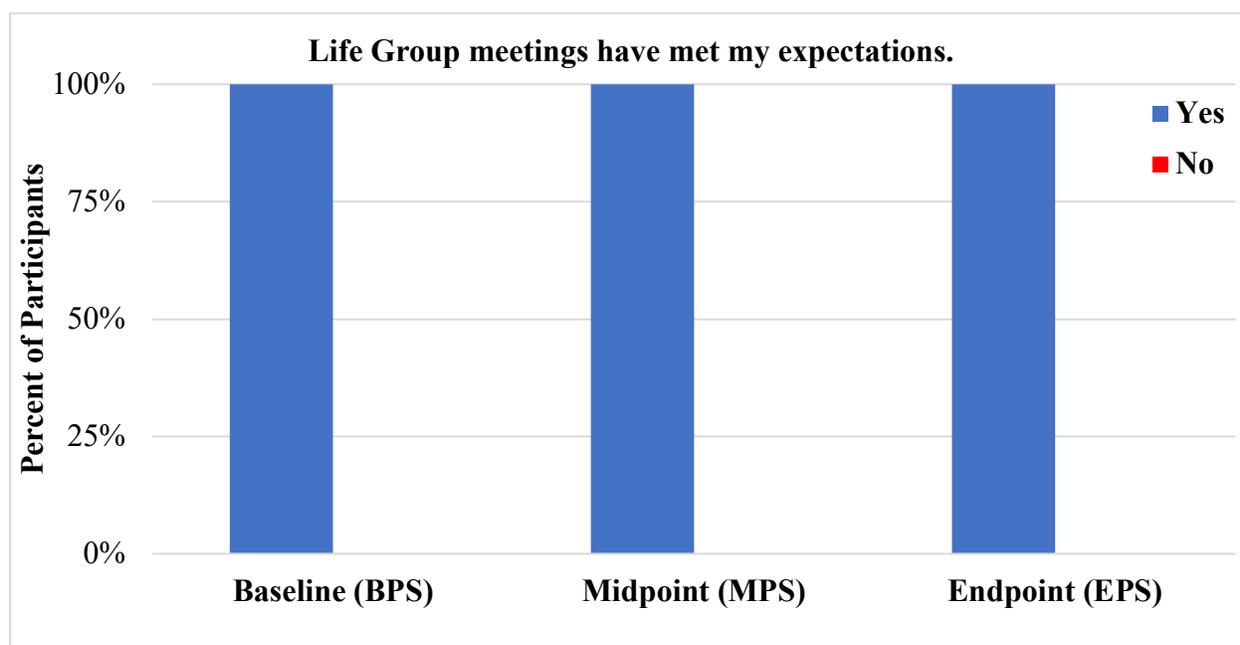
Figure 17. Participant surveys: life group meetings

The following survey questions were designed to provide insight into establishing

interpersonal relationships. With increased opportunities to participate in gatherings, the

researcher expected to observe increased opportunities for relationships among participants to grow. Sharing joint experiences builds solid peer relationships, increased commitment, and more engagement, which leads to a stronger relationship foundation.[2] With more gatherings and fellowship opportunities, expecting new relationships to emerge and current relationships to strengthen is not unreasonable.

Based on the responses, more fellowship opportunities sometimes translate to new relationships. As shown in figure 18, all the participants felt comfortable inviting others to ministry gatherings, although this has never been an issue with the millennials connected to NLC. However, when asked if new friendships were established due to increased gatherings, the results showed that new friendships still needed to be established, as revealed in figure 19. The data suggests that the participants had previously established friendships with one another. This was the first survey question that did not increase the intervention.
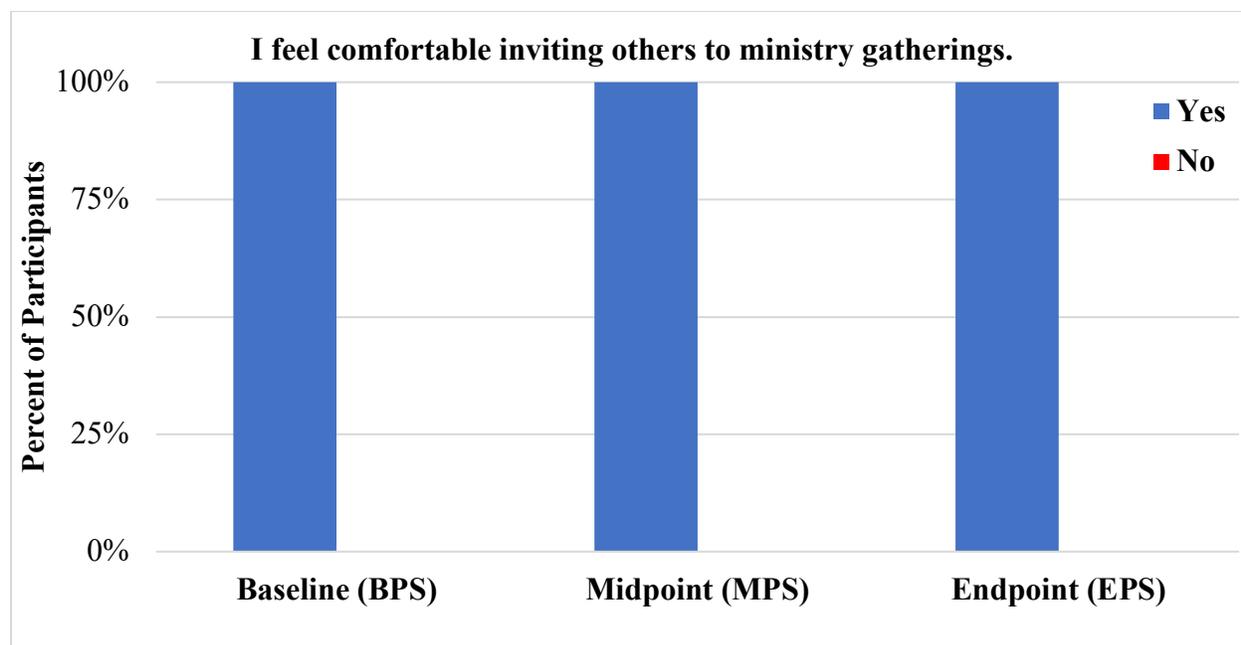
Figure 18. Participant surveys: inviting others to gatherings

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[2] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 163.
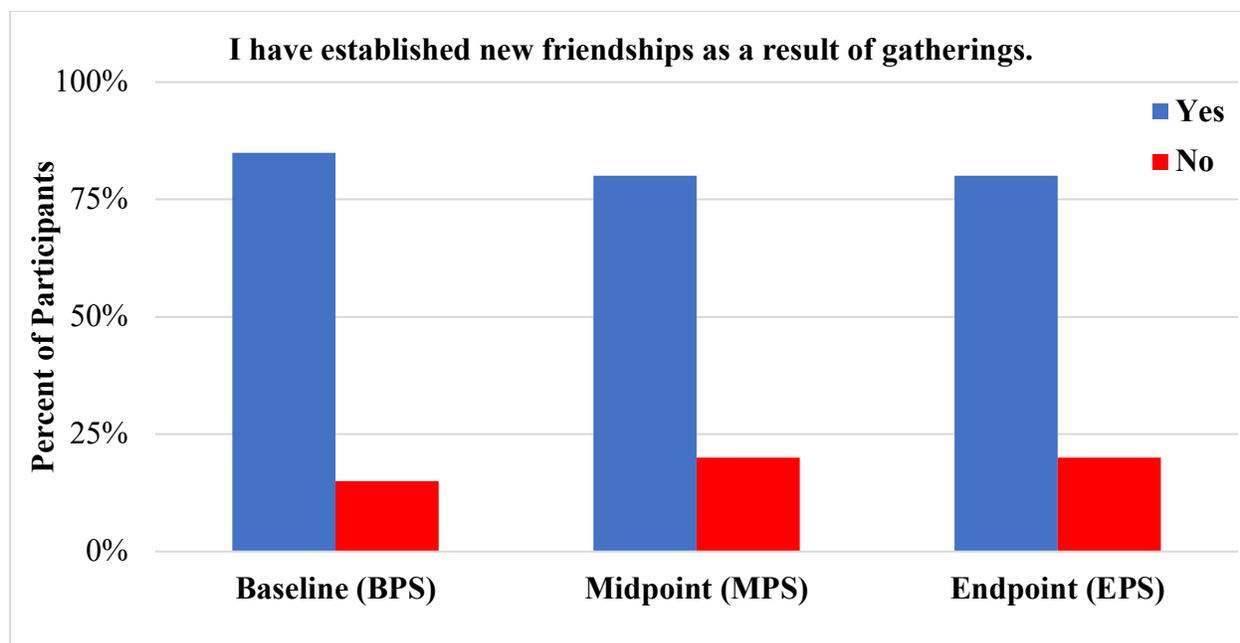
Figure 19. Participant surveys: new friendships

While new friendships may not have been established amongst the participants, the data shows that participants built intimate relationships throughout the intervention. As seen in figure 20, the data shows that from the beginning of the intervention to the end, there was an increase from 71 percent to 87 percent of participants who felt like they had someone they could confide in at NLC. Still, there was only a slight increase in participants who meet with others connected to NLC outside of ministry gatherings, as seen in figure 21. Based on the responses, the intervention strengthened most relationships among the participants. It is also likely that the participants who did not establish new friendships chose to interact with the individuals they already knew and were comfortable with.
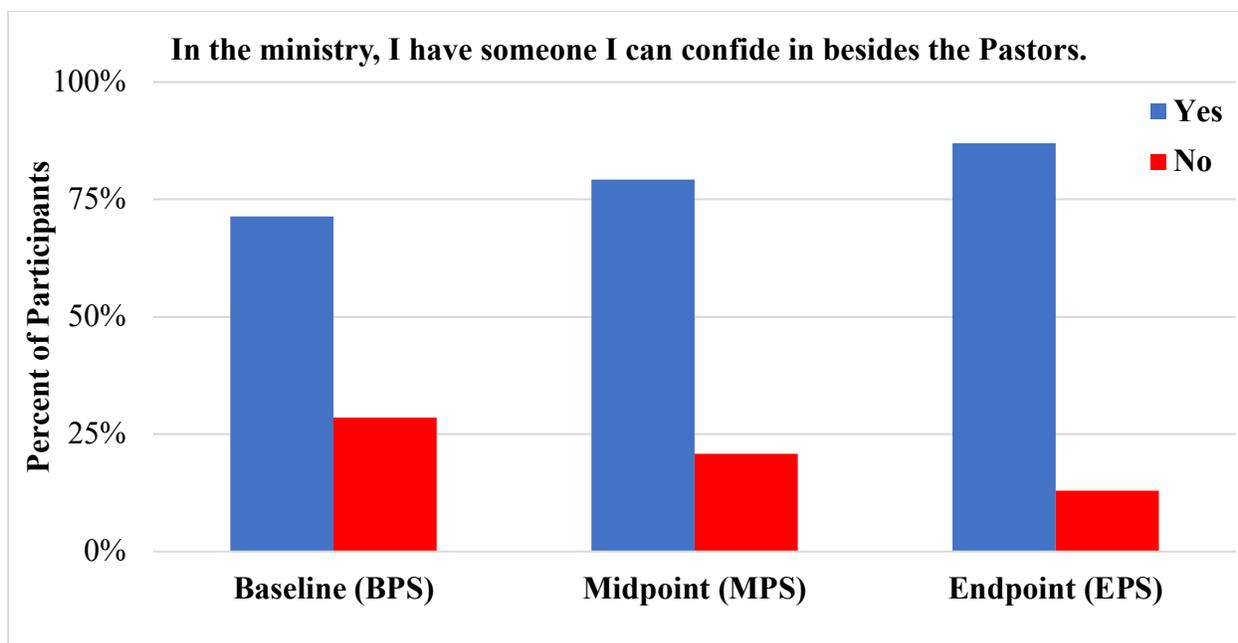
Figure 20. Participant surveys: someone to confide in
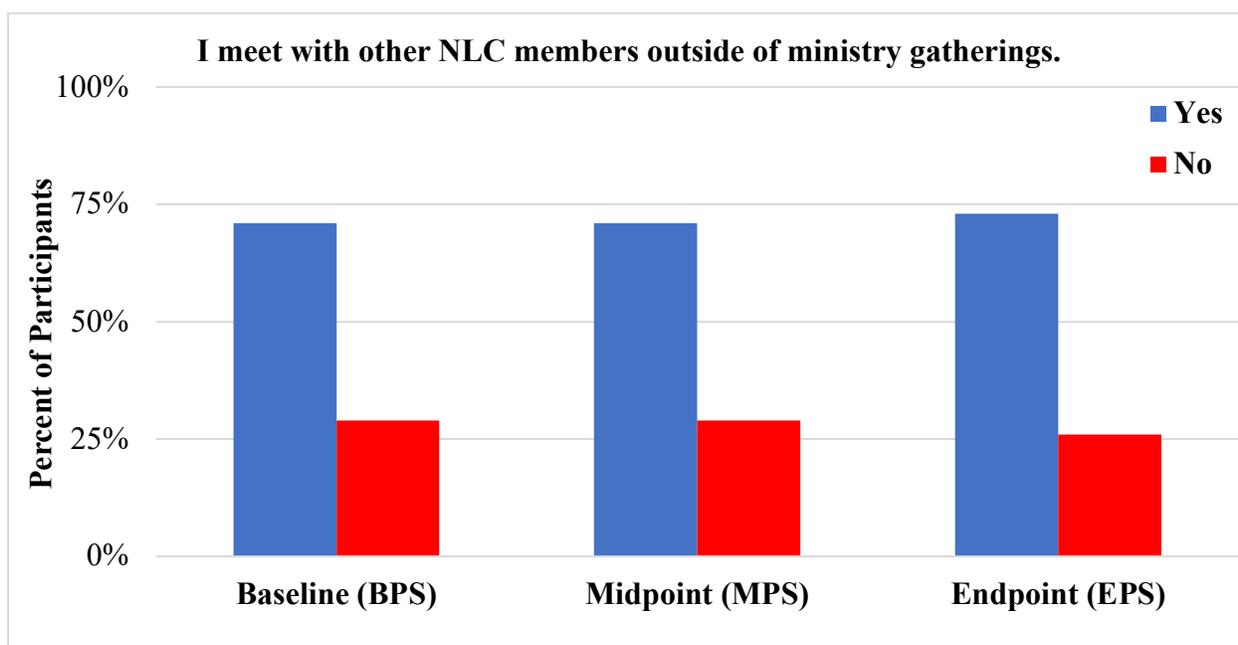
Figure 21. Participant surveys: fellowship outside of ministry gatherings

        To measure intergenerational relationships, participants were asked if they interact with

older and more spiritually mature members of NLC. Other researchers have found that positive

influences from parents, peers, pastors, siblings, and intergenerational relationships contributed to churches' retention of young adults and millennials.[3] Figure 22 indicates that most participants interact with older, spiritually mature members of NLC. The intergenerational interactions slightly increased throughout the intervention, which was also unexpected by the researcher considering the ministry lost two of the five older adults connected to it.

I interact with older and spiritually mature members of NLC.
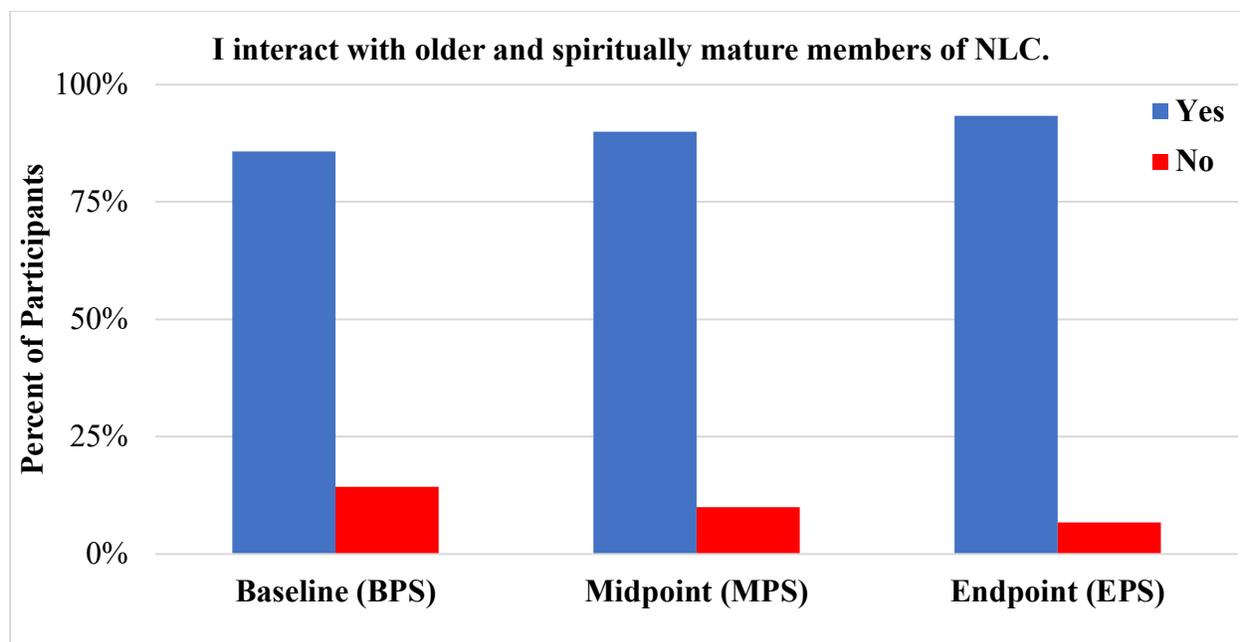
Figure 22. Participant surveys: intergenerational interactions

Participants were also asked if they felt like NLC offered them a community in which to belong. Millennials often search for communities where they feel surrounded by family-type relationships; thus, being a part of a community is deeply significant for them.[4] Establishing a community of believers is a primary goal of NLC. As seen in figure 23, the percentage of participants who felt that NLC is a trusted community they belong to, increased from 55 percent to 77 percent throughout the intervention. With approximately 23 percent of participants still

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[3] Schafer, "Faith Leaders' Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement," 76.

[4] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 108.

needing to feel like NLC is a trusted community, it became clear to the researcher that improvement is still required.

At New Life Community, I have a trusted community that I belong to.
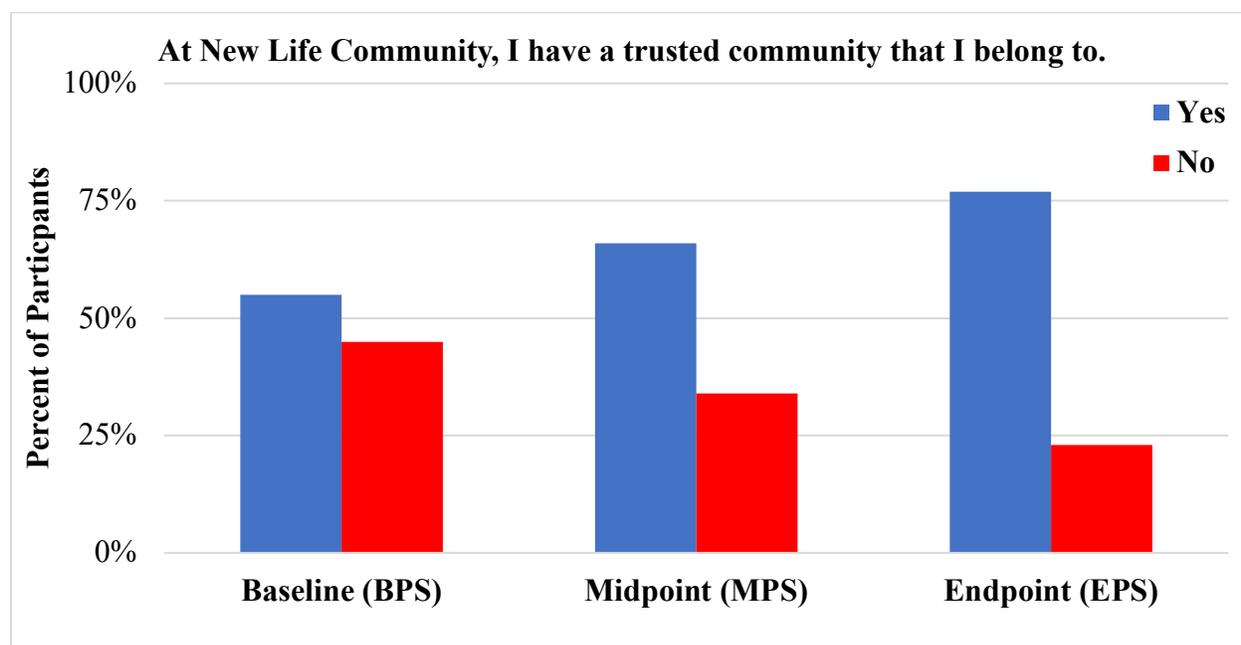
Figure 23. Participant surveys: trusted community

The remaining questions of the participant surveys were based on a Likert Scale and were designed to capture each participant's understanding of discipleship and their spiritual growth. The primary goal of NLC is to make disciples, as given by Christ in the Great Commission. With this goal, millennials connected to NLC must understand what a disciple and discipleship is, which was emphasized during the intervention. In reviewing the responses from the participants, it became evident to the researcher that during the intervention, NLC did well at teaching about discipleship, as seen in figures 24, 25, 26, and 27.

New Life Community teaches what a disciple is.
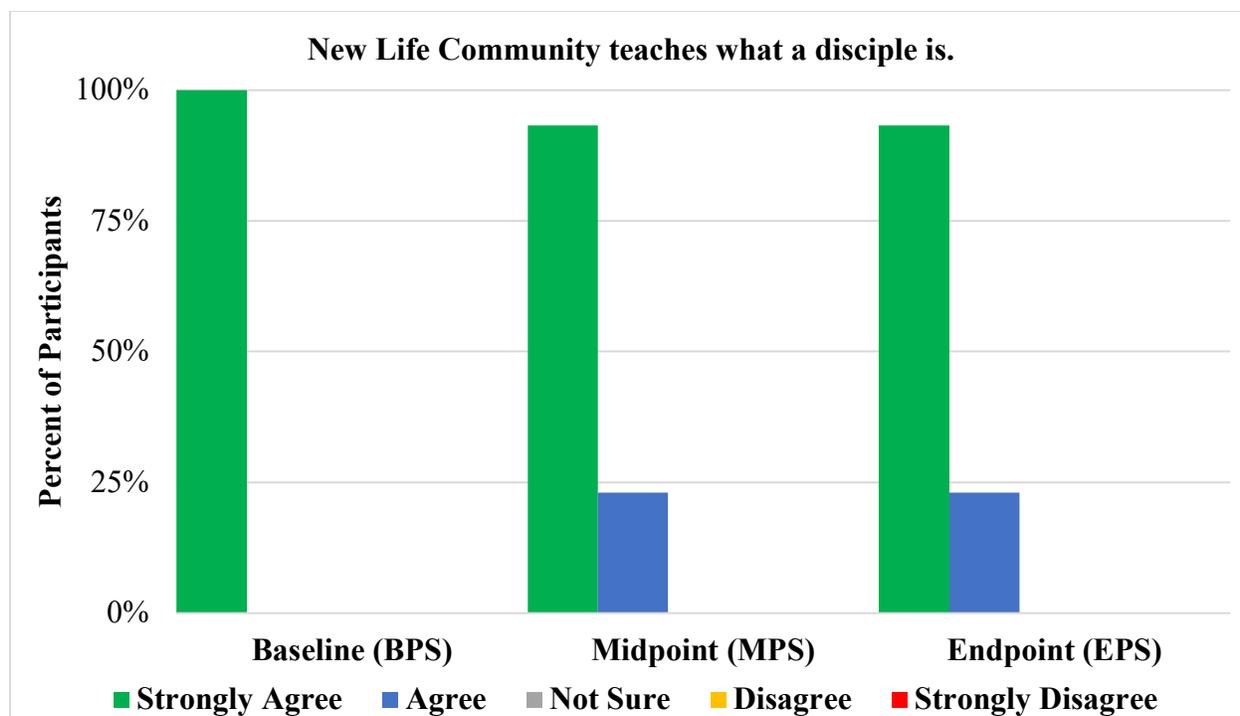
Figure 24. Participant surveys: what is a disciple

I believe that I am a disciple of Christ.
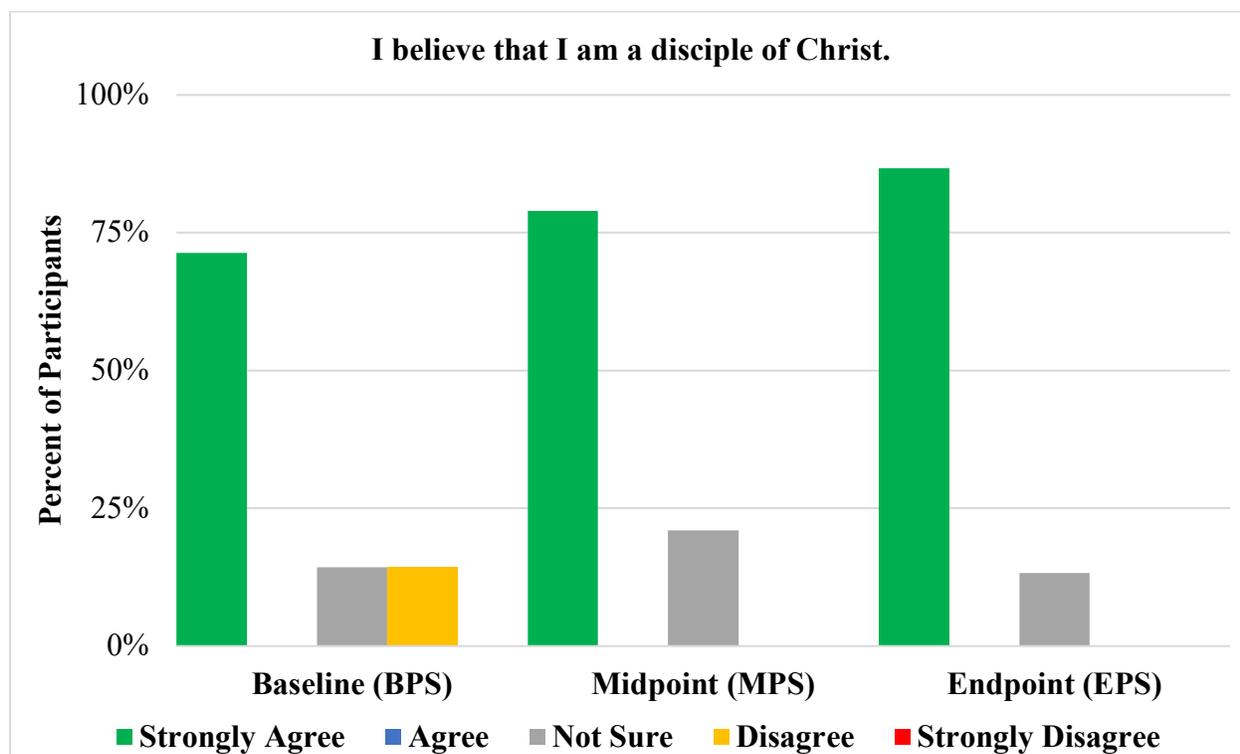
Figure 25. Participant surveys: being a disciple
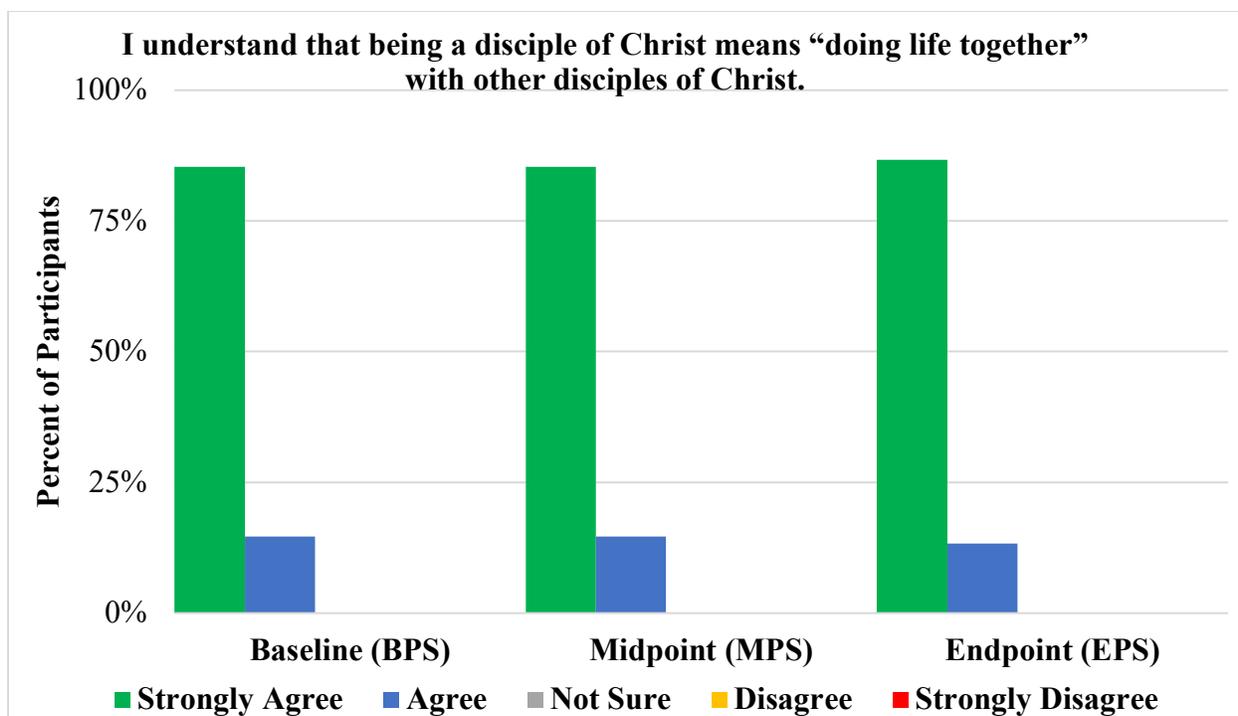
Figure 26. Participant surveys: understanding doing life together with other disciples
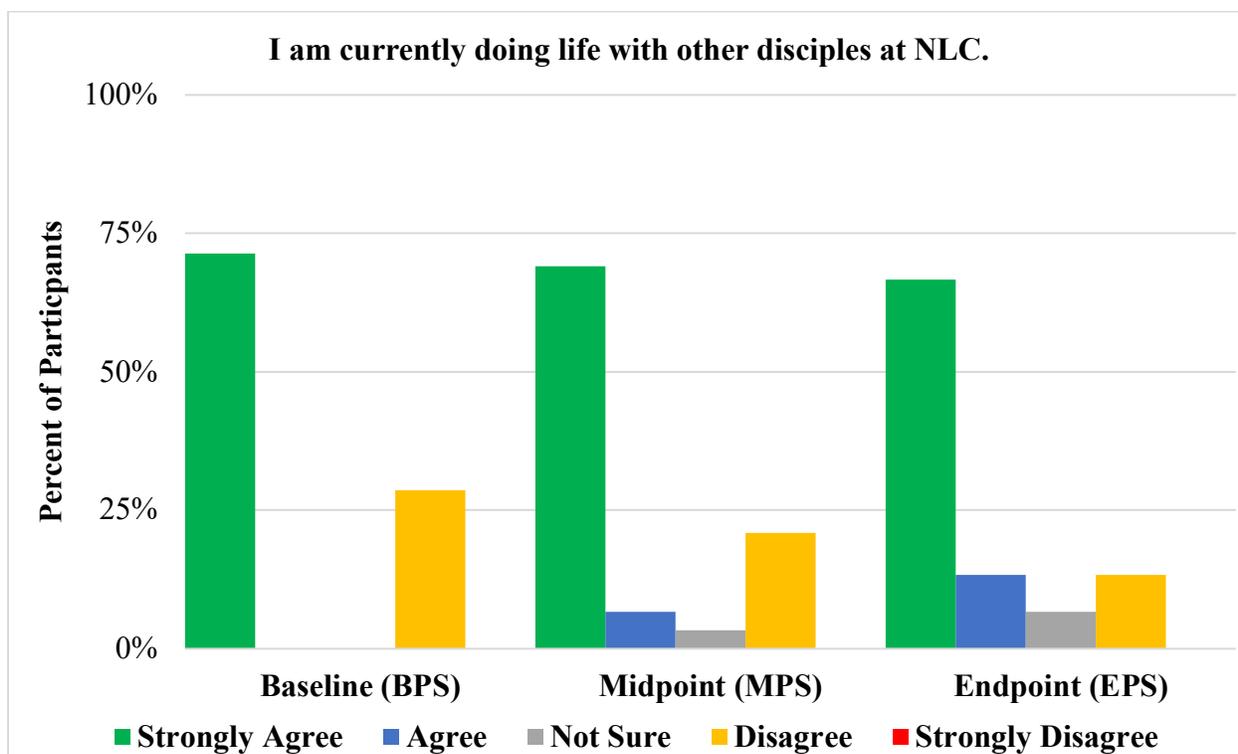
Figure 27. Participant surveys: doing life together with other disciples

Participants were also asked questions that measured how NLC did in increasing the spiritual growth of the participants. If millennials do not believe they are growing spiritually, they will leave. It was essential to the researcher that the changes applied during the intervention would benefit the spiritual growth of those connected to the ministry. Figures 28, 29, and 30 show that most participants responded favorably to NLC helping their spiritual growth.
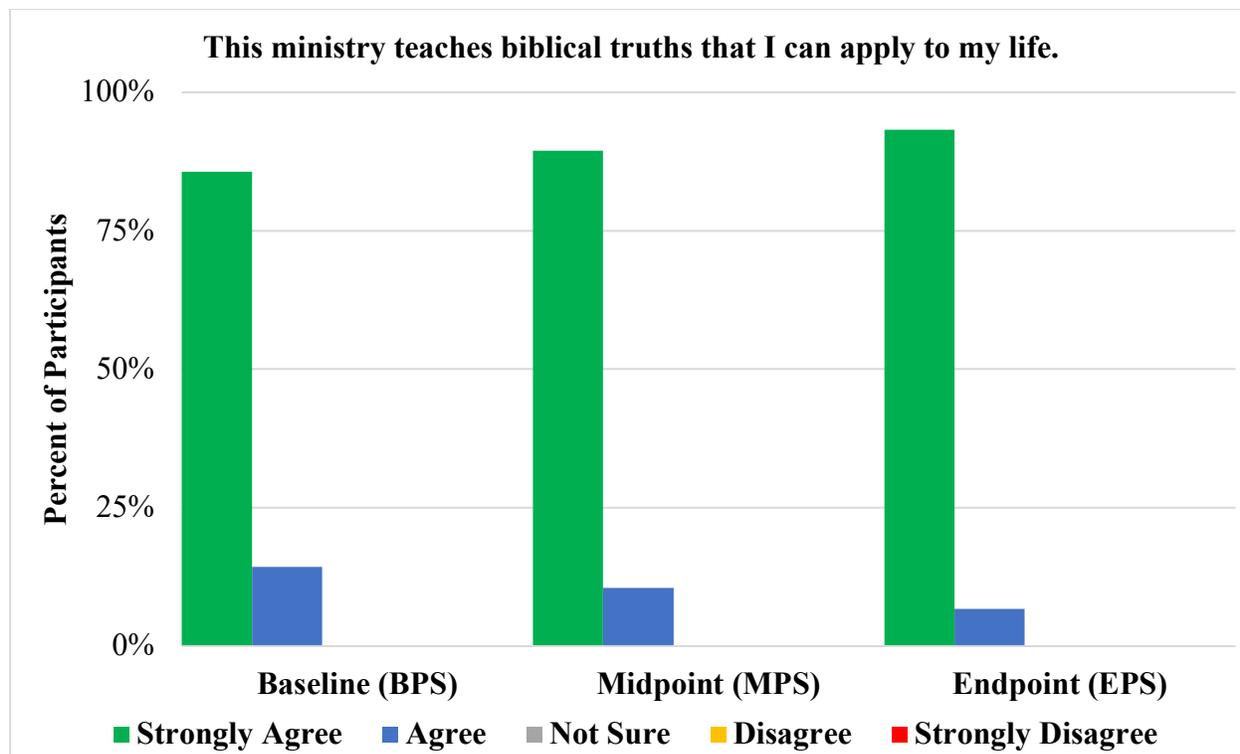
Figure 28. Participant surveys: biblical truths
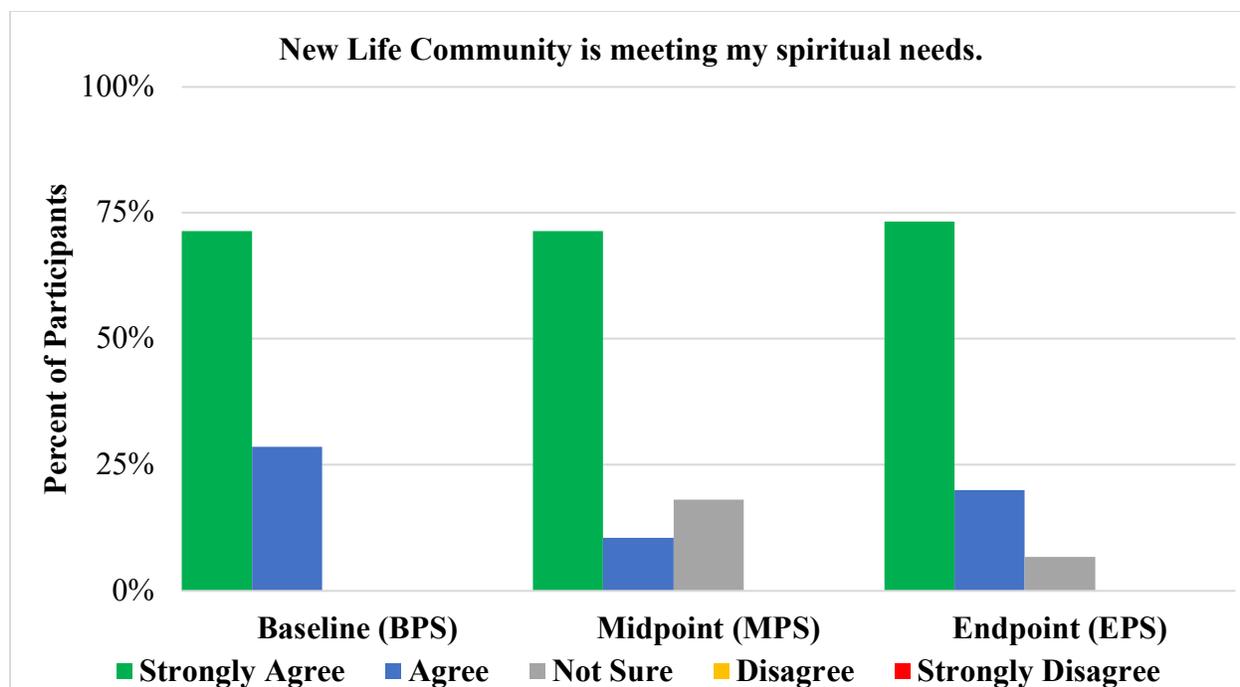
Figure 29. Participant surveys: spiritual needs
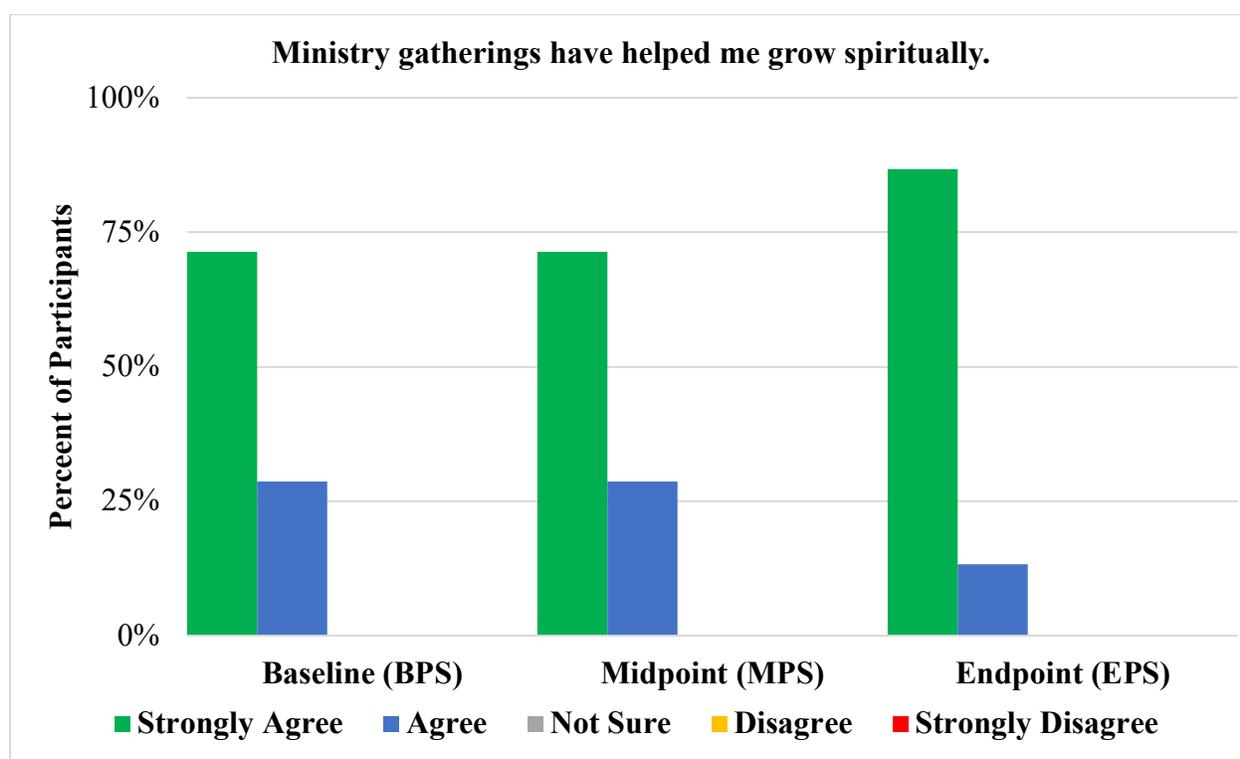
Figure 30. Participant surveys: spiritual growth

The remaining questions of the participant surveys were designed to measure how NLC is helping participants with leadership development and finding their God-given calling. Millennials can lead in some capacity right now, and we need to expect them to contribute to their church or ministry.[5] When asked if the ministry provided participants with leadership opportunities, the researcher expected unfavorable responses, as seen in figure 31, because there were few leadership opportunities for participants. Likewise, the researcher expected questions related to a participant's God-given calling to have unfavorable responses, as seen in figures 32 and 33. The lack of opportunity resulted from the ministry leaders needing more time and help to address participants' God-given calling during the intervention.

I have been provided leadership opportunities within this ministry.
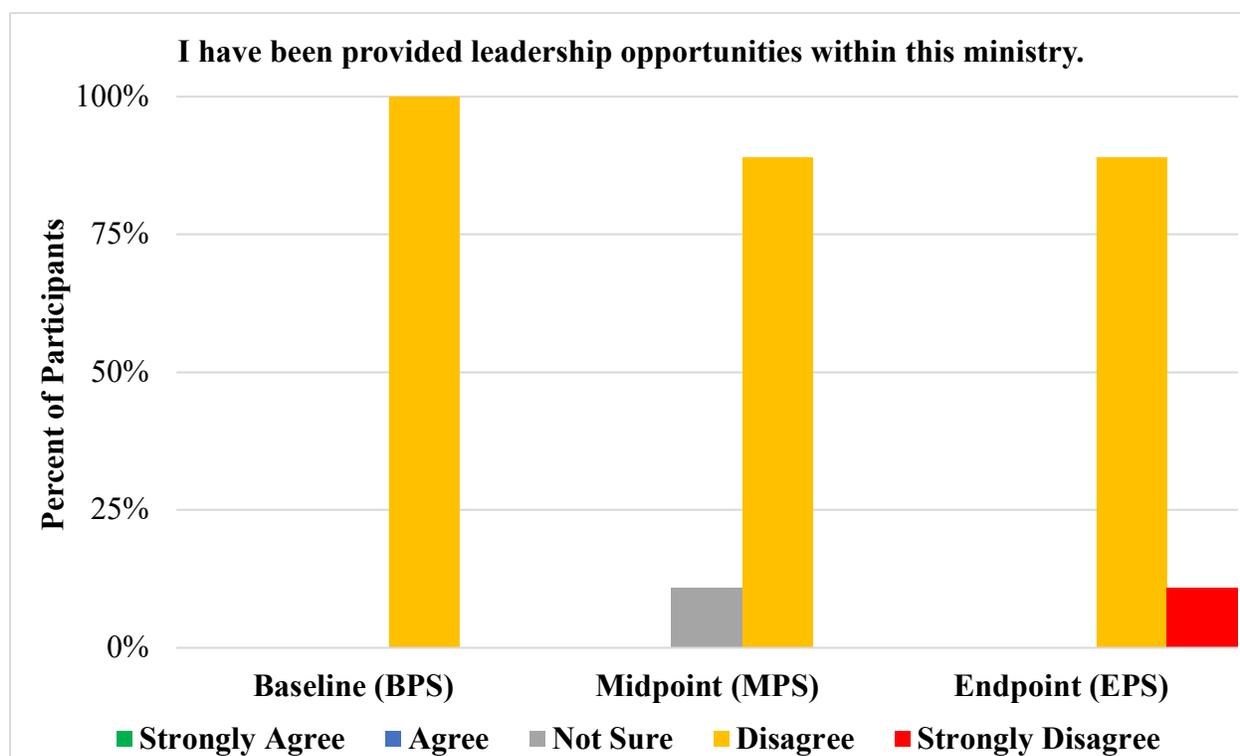
Figure 31. Participant surveys: leadership opportunities

[5] Beard, Let No One Despise You, 26.
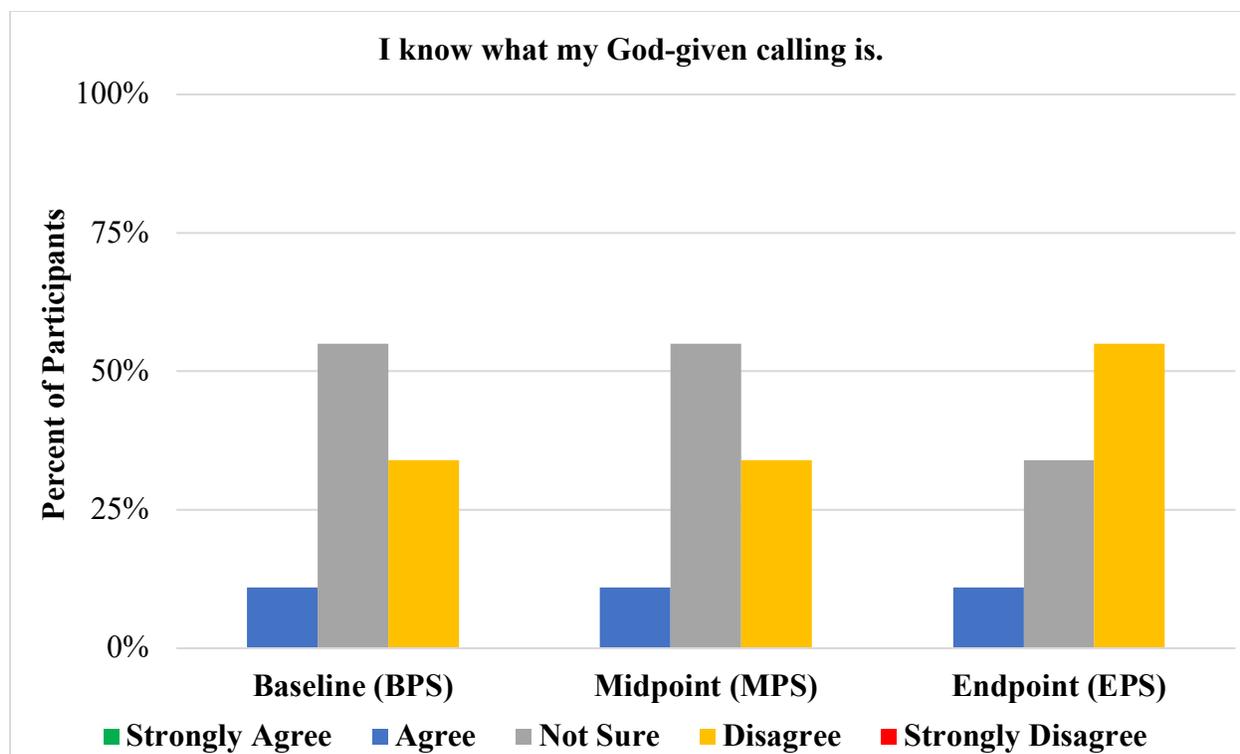
Figure 32. Participant surveys: knowledge of God-given calling
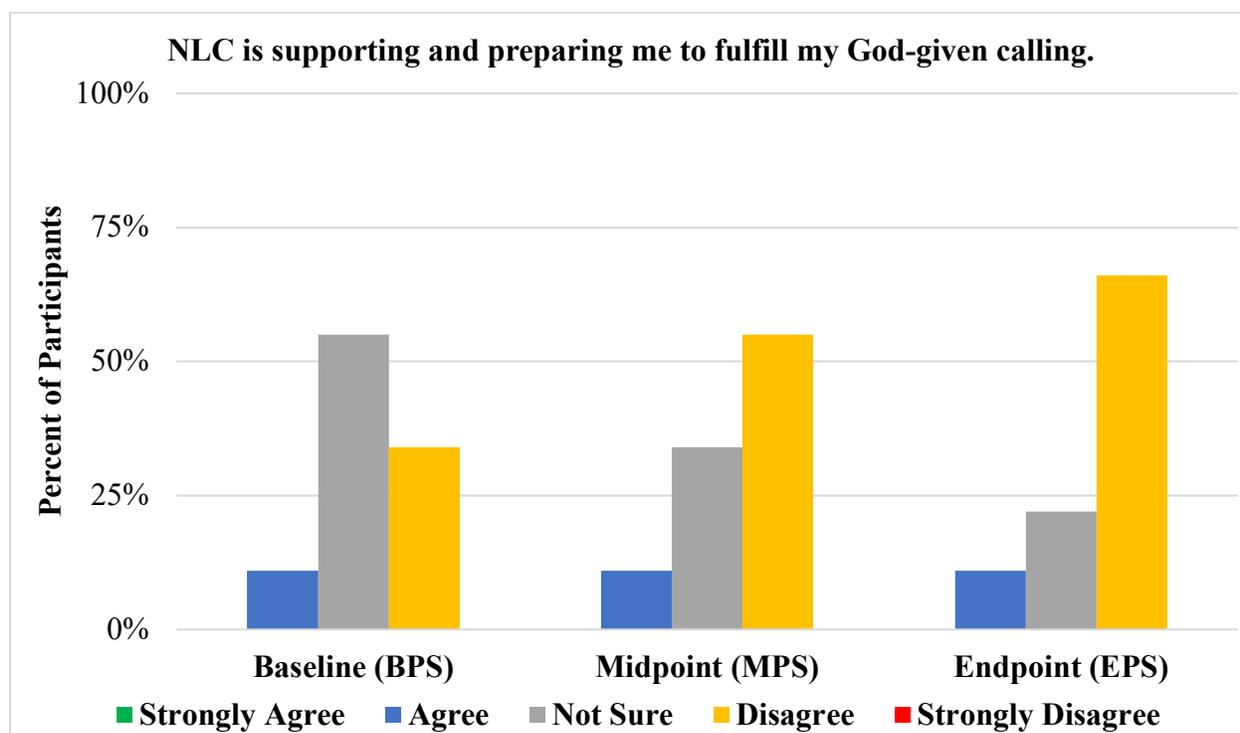
Figure 33. Participant surveys: preparation for God-given calling

Questionnaires

After each NLC ministry gathering, except for worship services and prayer group meetings, a Post-Gathering Questionnaire (PGQ) was distributed, by paper, to each attendee. The PGQ consisted of 10 open-ended questions to be completed by project and non-project participants. Questionnaires completed by non-project participants were marked with the code "OA" to identify that the questionnaire was completed by an attendee who was part of the OA group. Completion of the PGQ was voluntary, and as a result, not every attendee completed a questionnaire, and some gatherings had few or even no questionnaires submitted. During the last three weeks of the intervention, the researcher observed that attendees were becoming fatigued in completing the questionnaires. This fatigue resulted in lower submissions, especially among the project participants.

Responses to the submitted PGQ questions varied, including numerous unanswered questions. However, the researcher sorted the data into two response types: similar responses and unique responses. Similar responses are responses to similar questions among most attendees, such as the response of 'yes'. Conversely, unique responses provide a different perspective than those provided by no other attendees. The researcher also filtered the responses by project group, where "All" represents all the project groups, and ministry gathering type.

The first five questions of the PGQ focused on the attendees' overall experience at the gathering. A bad experience almost guarantees that a millennial attendee will not return. The attendees' responses to the questions provided insight into what changes were needed to ensure they were comfortable and that their time was well-spent. The PGQ question and summarized responses for the first five questions can be seen in tables 4.1–4.5.

Table 4.1. Questionnaires: recent attendance

Why did you decide to attend today's gathering?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	To meet new people To fellowship Invitation
	All	Small Group	Invitation The teaching and discussion
	All	Life Group	Help with my (dating) relationship To save my marriage
Unique	MM MA	Fellowship	I wanted to meet somewhere different.
	OA	Fellowship	Attending was something good to do. Free snacks It was good to be in a non-churchy environment.
	MM MA	Small Group	I love the discipleship series. I love attending these small group meetings.
	OA	Small Group	I was curious to learn about the truth about Easter.
	MM MA	Life Group	Help with finances My life is in shambles.

Table 4.2. Questionnaires: biblical truths learned

What biblical truths did you learn from this gathering?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	The importance of community What it means to break bread with others
	All	Small Group	Biblical foundations of discipleship How the disciples were called by Jesus Jesus did not die on a Friday. Easter has nothing to do with Jesus' death. All believers are not disciples. Discipleship occurs within a community.
	All	Life Group	Marriage is a covenant agreement.
Unique	MM MA	Small Group	Nathaniel was not called, but he became a disciple and apostle of Jesus.
	OA	Small Group	Judas was a disciple of Christ, but Satan still entered (possessed) into him.
	MM MA	Life Group	You do not get spousal rights and privileges when dating.

Table 4.3. Questionnaires: life application

How will you be able to apply what you learned to your life?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Staying in contact with other like-minded people
	All	Small Group	Intentionality with engaging with others Discipleship within a community instead of being isolated Being both a believer and disciple

Unique	OA	Fellowship	Being present in the moment
			Getting out more
	MM MA	Small Group	You have to be long-suffering when discipling others. Watch out for nostalgia and spiritual pride.
	OA	Small Group	Removing ungodly things and people from my life that I have been hanging onto Refer to today's lesson outline, notes, and the Bible.
	MM MA	Life Group	I have to be more like Christ in my marriage. The Bible provides guidance on healthy dating.

Table 4.4. Questionnaires: attendee interaction

Describe the interaction between all who attended.			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Response**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Organic Good vibes Fun
	All	Small Group	Engaging Good perspectives and dialogue Friendly Very interactive
	All	Life Group	Transparent Loving
Unique	OA	Fellowship	The pastors, especially Pastor Steele, were down to earth but also competitive when we played games.

	MM MA	Small Group	The interactions flowed well and were insightful and helpful. We were all connected.
	OA	Small Group	Interesting conversations It was the first church event I've been to where people weren't phony
	MM MA	Life Group	It was tense because our relationship is tense; however, the pastors made the session less tense.

Table 4.5. Questionnaires: comfort level

Describe your comfort level before and after attending this gathering.			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Response**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Very comfortable
	All	Small Group	Very comfortable
	All	Life Group	Comfortable
Unique	OA	Fellowship	I wasn't comfortable at first because I did not know anyone, but I was very comfortable afterward.
	MM MA	Small Group	I was initially only comfortable with the pastors, but afterward, I became very comfortable with everyone.
	OA	Small Group	I was a little uncomfortable at first because I did not know anyone, but I felt accepted by all.

The last five questions of the PGQ were focused on the attendees' views on establishing relationships with others connected to NLC and providing feedback on the gathering. A millennial's willingness to develop relationships within a community of believers, as they would

in the marketplace, means that they see value in what is happening in the community and deem the activities worthy of their time. Millennials need to know that peers are on similar spiritual journeys, not only for the sake of companionship but also to confirm the legitimacy of new faith experiences.[6] The attendees' responses to the questions provided insight into how NLC can improve the gatherings, not just specifically for millennials, even though millennials are the largest demographic at NLC. The PGQ questions and summarized responses can be seen in tables 4.6–4.10.

Table 4.6. Questionnaires: establishing relationships

Would you consider establishing a stronger relationship with others who attended? Why or why not?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Yes, it was fun.
	All	Small Group	Yes, I enjoyed the open dialogue. Yes, good energy and positive vibes.
	All	Life Group	Yes.
Unique	OA	Fellowship	Yes, everyone seemed to be down-to-earth. Yes, definitely with the pastors because they appeared to be very fatherly and motherly.
	MM MA	Fellowship	Yes, lots of laughter and learning.
	MM MA	Small Group	Yes, it felt like family. Yes, it was good to meet new like-minded people.
	OA	Small Group	Yes, everyone seemed genuine and caring and in my age group.

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[6] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 79.

	MM	Life Group	Yes, I would like to have a stronger and healthier relationship with the person I am currently dating.
	MA		

Table 4.7. Questionnaires: most liked

What did you like the most about this gathering?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	The fellowship
	All	Small Group	The teaching The discussion and interactive dialogue The people
	All	Life Group	The insight provided The compassion provided
Unique	MM MA	Fellowship	Yes, lots of laughter and learning.
	OA	Fellowship	The importance of being present The food and the fact that it was not structured
	MM MA	Small Group	Learning the truth about the resurrection makes me want to read the whole Bible now. It was biblically sound and was very inclusive. Looking at the scriptures together to get context.
	OA	Small Group	Breaking bread while studying the Scripture.
	MM MA	Life Group	The brutal but helpful honesty

Table 4.8. Questionnaires: least liked

What did you like least about the meeting?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Nothing
	All	Small Group	Nothing More people did not attend Not enough time: more time is needed.
	All	Life Group	Nothing
Unique	MM MA	Small Group	More visuals and an icebreaker to start things off
	OA	Small Group	It was a noisy environment [Food Hall], and it was hard to hear people. Need a different location and need to be able to bring children.

Table 4.9. Questionnaires: gathering improvements

How can this gathering be improved for you or for someone you may invite?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Nothing
	All	Small Group	Nothing Invite more people, better attendance More time
	All	Life Group	Nothing
Unique	MM MA	Fellowship	Having this gathering in other public venues such as shopping malls and parks

	OA	Fellowship	Be more inviting to people who weren't invited but were curious about what the group was doing.
	MM MA	Small Group	Icebreaker for someone who is new and does not know anyone Keep the gatherings going. A quieter environment Allow children to come to the gatherings or provide another option for children so more parents can participate.

Table 4.10. Questionnaires: future attendance

Will you consider attending this gathering again in the future? Why or why not?			
Response Type	**Group**	**Gathering**	**Responses**
Similar	All	Fellowship	Yes, I enjoyed the fellowship. Yes, I had a great time.
	All	Small Group	Yes, I love the teaching. Yes, I enjoyed the fellowship.
	All	Life Group	Yes.
Unique	MM MA	Small Group	Yes, it is impactful, and I am learning something good.
	OA	Small Group	Yes, I learned a lot and liked the people.
	MM MA	Life Group	Yes, I learned biblical solutions to issues that impact me and my family.

Personal Interviews

The researcher conducted Participant Personal Interviews (PPI) beginning in week five of the intervention. Interviews not only provide a record of interviewees' particular views and perspectives but also recognize the legitimacy of their views.[7] These recorded interviews were conducted privately with individuals from the MM and MA groups for a duration that was no longer than 10 minutes. The researcher captured the personal interview date and designated a participant code for each participant to keep their names private. While the interviews were informal and conversational, each individual could express feelings about the ministry changes incorporated in the intervention. The researcher asked all the participants to discuss how they felt about the ministry changes and whether they believed they should be made permanent. The researcher asked follow-up questions based on participant responses. The PPI responses from each participant were similar in context, as seen in tables 4.11 and 4.12.

Table 4.11. Participant personal interviews: responses

Date	Participant	Responses (Notes)
3/23/24	MM1	Meeting every week outside of worship services has been awesome. This was the first time we felt like a community in a long time. I loved meeting new people and the fellowship. The teaching on discipleship was eye-opening. There was so much I did not know. The ministry changes should be permanent if the goal is to become a community of believers.
3/23/24	MM2	I was glad for the changes that were made, especially the schedule changes, which allowed for gatherings every week.

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[7] Sensing, Qualitative Research, 103.

		The teachings in the small group Bible study meetings have been exceptional. The discipleship series was a reality check for me. We haven't fellowshipped like this in a long time, good vibes. I'm afraid the ministry won't last if the changes aren't permanent.
4/6/24	MM3	I like the energy and excitement that the changes brought. The fellowship gatherings were a lot of fun and a nice touch to add. I looked forward to each gathering I could attend; however, we must expand our efforts to reach more people. The discipleship series was outstanding; I learned so much. The changes should definitely be made permanent.
4/13/24	MA1	The only changes I recognized were the weekly gatherings held at different locations. Both changes were needed. The small group meetings were outstanding. I really like the teachings on discipleship and the Truth about Easter. Whatever changes were made, please keep them. I am more inclined to invite others to the ministry.
4/13/24	MM4	I am relieved about the changes that were made, which are very good. I considered finding another ministry more consistent with opportunities to meet and fellowship. The preaching and teaching have always been on point, but it seems you [the pastors] could use some help. I am open to being trained to assist with the ministry. Not only do the changes need to be kept, but the ministry should also be more proactive in evangelism to increase participation and win souls for Christ.

Table 4.12. Participant personal interviews: responses continued

Date	Participant	Responses (Notes)
4/14/24	MM5	I really like the change in direction the ministry is going. It is great to have multiple events available each week. I'm really enjoying the fellowship and feeling like a family again. Teaching in series have been very helpful for me. The discipleship series made me come to some truths about my own spiritual walk. I would like to see the ministry do more to prepare people for their calling. The changes are definitely a step in the right direction. I think the changes should be kept; however, there need to be more opportunities for leadership roles, such as leading a small group.
4/20/24	MM6	I'm so happy about the new direction the ministry is going by incorporating the changes. Teaching, preaching, and freedom of worship have always been good, but it's hard to stay connected when we meet occasionally. The frequent gatherings are a welcomed change. Since the changes were made, fellowshipping and connecting with other like-minded Christians has increased significantly. The small group teachings have been amazing, and humbling. I'm glad Life Group meetings have continued, but there haven't been any gatherings related to career and business – not a dealbreaker. The changes should be made permanent for sure. New Life will be better off with the changes.

4/20/24	MA2	This is the New Life Community that I've been longing to experience. The former way the ministry operated in terms of gatherings may have been convenient for my schedule but not for my spiritual needs. The ministry seems more structured with the changes. With the way things are now being done, New Life feels more like a community. The ministry is improved with the new changes and should be kept.
4/27/24	MM7	The changes have helped us come together as a community of believers. I was in expectation every week for the next gathering, The teachings on discipleship were very good. It was great breaking bread from house to house. Meeting in different locations has been exciting. The changes should be permanent but remain flexible to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Data Analysis

In reviewing the data collected from the project, the researcher could extrapolate specific reoccurring themes that project participants provided. First was the increased occurrence of gatherings. Increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings to where there was at least one weekly gathering was a significant change that the participants received well. Ministry leadership responses from the MLQ identified this as a needed area of improvement for the ministry, and almost all the project participants mentioned this change in their interviews. Weekly ministry gatherings are a significant reason there was an improvement in participant survey responses throughout the intervention. The researcher recorded in his field notes that

individuals within the MM and MA groups were becoming more comfortable with one another each week, and the camaraderie amongst themselves was increasing.

A direct result of increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings was the fellowship opportunities. Fellowship was the most identifiable theme across all qualitative and quantitative data points. The data indicated that fellowshipping with other Christian, like-minded individuals, regardless of age, was the ideal scenario. The researcher observed that there are times when millennials want to fellowship amongst their peer group; however, millennials still desire intergenerational interaction. The participant surveys showed that responses related to intergenerational interaction, which started with 85 percent of participants responding affirmatively, continued to increase throughout the intervention, ending with 93 percent of participants responding affirmatively.

The data also indicated that small group gatherings were highly regarded amongst project participants. Responses from the MLQ, PGQ, and PPIs revealed that having Bible study with interactive dialogue was highly valued. While NLC had already established small group gatherings before the intervention, the shift in content made the difference as the small group lessons focused on biblical discipleship. There was also a brief lesson on "The Truth About Easter Sunday," which was very popular based on participant feedback. The researcher observed that even after two hours of small group Bible study, attendees wanted to continue longer because of the interactive dialogue concerning the Scripture and the fellowship. Even after the intervention was completed, millennials connected to NLC continued to inquire about continuing small-group Bible study lessons.

Lastly, the data showed that leadership development needs more emphasis. Responses from participant surveys and personal interviews indicated that the ministry was missing the

training of leaders. The researcher has always understood that the ministry needed to develop leaders. However, because of the intervention, at least two individuals from the MM group have been identified by the researcher as potential candidates for leadership development.

Summary of Results

This chapter examined the data collected from three participant surveys, post-gathering questionnaires, and personal interviews. Participants in this research project were all born between 1981 and 1996 and millennials connected to NLC. The data collected from participant surveys and personal interviews reflected the responses from millennials likely connected to the ministry. However, the data collected from post-gathering questionnaires reflected the responses from adults of all ages, including those not connected to NLC. Unsurprisingly, most of the responses from the questionnaires were from millennials.

Based on the data from this research, increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings and incorporating the researched ministry preferences of millennials were well received by the participants. By increasing the frequency of meetings, participants were not only provided consistent opportunities to grow spiritually by learning about biblical discipleship and other biblical truths but also opportunities to strengthen interpersonal relationships. Participants overwhelmingly felt that the changes introduced as part of the intervention should be made permanent within the ministry because the changes promoted a sense of community. However, based on the research, improvements in leadership opportunities and development are still needed despite the changes.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This DMIN action research project aims to increase the incidence of gatherings and intergenerational relationships to improve relational discipleship among millennials at New Life Community (NLC). Many millennials at NLC have placed more importance on establishing and nurturing relationships in the marketplace and pursuing marketplace goals than on relationships at NLC. The researcher designed an eight-week action-oriented intervention that included more frequent ministry gatherings, fellowship opportunities among participants, intergenerational interaction, and emphasis on teaching participants about biblical discipleship. With intentionality placed on relational discipleship, spiritual formation, discipline, and growth, none of the gatherings during the intervention focused on marketplace initiatives, including career and entrepreneurial pursuits.

The findings of this action research project suggest that interpersonal relationships, spiritual growth, and a sense of community were improved among participants, who were all millennials. While social, moral, financial, and spiritual challenges are unique to the millennial generation, the participants want to be a part of a Christian Community that will help them live through and address those challenges. In a community context, millennials are supported in finding meaning and purpose, making sense of difficulties, receiving opportunities to experiment with beliefs and assess their value, and engaging with a moral community that supports their values and gives them an ethical framework.[1] When presented with more opportunities to

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[1] Seversen, *Not Done Yet,* 18.

exercise spiritual disciplines, participate in interactive biblical teachings, and strengthen interpersonal relationships through fellowship, the participants began to experience relational discipleship.

As a result, the researcher learned that marketplace discipleship, for the millennials connected to NLC, displaced relational discipleship because of inconsistent and infrequent ministry gatherings, a lack of teaching on biblical discipleship, which millennials can apply to their lives, and a lack of leadership opportunities and development. Without a community of believers that they could depend on and thus be committed to, there is a void left in their lives, which they have filled with entrepreneurial, career, and other marketplace pursuits. This chapter addresses Christian formation and human development, research implications, research applications, research limitations, and the topic of further research to provide a better understanding of the conclusion.

Christian Formation and Human Development

When conducting research, specifically when involving people, it is essential to understand the impact that one's research will have on human behavior. For research related to the Christian Community, researchers must be aware of the effect, intentional or unintentional, that their project will have on the development of Christian formation in the people involved. The authors of *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* make the case that theology and psychology deal with the interrelationship of theology and psychology by creating an integrated framework of spiritual formation available in academic and church

contexts.[2] This interrelationship consists of biblical data based on the Christian doctrine and major theories of human development formulated in academia.

The researcher utilized concepts provided by the authors of *Christian Formation* to explore how this research project impacted at least one area of human development while contributing to the participant's Christian formation. Thus, a person's Christian formation is developed through theology and human development. The researcher applied human development theories related to adult development, as identified by the authors. By aligning human development with theology, the researcher discovered the trajectory of Christian formation among the participants within the researcher's ministry context, New Life Community.

Human Development Theory and Theological Perspective Summary

As related to Christian formation, spiritual formation begins with a focus on being 'formed' and 'transformed'; it focuses on human participation and obedience to Jesus Christ, and it is a lifelong process that takes place in the context of community.[3] A Christian's continual practice of spiritual disciplines is part of being formed and transformed. Three areas comprise spiritual disciplines: inward, outward, and corporate. The inward domain focuses on inward disciplines such as prayer and Scripture reading. The outward domain focuses on social disciplines such as acts of mercy and tithing. The corporate domain focuses on disciplines of personal accountability such as confession and spiritual guidance. Ted Ward asserted that five empirical domains of human development, physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral,

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[2] James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 7, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[3] Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation,* Chapter 8.

serve as "input and output functions to and from the spiritual core."[4] The biblical approach to transformation is the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, meaning 'sacred reading' of Scripture. The church is where Christians are formed as they interpret Scripture in ways that enhance the goal of being like Christ.[5] Reading, studying, and applying the Scriptures is about formation and transformation. Through the spiritual disciplines of the church, reading of the Bible, and the community of faith, the lives of Christians are being continually formed and transformed.[6]

Two theories were relevant to the researcher's action research in regard to adult development and Christian formation. First is Daniel Levinson's theory that there are three transitions that adult men and women go through in life: the early adult transition, the midlife transition, and the late adult transition. People in the early adult stage are learning to become adults, although they go through a transition around age 30, where their early adulthood begins to culminate. Next, Jack Mezirow introduced transformative learning and perspective transformation. In his theory, he suggests that adults learn as they undergo a change of mind that leads toward personal and social change.[7] The biblical approach to adulthood is instruction, fellowship, and service. Christian formation requires adults to develop in the way God intended.

<div align="center">Participant Growth and Human Development Theory</div>

Discipleship is part of the transformation process for Christians. Specifically, for millennials, the action-oriented intervention experienced discipleship in the context of a community instead of the marketplace. With the increased incidence of ministry gatherings,

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[4] Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation,* Chapter 8.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., Chapter 7.

participants experienced more opportunities to practice spiritual disciplines. The three domains of spiritual discipline, inward, outward, and corporate, were exercised. Millennials seek experiential worship and engaging, pragmatic biblical teaching, a spiritual home that will provide community, and ideally, a place where they might contribute in some way.[8] With the increased utilization of spiritual disciplines such as praying, worship, fellowship, and service, all within the context of a community, participants experienced growth in their human development, including intellectual, emotional, social, and moral.

Another area of growth came from reading and studying the Scriptures, which are also spiritual disciplines. In addition to worship services, where sermons are based on biblical truths, small group gatherings took a deeper dive into the Scriptures to uncover truths that the participants could apply to their lives, all in the context of a community. Sermons are less important to millennials than the sense of community in the church; however, they still want applicable and challenging teaching, which they will take seriously and answer their many questions about faith and life.[9]

The millennial generation, born between 1981 and 1996, is in the early adult transition stage and is willing to change their minds through instruction. Most millennials have already reached the age of 30 and are experiencing life transitions. They are in their busiest stage of life, where they are busy building their careers and families and budgeting and scheduling their activities.[10] However, by participating in the action research, their theology experienced growth through biblical teaching that applies to their stage of life. God has disclosed in His written Word all that millennials need to know to reach their divine destination. He has revealed the truth in the

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[8] Perrin, *Changing Shape*, 17.

[9] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 77.

[10] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 130–31.

Bible.[11] By increasing the incidence of worship services and small groups, participants grew through biblical instruction, fellowship through interpersonal relationships established, and opportunities to serve others

<div align="center">Measuring Growth</div>

The researcher's action-oriented intervention measured growth by analyzing the data collected. Three anonymous surveys were collected from participants throughout the intervention to help measure growth theologically. The initial survey served as a baseline from which measurement began. The researcher administered the second survey midway through the intervention and administered the third survey at the end. With each succeeding survey, the data provided a trend that the researcher used to help determine growth. When the data stayed relatively the same as the baseline results, the researcher concluded that theological growth did not occur as expected and had peaked among the participants. However, the researcher determined that theological growth had occurred when the data trended positively with each survey. Lastly, where the data trended negatively with each survey, the researcher concluded that the ministry needed to change its strategy and approach toward theological growth.

The researcher was able to determine that growth was occurring, as evidenced by the relationships that were being established and strengthened. The researcher observed community growth throughout the intervention, which meant that interpersonal relationships were being established or strengthened. When millennials have the relationships they desire, they will get together outside of regularly scheduled worship, small groups, and gathering times, doing life

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[11] Tony Evans, *Kingdom Values: Character over Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2022), 36, ProQuest Ebook Central.

together.[12] Another indicator of growth was the formulation of intergenerational and discipling relationships. "Discipling is not just a one-way flow of teaching. Disciples and disciplers are learners together, which means that although a discipler may know more content of the Bible and Christian traditions, both discipler and disciples are continuing to grow and learn more about what it means to be a follower of Jesus."[13] At the end of the intervention, with all of the data collected and analyzed, the researcher determined the trajectory of the level of growth experienced by the millennials who are connected to New Life Community.

Research Implications

The problem presented for this action research project was that, for ministry gatherings at NLC, there had been a noticeable decline in overall participation from the millennials connected to the ministry. Millennials connected to NLC and visitors within the millennial generation began participating in marketplace-focused gatherings at a higher rate than regular ministry gatherings, including worship services. The researcher could have made an immediate assumption that millennials connected to the ministry were more interested in their pursuits in the marketplace. However, the research identified aspects of the ministry that implicated why there was a decline in participation for millennials connected to NLC.

Increasing the Incidence of Gatherings

First, the research confirmed that ministry gatherings were scheduled too infrequently. Ministry gatherings, including worship services, were scheduled bi-weekly, with some Life Groups meetings occurring monthly. Participants understood that ministry gatherings were

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[12] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 81.

[13] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 248.

scheduled bi-weekly throughout the month but attended only occasionally. With the infrequent scheduling of gatherings, many millennials connected to NLC were not committed to the ministry. Thus, they attended gatherings based on a need or productive use of their time, which marketplace-focused gatherings would offer. In his research, Lile detected that when people are infrequent in a group, the depth of relationships will not exist for significant spiritual formation to occur; thus, people were encouraged to attend group weekly as much as possible.[14] When NLC ministry gatherings were scheduled weekly during the intervention, the Participant Surveys showed that the percentage of participants who attended gatherings regularly increased from 57 to 93 percent. This increase occurred without any marketplace-focused gatherings scheduled during the intervention.

When ministry gatherings were occurring infrequently, it became difficult for millennials connected to NLC to establish interpersonal relationships, which made it challenging to build a community of believers. Along with the infrequent gatherings were infrequent opportunities for fellowship. It is only possible to develop deep relationships with significant time invested.[15] With ministry gatherings occurring weekly during the intervention, participant surveys showed that the percentage of participants who considered NLC a trusted community they belong to increased from 55 to 77 percent. Additionally, within the participant personal interviews, six out of the nine participants mentioned either enjoying fellowship with others or the ministry feeling like a community during the intervention. Discipleship is impossible without establishing and strengthening relationships.

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[14] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 340.

[15] Ibid.

Format of Ministry Gatherings

Next, the research revealed that the overall format of ministry gatherings needed to be revised for the millennials connected to NLC. The format of ministry gatherings was based upon the format used when the researcher and his wife led the young adult ministry for their previous church. Utilizing this format may have had early successes in attendance numbers, but the format still needed to evolve to meet the needs of the millennials as they experienced the complexities of adulting. As an independent house church ministry, it became clear that NLC still operated as an extension of a parent church ministry.

Therefore, in addition to increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings, the researcher identified two changes to meet the needs and preferences of the millennials connected to NLC. The first was related to the gathering locations. Most gatherings were conducted at the researcher's home as a house church ministry. In her research, Young found that millennials prefer meeting outside church buildings.[16] For Q1 of the MLQ, the consistent response from ministry leaders, when asked what changes are needed at NLC, was the expressed need for more centralized and different meeting locations. The researcher's home was not only the ministry's primary gathering location, but it also was not centrally located. In response to the research and feedback, the researcher expanded gathering locations during the intervention, which resulted in positive feedback. Participant interviews included responses such as, "Weekly gatherings held at different locations were needed" and "It was great breaking bread from house to house."

The second change was related to the teachings of biblical truths that can be applied to the lives of millennials and their spiritual formation and growth, specifically within small groups. Teaching biblical truths within small groups has always met the expectations of millennials

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[16] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 112.

connected to NLC. However, as researcher Jackson found in his ministry context, spiritual

formation and growth are improved when a set curriculum for small group study is provided by

leadership.[17] As part of the intervention, the researcher provided a planned curriculum of biblical

teachings within small group gatherings. The primary teaching was on 'Biblical Discipleship',

taught in a series format over six weeks. The other teaching, 'Truth About Easter', was for one

week and coincided with the US Easter Holiday.

During the intervention, participant surveys showed that the percentage of participants

who strongly agree that the ministry gatherings have helped them grow spiritually increased

from 71 to 87 percent. Also, during the intervention, the percentage of participants who strongly

agreed that NLC teaches biblical truths they can apply to their lives increased from 85 to 93

percent. Additionally, within the participant personal interviews, seven out of the nine

participants responded favorably about the small group teachings, especially the teachings on

discipleship. These results proved that the planned curriculum provided spiritual truths that

participants could apply to their lives.

<div align="center">Leadership Development</div>

The research also confirmed that NLC could have done better regarding leadership

development. Millennials are still figuring out who they are; they are looking for opportunities to

lead, and it is important to give them tasks that will allow them to develop transferable

leadership skills.[18] The researcher understands that leadership development is a shortcoming of

the ministry, especially as related to the millennials connected to NLC. A lack of leadership

opportunities not only negatively impacts their confidence as potential ministry leaders but also

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[17] Jackson, "Maximizing Discipleship," 99.

[18] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 114.

negatively impacts them from feeling empowered to lead social justice causes. During the intervention, participant surveys showed that all participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had been provided leadership opportunities. Also, the percentage of participants who disagreed that NLC supports and prepares them to fulfill their God-given calling increased from 34 to 66 percent. When millennials are not provided leadership opportunities, they are less likely to commit and will seek an opportunity elsewhere.

<p style="text-align:center">Irrelevance of Social Media</p>

Finally, the research revealed that social media was not integral to ministry gatherings. Most scholars agree millennials value relationships and are the most digitally connected generation, yet they still struggle to engage in authentic, intentional communities.[19] This was different with the millennials who are connected to NLC. While the researcher provided no social media questions to participants, NLC did not utilize social media to communicate with, market to, or digitally connect to millennials.

The researcher observed no issues with interpersonal and intergenerational interaction and authentic and intentional community for both participants and non-participants. In personal interviews, there were no mentions or requests for the ministry to establish any social media presence, contrary to what most scholars have concluded about millennials and social media. The ministry relied on the presence of personal engagement rather than a social media presence to reach others. The lack of a social media presence had minimal impact on the millennials connected to NLC.

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[19] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 78.

Research Applications

The researcher assessed the various scholarly research on discipling millennials in the marketplace and agreed with the innovative methods established by each scholar for their ministry context. What made this DMIN action research project unique is the context of millennials in the marketplace and relational discipleship. In a house church ministry environment, this action research project was designed to transition participants from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship by increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings, personal connections, focused teaching within small groups, and biblical life application. Accomplishing this transition to relational discipleship will improve millennials' spiritual formation, discipline, growth, and commitment to community connections.

The steps in this action research project will vary from one ministry to another based on size and resources. As affirmed by past studies, an essential part of this research was tailoring gatherings to the ministry preferences of millennials. Millennials tend to commit to a church or ministry based on style, convenience, peer group, or pragmatic factors like childcare provision.[20] Some ministries may only be able to accommodate some of the millennials' ministry preferences due to limited financial or human resources; however, the result of transitioning millennials from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship is still attainable.

Administering millennials' ministry preferences should be distinct from a total surrender of ministry standards and the biblical principles that those principles are based on. Although they have their ministry preferences, millennials still expect structure. They respect the role played by houses of worship and the governance and biblical principles that these houses represent.[21] The

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[20] Perrin, *Changing Shape*, 22.

[21] Clydesdale, and Garces-Foley, *The Twentysomething Soul,* 34.

researcher was intentional about implementing the ministry preferences of millennials. It was essential to give only a little deference to the millennials connected to the ministry to avoid the risk of losing those not in the millennial generation, especially baby boomers. However, the older ministry members were open to the changes incorporated in this action research project.

Another essential part of the research was the utilization of small groups. The teachings and interactive discussions within the small group gatherings were influential and well-received by the millennials connected to the NLC. For millennials, small groups establish community around a common interest, where a pastor can tailor Bible studies to their most pressing needs and interests.[22] The researcher designed the small group gatherings to feature teachings on biblical discipleship in a series format, which was needed in the researcher's ministry context. Small groups must be designed to facilitate connections between group members where vulnerability, transparency, and life-sharing can occur within the context of Scripture.[23]

Finally, there should be intentionality in exposing millennials to spiritual disciplines. There needs to be intentionality in exposing disciples to personal and communal spirituality patterns, including worship, prayer, Bible reading, and interaction with the Christian community.[24] All ministry gatherings at NLC incorporated the practice of spiritual disciplines. The gathering leader provided each attendee an opportunity to lead a prayer, sing a song, or read Scripture. During the project intervention, the researcher observed that exercising spiritual disciplines in gatherings, including fellowship and service, enabled participants and attendees to encounter God and be more open to interpersonal interactions. It is not enough to practice

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[22] Young, "A Study of Church Attendance among the Young Adults at Galilee Baptist Church," 112.

[23] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 85–86.

[24] Hibbert, and Hibbert, Walking Together on the Jesus Road, 46.

spiritual disciplines alone with God; we must practice them in a community where character change takes place.[25]

Research Limitations

There were limitations that were introduced in Chapter 1, as well as additional limitations that did affect the project intervention. First, the project intervention experienced fewer participants due to the unpredictability of millennials, who were initially considered connected to NLC. The ministry lost 20 percent of the pool of millennials who were to be recruited. Recruitment efforts fell shorter than expected as most of the recruited millennials were either unresponsive to requests or unwilling to commit to participating in the project intervention. The participant threshold for the efficacy of 25 percent was still met with nine participants. However, more project participants would have provided better-resulting data.

Likewise, the project intervention experienced a lower number of older believers that were going to be utilized for intergenerational interactions. The ministry lost two of the three adults from the baby boomer generation who had been expected to participate. With only three older adults connected to the ministry, including the researcher and his wife, the opportunities for intergenerational interactions with the millennial participants were impacted. There were instances where there were some gatherings with no older adults in attendance. The lone baby boomer interacted well with the millennial participants and established close relationships with some. However, there were missed opportunities for intergenerational relationships because there were no other older adults besides the researcher and his wife.

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[25] Lile, "Relational Discipleship," 273.

There were limitations with participants that impacted the resulting data. Seven out of the nine participants were women. With only two men participating in the project, the research may not sufficiently reflect the perspective of millennial men. Some participants did not complete the participant surveys, impacting participant percentages. Because the participant surveys were anonymous, when reviewing the survey responses, the researcher was unable to determine which participant did not complete the survey, which resulted in slightly distorted data.

Lastly, the time allocated for the project intervention needed to be increased and became the most significant limiter. The intervention was initially designed for seven weeks; however, the researcher extended it by another week to kick off the intervention with a fellowship gathering of fun, games, and food to re-spark interest in the ministry. Although the eight-week intervention provided positive results, additional weeks would have allowed the researcher more time to collect better qualitative and quantitative data and evaluate the ministry's contribution to each participant's spiritual formation and growth. Faith formation through a comprehensive ministry builds and strengthens relationships with Jesus Christ, their Christian community, their Christian mission in the world, and their peers who share the same values and beliefs.[26]

Additionally, more time would have given the researcher and ministry leadership the bandwidth to provide leadership opportunities to participants. More time was needed to delegate leadership tasks to participants and evaluate their progress appropriately. Leadership development was the only unsuccessful part of the project intervention and was responded to negatively by participants, although the researcher identified two potential candidates for leadership development. Despite this shortcoming and other aspects of the intervention that can be improved, this action research project successfully transitioned the millennials connected to

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[26] Carnate Atrero, "Young Disciples in the Marketplace," 164.

NLC from marketplace discipleship to relational discipleship, which improved their spiritual

formation, discipline, and growth.

Further Research

This action research project provides pastors with the components to attract and retain

millennials to their ministries and establish relational discipleship with them. As assessed in the

Literature Review section, many scholars agree that the millennial generation has unique

generational characteristics that previous generations do not understand. However, they are an

essential generation to the church despite continuing to leave it for various reasons. Most of their

reasons are related to differences with the traditional church structure and perceived hypocrisy

within the church.

Although scholars consistently address the behavior of millennials and their views on

religion, there needs to be more research on millennials in the marketplace and relational

discipleship. A good topic for future research is continuing this action research project, where the

time limitation is less constraining. It would be interesting to see the data produced by this

research when extended anywhere from three to six months. Another area of future research is

how millennials' marketplace pursuits correlate with their spirituality and discipleship. Based on

the researcher's observation during the project intervention, millennials seem to be less focused

on their spirituality and vice versa when they are focused on their marketplace pursuits.

Another potential research area is the contrast between Generation Z and young

millennials regarding marketplace and relational discipleship. Generation Z, or Centennials, born

between 1997 and 2012, will progress further than millennials in terms of culture and

technology. It would be interesting to see how the church is discipling Generation Z and what

marketplace discipleship looks like for their generation. There is a strong case that the older

members of Generation Z are experiencing one of the most traumatic socio-economic times in history. If this is the case, it would be interesting to see if they will have the focus and drive for entrepreneurial pursuits as millennials do if they will protest until a governing body provides a solution for them, and what this means for them spiritually.

Conclusion

This DMIN action research project aimed to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish and strengthen interpersonal relationships and improve relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community. While relational discipleship can occur in various forms, such as one-on-one, small groups, and even communal living, relational discipleship requires personal interaction among disciples.[27] The millennial generation makes up the most significant demographic at New Life Community. Thus, this generation's importance to the ministry, including the carrying out of Jesus' Great Commission and their spiritual growth, could not be ignored or underestimated.

An eight-week action-oriented intervention was designed and implemented to establish relational discipleship through small groups, personal connections, and biblical life application while creating a community. The intervention consisted of weekly gatherings that incorporated theories from precedent literature by researchers and scholars, including the ministry preferences of millennials. During the intervention, small group gatherings featured teachings on biblical discipleship. Nine out of 27 personally recruited millennials connected to New Life Community participated in the intervention. Each participant completed three anonymous participant surveys

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[27] Chartrand, "Spiritual Formation of Millennials," 48.

and a personal interview as part of the intervention. The participants and other ministry gathering attendees were also asked to complete voluntary post-gathering questionnaires.

The data collected from the three participant surveys, post-gathering questionnaires, and personal interviews revealed the impact of the intervention design. Increasing the frequency of ministry gatherings, incorporating the ministry preferences of millennials, and focused teaching on biblical truths such as discipleship were all well received by the participants. All participants overwhelmingly felt that the changes introduced as part of the intervention should be made permanent at New Life Community. However, the results also revealed that New Life Community needs to improve in providing leadership opportunities and development for millennials. There is a vast difference between doing ministry to millennials and doing ministry through millennials.[28] Training and coaching millennials for leadership will help improve their spiritual formation, discipline, and growth.

The results of this action research project have conclusively demonstrated that the gaps in the NLC Discipleship Plan, discussed in Chapter 3, would be improved by featuring the changes designed for and implemented during the eight-week action-oriented intervention. The gaps were believed to have occurred in the 'Connect and Equip' phases of the NLC Discipleship Plan due to irregular ministry gatherings and a lack of interpersonal relationships. The intervention revealed that irregular ministry gatherings and a lack of interpersonal relationships weakened the 'Connect' phase. Also, the intervention showed that not having a small group curriculum for teaching biblical truths, especially discipleship, and a lack of leadership training weakened the 'Equip' phase. The data collected from the intervention highlighted an overall improvement from

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[28] Skeldon, The Passion Generation, 203.

the previous data and showed that the millennials connected to New Life Community were

contributory in establishing a community.

Appendix A

MINISTRY LEADER CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace
Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

Principal Investigator: Marcus Steele, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of
Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be in a
leadership role at New Life Community. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings,
along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement
of relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a five-minute Ministry Leadership Questionnaire.

2. Participate in the research kickoff meeting that will last approximately two hours. In this group meeting with other participating ministry leaders, you will review and provide suggestions for the research study.
3. Be responsible for assigned tasks such as administering participant surveys and communicating with research study participants, which will take no longer than ten minutes.
4. Participate in no less than three research study progress meetings that will take no longer than one hour. These progress meetings will be utilized to review participant surveys and assist with addressing any adjustments that may be necessary for the research study.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include teachings on relational discipleship and building a Christian community.

Benefits to society include a strategy for discipling millennials and preparing them to carry out their God-given purpose.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses for surveys will be anonymous.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer and hardcopy data will be in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as senior pastor at New Life Community. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, data collection will be anonymous, so the researcher will not be able to link the collected data to the specific participants who provided or are associated with the data. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Marcus Steele. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Danny Allen, at ███████████████.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix B

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What changes do you believe are needed at New Life Community?

2. What inconsistencies do you believe are negatively impacting the ministry?

3. What are some of the things you believe attendees like the most about ministry gatherings?

4. What are some of the things you believe attendees like the least about ministry gatherings?

5. How is ministry leadership connecting with members and non-members?

6. Describe the interaction between older and younger attendees who are connected to the ministry.

7. Describe New Life Community's discipleship plan.

8. Describe your disciple-making relationship.

9. Who are the members that you believe should be trained for ministry leadership and why?

10. What do you believe is needed to create more of a sense of community within the ministry?

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT VERBAL RECRUITMENT

Hello Potential Participant,

As a Doctoral Candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community. If you are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a member or frequent attendees of New Life Community and must be born between 1981 and 1996. Participants will be asked to take an anonymous questionnaire and surveys, as well as take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately a combined total of 40 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

Would you like to participate? Great, could I get your email address so I can send you the link to the consent form? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

The consent form contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please sign, and submit. Once you have submitted the consent form, a link will be enabled for an anonymous survey for you to complete. The survey should not take longer than ten minutes to complete. If preferred, I can also provide you with paper copies of both the consent form and survey.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Potential Participant,

As a Doctoral Candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a member or frequent attendees of New Life Community and must be born between 1981 and 1996. Participants will be asked to take anonymous surveys as well as take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately a combined total of 40 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please click on the link to the consent form which contains additional information about the research study. After you have read the consent form, please sign, and submit. Once you have submitted the consent form, a link will be enabled for an anonymous survey for you to complete. The survey should not take longer than ten minutes to complete. If preferred, I can also provide you with paper copies of both the consent document and the survey.

Sincerely,

Marcus Steele
Senior Pastor, New Life Community

Appendix E

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Dear Potential Participant,

      As a Doctoral Candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

      Participants must be a member or frequent attendees of New Life Community and must be born between 1981 and 1996. Participants will be asked to take an anonymous questionnaire and surveys, as well as take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately a combined total of 40 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

      To participate, please click on the link to the consent form which contains additional information about the research study. After you have read the consent form, please sign, and submit. Once you have submitted the consent form, a link will be enabled for an anonymous survey for you to complete. The survey should not take longer than ten minutes to complete. If preferred, I can also provide you with paper copies of both the consent document and the survey.

Sincerely,

Marcus Steele
Senior Pastor, New Life Community

Appendix F

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

Principal Investigator: Marcus Steele, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a research study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member or a frequent attendee of New Life Community and must be born between 1981 and 1996. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to increase the frequency and attendance of group gatherings, along with increased opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships, for the improvement of relational discipleship among the millennial population at New Life Community.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a total of three participant surveys and one questionnaire that will take no more than ten minutes each.
2. Complete a survey at the end of each gathering that you attend, which will take no longer than 5 minutes.
3. Participate in at least one personal interview that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a strategy for discipleship and preparing disciples to carry out their God-given purpose.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses for surveys will be anonymous.
- Participant interviews will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer and hardcopy data will be in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as senior pastor at New Life Community. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, data collection will be anonymous, so the researcher will not be able to link the collected data to the specific participants who provided or are associated with the data. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Marcus Steele. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Danny Allen, at ███████████████.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your consent

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

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

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

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix G

BASELINE PARTICIPANT SURVEY

5. I consider myself a member of New Life Community.   Yes ( ) No ( )
6. I attend New Life Community ministry gatherings regularly.   Yes ( ) No ( )
7. Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month.   Yes ( ) No ( )
8. Worship services meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
9. Small Group meetings (Men's/Women's) have met my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
10. Life Group meetings (Life/Stewardship Coaching) have met my expectations. Yes ( ) No ( )
11. I feel comfortable inviting others to ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
12. I have established new friendships as a result of the ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
13. Within the ministry, I have someone I can confide in besides the Pastors.   Yes ( ) No ( )
14. I often meet with other ministry members outside of ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
15. I interact with older and spiritually mature members of New Life Community. Yes ( ) No ( )
16. At New Life Community, I have a trusted community that I belong to.   Yes ( ) No ( )

17. New Life Community teaches what a disciple is.

   Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

   Comments: _____

   _____

18. I believe that I am a disciple of Christ.

   Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

   Comments: _____

   _____

19. I understand that being a disciple of Christ means "doing life together" with other disciples of Christ.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

20. I am currently doing life with other disciples at New Life Community.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

21. This ministry teaches biblical truths that I can apply to my life.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

22. New Life Community is meeting my spiritual needs.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

23. Ministry gatherings, including worship services, have helped me grow spiritually.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

24. I have been provided leadership opportunities within this ministry.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

25. I know what my God-given calling is.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

26. New Life Community is supporting and preparing me to fulfill my God-given calling.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

Appendix H

POST-GATHERING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Why did you decide to attend today's gathering?

2. What biblical truths did you learn from this gathering?

3. How will you be able to apply what you learned to your life?

4. Describe the interaction between all who attended.

5. Describe your comfort level before and after attending this gathering.

6. Would you consider establishing a stronger relationship with others who attended? Why or why not?

7. What did you like the most about this gathering?

8. What did you like the least about this gathering

9. How can this gathering be improved for you or for someone you may invite?

10. Will you consider attending this gathering again in the future? Why or why not?

Appendix I

MIDPOINT PARTICIPANT SURVEY

27. I consider myself a member of New Life Community.   Yes ( ) No ( )
28. I attend New Life Community ministry gatherings regularly.   Yes ( ) No ( )
29. Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month.   Yes ( ) No ( )
30. Worship services meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
31. Prayer meetings meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
32. Small Group meetings (Men's/Women's) have met my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
33. Life Group meetings (Life/Stewardship Coaching) have met my expectations. Yes ( ) No ( )
34. Community Dinners meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
35. I feel comfortable inviting others to ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
36. I have established new friendships as a result of the ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
37. Within the ministry, I have someone I can confide in besides the Pastors.   Yes ( ) No ( )
38. I often meet with other ministry members outside of ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
39. I interact with older and spiritually mature members of New Life Community. Yes ( ) No ( )
40. At New Life Community, I have a trusted community that I belong to.   Yes ( ) No ( )
41. New Life Community teaches what a disciple is.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

_____

42. I believe that I am a disciple of Christ.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

43. I understand that being a disciple of Christ means "doing life together" with other disciples of Christ.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

44. I am currently doing life with other disciples at New Life Community.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

45. This ministry teaches biblical truths that I can apply to my life.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

46. New Life Community is meeting my spiritual needs.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

47. Ministry gatherings, including worship services, have helped me grow spiritually.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

48. I have been provided leadership opportunities within this ministry.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

49. I know what my God-given calling is.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

50. New Life Community is supporting and preparing me to fulfill my God-given calling.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

51. I have been provided leadership opportunities within this ministry.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

52. I know what my God-given calling is.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

53. New Life Community is supporting and preparing me in fulfilling my God-given calling.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

Appendix J

ENDPOINT PARTICIPANT SURVEY

54. I consider myself a member of New Life Community.   Yes ( ) No ( )
55. I attend New Life Community ministry gatherings regularly.   Yes ( ) No ( )
56. Ministry gatherings are scheduled regularly throughout the month.   Yes ( ) No ( )
57. Worship services meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
58. Prayer meetings meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
59. Small Group meetings (Men's/Women's) have met my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
60. Life Group meetings (Life/Stewardship Coaching) have met my expectations. Yes ( ) No ( )
61. Community Dinners meet my expectations.   Yes ( ) No ( )
62. I feel comfortable inviting others to ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
63. I have established new friendships as a result of the ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
64. Within the ministry, I have someone I can confide in besides the Pastors.   Yes ( ) No ( )
65. I often meet with other ministry members outside of ministry gatherings.   Yes ( ) No ( )
66. I interact with older and spiritually mature members of New Life Community. Yes ( ) No ( )
67. At New Life Community, I have a trusted community that I belong to.   Yes ( ) No ( )

68. New Life Community teaches what a disciple is.

   Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree

   Comments: _____

   _____

69. I believe that I am a disciple of Christ.

   Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

   Comments: _____

   _____

70. I understand that being a disciple of Christ means "doing life together" with other disciples of Christ.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

71. I am currently doing life with other disciples at New Life Community.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

72. This ministry teaches biblical truths that I can apply to my life.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree

    Comments: _____

    _____

73. New Life Community is meeting my spiritual needs.

    Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

    Comments: _____

    _____

74. Ministry gatherings, including worship services, have helped me grow spiritually.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

75. I have been provided leadership opportunities within this ministry.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

76. I know what my God-given calling is.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

_____

77. New Life Community is supporting and preparing me to fulfill my God-given calling.

Choose One: Strongly Agree ( ) Agree ( ) Not Sure ( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly Disagree ( )

Comments: _____

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IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 18, 2023

Marcus Steele
Danny Allen

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-447 Millennials in the Marketplace: Transitioning from Marketplace Discipleship to Relational Discipleship at New Life Community

Dear Marcus Steele and Danny Allen,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your project is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word** *research* **with the word** *project* **throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office