

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BEST PRACTICES FOR RETAINING YOUTH GROUP STUDENTS
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH POST-HIGH SCHOOL

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Christopher Dale Dortch

Lynchburg, Virginia

April 2014

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

GRADE

MENTOR

Dr. Charles N. Davidson
Director, Doctor of Ministry
Assistant Professor of Counseling

READER

Dr. David W. Hirschman
Acting Dean, Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary
Assistant Professor of Religion

To my grandfather Murphy Eugene Cain

December 2, 1926 – October 29, 2008

To my grandmother June Katrine Cain

November 3, 1931 – January 1, 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Charles N. Davidson and Dr. David W. Hirschman for serving as my mentor and reader respectively. Their feedback has been invaluable and their encouragement has been motivating. The authenticity and genuine concern for the success of their students is a model for all Liberty professors.

I would like to thank Doug Fields and Josh Griffin for their encouragement and assistance in helping find participants for my research. Doug has been a champion of youth pastors for many years and has heavily influenced how I think about student discipleship. I am especially thankful for Josh's assistance in directing youth pastors to participate in my research. Your blog post and tweets were essential to the success of this project.

I would like to let Christ Community Church, the church staff, and Senior Pastor Jack Homesley know how much I appreciate their support. Many of them have not only supported but they have encouraged my continued education. I believe my thirteen years at Christ Community Church have been as educational as my formal schooling.

I would like to offer my gratitude to my dearest friend Doug King who has encouraged my walk with Christ for over twenty-five years. It was Doug who helped me understand the importance of developing spiritual disciplines. In many ways, the doctoral degree that I am earning belongs to him because of the investment he has had in my life.

I would like to convey gratefulness to my parents Roger and Norma Dortch. Their unwavering support has been a source of strength and motivation. Nearly every toy they purchased for me during my childhood had an educational purpose. I believe that has instilled within me a desire for lifelong learning.

I would like to say thanks to my son, Carson Dortch, for his understanding. I have been working on post-graduate work since he was in high school. I think I brought a book to every football game, band competition, or any other event he was involved in. While he may remember that I was always studying, I hope he also remembers that I was always there to support him.

I would like to let all those who read these words know that Cheryl Dortch has been the most supportive and understanding wife imaginable. She was patient when I needed to spend the entire weekend studying. She was nurturing and would bring me something to eat when I simply did not have enough time to stop studying. She understood when I told her how much I needed to spend on books. Her faith has encouraged my own. It is my prayer that I will be found obedient to Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

I believe Paul's words from Philippians 1:2-8 express my own feelings of thankfulness for all of these mentioned:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

ABSTRACT

BEST PRACTICES FOR RETAINING YOUTH GROUP STUDENTS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH POST-HIGH SCHOOL

Christopher D. Dortch

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013

Mentor: Dr. Charles N. Davidson

Research has indicated that students who were once active in a local church are leaving the church and possibly leaving the faith after they graduate high school. The purpose of this project is to present best practices for youth pastors in retaining students' involvement in a local church post-high school. The project will consist of surveying fifty student pastors and will examine the impact of the student pastor's tenure, student ministry philosophy and structure, curriculum plans, and the role of the student pastor in assisting students through this transition. Through a review and examination of these elements, the project will offer best practices for student pastors in retaining the involvement of youth group graduates in the local church.

Abstract length: 118 words.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	i
TABLES	iii
ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Statement of Limitations	7
Theoretical Basis for the Project	7
Statement of Methodology	8
Literature Review	9
CHAPTER TWO: REASONS FOR CHURCH DROPOUTS	25
Life Changes or Situations	29
Church or Pastor Related Issues	34
Religious, Ethical, or Political Reasons	41
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH OF CHURCH DROPOUTS	44
Life Changes and Circumstances	55
Relational Disconnectedness	57
Conflicting Worldviews	59
CHAPTER FOUR: PREVENTION OF CHURCH DROPOUTS	63
Strategies for Life Changes and Circumstances	63
Strategies for Relational Ministry	72
Strategies for Making Disciples	78
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	86

Hanging Out with God	87
Accountability with Peers and Inter-generational Relationships	90
Bible Study	95
Involvement in the Church Body through both Ministry and Missions	98
Tithing Commitment/Stewardship	102
Scripture Memorization	103
APPENDIX A: Research Questions	107
APPENDIX B: Research Summaries	108
APPENDIX C: Scripture Memorization List	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124
IRB Approval/Waiver Page	128

TABLES

Table 1. Comparison of Responses to Determine Attrition	47
Table 2. Methods for Tracking Student after Graduation	47
Table 3. Components of Discipleship Process	50
Table 4. Emphases of Student Ministry Philosophy	53
Table 5. Analysis of Curriculum Strategy	53
Table 6. Analysis of Retention Factors	54

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Years of Ministry Service	45
Figure 2. Number of Youth Group Graduates	45
Figure 3. Continued Involvement after High School	46
Figure 4. Student Pastors with Post-Graduate Strategy	48
Figure 5. Student Attendance in Worship Services with Adults	49
Figure 6. Life Stage Considerations within Discipleship Process	51

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research has demonstrated for several decades that teenagers and young adults are leaving the local church. David A. Roozen examined the disengagement of teenagers and young adults of the 1960s and 1970s. His research discovered that church dropouts had increased dramatically from previous decades. Among the reasons provided for dropping out of church, the most commonly reported reason for leaving church was relational discord with someone within the church. This response ranges from perceived criticisms from those within the church to feelings of rejection by those within the church. The second most common group of reasons for leaving the church was some type of disruption in life. This included college, work, or such items as a change in health. Viewing the church as irrelevant was ranked third. What made Roozen's work unique was that he was also concerned with the re-entry of those who had already dropped out of church.¹

In 1999, twenty years since Roozen's work, Roger L. Dudley made similar observations in his research and analysis of the disengagement of teenagers and young adults, developing hypotheses concerning the influence of family. In addition, the study also developed hypotheses concerning the influence of schooling, congregational involvement, and personal devotional practices. Roozen estimated that 46% of Americans drop out of church with the teenage years being the peak.²

¹ David A. Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," *Review of Religious Research* 21, no. 4 (1980): 427.

² Roger L. Dudley, "Youth Religious Commitment Over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention," *Review of Religious Research* 41 (Autumn 1999): 110.

Other researchers have made observations of disengagement as well. Roof and McKinney discovered that 59% of non-churchgoers were under the age of thirty-five.¹ Hoge and Petrillo found that attendance among Southern Baptists was often related to parental involvement, peer pressure, type of youth leader, and the quality of their religious education.² Dudley and Laurent found that Methodist young people left due to lack of involvement, boring sermons, deficient devotional life, and the religious rules.³

A 2007 survey conducted by LifeWay Research revealed that 70% of 23-30 year olds dropped out of church for at least one year between the ages of 18-22; however, 35% of those who indicated they dropped out of church also returned to the church.⁴ Perhaps one of the most significant observations is that many of those who become disengaged from church have some intention of returning to the church at some point. Their decision to leave church is viewed as temporary or a transitional stage.⁵

Young adults who return to the church after having dropped out of church for a year or longer indicate three major reasons for returning to the church: (1) they were encouraged by family or friends to come back; (2) they sensed a desire or calling to return to church; and (3) they experienced a life changing event that prompted their return. Based upon this research the 50% of those who returned were influenced by the prayers and encouraging words from family or friends. The life events that prompted a return to church were often marriage and having

¹ Dudley, "Youth Religious Commitment Over Time," 111.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David Rudd, LifeWay Research, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," *SlideShare* (August 2007), <http://www.slideshare.net/daverudd/church-dropouts-how-many-leave-church-and-why> (accessed March 6, 2013).

⁵ Roozen, "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," 446.

children.⁶ However, this thesis is more concerned with the prevention of dropouts entirely as opposed to strategies for bringing them back to church. LifeWay Research indicates that two-thirds of the young adults who remained in church saw the church's role as a vital part of their relationship with God. Nearly 60% believed the church helped them make better choices. Over 40% remained involved because of their commitment to the mission and work of the church. There were also perceived benefits to those who remained active in the church. Half of them believed that church attendance helped them become a better person. One-third of them gained strength from those in the church to make it through a challenging time in their life. Over 40% had a desire to embrace the values of a parent or other family member.⁷

Some of the other major factors for staying in church included: (1) the location of the church was convenient; (2) the time of the worship service was convenient; (3) friends were also attending the same church; (4) they wanted to follow the example of someone they knew and admired who attended church; (5) they continued to attend out of habit; (6) they were actively involved in the mission trips or service opportunities held by the church; and (7) they attended church to please other people.⁸

The purpose of this project is to present best practices for youth pastors in retaining students' involvement in a local church post-high school. It is believed that retention of students' involvement will have a strong correlation to the student pastor's discipleship process. The strategy for increased retention must address all major categories for disengagement.

⁶ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 31.

⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸ Ibid., 38.

Five definitions are necessary in the examination of retaining teenagers and young adults within the local church. The first term is “dropout.” According to LifeWay Research, “Church ‘dropouts’ are defined as those who stopped attending church regularly for at least a year.”⁹ In other words, high school graduates who stopped attending during their freshman year and then returned to the church the following year would still be identified as a dropout.

The second word to be defined is “disengagement.” The term disengagement has several connotations from a military troop withdrawing from combat or a couple breaking off plans to be married. The idea is that the dropout has become disconnected from the church body. This may indicate a disengagement from the church or a disengagement from Christianity entirely.

The word “church” will be commonly used to describe the local church. Some students will disengage from the Church (i.e. Christianity), all students who are identified as dropouts have disengaged from the local church. The word “Church” will be capitalized when referring to disengagement from Christianity. In all other instances, the word church is in reference to the local church.

The fourth definition is for the word “re-entry.” The term re-entry is used of the action of those who have been absent from the local church for at least a year or longer and have returned to the church. Some research presented is primarily concerned with re-entry, while the focus of this project is to prevent disengagement among youth group graduates.

The final term is “veteran youth pastor/worker.” The term veteran youth pastor is used to describe someone who has been serving in vocational youth ministry of the local church for more than five years. All of those surveyed in this study have been identified as veteran youth pastors.

⁹ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 3.

Statement of the Problem

After twenty years of serving as a youth pastor in local churches, this author has developed a deep concern for those who leave the church after high school. There are some who point a finger at youth ministry and its leaders as the cause for the disengagement of young adults. The observation has been made that students who have involved parents are more likely to remain involved in the church themselves. In fact, these three aspects are the highest contributing factors in retaining young people in the church: (1) their parents are committed to church, (2) their parents were intentional about passing on their values to their children, and (3) the parents and children have a strong relationship.¹⁰ Those who place blame upon youth ministry assert that youth ministries allow parents to abdicate their responsibilities in the spiritual maturation of their children. Admittedly, in a perfect world all parents would be committed to the church, passing on Christian values, and have healthy relationships with their children. However, not all students in local churches meet these criteria. Many students come from broken homes, some parents do not attend church, and relationships are often strained. Churches must determine what to do with the sophomore in high school who drives himself to church, but has no parental support. Youth pastors and leaders must consider what they can do differently to continue to minister to these students, while increasing their likelihood of remaining in church through adulthood. In a world of divorce and broken homes not every student comes from an intact family who is involved in church. Many youth attend church with peers who have invited them but have no parental involvement or support. Dudley also reveals additional factors that contribute to retaining young people in the church. First, youth who make a personal decision during their teen years to remain involved tend to stick with this commitment into adulthood.

¹⁰ Dudley, "Youth Religious Commitment Over Time," 111.

Second, youth who attend a Christian academy are more likely to remain involved. Third, youth who have developed a personal prayer life are more likely to remain in church. Fourth, youth who strongly agree with the doctrinal standards of the church will likely remain active. Finally, youth who were involved in a youth group were more likely to remain involved.¹¹ It stands to reason that these factors should be given high priority for youth in churches that are attending without parental support at home.

Most research seems to emphasize the family and with good reason. The family produces the greatest likelihood of continued involvement into adulthood. However, not every teenager who attends church has parental support. For this reason, it is important to consider other factors. Youth pastors should be equipped with the resources necessary to help young people develop spiritual disciplines such as prayer and daily devotionals. Youth should be given opportunities to have significant involvement within the congregation. Identifying and implementing some of these insights could actually increase the involvement of young people in the local church.

The focus of this thesis is not to prove that young adults are dropping out of church. Few would disagree with this assertion. Neither is the focus to list the reasons why young adults are leaving the church. Instead, the question this thesis is addressing is, “What are the best practices for youth pastors to implement within their youth ministries for the purpose of retaining students’ involvement in a local church post-high school?” These best practices must be universal in application for all students regardless of their background or the amount of parental support each student has from home.

¹¹ Dudley, “Youth Religious Commitment Over Time,” 110.

Statement of Limitations

Due to the broad scope of this thesis, the following issues will not be addressed. First, it is not the purpose of this thesis to examine the role of Young Adult/College Ministries within the local church. Second, it is not the purpose of this thesis to examine the reasons that adults after the age twenty-three drop out of church. Third, it is not the purpose of this thesis to present ideas for re-entry, but rather to avoid disengagement from the beginning. Fourth, it is not the purpose of this thesis to present a new model for youth ministry nor is it an analysis of the successes and failures of youth ministry.

Theoretical Basis for the Project

The Bible will provide the theoretical basis for this thesis project. It is believed that the Scriptures teach that a healthy church consists of adults who are teaching sound doctrine to a younger generation (cf. Titus 2). Parents hold the primary role for instructing their children (cf. Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6); however, it is clear that parents are not to be the only ones called to give instructions to believers (cf. Ephesians 4:11-13).

As well, it is a fundamental belief of this author that teenagers do not connect with programs, but rather they connect with other people. Therefore, the relational aspects of retaining students in the local church will be examined. Scripture declares, “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.”¹²

Finally, it is the belief of this author that there are at least six spiritual disciplines that must be developed by students prior to graduation from high school to maintain their spiritual

¹² 1 Thess. 2:8 (NKJV)

walk into adulthood. Whether these disciplines are taught by parents or by youth workers, these disciplines are essential to the continued involvement of students in the local church post-high school. These six spiritual disciplines include daily time with God in prayer and in His Word, accountability with other believers, Scripture study, involvement in the church through serving, tithing commitment, and Scripture memorization.

Statement of Methodology

This project will examine the practices of veteran youth pastors for retaining students in the local church post-high school. This will include surveying fifty veteran youth pastors. Eligible respondents must have served in youth ministry for five or more years. Student pastors with less than five years experience have not had enough time to observe students through four years of high school and their first year outside of the youth group.

The thesis project will be presented in the following manner:

Chapter 1, Introduction: This chapter will consist of five main components: the statement of the problem, the statement of limitations, the theoretical basis for the project, the statement of methodology, and the review of related literature including books, articles, and scripture passages.

Chapter 2, Reasons for Church Dropouts: This chapter will introduce the research that has already been produced on the reasons for church dropouts among young adults. This research will be divided into three major headings that identify the categorical reasons for young adults' disengagement: life changes or situations, church or pastor related issues, and religious, ethical, or political reasons. This chapter will also present why the results of previous research should prompt youth workers to action.

Chapter 3, Research of Church Dropouts: This chapter will examine the current trends for retaining students in the local church post-high school. This chapter will present the participants in the survey, the approach to the survey, as well as the results of the survey.

Chapter 4, Prevention of Church Dropouts: This chapter will examine the discoveries from the research presented in Chapter Three. Emphasis will be placed upon what youth pastors are doing to retain students in the local church post-high school. This chapter will also present best practices for youth pastors in retaining students within three major categories: a plan for life changes and circumstances, a strategy for relational ministry, and a process for making disciples.

Chapter 5, Conclusion: The final chapter will provide a summary of the thesis project. The summary will promote youth pastors to take action upon the discoveries of Chapter Four. This action will be in the form of resourcing students for developing specific spiritual disciplines that will produce lifelong followers of Christ.

Literature Review

The following is a compilation of the books, articles, and Scripture references that are relevant to the subject of church dropouts and retaining students in the local church post-high school.

Books

Books have been divided into two major categories. The first category of books is for those that provide research of why young adults are leaving the church. Some books focus upon extensive research through surveys while others utilize case studies and interviews. Some of these books may offer solutions, but they were large contributors to understanding why young

adults are disengaging from the local church. Some of these books were even divided into sub-categories that aligned them with one of the three major groupings for disengagement: life changes or situations, church or pastor related issues, and religious, ethical, or political reasons.

Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church by veteran youth worker Kenda Creasy Dean, PhD is an insight into the mindset of why students respond positively toward Christianity but appear apathetic toward genuine religious practices.¹³

Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do To Stop It by Ken Ham and C. Britt Beemer uses an alarmist approach in analyzing the research of church dropouts. Ken Ham is the CEO and founder of Answers in Genesis, but is not a veteran youth worker. Likewise, Britt Beemer is a research analyst doing most of his work in the political world, but is not a veteran youth worker.¹⁴

Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts by Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III boils all of the research down to one simple idea: churchgoing students leave the church after high school because they do not see the church as essential to their lives.¹⁵

Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith... and How to Bring Them Back by Drew Dyck is based upon the personal experience of Dyck's friends walking away from church during their twenties.¹⁶

¹³ Kendra C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009).

¹⁵ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

¹⁶ Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith... and How to Bring Them Back*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010).

Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future by Dr. Tim Elmore is a guide for parents, youth workers, coaches, or anyone who works with teenagers. Elmore does more than sound the alarm he provides practical strategies for engaging today's generation.¹⁷

Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers by veteran youth worker Kara E. Powell, PhD examines the reasons that active church kids drop out of church during college. Powell offers practical programming ideas for youth pastors that will impact teenagers long after they have left the youth group.¹⁸

Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It by veteran youth worker Mark DeVries helps churches and youth pastors develop a strategy for youth ministry that will impact students beyond youth group and impact the church beyond the tenure of the youth pastor.¹⁹

The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, PhD suggests that youth pastors should allow the students in their youth groups to grapple with challenging theological issues. This book offers practical insight on how to share theology with purpose through compassionate conversation.²⁰

The second category of books is identified as those that are more focused upon presenting a solution for retaining young adults and producing life-long followers of Christ. These books may acknowledge the problem, but are largely solution-focused.

¹⁷ Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010).

¹⁸ Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2011).

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

²⁰ Andrew Root and Kenda C. Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

101 Ideas for Making Disciples in Your Youth Group by veteran youth worker Kent Julian is more than a list of ideas. The book is divided into two sections with the first section providing insight into developing a strategy to produce life-long disciples within the youth group. The second section of the book provides 101 suggestions on implementing the strategy.²¹

Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples: A Small Book about a Big Idea by veteran youth worker Dr. Duffy Robbins challenges youth pastors to instill within students a desire for a lifelong love of God. Robbins provides a simple blueprint for youth workers to implement this strategy.²²

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Dr. Richard Foster emphasizes the spiritual disciplines that Christians should be developing. He divides the disciplines into three categories: the inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study, the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service, and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.²³

Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: No-So-Secret Findings about Youth Ministry by veteran youth workers Chap Clark, PhD and Kara Powell, PhD is divided into three sections and challenges youth pastors to re-consider methods, communication, mentors, parents, and several other key areas that impact whether the youth group is producing shallow attendees or deep disciples.²⁴

²¹ Kent Julian, *101 Ideas for Making Disciples in Your Youth Group*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007).

²² Duffy Robbins, *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples: A Small Book about a Big Idea*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2011).

²³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998).

²⁴ Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings about Youth Ministry*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2006).

Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ by Dr. George Barna is a strategy to assist pastors in developing disciple-makers within their congregations. Barna suggests that having a discipleship program does not automatically produce disciples. Barna's research and strategies should not be viewed as something for adults or too demanding for teenagers.²⁵

Help! I'm a Student Leader!: Practical Ideas and Guidance on Leadership by Doug Fields is written for students who desire to be used by God in ministry. The author provides practical advice for student leaders to care for their own spiritual walk as well as leading others.²⁶

Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers by veteran youth worker Chap Clark, PhD provides extensive research on today's generation of teenagers. The book provides practical insight for both preventative behavior as well as positive influence on today's youth culture.²⁷

The Magnet Effect: Designing Outreach Events that Draw Kids to Christ by veteran youth workers Barry St. Clair and Jim Burns, PhD is less about events and more about relational ministry. When students feel connected to other students, events become magnets for young people. This opens the opportunity to point them towards Christ.²⁸

The Ministry of Nurture: A Youth Worker's Guide to Discipling Teenagers by veteran youth worker Dr. Duffy Robbins identifies key elements for helping students personalize their

²⁵ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

²⁶ Doug Fields, *Help! I'm a Student Leader!: Practical Ideas and Guidance on Leadership*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2005).

²⁷ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Teenagers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

²⁸ Barry St. Clair et al., *The Magnet Effect: Designing Outreach Events That Draw Kids to Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994).

faith. Robbins provides seven keys for youth workers in effective discipleship as well as the key areas that students must develop in their own lives: outreach, nurture, and service.²⁹

Power through Prayer by E. M. Bounds examines the role of prayer in the life of a believer. Prayer is presented as a spiritual discipline that transforms the life of the believer.³⁰ Spiritual disciplines are not to be understood as tasks to check off of a list, but are the source for strength and growth for the Christian.

Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: Nine Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth by veteran youth worker Doug Fields emphasizes a relational approach to ministry and provides practical spiritual disciplines that help students own their faith. Students who develop spiritual disciplines into their lives do not graduate from their faith when they graduate high school.³¹

The Seven Checkpoints: Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know by former youth worker Andy Stanley and veteran youth worker Stuart Hall is a strategy to ensure that youth ministries are balanced in their approach to discipleship. It is a ministry strategy to assist youth pastors in equipping students for “life beyond youth group.”³²

Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship by Eric Geiger, co-author of *Simple Church*, challenges youth pastors to re-think their over-stimulated youth program into a more simple discipleship process.³³

²⁹ Duffy Robbins, *The Ministry of Nurture: A Youth Worker's Guide to Discipling Teenagers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990).

³⁰ E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1979).

³¹ Doug Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: Nine Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1998).

³² Andy Stanley and Stuart Hall, *The Seven Checkpoints: Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know*. (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 2001).

³³ Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton, *Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students: A Guide for Youth Workers, Pastors, Teachers, and Campus Ministers by Richard R. Dunn is a challenge for youth workers to set the pace for students in their physical, mental, social, and spiritual lives.³⁴

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives by Dallas Willard, PhD provides an insightful look at the need for developing spiritual disciplines within the life of a disciple. Spiritual disciplines should lead to the transformation of Christ-likeness.³⁵

Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide by Reggie Joiner emphasizes the importance of families within the life of the church.³⁶

When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students by youth ministry veteran Dr. Les Christie is a strategy for handling disruptive students in a youth group. Christie provides practical insight for transforming problem students into productive disciples.³⁷

You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith by David Kinnaman is an examination of why teenagers and young adults are choosing to leave the church.³⁸ David Kinnaman, in an interview with the *Christian Post* said, “Everyone has his or

³⁴ Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students: A Guide for Youth Workers, Teachers, Pastors, and Campus Ministers*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

³⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988).

³⁶ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide*. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).

³⁷ Les Christie, *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2008).

³⁸ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

her own mix of reasons for leaving the church. It can be a pretty wide range of perspectives that create disconnections.”³⁹

Articles

Articles were divided into two major sections. The first grouping of articles deals with the problem of why young adults are leaving the church. These articles interact with existing research on the subject matter. While some of these articles may present solutions, they were largely concerned with answering the question of why young adults are leaving the church.

“LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church” by Scott McConnell examines why most young people leave the church, why some young people stay in the church, and what has prompted many of the dropouts to return to the church. McConnell identifies life changes or life situations were the top reason for leaving church with 97% identifying at least one life circumstance among their top reasons. 25% identified leaving for college as the primary reason they stopped attending church. 23% listed work responsibilities prevented them from attending. 22% moved too far away from their existing church to continue attending.⁴⁰

“Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church” by Audrey Barrick is an examination of LifeWay’s 2007 research concerning the reason that young adults are dropping out of church.

³⁹ Gina E. Ryder, “Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?” *The Christian Post* (October 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-dropouts-why-are-young-people-skipping-out-on-church-57853/> (accessed January 14, 2014).

⁴⁰ Scott McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18-to-22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church,” *LifeWay Articles* (August 2007). <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church> (accessed January 18, 2014).

Young adults who remain active within the church from eighteen through twenty-two are more likely to remain active throughout their adult life, with only 6% leaving the church.⁴¹

“Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts” by the Barna Group exposes the misconceptions of why some students are not attending church. These myths include the misconception that “most people lose their faith when they leave high school.” Second, “dropping out of church is just a natural part of young adults’ maturation.” Third, “College experiences are the key factor that causes people to drop out.” This myth is not in reference to moving away to college, but rather is in reference to the worldview that is presented in secular colleges. Fourth, “This generation of young Christians is increasingly ‘biblically illiterate.’” There is little theological difference between generations. Finally, “Young people will come back to church like they always do.” This myth is partially true, some adults may return when they get married or have children of their own. However, many are delaying marriage and having children and may not return.⁴²

“Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?” by Matthew Green places much of the reason that young people are leaving the church squarely on the leadership of churches. Green identifies that many young people are disappointed in the hypocrisy of those in leadership within churches. The lack of authenticity is a contributing factor in their reason to leave the church.

Young adults may not give up on Jesus or Christianity, but many are frustrated with the

⁴¹ Audrey Barrick, “Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church,” *The Christian Post* (August 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-reasons-why-young-adults-quit-church-28813/> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁴² David Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts,” *Barna Research* (November 2011). <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts> (accessed January 14, 2014).

organized church. Young adults are searching for a relational form of discipleship that resembles the early church.⁴³

“Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out on Church?” by Gina E. Ryder is an examination of the Barna Research and why young adults are dropping out. They assert that the reasons for leaving the church are as unique as the individual.⁴⁴

“Study: Why Young Christians Leave the Church” by Jeff Schapiro examines the reasons that young adults are frustrated with the church. This article focuses on those who are frustrated with the local church for theological reasons, and does not address disengagement of those who are experiencing life change or circumstances. Those who are frustrated focus upon the theology and practices of the church and believe the church’s views on sexuality and other issues are out of date.⁴⁵

“Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church” by Lillian Kwon suggests that young adults are not giving up on church or Christianity, but are giving up on churches that appear hypocritical. Young people enjoy singing old hymns as sung by Chris Tomlin and Matt Redman. Young people are not turned off by suits, as they watch late night talk show hosts who wear suits. Young people are opposed to lifeless churches that sing the words of hymns with their lips and appear to have no life change in their daily lives.⁴⁶

⁴³ Matthew Green, “Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?” *Charisma Magazine* (December 2012) <http://www.charismamag.com/spirit/church-ministry/7279-the-church-dropout> (accessed January 14, 2014).

⁴⁴ Gina E. Ryder, “Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?” *The Christian Post* (October 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-dropouts-why-are-young-people-skipping-out-on-church-57853/> (accessed January 14, 2014).

⁴⁵ Jeff Schapiro, “Study: Why Young Christians Leave the Church,” *The Christian Post* (September 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/study-why-young-christians-leave-the-church-56722/> (accessed January 18, 2014)

⁴⁶ Lillian Kwon, “Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church,” *The Christian Post* (February 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/young-people-leaving-hypocrisy-not-traditional-church-25912/> (accessed January 18, 2014).

“Interview: Drew Dyck on Why Young Adults are Leaving Christianity” by Michelle A. Vu interviews Drew Dyck, author of *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith... and How to Bring Them Back*. Dyck identifies six categories of young adults who formerly attended church. He identifies the challenges of bringing them back to church.⁴⁷

“Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry” by David A. Roozen is a 1980 study of the trends in young adult dropouts from the 1960s and 1970s. This is discovered to be a significant change from previous decades and generations.⁴⁸

“Youth Religious Commitment Over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention” by Roger L. Dudley is a 1999 study of the trends in young adult dropouts from throughout the 1990s. Comparisons are then made with Roozen’s research from 1980.⁴⁹

“Faith Matters: Leaving the Church” by Barbara Brown Taylor is a liberal perspective on why the local church is not necessary and more people should leave local church and engage in a more inclusive religious group of people who have the common goal of healing a broken world.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Michelle A. Vu, “Interview: Drew Dyck on Why Young Adults are Leaving Christianity,” *The Christian Post* (January 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-drew-dyck-on-why-young-adults-are-leaving-christianity-48414/> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁴⁸ David A. Roozen, “Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3510682> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁴⁹ Roger L. Dudley, “Youth Religious Commitment Over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3512430> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵⁰ Barbara B. Taylor, “Faith Matters: Leaving the Church,” *The Christian Century* (June 1999). <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/217214890> (accessed January 18, 2014).

“Parting Shots: When Church Members Leave” by Gordon Atkinson is one pastor’s perspective on letting people leave the church. He suggests that not every occasion that someone leaves the church is a bad thing.⁵¹

“Why People Leave the Church: Don’t Blame the Zeitgeist” by John Garvey suggests that some of those who are leaving the church are doing so because of the blatant disregard of those who abuse children and others. When such offenses are swept under a rug in hopes of protecting the church’s reputation, they are causing more damage. This is not the example of Jesus, who exposed sin and defended those who were abused by the religious leaders.⁵²

“The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults” by Roger L. Dudley and Randall L. Wisbey identify the influence of parenting styles on their children’s decision to drop out of church as young adults.⁵³

The second grouping of articles was a much more limited group that focused largely upon the solution for retaining young adults within the local church. While reasons for disengagement may be addressed within the article, the focus of the article was not the cause of young adults leaving the church but actions steps for retention.

“Squaring Off with the Church Dropout Rate” by Sam Rainer provides practical advice for churches to prevent young adults from leaving the church. Rainer reviews the top ten life changes that young adults identify as reasons for dropping out of church and then offers suggestions for retaining young adults. While the article uses the heading “How Can the Church

⁵¹ Gordon Atkinson, “Parting Shots: When Church Members Leave,” *The Christian Century* (September 2009). <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/217273273> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵² John Garvey, “Why People Leave the Church: Don’t Blame the Zeitgeist,” *Commonweal Magazine* (April 2007). <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/210404804> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵³ Roger L. Dudley and Randall L. Wisbey, “The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults,” *Religious Education*. Vol. 95, Issue 1. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/199363316> (accessed January 18, 2014).

Reclaim Dropouts?” the article focuses on retaining students, not merely bringing them back.⁵⁴

“Indicators of Commitment to the Church: A Longitudinal Study of Church-Affiliated Youth” by Roger L. Dudley discovers that teenagers who indicate their desire to remain committed to the church into adulthood actually do so.⁵⁵

Scriptures

The following passages of Scripture will be used as foundational support for the thesis. These passages demonstrate the importance of relational discipleship in the history of God’s people. There are three categories for the Scripture used in support of the thesis. First, there are examples of relationships throughout Scripture that are focused on the discipleship of a younger generation. Second, there are Scripture passages that identify important aspects to the discipleship process. Third, there are passages of Scripture that serve as the foundation for developing a philosophy of ministry to students. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless stated otherwise.

There are several passages that indicate that young people are to be mentored by adults in the church. Timothy appears to have been a young man when Paul was writing to him. Paul writes, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”⁵⁶ Paul’s mentor relationship encouraged young Timothy to follow his example. “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose,

⁵⁴ Sam S. Rainer III, “Squaring Off with the Church Dropout Rate,” *Sermon Central*. <http://www.sermoncentral.com/articleb.asp?article=Sam-Rainer-Squaring-Off-Church-Dropout-Rate&ac=true> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵⁵ Roger L. Dudley, “Indicators of Commitment to the Church: A Longitudinal Study of Church-Affiliated Youth,” *Adolescence Magazine*. Vol. 28, No. 109. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/195931313> (accessed January 18, 2014).

⁵⁶ 1 Tim. 4:12 (NKJV)

faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all, the Lord delivered me.”⁵⁷ The author of Hebrews wrote, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”⁵⁸ This passage implies a relationship with authority, teaching, and modeling the faith. Perhaps one of the clearest passages of inter-generational discipleship comes from Titus 2:1-8:

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.⁵⁹

An important passage in consideration of youth ministry is Paul’s treatise on the body as described in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, begin many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor

⁵⁷ 2 Tim. 3:10-11 (NKJV)

⁵⁸ Heb. 13:7 (NKJV)

⁵⁹ Titus 2:1-8 (NKJV)

that that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.⁶⁰

Teenagers and young adults have a long history of being used of God to accomplish great things. As young professing believers the older Christians have a responsibility to invest into the younger as part of the body of Christ. The older cannot say to the younger, “I have no need of you.” As their minds and bodies are continuing to develop, the older and more mature members of the body of Christ are to be an example to them, encourage them, and teach them in the faith. These passages show that discipleship is highly relational and will be foundational in understanding the importance of inter-generational discipleship.

There are some passages of Scripture that are fundamental to the discipleship process. The three characteristics of the disciple making process are intentional, individual, and missional with each being fueled by the transforming love of Christ. Jesus declared to His disciples:

Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish”?⁶¹

Jesus also said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁶² These passages indicate that the disciple is sacrificial, relational, and transformational.

Finally, there are four essential passages that will be necessary in developing a philosophy of ministry to students. Paul identifies the equipping role of leaders in Ephesians

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 12:12-26 (NKJV)

⁶¹ Luke 11:27-30 (NKJV)

⁶² John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

when he writes, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”⁶³ The Great Commission gives direction and authority, “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.”⁶⁴ The Great Commandment provides the motivation for ministry, “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”⁶⁵ Finally, the New Commandment provides the measure for healthy disciples. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Eph. 4:11-12 (NKJV)

⁶⁴ Matt. 28:19-20 (NKJV)

⁶⁵ Matt. 22:37-40 (NKJV)

⁶⁶ John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

CHAPTER II

REASONS FOR CHURCH DROPOUTS

There are numerous books and articles that address the reasons that young adults are dropping out of church. According to LifeWay’s research, forty-five specific reasons have been provided for the dropout rate among young adults.¹ Those reasons have been grouped into three major categories. The first category can be identified as “life changes or situations.” Nineteen of the reasons given fall into this category with 97% of all church dropouts indicating some change or circumstance that occurred within their life that was a contributing factor to their decision to stop attending church on a regular basis.² In some cases, the circumstances prevented them from attending church even though they still maintained a desire to attend. Most books and articles fail to address this major contributing factor to young adults leaving the church. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer address this category in their book *Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. Their research explores the top ten life changes that contributed to young adults dropping out of church. The top reason was they “simply wanted a break from church.” This was the number one reason given for disengagement among all three categories with 27% of young adults. Second, they moved away to college. Third, they experienced a change in work responsibilities. Fourth, they moved too far away from the church. Fifth, their schedule became too busy, even though they desired to attend. Next, they began to spend more time with un-churched friends. Seventh, schoolwork prevented them from attending. Eighth, they desired to make life decisions that were not accepted by the church. Ninth,

¹ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 1.

² Ibid., 5.

responsibilities at home prevented them from attending. Finally, they no longer stayed in touch with their

churchgoing friends.¹ The remaining nine reasons included: scheduling conflicts, guilt over lifestyle, got married, friends do not attend, parents divorced, friends stopped attending, family moved to far away, parents did not expect attendance, and sport activities conflicted with church attendance.²

Change is a natural occurrence within life. As discovered in Rainer’s research, it often serves as the catalyst for disengagement from a local church. While most dropouts have identified these factors as a major contributing factor, little is written to address how to handle these changes within the local church. Rainer suggests that these reasons sound mundane, but they are none-the-less a major contributing factor in young adult disengagement.³

The second major category of the reasons given for young adult disengagement is “church/pastor related.” While two of the fourteen reasons that compose this category deal with programs/worship style, most of the reasons provided are relational in nature. Fifty-eight percent of church dropouts identified one of the fourteen reasons within this category as a specific reason for disengagement.⁴ The number one reason within this category according to LifeWay’s research is the perception that church members were judgmental or hypocritical. This was the number one reason within this category and the second highest reason among all three categories with 26% of young adults giving this reason as a contributing factor. Second, young adults did not feel connected to others who attended the church. Third, church members were perceived as unfriendly, unwelcoming, and even cliquish. Fourth, the pastor’s sermons were not engaging. Fifth, young adults felt the church was not helping them develop spiritually. Sixth, young adults

¹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 73.

² Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 13.

³ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 73.

⁴ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 11.

left the church when their pastor left the church. Next, young adults left the church because they did not have programs for them. Eighth, young adults felt that church members were vastly different from themselves. Ninth, young adults felt the worship style was unappealing. Finally, young adults left if they believed the pastor was not a good preacher.⁵ The remaining reasons provided included: did not feel involved in meaningful work in the church, sermons were not relevant, too many expectations, and the youth minister left the church.⁶

Rainer's research suggests that young adults are searching for meaningful relationships among church members and the church staff. Mark DeVries in his book *Sustainable Youth Ministry* writes, "In a survey of ten thousand Christian teenagers, kids rated only two qualities of church more important than 'a senior pastor who understands and loves teenagers.'" ⁷ This statement suggests that the senior pastor has a great influence upon their choice of church and their involvement. With the perception among young adults that church members are judgmental or hypocritical, there are many books that help the youth worker understand how to build healthier relationships with those who feel judged, disconnected, unwelcome, or simply different. Les Christie, in his book *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students* addresses many of the relational challenges that occur during adolescence and how youth workers can develop healthy relationships that mature them into spiritually healthy young adults within the church.⁸ The average tenure of a full-time youth

⁵ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 14.

⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷ DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 12.

⁸ Christie, *When Church Kids Go Bad*, 21.

pastor reached 3.9 years after the turn of the century. This is in comparison to eighteen months to three years as widely reported a decade earlier.⁹

According to LifeWay Research, the third major category that classifies the reasons for young adult disengagement is “religious, ethical, or political reasons.”¹⁰ Fifty-two percent of church dropouts gave one of the reasons within this category as a contributing factor toward their disengagement.¹¹ While the first two categories provide room for adjustment on the part of church leadership, the final major category is one that has little to no room for compromise. The number one reason within this category is that a young adult disagreed with the church’s official stance on particular political or social issues. While this is the number one reason within this category, it ranks eighth among all categories with 18% of young adults.¹² Second, young adults left because they were previously attending just to please others. Third, young adults no longer wished to be identified with the church or organized religion. Fourth, they disagreed with the church’s moral and ethical guidelines for daily living. Fifth, they faced a challenge in life that resulted in the young adult questioning their faith. Sixth, they disagree with what the church teaches about God. Seventh, attending church was merely a habit. Next, young adults disengaged because they were unsure of the reasons behind their faith. Ninth, young adults disengaged because they no longer wanted to be identified as a Christian. Finally, young adults left the church because they did not agree with that particular denomination. The remaining

⁹ Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 64.

¹⁰ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

reasons given among young adults for disengagement were becoming angry with God for personal reasons and they stopped believing in God.¹³

Religious, ethical, and political reasons for disengagement are undoubtedly important issues, but they certainly ranked lower than most other reasons. However, these reasons are the subject of most books and articles concerning young adult dropouts. Some have suggested that youth ministry is to blame and should therefore be eradicated from the church, while others suggest we simply need stronger apologetics within children and youth ministries.¹⁴

These three major categories are critical to understanding not only the reasons young adults are leaving the church, but also crucial in developing a strategy for retention. The following is a closer look at the three categories and the top three reasons from each division.

Life Changes or Situations

There are a number of books that are dealing with the need for change within the modern church suggesting that leaders must be rethinking, reinventing, or reimagining church. While change within the church may be necessary, there already exist external changes that are influencing young adults to leave the church. The church must be prepared not only to push for change that improves their existing ministries, but Rainer suggests that churches must develop “ministries to accommodate for the change that the people of the church experience from their daily lives.”¹⁵

¹³ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 17.

¹⁴ Ham, Beemer, and Hillard, *Already Gone*, 46.

¹⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 74.

As stated earlier, the first reason for young adults disengaging from church is they simply wanted to take a break from church (27%).¹⁶ As young adults became busier in their schedules, they simply had no room for attending church. Church was viewed as an activity on the weekly to-do list that took up time on their already overbooked calendar. Young adults may not view church as necessary for a relationship with Christ. However, the two are inseparable. Christ is the groom and married to His bride, the church. A Christian that is not involved in church is like attempting a marriage without the spouse. Rainer writes, “It should be harder to leave a church than to join a church.”¹⁷ His point is clear: most churches are extremely excited and celebratory when new people join the church. However, people can leave the church and no one seems to notice as church programs continue to operate as usual. Regardless of the life occurrence that is blamed for the disengagement, there may be unspoken reasons for young adults departing the church.¹⁸

The second reason for disengagement among young adults within the category of life changes is because they moved away to college (25%).¹⁹ Many churches do not have ministries developed for college-age students. The primary reason given for this is because a large number of those churches are not located within college towns. However, 10% of the United States population is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.²⁰ Lack of college-age young adults within the community is not the problem. In fact, Rainer’s research demonstrates no significant

¹⁶ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 12.

¹⁷ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 76.

¹⁸ Gordon Atkinson, “Parting Shots: When Church Members Leave,” *The Christian Century* (September 2009). <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2009-09/parting-shots> (accessed January 18, 2014).

¹⁹ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 12.

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, “Table: S0101 – Age and Sex: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_S0101&prodType=table (accessed January 20, 2014).

difference between the dropout rates of college students (69%) and those who did not attend college (71%).²¹ This statistic seems to suggest that universities are not the cause of students leaving the church. The Barna Research Group has confirmed similar findings. David Kinnaman of the Barna Group writes, “the university setting does not usually cause the disconnect; it exposes the shallow-faith problem of many young disciples.”²² Perhaps it is the church that must take responsibility that many of these formerly church-attending young adults have difficulty transitioning out of youth ministry and into the adult population of the church body. Rainer condemningly writes, “The myth of the university is broken; colleges are not responsible for church dropouts. The church is responsible for church dropouts.”²³ Kinnaman explains that college certainly contributes to the development of a young Christians’ spiritual journey, but the educational experiences of the classroom are not the primary cause of young adult disengagement from the local church.²⁴ It is clear that most young adults have difficulty identifying with those in differing life stages and potentially leave the church.²⁵ It is important to note that 80% of young adults who dropped out of church had no intentions of leaving until they reached the young adult life stage.²⁶ Once they became a young adult they no longer viewed church as a meaningful and necessary part of their spiritual growth. Therefore, when life presented changes they adjusted their schedule and church was the first to go. Young adults who understood the importance of church within the process of their spiritual growth were more

²¹ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 88.

²² David Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts.” *Barna Research* (November 2011). <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts> (accessed January 14, 2014).

²³ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 89.

²⁴ Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts.”

²⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

likely to remain involved in church. Scott McConnell writes, “The two most frequent reasons young people stay in church relate to the relevance of church: ‘Church was a vital part of my relationship with God’ (65%) and ‘I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life’ (58%).”²⁷ Deepening the understanding and importance of church involvement improves the likelihood of retention. However, Rainer makes it clear that “activity is not the same as being active.”²⁸ He explains that activities can be attractive to the unchurched and bring them to the church, but they are not sufficient to assimilate the unchurched into the body. Young adults who are simply attending activities within the church without recognizing the personal value in their spiritual maturity are more likely to disengage. It does not matter whether it is worship services, Bible studies, youth events, or any other church activity, if the church is not valued it will be removed from the calendar when life change or circumstances occur.

The third reason given for disengagement among young adults within the life change category is the demands of work prevent the ability to attend church (23%).²⁹ Logically, many young adults have two major choices upon high school graduation. They either enter the work force or begin college/military. Therefore, it is only natural that work responsibilities quickly follow moving away to college as a primary reason for disengagement from church. This would especially be true for those who are working and attending college at the same time. Whether college, work, family, friends, marriage, or sports are the contributing factor in the decision to leave, the choice is ultimately a matter of priority for the individual. As stated earlier, when young adults understand the value of church involvement to their personal spiritual growth, they

²⁷ Scott McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church.” *LifeWay Articles* (August 2007). <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church> (accessed January 18, 2014).

²⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 84.

²⁹ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 12.

are more likely to remain involved. McConnell writes, “Half of those who stayed in church recognize benefits and say, ‘I felt that church was helping me become a better person.’”³⁰ There is a major difference in the attitudes of those who stated they “wanted a break” or “work responsibilities were too great to remain involved” and those who declared, “church was vital to the Christian walk.” McConnell states, “The vitality and everyday relevance these young people experienced in church is a stark contrast to church dropouts who wanted a break from church and felt unconnected.”³¹

Dropping out of church due to life change or circumstances is a fairly recent phenomenon. Evidence suggests that the Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) were the first American generation to drop out of church in large numbers once they became young adults.³² Ed Stetzer commented on the priorities of young adults and church, “When life changes, reshuffle priorities and time in young adults’ lives, church doesn’t make it back on that list for a lot of them and I think that maybe tells us where we’ve prioritized those things.”³³ Unless there is a change in how the individual perceives the value of church, life change and circumstances can create a cycle of church involvement. The life change of marriage may cause them to leave the church, while the life change of having children can bring them back. Yet another life changing circumstance may result in their disengagement again. Because life is filled with changing circumstances the cycle of church involvement can be unending.³⁴

³⁰ McConnell, “LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kinnaman, “Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts.”

³³ Audrey Barrick, “Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church.” *The Christian Post* (August 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-reasons-why-young-adults-quit-church-28813/> (accessed January 18, 2014).

³⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, 90.

Church or Pastor Related Issues

In this section, rather than addressing the top three issues, it will be necessary to address the top six issues because of their subject matter. The top three reasons given within this category are related to the church membership, while the next three reasons given are closer related to the pastor.

The first reason within the category of “church or pastor related issues” is that church members give the perception of being judgmental or even hypocritical (26%).³⁵ Kinnaman and the Barna Group agree that many young people leave the church because they view church members as judgmental. Kinnaman identifies those young adults in three categories: nomads, exiles, and prodigals. The nomads are leaving traditional religious institutions but their spiritual journey is still a high priority. The exiles are hopeful within the belief system, but have difficulty remaining involved when life changes occur. The prodigals are those who are leaving and abandoning the faith.³⁶ What Kinnaman has identified as the exiles was largely addressed with those who leave for “life change or situations.” Those who view the church as judgmental are either leaving the church entirely (i.e. prodigals) or have given up on the traditional institutions (i.e. nomads).³⁷ There is a growing number of clergy that are also leaving the traditional institutions and searching for a more organic structure to ministry.³⁸ Young adults are more interested in doing hands-on missions rather than viewing missions as merely financial support for someone on the other side of the world. Suits and hymns are not the obstacle for young adults, but the lack of joy that should accompany the hymns. There is a change of clothes,

³⁵ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 14.

³⁶ Ryder, “Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?”

³⁷ Kwon, “Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church.”

³⁸ Taylor, “Leaving the Church.”

but not a change of life that conforms to the likeness of Christ. Many young adults view those within the church as hypocritical because their worship is lifeless and their mission is outsourced.³⁹ Whether the judgmental attitude is actual or perceived, young adults' feelings are a reality. Gina Ryder explains, "For some young people, church expectations and individual sexual experiences collided. One in six Christians said, 'they have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.'"⁴⁰ Some suggest that young adults are viewing hypocrisy not only in the pews of the church, but within their own family. Parents who project a persona at church, while living in complete contrast the other days of the week are a consideration as well.⁴¹

According to Scripture, judgment is not the problem but rather how people are judged is the problem. John 7:24 declares, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."⁴² Judgment is necessary for spiritual maturation. However, judgment that is not matched with grace in a meaningful discipleship relationship does more harm. Proverbs 31:9 proclaims, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."⁴³ Once again, the qualifier for judgment is righteousness that is obtained by God's grace. As a result, young adults who feel judgment without the demonstration of God's grace will continue to leave the church.

The second reason for disengagement of young adults within the category of "church or pastor related issues" is that young adults did not feel connected to others within the church

³⁹ Kwon, "Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church."

⁴⁰ Ryder, "Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?"

⁴¹ Dudley and Wisbey, "The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults."

⁴² John 7:24 (NKJV)

⁴³ Prov. 31:9 (NKJV)

(20%). Kara Powell of the Fuller Youth Institute writes, “As a research team, we weren’t all that surprised that of five major sources of support (adults in the congregation, parents, youth workers, friends in youth group, and friends outside of youth group), high school seniors ranked adults in the congregation last.”⁴⁴ Powell’s research indicates that students felt most welcomed and valued when adults within the congregation demonstrated a genuine interest in them. When adults make an attempt to get to know the young people in their own church, they are making a significant impact on making them feel welcome and valued as part of the body of Christ. For this to take place, adults must have opportunity to interact with young people. One of the ways to accomplish this is through providing opportunities for teenagers to serve within the church alongside older adults.⁴⁵

It is important to maintain the sense of connectedness when young adults leave their home church for college. Freshman who are contacted by members of their congregation within the first semester are more encouraged to remain involved in church. Research indicates that college freshman rate finding a local church in their new college town as among the top three challenges they face in leaving for college. Developing new friends and feelings of loneliness were the top two challenges respectively.⁴⁶

The third reason that young adults become disengaged from the church is because church members are not friendly or welcoming to young adults (15%).⁴⁷ As stated earlier, the church members may actually be unfriendly or it they may be perceived that way. Regardless, many young adults within the church are experiencing feelings of being unwelcome.

⁴⁴ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford. *Sticky Faith*, 77.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁷ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 14.

After breaking bread together Jesus said to His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Jesus understood that one of the greatest testimonies a church can have is how they treat one another. As a disciple of Christ, there is a relational aspect of love for God and His people. Jesus has identified love as the evidence of authenticity. More specifically, love is demonstrated for God’s people. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2:1-4:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.⁴⁸

This type of love for others is accomplished when the body of Christ is united in one mind in ministry and mission. Each believer serves in relation to the rest of the body according to his or her spiritual gifting. The body is healthy when each part, that is each disciple, is properly serving in relation to others in the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12). Unfortunately, there are adults within the church that do not display a Christ-like attitude. Powell suggests that youth workers steer young people into the direction of mature individuals within the church that can be trusted with the “high calling of entering the life of a kid.”⁴⁹

Whether young adults are experiencing feelings of judgment, feelings of disconnectedness, or feelings of being unwelcome, the responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the adults within the church congregation to adjust their own attitudes and actions toward young adults.

⁴⁸ Phil. 2:1-4 (NKJV)

⁴⁹ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 90.

In addition to these failures of the adult church membership, young adults also disengage from the church as a result of pastor related issues. The fourth reason for disengagement among young adults within the category of church or pastor related issues is because the sermons did not capture the attention of the young adult (14%).⁵⁰ There are many questions surrounding this particular reason for disengagement. It is possible that young adults associated this answer with boredom. Jeff Schapiro states that according to research from the Barna Group, one-third of the young adults surveyed felt that “church is boring.”⁵¹ Matthew Green expands on the problem of boredom and addresses additional problems:

All across the United States today, believers who once attended church regularly are in the dropout category. Some quit because they were wounded by leaders or disappointed by pastoral failure. Others became bored with irrelevant church programs or petty squabbles. Other simply felt relationally disconnected, even though they sat behind the same people week after week.”⁵²

It appears that the boredom of young adults is not limited to the pastor’s sermons, but entire programs. Perhaps they believed the pastor’s sermons were not relevant to their stage in life. Another possibility is that young adults may expect the sermon to have a certain quality of entertainment value. Regardless, the sermon did not connect with the young adult on a personal level. The details of this particular reason could be as varied as the individual pastors who delivered the messages.

The fifth reason for disengagement among young adults is because the church was not helping the young adult develop in spiritual maturity (13%).⁵³ It is possible that even though this particular reason was only selected thirteen percent of the time, that many more were not being

⁵⁰ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 14.

⁵¹ Schapiro, “Study: Why Young Christians Leave the Church.”

⁵² Green, “Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?”

⁵³ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 14.

developed into spiritual maturity and they were simply unaware of their own deficiencies in spiritual growth. Scripture provides a clear expectation that every member of the church body is to contribute to the discipleship process of another believer.

Two passages help identify the characteristics of the disciple making process, they are Ephesians 4:11-16 and Colossians 1:28. Ephesians 4:11-12 states, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”⁵⁴ Within this discipleship process God has called some to equip others in the body of Christ for the work of ministry. This ministry is the same ministry as discovered throughout Scripture, to spread the Gospel and in so doing fulfill the Great Commission. There is to be a unity of mind within the Church concerning ministry and mission. The passage continues in verse sixteen, “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” While some have been called to equip the members of the body, every member of the body has a role in the discipleship process. When each part of the body is doing their part, then the church begins to experience numerical growth. Once again, Ephesians 4 identifies love as the motivation for each individual to serve within their role in the body. Likewise, Colossians 1:28 states, “Him we preach, warning *every* man and teaching *every* man in all wisdom, that we may present *every* man perfect in Christ Jesus” (italics added for emphasis).⁵⁵ This verse emphasizes the importance of “every” individual in the church. Motivated by love, every person within the body of Christ works together in the discipleship process. If a church is following the

⁵⁴ Eph. 4:11-12 (NKJV)

⁵⁵ Col. 1:28 (NKJV)

New Testament model for making disciples, there is no reason for any person to leave the church because the church was not helping them mature in their faith.

The sixth reason provided for young adult disengagement from the church is because a well-liked pastor left the church (13%).⁵⁶ While it is true that people connect to other people and not programs, it is also important that the connection not be limited to a single personality within the church. The relational aspect for young adult involvement is crucial. Trouble begins when the young adult has no other connections except for the senior pastor. While church growth should not be centered on the senior pastor's personality that is not to say the senior pastor is not essential in the retention of young adults. Senior pastors must champion ministry to young people. The senior pastor is positioned to assist the church membership in understanding the importance of a healthy student ministry that is preparing them for young adult life as a maturing follower of Christ.⁵⁷

Scandal among church leaders was not listed among the reasons within LifeWay's research for young adult disengagement. However, it is worthy to note that various authors have identified some type of abuse as a contributing factor for young adult disengagement from the church. Drew Dyck suggests that some young adults are recoiling because of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse within the church.⁵⁸ It is difficult for children to make a distinction between God and their abusers. As young adults, they may associate those painful experiences with God and as a result experience challenges with their faith.⁵⁹ While verbal, physical, or sexual abuse are damaging to those involved, there are also scandals that are damaging to institutional churches.

⁵⁶ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 14.

⁵⁷ DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 13.

⁵⁸ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 58.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

John Garvey suggests that the church can no longer blame secular influences for young adults leaving the church, but must take responsibility for the scandals that have occurred and not attempt to hide them from the public. Garvey suggests that some individuals seem more concerned with hiding a scandal and less concerned for the victims of said scandal.⁶⁰ When this type of abuse is swept under a rug in hopes of protecting the church's reputation, they are causing more damage. This is not the example of Jesus, who exposed sin and came to the defense of those who were abused by the religious leaders of His day.

Religious, Ethical, or Political Reasons

There were twelve responses to LifeWay's survey that fall into the category of "religious, ethical, or political reasons" for disengagement.⁶¹ The three top-rated issues within the category address all three areas.

The top reason within this category was young adults who disagreed with the church's stance on a political or social issue (18%).⁶² While political positions are important topics, it can easily become an obstacle when attempting to share the gospel or bring someone back to the faith. Drew Dyck cautions, "Leave politics out of your discussions with them [disengaged young adults]. Once they come back to the fold and you think being a Christian means standing on a particular issue; that will be sorted out later. But you don't want to demand that they embrace your particular political issue before coming back to the fold."⁶³ Tim Elmore, author of *Generation iY* explains that today's teenagers and young adults are experiencing a cultural shift.

⁶⁰ Garvey, "Why People Leave the Church: Don't Blame the Zeitgeist."

⁶¹ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 16.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Vu, "Interview: Drew Dyck on Why Young Adults are Leaving Christianity."

This cultural shift is effecting how students view social and political issues. This postmodern worldview embraces relativism, pluralism, and cynicism that create tension with a biblical worldview.⁶⁴ Views of sexuality have drastically changed as pornography has become more readily available and sexting (i.e. sending nude or sexual photos of oneself to others) has become a growing trend.⁶⁵ The cultural shift is making it growingly difficult for young adults to embrace a biblical worldview concerning social and political subjects.

The second reason for young adult disengagement within this category is that some young adults were only attending church to please other people (17%).⁶⁶ It is unclear from the research whether this influence was from parents, peers, or some other person of influence. Regardless, attending for the wrong reasons is an ethical problem. However, instead of considering the proper reasons for attending church, young adults resolved the ethical conflict by disengaging from the local church. Moral compromise is viewed as the appropriate response. When a conflict arises between beliefs and behavior a decision must be made. Young adults who say they believe one thing, yet behave quite differently must resolve by either abandoning their beliefs or changing their actions.⁶⁷

The third reason for disengagement within the category of religious, ethical or political reasons is that young adults no longer wish to be identified with the church or any form of organized religion (16%).⁶⁸ While they still believe in the importance of spirituality, they believe the church is not necessary in that process. Instead, many have embraced a moralistic

⁶⁴ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁶ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 16.

⁶⁷ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 20.

⁶⁸ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 16.

approach to their spiritual journey. They believe a god exists and is generally watching over the world he or she created. Furthermore, this god wants people to be good and treat one another in a fair manner. It does not matter if this principle is learned from the Bible or from any number of world religions god just wants people to get along. This view also suggests that the main purpose in life is to be happy and to feel good about self. While god is believed to exist, god has no concern or involvement in a person's life except when god is needed to resolve a particular problem. Finally, heaven is a place where good people go when they die.⁶⁹

Religion may be viewed as important, but young adults and teenagers do not give it much thought.⁷⁰ The lack of concern given to faith and the growing view of moralism are contributing factors in the decision of young adults to disengage from church or organized religion entirely.

⁶⁹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH OF CHURCH DROPOUTS

The research involved was specific to discover what seasoned student pastors have already identified as successful methods in retaining students in the local church after they have graduated high school. For this reason, participants must have at least five years of student ministry experience. This tenure allows the student pastor enough time to observe students through four years of high school ministry and at least one year after they have graduated high school. There were a total of fifty-five survey participants. Survey participants with six to ten years of student ministry experience comprised the largest group of student pastors with 22 participants (40%). Six participants met the minimal requirements with five years of ministry experience (10.91%). There were sixteen participants with eleven to fifteen years experience (29.09%). Six participants had observed multiple generations of student ministry with sixteen to twenty years of experience (10.91%). Five participants had extensive experience with over twenty-one years of student ministry experience (9.09%).¹

Fourteen of the respondents to the survey indicated they observe six to ten high school students graduate from their student ministry each year (25.45%). Similarly, fourteen of the respondents to the survey observe twenty-one or greater each year (25.45%). The third largest number of respondents was eleven student pastors who observe between one and five graduates each year (20%). Nine respondents observe sixteen to twenty graduates each year (16.36%). Finally, seven respondents observe between eleven and fifteen graduates each year (12.73%).²

¹ See Appendix C, Q1: How long have you been serving in vocational student ministry?

² See Appendix C, Q2: On average, how many high school students graduate from your student ministry each year?



Figure 1. Years of Ministry Service

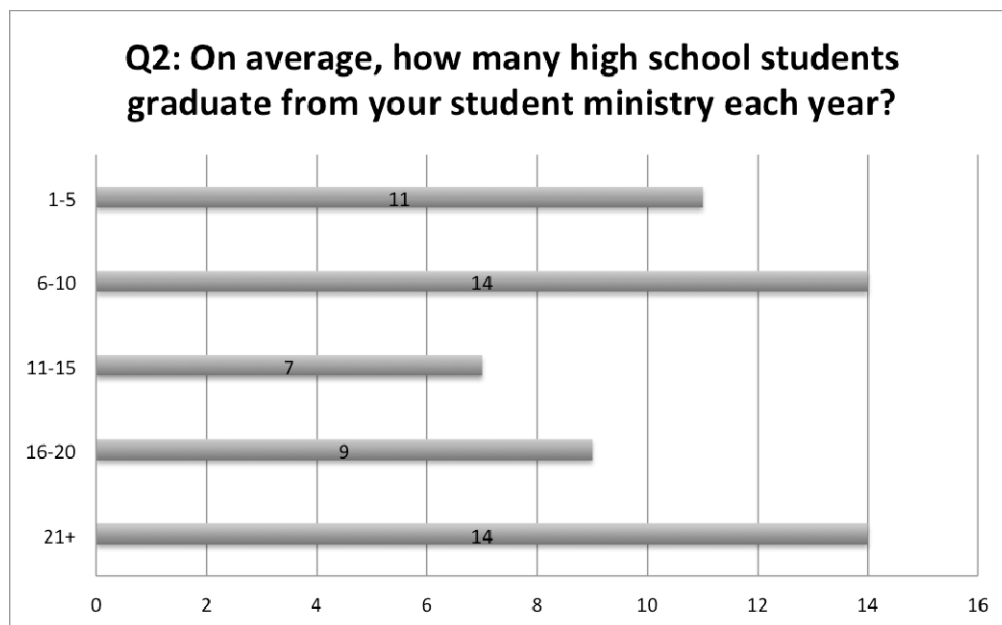


Figure 2. Number of Youth Group Graduates

The majority of youth pastors saw a reduction in the participation of young adults regardless of church size. Twenty-nine of the fifty-five survey participants saw a very clear

reduction in participation (52.73%). Five of the survey participants acknowledged they have no way of knowing how many graduates are currently involved in a local church (9.09%). When asked how they determined the number of students who continued involved, twenty-three youth pastors suggested they made personal contact with the graduates but provided no method. Some youth pastors have indicated they maintain contact through social media, college breaks, parents/family, or they helped the college student become connected to a local church/campus ministry in their college town. Ten youth pastors indicated their college ministry follows up with young adults. Ten youth pastors indicated they were able to follow up with graduates because they continue to attend and serve within their church. Some churches have members who stay in touch through letters and care packages.¹

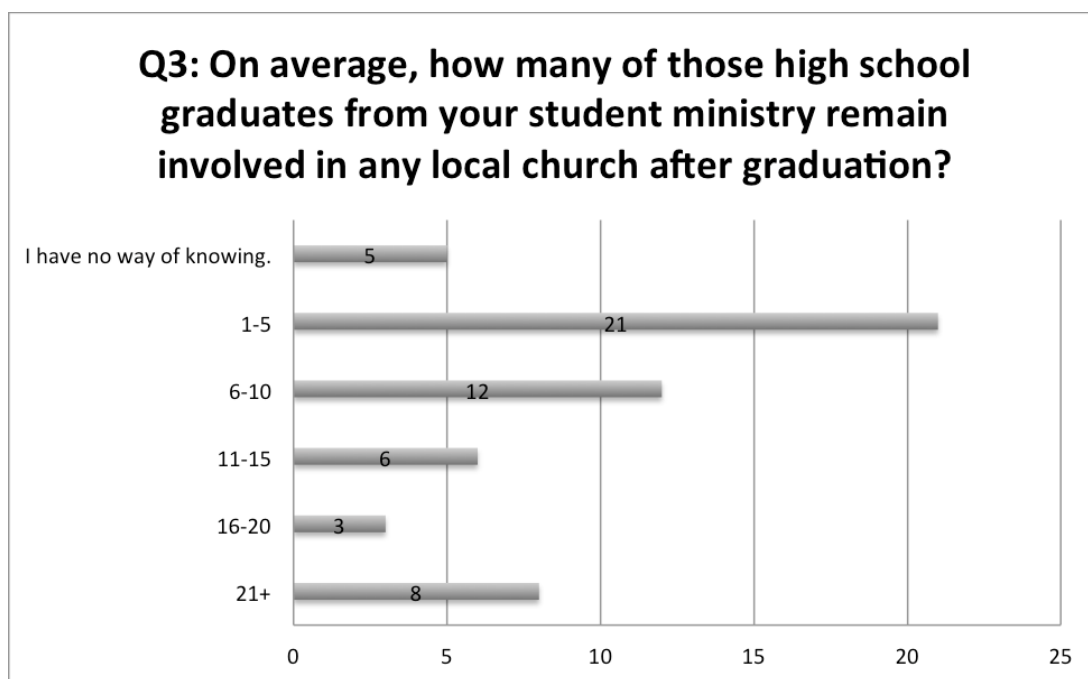


Figure 3. Continued Involvement after High School

¹ See Appendix C, Q3: On average, how many of those high school student graduates from your student ministry remain involved in any local church after graduation?

Table 1. Comparison of Responses to Determine Attrition

Answer Comparisons	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
I have no way of knowing.	5	9.09%
Reduction in their answer between Q2 & Q3	29	52.73%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (1-5 graduates)	10	18.18%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (21+ graduates)*	8	14.55%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (6-10 graduates)	3	5.45%
*Some with 21+ graduates indicated they still experienced a reduction even though current participants are greater than 21.		
Total:	55	100%

Table 2. Methods for Tracking Students after Graduation

Categorical Analysis of Comments	Number of Responses
Our College Ministry follows up with them.	10
They currently attend or serve in our church.	10
They are tracked through church database.	3
Youth Pastor makes personal contact (no method given)	23
Youth Pastor makes personal contact when they are home during breaks.	3
Youth Pastor stays in touch through social media.	8
Youth Pastor stays in touch through their parents.	7
Youth Pastor helps to connect them to a local church/campus ministry in their college town.	8
Church members stay in touch through letters, care packages, etc.	3

The reduction in young adult participants in the local church is no surprise considering that nearly 40% of survey participants indicated they have no strategy, plan, or process for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation.² However, of those who indicated they have a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation, six major emphases were identified. Fourteen survey respondents indicated a partnership between the student ministry and their college ministry. Fifteen respondents emphasized the importance of serving with the church. Eight centered on the importance of relationships. Eight survey participants assist their graduates in finding a local church/campus ministry in the graduate's college town. Seven identified proper discipleship that involves personal spiritual growth as a key component to their strategy toward retention. Finally, only one respondent emphasized parental involvement as part of their strategy for retaining young adults.³

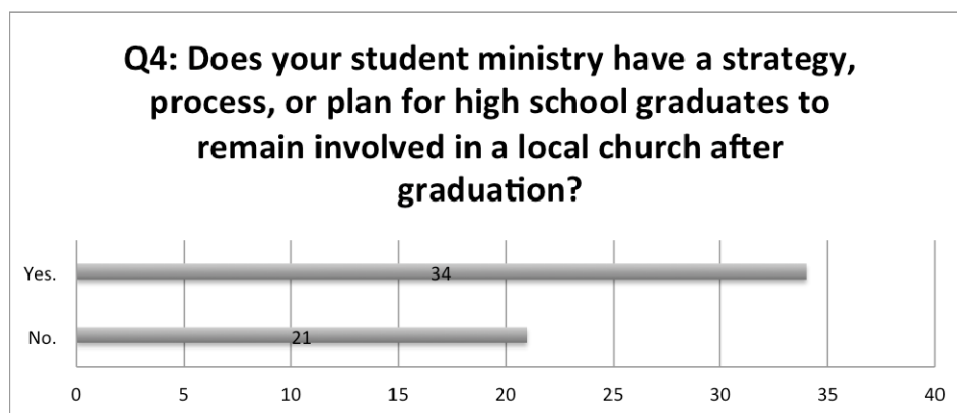


Figure 4. Student Pastors with Post-Graduate Strategy

² See Appendix C, Answer comparison between Q2 & Q3.

³ See Appendix C, Q4: Does your student ministry have a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation?

Youth pastors were asked if students attend worship services with adults on Sunday mornings. An overwhelming fifty-two of the fifty-five survey participants responded yes (94.55%). Only three participants indicated that students and adults have different worship services (5.45%).⁴ However, upon closer observation of the descriptions of these worship services, seven survey participants indicated that while students do attend worship services with adults on Sunday mornings, they also have the option of attending a student weekend worship service in addition to worshipping with parents/adults. In many cases, students are encouraged to attend both.⁵

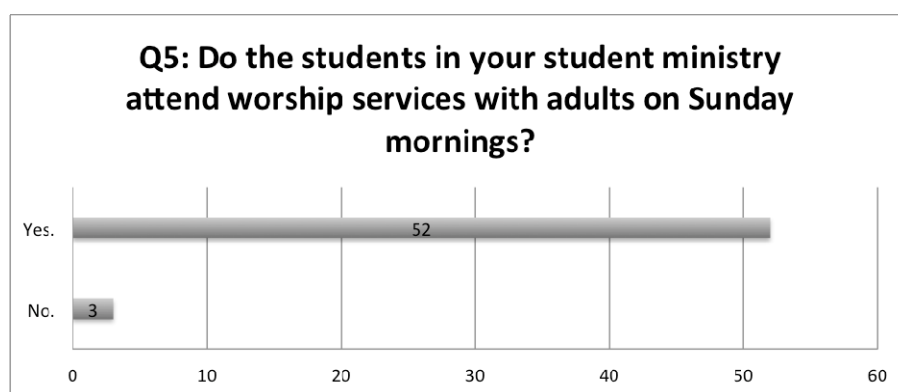


Figure 5. Student Attendance in Worship Services with Adults

When asked about their process for developing a student's spiritual life, student pastors provided eleven aspects related to their processes. Twenty-eight youth pastors indicated small groups as a major part of their structure in implementing their process. The educational component was the dominant feature of the process with twenty-four survey respondents. Nineteen indicated the importance of an inter-generational component. This would include such

⁴ See Appendix C, Q5: Do the students in your student ministry attend worship services with adults on Sunday mornings?

⁵ See Appendix C, Categorical Analysis of Attendance in Worship Services.

aspects as small group leaders, mentors, and prayer partners. Twelve survey respondents indicated personal spiritual disciplines such as quiet time, personal Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, and stewardship/tithing/giving to the church. Personal spiritual disciplines helped the students make their faith personal and less dependent upon programs. Eleven survey respondents indicated a missions component to their spiritual development process. This included such things as mission trips, evangelism training, missional living, and multiplication (i.e. disciples who make disciples). Ten respondents emphasized the importance of serving within the church as a part of the process. Eight indicated that peer relationships were important to the process and are developed through the structures of fellowship events and retreats. Six identified parental involvement, five identified accountability among both peers and adults, five included worship as an important part, and finally one included a transitional component to the process that considers life stages from elementary through adulthood.⁶

Table 3. Components of Discipleship Process

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Small Groups	28
Educational component (discipleship, teaching, preaching, etc.)	24
Inter-generational component (adult small group leaders, mentors, prayer partners, etc.)	19
Personal spiritual disciplines (quiet time, personal Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, tithing/giving)	12
Missions component (mission trips, evangelism training, missional, multiplication)	11
Serving component (discovering spiritual gifts, leadership development,	10

⁶ See Appendix C, Q6: What is your process for developing a student's spiritual life?

serving on ministry teams)	
Peer relationships (fellowships, events, retreats)	8
Parental involvement	6
Accountability component (peers or adults)	5
Worship component	5
Transitional component (elementary to middle to high to college/career)	1

While only one survey participant initially identified life stages and the transitional component as part of their process, 80% stated it was a part of their process when asked specifically.⁷ It becomes clear that most of the survey respondents only consider the life stages that occur within the youth group years. Some give consideration to the transition between middle and high school; they may even consider the cognitive, emotional, or sociological differences between middle and high school. However, only four survey participants emphasized a comprehensive consideration of life stages from childhood into adulthood and cooperation between ministries. One identified the transition between children and youth ministries. Two identified the transition between youth and college/career ministries.⁸

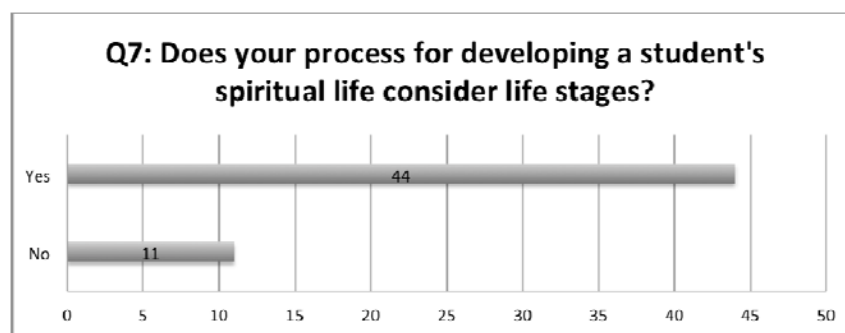


Figure 6. Life Stage Consideration within Discipleship Process

⁷ See Appendix C, Q7: Does your process for developing a student's spiritual life consider life stages?

⁸ See Appendix C, Categorical analysis of process emphases.

When asked to describe their student ministry philosophy, three emphasized the importance of alignment with the church's overall philosophy and mission. While many varied answers were given, they fell into two overarching categories. First, many student pastors identified the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders within the student ministry for the work of ministry. These responses were largely centered upon Ephesians 4. The second group identified the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and/or the New Commandment as the foundation for their philosophy of ministry. Several youth pastors emphasized making disciples, multiplication, missions, and teaching within their philosophy (Great Commission). Some emphasized love for God and others (Great Commandment). Others gave great emphasis toward loving one another and developing a relational ministry (New Commandment).⁹

Twenty-four of the youth pastors surveyed seem to think of curriculum as nothing more than content. Several identified curriculum as something to be purchased. Six survey respondents had a comprehensive understanding of curriculum that involved content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.), scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcomes), and pacing (the amount of time given to particular concepts, principles, etc.). Of those six that had a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum, five of them had been in student ministry for more than eleven years. Only one of them had been in youth ministry between six to ten years. None of them had been in student ministry for only five years. Seven of the youth pastors surveyed focused primarily upon the content of curriculum,

⁹ See Appendix C, Q8: Please describe your student ministry philosophy.

but gave some thought to scope and sequence, goals, or pacing. Eleven of the youth pastors surveyed had no clear curriculum strategy and were unclear of the purpose of curriculum.¹⁰

Table 4. Emphases of Student Ministry Philosophy

Major emphases of student ministry philosophy.	Number of Responses
Emphasizes the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry (Eph. 4).	25
Emphasizes Great Commission, Matt. 28:16-20 (making disciples, multiplication, missions, teaching), Great Commandment, Matt. 22:36-40 (love God, love others), and/or New Commandment, John 13:34-35 (love one another, relational ministry).	26
Emphasizes the importance of alignment with church's overall philosophy.	3

Table 5. Analysis of Curriculum Strategy

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Very Strategic: The youth pastor developed curriculum that considered content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.), scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcomes), and pacing (the amount of time given to particular concepts, principles, etc.).	6
Strategic: The youth pastor writes or purchases curriculum that is focused primarily on content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.), but has also given some thought to scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcomes), or pacing (the amount of time given to particular concepts, principles, etc.).	7
Somewhat Strategic: The youth pastor writes or purchases curriculum that is focused primarily on content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.).	24
No Clear Curriculum Strategy: The youth pastor is unclear of the purpose of curriculum.	11

¹⁰ See Appendix C, Q9: How does curriculum play a role in the development of a student's spiritual life?

When directly asked to identify the greatest factors in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school, youth pastors surveyed identified seven factors. Twenty-three identified relationships with others in the church as central to retaining young adults. This would include relationship with peers, small group leaders, college pastor, caring adults, etc.). Nineteen identified equipping them and helping them discover their role within the body and serving. This would include helping them discover their spiritual gifts, investing in others, and serving on ministry teams. Properly equipping teens and young adults to understand their role in the body of Christ will give them a sense of purpose and belonging, help them see they are needed, and demonstrate value to their ministry role. Ten identified the importance of taking ownership of their faith. This is accomplished through developing personal spiritual disciplines that are not dependent upon a program. Such things as quiet time, personal Bible study, prayer, and stewardship are among those mentioned. Five stated that healthy discipleship that emphasizes proper knowledge of the Christian faith and an environment to ask challenging questions are key factors. Three identified parental involvement as a key factor in retaining young adults. Two youth pastors saw the importance of helping young adults get connected to a local church or campus ministry in their college town. Finally, one identified alignment with the church's overall mission as the key factor.¹¹

Table 6. Analysis of Retention Factors

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Relationship with others in the church (small group leaders, college pastor, caring adults, etc.).	23

¹¹ See Appendix C, Q10: What are the greatest factors in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school?

Equipping them and helping them discover their role within the body and serving (spiritual gifts, investing in others, sense of purpose/belonging, needed and valued in their ministry role).	19
Taking ownership of their faith (developing personal disciplines that are not dependent upon a program).	10
Healthy discipleship that gives them the proper knowledge of the Christian faith and an environment to ask challenging questions.	5
Parental involvement.	3
Connecting young adults to a local church or campus ministry in their college town.	2
Alignment of the student ministry with the church's overall mission.	1

Within the following three subdivisions of this chapter, the research will be aligned with the three major categories leading to church dropouts. The purpose is not to draw conclusions, but to identify which research questions and answers correspond with life change and circumstances, church or pastor related issues, and finally religious, political, or ethical reasons for disengagement.

Life Changes and Circumstances

Only thirty-four of the fifty-five youth pastors surveyed identified they had a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation (60.78%).¹² In other words, nearly 40% have no plan to even consider life changes or circumstances within the life of young adults. For many of the respondents, their plan was limited to continued involvement in the current church. Only eight of the respondents considered the life change of moving to away to college and incorporated the strategy of

¹² See Appendix C, Major emphases of retention.

assisting young adults in finding a local church or campus ministry in the college town of the young adult.

When asked about the process for developing a student's spiritual life, only one survey participant included the consideration of transitioning into college as part of the process. Arguably, personal spiritual disciplines and an educational component will help prepare the young adult for life changes and circumstances, but little emphasis is devoted toward anticipation of life change and circumstances within the development process of a student's spiritual life.¹³ Furthermore, when prompted to consider life stages within their process for developing a student's spiritual life, six survey respondents included the component of preparing for the transition into college/career.¹⁴

Curriculum is largely viewed as content pertaining to doctrine, life application, or theology. While content is an essential component of curriculum, it is not the only consideration. Six survey participants have given consideration to scope and sequence, goals, and pacing which will ensure that graduates have covered the essentials of the Christian faith. Without scope and sequence it is unclear if the learning objectives have been covered prior to graduation. Likewise, without pacing it is unclear if particular concepts and biblical principles have been discussed and comprehended prior to graduation. A few youth pastors have identified the desired outcome for their graduates, but have difficulty articulating the process of getting there.¹⁵

Seven factors have been identified by survey participants in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school.¹⁶ Five of those seven are preparatory in nature. While they

¹³ See Appendix C, Components of Discipleship Process.

¹⁴ See Appendix C, Analysis of Process Emphases.

¹⁵ See Appendix C, Analysis of Curriculum Strategy.

¹⁶ See Appendix C, Analysis of Retention Factors.

do not directly assist the young adult with life change or circumstances, they assist in preparing them for such occasions. These include: equipping, developing personal disciplines, healthy discipleship, parental involvement, and alignment of the student ministry with the church's overall mission. Two of these factors will prove to be more beneficial to graduates who are facing life changes or circumstances. The first is their relationships with others in the church. Stronger relationships with small group leaders, college pastor, and caring adults will make it easier for young adults to navigate life changes or circumstances post-high school. The second is youth pastors who assist young adults in connecting them to a local church or campus ministry in their college town. These two factors are direct influencers in assisting young adults through life change and circumstances.

Relational Disconnectedness

A large number of the responses indicated the points of contact for young adults were primarily with the youth pastor.¹⁷ Twenty-three identified personal contact as the means of tracking involvement even though no method was provided. Youth pastors also look for points of contact during college breaks, social media, or through their parents. Three churches have members who send letters and care packages to college student. Ten youth pastors surveyed identified the college ministry as the new point of contact for graduates.

Fourteen of those surveyed identified the partnership between student ministry and college ministry as an important part of their strategy.¹⁸ Some identified the relational aspect of a college pastor meeting with high school seniors on a regular basis. Others suggested the

¹⁷ See Appendix C, Methods for Tracking Students after Graduation.

¹⁸ See Appendix C, Major emphases of strategy for retention.

importance of developing mentor relationships between high school seniors and those who have already successfully navigated the challenges of their first year in college. Eight of those surveyed identified the importance of building relationships with others in the church, not just the youth pastor. Parental involvement can also contribute to the young adult's tendency to disengage. Parents who no longer remain active after their son or daughter has graduated from high school are modeling disengagement for their college children.

The role of inter-generational worship must be considered. While 94.55% of students are already attending worship with adults, churches are still experiencing disengagement among graduates.¹⁹ Inter-generational ministry is more than experiencing the same worship service. For young adults, there must be a more relational component than simply occupying the same room. What makes a worship service inter-generational?

When considering the process for developing a student's spiritual life, youth pastors surveyed identified six relational components.²⁰ The inter-generational component which involves adult small group leaders, mentors, and prayer partners, missions and serving components which emphasize the importance of relationships through contributing and not consuming, peer relationships through events and retreats, parental relationships, and accountability relationships with both peers and adults. There were eleven components total, six of which were identified as highly relational.

Youth pastors surveyed identified their student ministry philosophy and every philosophy demonstrated a relational component. These include the student/teacher relationship for equipping students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry. This includes the Great Commission relationship of making disciples. This includes the Great Commandment

¹⁹ See Appendix C, Categorical Analysis of Worship Service Attendance.

²⁰ See Appendix C, Components of Discipleship Process.

relationship with God and other people. This includes the New Commandment relationship to love one another. All stated philosophies were highly relational.²¹

When considering the greatest factor in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school, three of the seven major factors are identified as relational.²² The first one is developing relationships with others in the church (e.g. small group leaders, college pastor, peers, caring adults, etc.) is a key factor. The second is equipping young adults to care for and minister to others through serving is a key component. Finally, parental involvement is identified as a relational component to retaining young adults.

Conflicting Worldviews

The surveyed youth pastors were asked if they have a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation. There were six major emphases given, with one of them dealing with developing a biblical worldview through proper discipleship.²³ Students must experience not only healthy relationships, but also healthy doctrine that impacts their worldview.

In addition to developing a strategy for maintaining the involvement of young adults, it is important to give consideration to the process of developing a student's spiritual life. Three of the process components mentioned in the survey relate to developing a biblical worldview.²⁴ Twenty-four youth pastors surveyed identified an educational component of the development process. Again, while the relational aspects are largely important it is essential that young adults

²¹ See Appendix C, Emphases of Student Ministry Philosophy.

²² See Appendix C, Analysis of Retention Factors.

²³ See Appendix C, Major Emphases of Retention Strategies.

²⁴ See Appendix C, Components of Discipleship Process.

develop authentic faith through those relationships. Authentic faith requires some knowledge. This is the educational component identified. Authentic faith also requires a proper object. Faith is always placed in something. This is the “object” of faith, and for faith to be authentic the object of faith must be true. This is the component that five youth pastors have identified as Christ-focused. Third, authentic faith requires a submission of the will. There must be action that accompanies the belief. Twelve youth pastors have identified the importance of developing personal spiritual disciplines as a submission of their will to following Christ. This includes such disciplines as quiet time, personal Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, and stewardship as important action steps in maturing their faith. Therefore, the process for developing a student’s spiritual life has the component of authentic faith that requires some knowledge, a proper object, and submission to Jesus as identified in the survey.

The philosophy for all student pastors had biblical support and therefore contributes toward developing a biblical worldview. Twenty-five student pastors emphasized the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry as described in Ephesians 4. Twenty-six student pastors emphasized the importance of making disciples as described in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-20, loving God and others as described in the Great Commandment, Matthew 22:36-40, and/or the importance of love for one another as described in the New Commandment, John 13:34-35. In addition to these two major categories, three youth pastors emphasized the importance of alignment with the church’s overall philosophy and mission.²⁵ The philosophy of ministry will impact heavily the worldview developed by students and young adults.

²⁵ See Appendix C, Emphases of Student Ministry Philosophy.

Youth pastors surveyed were asked what role in the development of a student's spiritual life does curriculum play.²⁶ Twenty-four youth pastors viewed curriculum as primarily content such as doctrine, life application, and theology. Six youth pastors described a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum that identified content, scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcomes), and pacing (the amount of time given to particular biblical concepts and principles). There were seven youth pastors surveyed that understood curriculum was more than content, but had not fully developed a comprehensive strategy. Eleven youth pastors were unclear of any purpose for curriculum. Those with eleven years or more of youth ministry experience tended to be very strategic in their lesson plans. Developing a comprehensive curriculum strategy that identifies what biblical truths, principles, and spiritual disciplines should be understood and developed by graduation is an important component to developing a biblical worldview. The scope and sequence as well as the pacing will guide the process to reach those goals before graduation.

Finally, youth pastors surveyed were asked to identify the greatest factors in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school.²⁷ Of the seven categorical responses given, three of them are contributing factors in developing a student's worldview. Youth pastors stated that students must be equipped in understanding their role within the body of Christ. Before they graduate high school, students should grasp how their spiritual gifts contribute to the church as a whole. Students should understand their role in contributing to the church and not view themselves as a consumer of the church's services. Those who view their role as a significant contribution to the body have a stronger sense of purpose and belonging. They see themselves as needed and valued in their ministry role. Nineteen youth pastors identified this as

²⁶ See Appendix C, Analysis of Curriculum Strategy.

²⁷ See Appendix C, Analysis of Retention Factors.

one of the key aspects of retaining young adults, second only to relationships with others within the church. In addition to their role within the church, ten youth pastors surveyed identified the importance of students taking ownership of their faith. This included the importance of developing spiritual disciplines that were self-paced and self-initiated. Students are encouraged to develop disciplines that are not dependent upon a program. This would include such things as personal Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, and stewardship. Five youth pastors surveyed identified the importance of discipleship that gives the students the proper knowledge of the Christian faith. Youth pastors expressed the importance of giving students the opportunity to ask challenging questions.

CHAPTER IV

PREVENTION OF CHURCH DROPOUTS

There are numerous books that address the reasons for disengagement from the local church among young adults. Many of those books offer solutions for bringing young adults back into the church. While discovering methods to re-engage young adults within the local church are important, greater efforts and resources should be developed in retaining active young adults in the church post-high school. As identified by Kara Powell, “There is no simple list of steps you can take to give youth a faith that lasts.”¹ The point must be made that while research is a valuable tool, the methodical strategies developed through research are no substitute for prayer and the work of God in the lives of students. The Barna research group stated that the reasons young adults are disengaging from the local church are as unique as the individual.² However, the commonalities among those reasons for disengagement can provide insight for developing a comprehensive strategy for retaining students after they graduate high school. The reasons for disengagement can be categorized into three major groupings: situational, relational, and spiritual.

Strategies for Life Changes and Circumstances

All students eventually leave the youth group. They may leave because they are moving, going to college, starting a career, or simply graduating high school. In other words, life change is an inevitable occurrence in the life of young adults. The fact remains that student ministry comes to a close for every person. However, of the youth pastors surveyed nearly 40% have no

¹ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 24.

² Ryder, “Church Dropout: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?”

strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation. While a majority of those surveyed have a plan, it is largely limited to their continued involvement in their current church. Only 15% of those surveyed had a plan to continue ministering to those who move away to college. Therefore, there are four considerations that youth pastors must employ in anticipation of life changes or circumstances: relationships, alignment, curriculum, and college transition.

First, the thread that runs through all categories for disengagement is a breakdown in relationships. While the relational disconnectedness is more largely addressed in the next section, the importance of relationships woven throughout the strategy is important to success in retaining young adults after graduation. After all, discipleship does not occur outside of relationships. Students who have developed strong relationships with small group leaders and other caring adults within the church will have a better support system for navigating life changes or circumstances after they graduate high school. However, those relationships must move beyond the weekly lesson plan. Students do not connect to programs, they connect to other people. If their connectedness is limited solely to peer relationships and their involvement is limited to programs they will have difficulty facing life changes or circumstances when they occur. For this reason, youth pastors must construct a network of caring adults who are investing in the lives of students. The inter-generational component was identified by nearly 35% of survey respondents as an important part of their discipleship process.¹ This network of caring adults was comprised of such roles as small group leaders, mentors, and prayer partners. These healthy relationships also developed a level of accountability. Regardless of what role adults hold within the student ministry, the critical factors are that caring adults are investing into a

¹ See Appendix C, Components of Discipleship Process.

younger generation that is modeled by in their own life and they have developed a level of accountability.

While parents are the primary teachers for their children, Scripture indicates that the older adults in the church are to invest in the younger generations. Titus 2:1-8 encourages the older men and women to be an example in their lifestyle and in their doctrinal teachings to younger generations. Psalm 78 expresses the importance of inter-generational teaching. The passage emphasizes the importance of passing on beliefs from one generation to the next. While the familial terms of fathers and children are used, the text does not limit this responsibility to parents, but are in reference to plural generations. For this reason, it is not merely a good idea for adults to invest in the lives of younger generations it is a biblical responsibility of the Christian community.

Second, youth pastors must develop a student ministry that is in alignment with the church's overall mission. While only one survey respondent identified alignment as a key factor in retaining young adults, alignment helps students identify with the body as a whole not just inside the student ministry. If the student ministry operates completely independent from the rest of the body, it is not functioning as a proper part of the local church. Authors Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton write, "Alignment is the product of people unified around a common purpose. If student ministries are going to complete their mission and effectively reach students with the gospel, alignment is imperative."² Romans 15:5-6 states, "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."³ Again in Philippians 2:1-2, "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any

² Geiger and Borton, *Simple Student Ministry*. 87.

³ Rom. 15:5-6 (NKJV)

fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”⁴ These are only two examples of the many passages of Scripture that express the importance of like-mindedness. Biblical unity is more than simply getting along with one another. Biblical unity is a union of like-mindedness that reflects the thoughts and actions of Christ. Alignment suggests that students are no longer viewed as “the future of the church,” but a necessary and valued part of the present church.

There are two major components that youth pastors have identified as important to the discipleship process and contribute directly to alignment. They are ministry and missions. Missions is a critical component of alignment. Students experience evangelism training, mission trips, and are encouraged to think missional in their daily living. When the entire church is focused on missions and missional living, the students see their role in missions beyond their years in student ministry. The passion for missions and their ability to live out a missional life in their own community is not dependent upon the student ministry, but has become a discipline that students carry with them into adulthood. Therefore, a congregation of adults and a congregation of students that are both focused on missions creates alignment within the body and removes roadblocks that may lead to disengagement during the transitional life changes that may occur after high school. Similarly, ministry is an important component of alignment. Students should be encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts and then use those spiritual gifts through serving within the life of the church. When students discover they have a necessary and valued role within the church, they are more likely to remain engaged. It does not seem to matter if their role is within the children’s ministry, student ministry, or working alongside adults. The important aspect is that students are engaged within the body as contributors and not consumers. Students who view themselves as a consumer and the church as a service provider will become

⁴ Phil. 2:1-2 (NKJV)

disengaged when the services are viewed as no longer necessary or another church, religion, or organization offers better services. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 emphasizes the importance of each member of the body contributing to the whole. While each part may have a different function, they are all necessary to one another. Teenagers and young adults are not the future of the church they are an essential and functioning part of the current body of Christ. Failure to engage them in ministry causes the entire body to suffer.

The philosophy of youth pastors was largely centered on ministry and missions. Twenty-five of those surveyed emphasized the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry. Their philosophy was largely identified with Ephesians 4 in equipping the church membership for the work of ministry. In addition, twenty-six of those surveyed emphasized the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and/or the New Commandment in their philosophy of student ministry. When a church experiences alignment in ministry and mission between the student ministry and the church as a whole, students begin to see their role as greater than the ministry department in which they serve. Their role in ministry and mission are carried with them into adulthood and are not dependent upon their continued involvement in student ministry, but are dependent upon their continued involvement in the church. They are a viable and functioning part of the body of Christ that is needed and greatly valued. It is the role of the youth pastor and other church leaders to create contributors and not consumers. Those who remain consumers are likely candidates for disengagement during life changes or circumstances. Alignment paves the way for the development of contributing-members of the body of Christ.

Third, youth pastors must consider the scope and sequence as well as the pacing and repetition of curriculum. Youth pastors with eleven or more years of experience were more

likely to consider scope and sequence. Those with less experience viewed curriculum solely as content or something to be purchased. While the content of curriculum will be addressed later in this chapter, the scope and sequence of curriculum may effect disengagement among young adults when facing life changes or circumstances. Scope and sequence are best understood as the learning objectives and when they will be taught. Andy Stanley and Stuart Hall have developed a scope and sequence for student ministry that identifies seven checkpoints. The first checkpoint is authentic faith and focuses on ensuring students have a proper understanding of faith. The second checkpoint is spiritual disciplines. The next checkpoint is moral boundaries, which help teenagers establish clear moral limits. The fourth checkpoint addresses the importance of healthy friendships. The fifth checkpoint helps students understand the importance of wise choices and focuses on the application of godly wisdom. The sixth checkpoint helps students understand the importance of ultimate authority. The final checkpoint helps students discover the importance of putting others first.⁵ These checkpoints provide the scope for a comprehensive curriculum.

Youth pastors who have given consideration to scope and sequence are identifying what students should know and understand as they progress through their student ministry. For example, one student pastor meets with rising sophomores and challenges them to remain involved once they obtain their driver's license later that year. They spend time talking about how much busier they will become with their new found driving privileges. Some will get their first job or may experience an increase in the amount of time spent with friends. The student pastor recognized that the sophomore year marked the beginning of a very busy teenage calendar with the arrival of their driver's license. As a result, he incorporated learning objectives and challenges that focused upon developing healthy Christian priorities prior to their sophomore

⁵ Stanley and Hall, *The Seven Checkpoints*. 10.

year. Some student pastors identify the senior year of high school as a year to prepare students for college or career. Accordingly, they develop a scope and sequence of curriculum that emphasizes specific learning objectives for their senior year. Giving careful consideration to scope and sequence of curriculum can be a proactive step in preventing disengagement when life changes or circumstances occur. George Barna writes:

Not one of the highly effective churches waits until a person is eighteen or twenty-one to begin an intensive, intentional discipling process. Each church has its own starting point and reasons for why they start at that age. One church begins kids in preschool with a regimen of principles (based on stories) and practices (group activities) that fits within a long-term plan for spiritual development.⁶

Barna stated that each church gave considerable thought to the “developmental psychology or other behavioral and educational research – as to why they begin the process at a particular age or grade level.”⁷ Another consideration is pacing and repetition. Pacing is the amount of time given to particular concepts or principles. Repetition is revisiting particular concepts or principles on a regular basis. Student pastors must consider what concepts and biblical principles will be continually repeated throughout the students’ years in the youth group. Likewise, the student pastor must consider the amount of time given to particular subjects. For example, some students may be content with talking about the subject of sex every single week during small group. However, the student pastor must consider content, scope and sequence, pacing, and repetition as important components of the curriculum development. Pacing is especially important as students mature. They will have challenging questions that will require honest conversations and ample time to discuss. It is important for youth pastors to consider pacing that allows for students to grapple with the content and ask challenging questions. Teenagers and young adults who feel their questions and doubts about faith are being ignored

⁶ Barna. *Growing True Disciples*. 115.

⁷ Ibid.

will become likely candidates for disengagement. In his book *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students*; Richard Dunn expresses the importance of scope and sequence as well as pacing. He offers insight for student pastors in “how to pace and then lead adolescents during early, middle, and late adolescence.”⁸ The scope and sequence of curriculum as well as pacing and repetition are proactive measures in preventing young adults from disengagement.

Fourth, youth pastors should consider their role in assisting students through the transition out of student ministry. Great effort is exerted in retaining students while they are in the youth group, while less effort is devoted to retaining them in the church after graduation. The transition out of the youth group is inevitable and the success or failure of retention is often viewed as either a commendation or an indictment of the student ministry. For this reason, youth pastors must give greater consideration to successfully transitioning students into the next step within their church’s structure. For some, this will include a college ministry of the church. Whether a church has a college ministry or not student pastors must help young adults transition through this life change. Even churches with college ministries are heavily dependent upon the partnership with the high school ministry in assisting young adults through this transition. During the junior and senior years of high school, student pastors and other adult leaders should be having conversations to help them prepare for the transition into adulthood. Student ministries who are merely repeated the same information given during their freshman and sophomore years will begin to see disengagement before graduation occurs. Juniors and seniors are already giving great thought to their future. They are deciding where to attend college, whether or not to join the military, or begin a career. Moving away to college was ranked third

⁸ Dunn. *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students*, 165.

of the top reasons given by young adults for disengagement from the local church (25%).⁹ Only two of those surveyed identified assisting students moving away to college as a key factor in the retention of young adults in the local church.¹⁰ Student pastors can assist students in the youth group who will be moving away from their local church in two ways. First, student pastors and adult leaders can introduce students to opportunities for attending Christian universities. Students may not be aware of the degree programs offered at Christian universities and may assume these colleges and universities are only for those entering vocational ministry. Some Christian universities may be willing to visit churches and share information about the programs they offer. This will expose students to more choices for their academic future. Some universities offer opportunities for high school students to visit their campus and experience college life first hand before making their decision. Student pastors can coordinate these opportunities. Second, student pastors and adult leaders can assist students and encourage them in finding a local church or a campus ministry in their college town. Involvement in a campus ministry is not a substitute for a local church, but many of those involved in campus ministries are also involved in local churches. According to research of the Fuller Youth Institute, college freshman identified finding a local church among the top three difficulties they faced after graduation. The number one difficulty was developing friendships. The second difficulty was feelings of aloneness. The third was finding a new church.¹¹ One student pastor identified the importance of assisting these students in finding a local church and holding them accountable to do so within the first three weeks of moving to their college town. It is believed that the habits that are developed during the first month of college will set the pace for their entire academic

⁹ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 10.

¹⁰ See Appendix C, Analysis of Retention Factors.

¹¹ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 78.

career. Another student pastor presents each graduate with a care package that includes information on the campus ministries and churches unique to their college town. These student pastors have given consideration to their role in assisting young adults through this life changing transition.

Student pastors who wish to see greater retention of young adults in a local church post-high school can be proactive in preparing them for life changes and circumstances. Together, these four considerations may not eliminate disengagement for reasons related to life changes or circumstances, but they will certainly improve the likelihood of retention as students are better equipped for those occurrences.

Strategies for Relational Ministry

Brad Waggoner, LifeWay's vice president of research and ministry development states, "Relationships are often the glue that keep people in church or serves as the attraction to begin attending again following a period of absenteeism. Many people are deeply influenced by friends and loved ones."¹² In contrast, young adults who observe unhealthy relationships filled with hypocrisy and judgment are disengaging from the local church. This accounts for 26% of young adult dropouts. Furthermore, young adults who did not feel connected to others in the church accounted for 20% of church dropouts. Another 15% of church dropouts identified church members as unfriendly, unwelcoming, or even cliquish.¹³ Each of these is a sign of an unhealthy relational ministry. After observing the Passover with the disciples, later that night

¹² Scott McConnell, "LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church." <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church> (accessed February 14, 2014).

¹³ Rudd, "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 14.

Jesus shared with them, “A new commandment I give to you, that you also love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹⁴ The authentic love that believers demonstrate toward one another is a marker of identification for true followers of Christ. Those who simply do not have a love for God’s people are simply not followers of Christ. Author Kenda Creasy Dean expresses the importance of relationships in student ministry:

Youth ministry focuses on relationships, not only because of who teenagers are but because of who God is. God is a relationship – Christian tradition uses the relational language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to describe the persons of the Trinity – and this God’s love is so generous the Godhead alone cannot contain it. Significant relationships with other Christians matter because they teach us something about what God is like – the One who can love us in spite of ourselves and who love us passionately enough to suffer willingly on our behalf.¹⁵

There are four components identified as critical in developing a healthy relational ministry. They are authenticity, inter-generational, frequent and intentional points of contact, and others focused. Addressing these four relational aspects can reduce the attrition rate of those disengaging from the local church for church or pastor-related reasons.

First, students and young adults are searching for authenticity. Kinnaman identifies those who have left their childhood or teen faith as prodigals.¹⁶ They are often more committed to distancing themselves from Christianity than embracing a differing spiritual perspective. This distancing from Christianity is often a reflection of their resentment toward Christians, which is rooted in a negative relational experience.¹⁷ Prodigals can be driven by intellectual questions or emotional experiences, but either way they have chosen to distance themselves from Christianity.

¹⁴ John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2005), 27.

¹⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

Young adults who have intellectual questions are seeking authenticity in their discussions. They may view the faith of Christians as willful ignorance. Prodigals who are emotionally driven are seeking authenticity in the lives of those within the church. When church leaders are perceived as judgmental or they demonstrate hypocrisy, their faith is viewed as less than real. Young adults are in need of relationships within the church that allow for challenging questions. Students who have difficult questions and are never given opportunity to discuss those questions may assume the church does not have answers and as a result they will disengage. Students must be given opportunities to discuss their doubts without fear of judgment. Creating an authentic and transparent atmosphere where students can grapple with challenging faith questions will actually strengthen their faith. Duffy Robbins identifies two essential parts in nurturing a faith within the lives of students that will impact their daily living. First, students must understand that living out the Christian faith is not an easy task. Everyone is going to make mistakes, including those who are adults in the church. Stumbling is part of the growth process, but it cannot lead to discouragement or disillusionment. Second, student pastors and church leaders must understand they are teaching students how to live by faith by their own daily modeling.¹⁸ Paul expresses this truth, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.”¹⁹

Modeling how to daily live by faith leads to the second aspect of healthy relational ministry, students and young adults are in need of inter-generational relationships, however, inter-generational relationships must be more than students and adults occupying the same room

¹⁸ Robbins. *The Ministry of Nurture*. 139.

¹⁹ 2 Tim. 3:10-11 (NKJV)

during a worship service. While there is certainly great value in corporate worship, it is worthy to note that nearly 95% of those surveyed have inter-generational worship services and are still experiencing disengagement among young adults. With this in mind, youth pastors must consider how they can develop a network of inter-generational opportunities for conversations and accountability. This can be accomplished through relationships with small group leaders, mentors, parents, and prayer partners. While peer relationships are integral part of student ministry, it is the inter-generational relationships that produce a maturing faith within students. Older and more mature adults may not have all of the answers, but they are at least one step ahead of the students. Les Christie, author of *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students*, offers a list of ten qualities that when modeled can be effective discipleship tool, even when ministering to the most challenging of students. His list includes: integrity, honesty, wisdom, patience, teamwork, consistency, flexibility, accountability, a sense of humor, and love.²⁰ Christie's list of ten qualities can only be possessed if they are modeled through relationships.

Chap Clark expresses the importance of students experiencing meaningful relationships with adults:

Yet the fact remains that every child needs authentic, intimate relationships with adults until he or she has completed much of the adolescent process. This responsibility cannot fall to parents alone or to teachers, who can influence individual students for a year at best. The only way we can stem the tide of the consequences of abandonment is to encourage a wide variety of adults to take part in the lives of the young. Nothing else will make a difference – not more baseball fields, more programs and events, or more job opportunities. Because the root of the issues related to contemporary adolescence has to do with leaving this age group to flounder on its own, the answer is relationships with adults who sincerely care. That is the most fundamental need of this abandoned generation.²¹

²⁰ Christie, *When Church Kids Go Bad*, 59.

²¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 195.

Third, students and young adults are in need of frequent and intentional points of contact within those inter-generational relationships. A small group leader or Sunday school teacher who simply shares a lesson each week and does not become personally involved within the lives of the students they are leading will be less effective than the leader who invests beyond the lesson. Small group leaders and Sunday school teachers who make frequent and intentional points of contact with students are developing inter-generational relationships that transcend the weekly lesson plan. While adult leaders should avoid being alone with students, they can look for opportunities to spend time with them in smaller groups. For example, taking a group of two or three students to attend a dance recital, band competition, or sporting event of one of their peers. These opportunities show support of the one involved in the activity, while giving the small group leader an opportunity to invest in two or three other students from the group. Youth pastors and adult leaders should never do ministry alone. Every ministry undertaking is an opportunity to disciple an inner group of three students. Jesus ministered to multitudes, yet He had an inner group of Peter, James, and John. Student pastors and small group leaders should bring students with them on errands, visits to the hospital, or any other ministry task.

Some youth pastors have developed ways to build relationships between the senior adults of the church and young adults. One student pastor has the senior adults of his church write cards and send care packages to their college students who are away from home during the school semester.²² This inter-generational relationship demonstrates that those who are away for college are still on the minds of those from their home church. Powell writes, “Hearing from an adult from their home church – whether it be via text, email, phone, or something you’ve perhaps

²² See Appendix C, Analysis of Retention Factors.

heard of called ‘the U.S. Postal Service’ – seems to help students take their faith to college with them. In fact, that ongoing contact still makes a difference three years later.”²³

Parental involvement is a vitally important part of any student ministry. Reggie Joiner helps student pastors identify four levels of partnership that exist with parents. First, is what Joiner describes as “aware.” These parents are concerned, do not attend church but are open, and are interested in becoming better parents. The second group is identified as “involved.” These parents have some familiarity with the church, perhaps attend on occasion, and have an interest in their children’s spiritual growth. The third group is “engaged.” These parents are committed to the church; they are maturing in their own faith, and assume responsibility for the spiritual growth of their family. The fourth group is “invested.” These parents are not only “engaged,” but they are invested in the strategies of children and youth ministries and are in community with other Christian parents.²⁴ It is important to understand that parents at all levels have a partnership with the student ministry and youth pastors can discover ways for increasing parental involvement and moving parents toward the next level of participation.

Fourth, students and young adults must discover the importance of being “others focused.” As stated earlier, Philippians 2:1-2 identifies the importance of unity in ministry and mission. That same passages continues, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”²⁵ Students must be in union with the entire body of the church in both ministry and mission. The emphasis of both ministry and mission is focused on the needs of others. Students who discover their spiritual

²³ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 78.

²⁴ Joiner, *Think Orange*, 164.

²⁵ Phil. 2:3-4 (NKJV)

gifts will also discover their spiritual gifts are for the edification of others within the body.

Therefore, healthy relational ministry is not inwardly focused but is selfless and reflects the mind of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:5-8).

Two “church or pastor-related reasons” for disengagement are among the top ten reasons indicated by young adults for dropping out of church.²⁶ Student pastors must address these relational breakdowns in their efforts to reduce the attrition rate among young adults. Healthy relationships are a common thread that runs throughout the strategy for retaining young adults in a local church post-high school. Duffy Robbins explains, “The central mandate of youth ministry is to be incarnational – to flesh out the Word of God to the students with whom we are working, to consistently, creatively, and obediently live out the Word of God in their presence. We can’t talk about building disciples without talking about building relationships.”²⁷ These four characteristics of a healthy relational ministry tackle the relational reasons for disengagement and provide not only increased likelihood of retention, but also a healthier functioning local church.

Strategies for Making Disciples

Christ has both entrusted and empowered the Church with the task of making disciples. Before addressing the challenges of disengagement for religious, ethical, or political reasons it is important to have a biblical understanding of discipleship, what characterizes an authentic disciple, and authentic faith. The characteristics of the discipleship process are identified within Scripture. John 13:34-35 proclaims the Great Commandment, Matthew 28:16-20 declares the

²⁶ Rudd, “Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why,” 10.

²⁷ Robbins. *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples*, 57.

Great Commission, and Acts 2:40-47 demonstrates the impact of Peter's sermon upon the church. The common thread among these passages is the intentionality in their process that is motivated by love for reaching others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Disciples are not made by accident. It is the result of a clear strategy and process that has been intentionally engaged. However, the process cannot operate apart from love. Love is the fuel that motivates and keeps the process of discipleship in action. When a church no longer has love, the discipleship process ceases (cf. Revelation 2:1-5). The church of Ephesus did well to identify false teachers and they recognized the evil of the world, but they failed to demonstrate the love of Christ.

Two additional passages that help identify the characteristics of the disciple making process are Ephesians 4:11-16 and Colossians 1:28. Ephesians 4:11-12 states, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."²⁸ Within this discipleship process God has called some to equip others in the body of Christ for the work of ministry. This ministry is the same ministry as discovered throughout Scripture, to spread the Gospel and in so doing fulfill the Great Commission. There is to be a unity of mind within the Church concerning ministry and mission. Ephesians 4:16 continues, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."²⁹ While some have been called to equip the members of the body, every member of the body has a role in the discipleship process. When each part of the body is doing their part, then the church begins to experience numerical growth. Once again, Ephesians 4 identifies love as the motivation for each individual to serve in the body. Likewise, Colossians 1:28 states, "Him

²⁸ Eph. 4:11-12 (NKJV)

²⁹ Eph. 4:16 (NKJV)

we preach, warning *every* man and teaching *every* man in all wisdom, that we may present *every* man perfect in Christ Jesus” (italics mine).³⁰ This verse emphasizes the importance of *every* individual in the church. This certainly includes young believers. Motivated by love, every person within the body of Christ works together in the discipleship process.

The Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20 again identifies another characteristic of the disciple making process. Jesus commanded, “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.”³¹ The task is for the church to reach people “of all the nations.” There are 7.2 billion people in the world.³² There is an estimated 2.18 billion Christians in the world.³³ According to the Joshua Project, an estimated 2.91 billion people have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ.³⁴ While the only hope our world has is Christ, the Church must understand that Christ has placed upon its shoulders the responsibility to share the hope of Christ. Motivated by love, the Church must become global in their scope and missional in their strategy. Kent Julian writes, “Christ’s earthly ministry has everything to do with making disciples. It elevates both disciple making and the role we [youth pastors] play in the disciple-making process.”³⁵

³⁰ Col. 1:28 (NKJV)

³¹ Matt. 28:19-20 (NKJV)

³² Worldometers, “Current World Population,” <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/> (accessed February 15, 2014).

³³ Pew Research, “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/> (accessed February 15, 2014).

³⁴ Joshua Project, “Great Commission Statistics.” <http://www.joshuaproject.net/great-commission-statistics.php> (accessed February 15, 2014).

³⁵ Julian, *101 Ideas for Making Disciples in Your Youth Group*, 44.

The three major characteristics of the discipleship making process are intentional, individual, and missional each of which are fueled by the transforming love of Christ within the believer. Therefore, discipleship is the process of intentionally mobilizing every individual believer to fulfill their God-given calling within the body of Christ by using their gifts in fulfilling their role in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ.

Jesus declared, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’?”³⁶ This passage indicates that to be a disciple of Christ, a person must make a conscious decision to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In doing so, the potential disciple must consider the sacrificial commitment to surrender everything to Him. This would include not only their time, energy, resources, and personal plans but their very will is surrendered and if need be their family and own life as well. Therefore, the life of a Christian disciple is one that is marked not only by the sacrifice of Christ, but the sacrifice of self. At the point of salvation a disciple considers the cost of following Him, and then daily renews that commitment as they mature in their faith and those sacrifices are challenged. “Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”³⁷ These passages in Matthew and Luke make it clear that submission to Christ and His plans are essential to the mark of a disciple.

³⁶ Luke 11:27-30 (NKJV)

³⁷ Matt. 16:24 (NKJV)

After breaking bread together Jesus said to His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”³⁸ As a disciple of Christ, there is also a relational aspect of love for God and His people. Jesus has identified love as the evidence of authenticity. More specifically, love is demonstrated for God’s people. Therefore, the sacrificial aspect of being a disciple is made evident through loving others. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2:1-4:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.³⁹

This type of love for others is accomplished when the body of Christ is united in one mind in ministry and mission. Each believer serves in relation to the rest of the body according to his or her spiritual gifting. The body is healthy when each part, that is each disciple, is properly serving in relation to others in the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12).

The third identifier of a Christian disciple is a life marked by transformation. A disciple cannot continue in life unchanged by the Gospel. While the believer is saved by grace through faith, there is a change of mind that produces a change in attitude and action. That transformation that is brought about by the Gospel is nurtured by spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, and stewardship. Apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, these disciplines are fruitless. However, when a life has been impacted by the saving grace of Jesus Christ, these disciplines serve as nutrients that will produce fruit within the life of a believer. As a result, the

³⁸ John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁹ Phil. 2:1-4 (NKJV)

disciple becomes more like Christ and in so doing their sacrificial love for others becomes greater.

There is a deep intimacy between these three identifiers of a disciple. Sacrificial, relational, and transformational living are woven together in the life of a maturing follower of Christ. Therefore, a disciple is someone who has counted the cost of following Christ, surrendered all to Him, has been transformed by the Gospel, and is committed to maturing in the faith by developing spiritual disciplines that mobilize the disciple for ministry and mission.

Preventing the disengagement of young adults for religious, ethical, or political reasons begins with developing a biblical worldview within the lives of students. For example, a secular worldview describes faith as willful ignorance, arguing that Christians simply believe in something when all the evidence and good reason say not to believe. However, this is a gross misunderstanding of faith. Authentic faith requires some knowledge. After all, no one can have faith in a God they do not have any information about (cf. Hebrews 11:6). Twenty-four student pastors identified the importance of the educational component in their process of developing a student's spiritual life. Therefore, the content of curriculum is of critical concern for the student pastor. They must determine what educational components should be taught and how that knowledge will strengthen the faith of students. However, knowledge alone is insufficient. Author and apologist Dinesh D'Souza suggests that the purpose of apologetics is to "clear the path to God by removing obstacles to faith."⁴⁰ Authentic faith also requires a proper object. The object of faith must be true or the faith is without merit. Simply having an immense amount of faith in an untrue object does not make the faith more valid. Christians identify Christ as the object of their faith. Five student pastors indicated the importance of instilling a Christ-focused faith in their process of developing a student's spiritual life. Authentic faith also requires a

⁴⁰ Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 102.

submission of the will. There must be some type of action that accompanies the belief. Students who have obtained sufficient knowledge to profess faith in Christ, identify Christ as the true object of their faith, but then never surrender their will to Christ have an incomplete faith. Twelve student pastors have identified the importance of personal spiritual disciplines in their process of developing a student's spiritual life. Richard J. Foster identifies twelve spiritual disciplines that can be developed in the life of a disciple. These include inward disciplines such as meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. He identifies outward disciplines such as simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. Finally, he includes corporate disciplines such as confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.⁴¹ Dallas Willard offers his suggestion of disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. He suggests that there are disciplines in which the believer is abstaining from something (e.g. fasting, chastity, sacrifice, etc.) and disciplines in which the believer is engaging an activity (e.g. study, prayer, worship, etc.).⁴² Student pastors must consider how to equip students to develop spiritual disciplines. While spiritual disciplines are an essential part of the maturing Christian faith, it is important for students to understand that spiritual disciplines are not a means of righteousness. Powell explains "the way we deepen our trust is by putting ourselves in a position to draw close to God, even while the Holy Spirit is pursuing and surrounding us. This is the function of 'spiritual disciplines.'"⁴³ Authentic faith must also produce fruit within the life of a believer that is evidence of the activity of God in their life. Faith that is internalized by students will produce a fruitful and transformed life. Jesus said in John 15:1-5, 16:

⁴¹ Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*. v.

⁴² Willard. *The Spirit of Disciplines*. 158.

⁴³ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 36.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. . . . You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.⁴⁴

There is a natural progression from no fruit, to fruit, to much fruit, to fruit that will last.⁴⁵

When students develop an authentic faith, one that has proper knowledge, focused on Christ, and submits to His will it will produce “fruit that will last.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John 15:1-5; 16 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ St. Clair and et al., *The Magnet Effect*, 24.

⁴⁶ John 15:16 (NIV)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The reasons for disengagement are many and varied; however, the student pastors surveyed have identified effective strategies for retaining youth group students in the local church after high school graduation. With an understanding that the top reasons for disengagement can be categorized into three major groupings, it becomes obvious that a comprehensive strategy for retaining young adults must address all three categories. If student pastors are going to be successful in retaining those who graduate from their ministry, they must give attention to life change and circumstances, relational issues, as well as theological concerns. Doug Fields writes, “Before you can find appropriate resources to help your students develop spiritual habits, you must first identify the habits you want your graduates to carry with them.”¹ Fields is suggesting that student pastors give consideration to the spiritual disciplines that a graduate can take with them beyond their years in the youth ministry. There are two questions that a student pastor can ask in helping them develop their strategy for retention. The first question to ask is, “What personal disciplines are essential in developing a lifelong spiritual walk?” The second question asks, “What resources can a student pastor provide to encourage those personal disciplines?” Fields has identified six spiritual disciplines using the acrostic H.A.B.I.T.S.; these include: hang time with God, accountability with another believer, Bible memorization, involvement with the church body, tithing commitment, and study scripture.² These six disciplines have been adapted in consideration of the three major categories of reasons for disengagement. As a result, the following six best practices have been recognized as superior

¹ Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 159.

² *Ibid.*, 160.

methods for retaining young adults and collectively provide a comprehensive strategy for student pastors. These six best practices are organized using the acrostic H.A.B.I.T.S.

Hanging Out with God

The main idea in developing spiritual disciplines is transformation of the person into Christ-likeness. This is accomplished when old destructive habits are replaced with new life-giving habits.¹ Developing a consistent time with God through reading the Bible and personal prayer is an important part of developing a lifelong walk with Christ. Students who have developed this discipline prior to high school graduation have begun to personalize their faith. Their spiritual growth is not dependent upon the programs of the student ministry. Instead, students are experiencing on their own time and at their own pace the transforming power of God's word and prayer. When life changes or circumstances occur within their life as a young adult, they have already developed the habit of spending daily time with God in His word and through prayer. Their commitment to consistently spend time with God does not become interrupted when they experience life changes. Instead, the time spent reading the Bible and in prayer can easily become a source of strength when facing life changes or circumstances. It is during life changing moments that students can discover the power of prayer. In contrast, students who have not developed this discipline are not seeking wisdom for life changes or circumstances through prayer.

Scripture makes it clear that time in God's word is beneficial for the believer. Psalm 119:11 declares, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."² This

¹ Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*, 62.

² Psalm 119:11 (NKJV)

passage suggests that hiding God's word within the heart is more than memorized words, but a personal decision to allow God's word to impact character and actions. Psalm 119:9 asks, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."³ Personal time within God's word is essential to the Christian walk. It is the Christian's source for truth and instruction for daily living.

Not only does time in God's word strengthen the believer, but prayer is also an important discipline of the believer's daily walk. There is a close connection between reading God's word and prayer. Spending time in God's word begins to transform the mind, while spending time in prayer begins to transform the life. Furthermore, God's word is the voice of God that speaks to the hearts of His people. Foster writes, "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives."⁴

Throughout Scripture those who walked with God have understood that prayer is an essential discipline. King David understood the importance of personal time with God as he asked God to search his heart (cf. Psalm 139). David also declared, "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You."⁵ Scripture demonstrates Jesus' need for daily time alone with His Father in prayer. Mark describes Jesus' prayer time, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."⁶ Prayer was a consistent part of Jesus' ministry on earth. Luke writes in reference to Jesus, "So He Himself

³ Psalm 119:9 (NKJV)

⁴ Foster. *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

⁵ Psalm 63:1 (NKJV)

⁶ Mark 1:35 (NKJV)

often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed”⁷ The disciples understood the necessity of prayer as Jesus modeled it when they asked Him to teach them to pray (cf. Luke 11:1).

Throughout Christian history the discipline of prayer has been essential to a healthy walk with Christ. Reformer Martin Luther declared, “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”⁸ Great Awakening leader John Wesley held a deep conviction that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”⁹

Prayer is a learned discipline. The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”¹⁰ Jesus’ teaching on prayer was aligned with a modeled prayer life the disciples had observed. The believer who spends time in God’s word and in prayer will be better equipped to handle life changes or circumstances, relational challenges, and religious, ethical, or political questions. In fact, it is the role of student pastors to equip students in such a way that they are grounded in God’s word and prayer. The world will challenge their faith and is plotting against them with false doctrine (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16). Student pastors are to be an example in their conduct for students to observe. When proper teaching and lifestyle are matched in the life of a student pastor, the students will have a model when their faith is challenged by “various and strange doctrines” (cf. Hebrews 13:7-9).¹¹ The student pastor is much like Eli who taught a young Samuel how to listen to God and know the word of the Lord (cf. 1 Samuel 3:1-18).

The development of this spiritual habit is largely dependent upon the student and their personal initiative. The teaching, modeling, and resourcing are largely dependent upon the

⁷ Luke 5:16 (NKJV)

⁸ Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰ Luke 11:1 (NKJV)

¹¹ Hebrews 13:9 (NKJV)

student pastor. There are two essential ingredients that have already been identified in developing this spiritual habit. The first is meditation upon God's word and the second is prayer. The two of these ingredients work together as the Christian communicates with God and develops the ability to know the voice of God and obey His word. Resourcing students to develop the discipline of daily time in God's word and prayer can take many forms. Student pastors may wish to provide Bible reading plans, daily devotionals, journals, or other tools to assist students in developing this spiritual habit. Student pastors may also consider resourcing the entire family with both family and personal devotionals. If a student has a family devotional, it is still important for them to begin to develop a personal time in God's word and prayer.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:1-2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.¹²

It is essential in producing lifelong followers of Christ to model, teach, and resource students to develop a communion with God that involves prayer and daily time in His word. This communion will transform the lives of students.

Accountability with Peers and Inter-generational Relationships

Relationships are an essential part of the Christian faith. Christians are to love one another (cf. John 13:34-35), serve one another (cf. Gal. 5:13), teach one another (cf. Rom. 15:14), encourage one another (cf. 1 Thess. 5:11), be subject to one another (cf. Eph. 5:21), confess to one another (cf. Jam. 5:16), forgive one another (cf. Col. 3:13), and the list continues. Living out the Christian faith cannot be accomplished in isolation. Fifty-eight percent of those

¹² Rom. 12:1-2 (NKJV)

who disengaged from the local church provided at least one of the fourteen relational reasons for disengagement.¹³ Romans 12:9-21 describes the environment that young adults are searching for, but are having difficulty finding within churches:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honoring giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.¹⁴

Unfortunately, there is a relational disconnection among high school graduates and the older adults within the church. The number one reason given for disengagement within the category of "church or pastor related issues" is that church members give the perception of being judgmental or even hypocritical (26%).¹⁵ Kara Powell's research indicates that students felt most welcomed and valued when adults within the congregation demonstrated a genuine interest in them. When adults make an attempt to get to know the young people in their own church, they are making a significant impact on making them feel welcome and valued as part of the body of Christ.¹⁶ It is possible that young adults who are experiencing feelings of judgment, feelings of disconnectedness, or feelings of being unwelcome are confusing those feelings with a

¹³ Rudd. "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 11.

¹⁴ Rom. 12:9-21 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Rudd. "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," 14.

¹⁶ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 75.

sense of conviction over sinful behaviors. Young adults who have healthy relationships with more mature followers in the church are able to discern that distinction.

Student pastors must begin to think strategically about developing Christ-honoring relationships within the church. There is great strength in relationships that hold one another accountable. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 declares:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But who to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.¹⁷

Jesus gave both assurance and authority to his disciples concerning accountability; “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”¹⁸ Student pastors must then nurture two healthy types of relationships among those in the church youth group. First, students must develop healthy relationships among their peers. Proverbs 27:17 declares, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”¹⁹ Second, mature adult Christians within the church must invest into younger generations. Titus 2 encourages the older men and women in the church to be godly examples in their lifestyle and also to teach younger generations sound doctrine.

Some claim that youth ministry does not work and they find no room for an age-based ministry to teenagers. In reference to the relational disconnectedness of students, Ed Stetzer states, “People have been beating on youth ministry like a low-hanging piñata on Cinco de Mayo

¹⁷ Eccles. 4:9-12 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Matt. 18:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Prov. 27:17 (NKJV)

for a few years now. I think we've got to ask some hard questions and I think it's okay to ask those hard questions."²⁰ One of those difficult questions must address the role of parental involvement in the spiritual maturation of their children. The parental role is important. However, church youth groups often encounter students whose parents are not Christians and do not attend church. Another difficult question must address what inter-generational ministry is and is not. For example, inter-generational ministry is not merely occupying the same room. Nearly 95% of the survey respondents indicated their church has inter-generational worship services, yet those churches still experienced the challenge of disengagement among young adults.²¹

Student pastors can help develop healthy accountability partnerships among peers by encouraging students to develop prayer partners. Doug Fields describes this type of accountable relationship, "We coach all of our committed students to find one Christian friend on their campus with whom they can pray and develop an accountable relationship. We don't ask them to pray in the middle of the campus or to stand on lunch tables to draw attention to their spirituality; we do ask them to meet somewhere at school and pray together."²² In addition to an accountability partner, student pastors can develop small groups that create an environment where students have the freedom to share their struggles and prayer requests.²³ There are numerous resources that offer suggestions for how to organize small groups. It is mission critical for student pastors to create opportunities for peer relationships that encourage their faith and

²⁰ Audrey Barrick, "Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church," *The Christian Post* (August 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-reasons-why-young-adults-quit-church-28813/> (accessed January 18, 2014).

²¹ See Appendix C, Student Attendance in Worship Services with Adults.

²² Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 168.

²³ *Ibid.*, 142.

challenge them to discuss biblical principles and how those principles are relevant to their daily living. In other words, the goal is not to simply create opportunities for peer relationships, but to create healthy relationships that are built upon discussion and application of biblical truths and a level of accountability in living it out.

In addition to peer relationships, inter-generational relationships are also essential. An inter-generational student ministry is not only focused on creating peer relationships, but creating opportunities for older maturing Christians to invest into the lives of a younger generation. This group of adults is not limited to parents, but certainly includes parental involvement. The role of the adults is not to chaperone. The term “chaperone” implies their role is simply to observe and to ensure that students are behaving properly. Instead, adult leaders are intentional about living and teaching God’s word to a younger generation. Paul describes these adults, “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.”²⁴ These adults are to both teach and model the Christian faith to younger generations. Scripture makes it clear that the responsibility of investing into adolescents is not solely the responsibility of parents, but parents must be accompanied by a host of adults who are living and teaching God’s word. Chap Clark suggests that youth pastors “reverse the youth ministry ratio.” Instead of one adult per five students, each student has five adults who are investing in their life.²⁵ Clark is not suggesting that each student should have five adult small group leaders. However, a student in the youth group should be able to identify five adults in the church who are investing into their life. Kara Powell writes, “According to one study, teens who had five or more adults from the church

²⁴ Titus 2:1-3 (NKJV)

²⁵ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 79.

invested in them during the ages of 15 to 18 were less likely to leave the church after high school.”²⁶ Student pastors must give consideration to creating opportunities for adults and students to interact. Adults who are willing to participate in an event designed for teenagers will demonstrate to young people a genuine interest. These adults should know students by name, know some details about their lives, be willing to enter teenage environments, and live out the gospel with them. These adults not only desire to share the gospel, but to invest their life into the lives of others (cf. 1 Thess. 2:8). This type of investment is greater than teaching a lesson plan, chaperoning an event, or occupying the same room. Those things may be important, but their effectiveness will have a direct correlation to the depth of their relationship with the students. Inter-generational student ministry requires an intentional plan for cultivating multi-generational relationships that can be measured when every student can identify at least five adults in the church who are investing in their life. Producing lifelong followers of Christ will involve accountability relationships. Student pastors must cultivate peer and inter-generational relationships that emphasize discussion and application of biblical truths if they intend to reduce the number of young adults who disengage for relational reasons.

Bible Study

Faith requires some knowledge. Producing a lifelong faith in the lives of students will require them to develop the spiritual habit of studying the Bible. Jesus made it abundantly clear that knowledge of truth will set a person free from the bondage of sin (cf. John 8:31-36). Bible study is distinctly different from devotional reading and prayer as outlined earlier. While both produce a transformed life by the renewing of the mind (cf. Rom. 12:2), devotional reading is

²⁶ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 79.

more meditative with emphasis on application and Bible study is more analytical with an emphasis on interpretation.²⁷ Students who develop the spiritual habit of Bible study are developing a biblical worldview that will enable them to discern truth. Foster identifies four steps in Bible study: repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection.²⁸ Scientists have confirmed that repetition of a particular truth produces modified behavior that conforms to the repeated truth.²⁹ Concentration is the ability to remove all distractions and focus upon the subject matter. However, it is not enough to repeat and concentrate upon a particular truth, it is important to understand the truth. This is comprehension. Finally, reflection allows the student to consider the significance of the truth in light of their own life.³⁰ Student pastors must give consideration to three major aspects of Bible study to reduce the amount of young adults who disengage for religious, ethical, or political reasons.

First, student pastors must consider the content of their curriculum. Students have a limited number of years within the youth group and the content covered during those years can lay the foundation for their entire spiritual walk. Developing a comprehensive curriculum will involve identifying what biblical truths, principles, and spiritual disciplines should be understood and developed before students graduate from high school. The content may include such things as the deity of Christ, salvation by grace, salvation through Christ alone, the resurrection of Christ, and so forth. The purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive list of essential doctrines of the Christian faith, rather to suggest that student pastors must consider how they unpack the Bible in such a manner that students are exposed to the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

²⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

Student pastors must also consider the scope and sequence of their curriculum. It is important to give consideration to the learning objectives and when they will be taught. Student pastors may want to spend the freshman year of high school introducing students to the life and ministry of Jesus and developing spiritual habits. This may involve spending the entire year going through Gospels and the epistles. The sophomore year may focus upon developing authentic faith and expose students to a survey of the Law and the Prophets and an in depth look study through the book of Hebrews. The junior year may focus on missional living and take students through the book of Acts as well as Nehemiah. The senior year may encourage students to discover what a lifelong committed follower looks like and examine various people of the Bible and their enduring faith. The scope and sequence encourages student pastors to not only consider what will be taught, but when it will be taught.

Finally, student pastors must consider the pacing. Pacing is the amount of time given to particular subjects and gives consideration to repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. For example, student pastors cannot teach on the subject of developing spiritual disciplines during the freshman year and never mention it again. There must be repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection on each subject matter. While an in depth study through the book of Hebrews will expose students to a deeper understanding of faith, the principles of faith will be discovered repeatedly. Pacing ensures that students comprehend the biblical truths and discovering their significance through personal reflection.

Resourcing students for Bible study should be done in both group settings as well as individual studies. Paul encouraged Timothy to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”³¹ Carefully resourcing students for Bible study has the greatest potential for developing a biblical worldview.

³¹ 2 Tim. 2:15 (NKJV)

A worldview is the lens that influences how the world is perceived.³² When the world is viewed through the lens of the Bible, it impacts personal views of relationships, culture, government, science, education, religion, and every other arena of life. For the Christian, interaction with each of these arenas should bring glory and honor to Christ. When students who were once active in a youth group disengage from the local church for religious, ethical, or political reasons there has been a breakdown in the development of a biblical worldview. For this reason, student pastors must give great consideration to Bible study curriculum that considers content, scope and sequence, and pacing. They must also consider resourcing students in both group and personal Bible study. Implementing a Bible study strategy that produces a biblical worldview will reduce the number of young adults who disengage for religious, ethical, or political reasons.

Involvement in the Church Body through both Ministry and Missions

Student pastors should strive to ensure the student ministry is closely aligned with the church's overall mission. When the student ministry reflects the vision of the whole church, it is easier for students to see how they fit into the larger congregation. If the student ministry resembles nothing of the rest of the church, then students will have difficulty transitioning after graduation. One of the ways this is accomplished is through involving students in the church's ministries and missions. Twenty-five of the student pastors surveyed emphasized the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry. Their philosophy was largely built around Ephesians 4. Twenty-six of the student pastors surveyed emphasized the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:16-20), the Great Commandment (cf. Matt.

³² Israel Wayne. "What is a Christian Worldview?" *Christian Worldview*. <http://www.christianworldview.net/> (accessed March 7, 2014).

22:36-40), or the New Commandment (cf. John 13:34-35).³³ Reducing the number of young adults who disengage from the local church will require a philosophy that embraces both.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”³⁴ This passage makes it clear that the role of church leaders is to equip the believers within the church to do the work of ministry. Student pastors are to equip students for the work of ministry. This is accomplished when students discover their spiritual gifts and begin to serve the needs of others through the church.

Spiritual gifts within the body of Christ are not for personal gain, but are for the benefit of others. When students are using their spiritual gifts, it produces health within the church. The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of using each person’s spiritual gifts in Romans 12:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.³⁵

1 Corinthians 12 continues to demonstrate the necessary and many diverse parts of the body of Christ. While students are young, those who are professing believers in Christ have a role within the body of Christ. Each part is needed and necessary. In fact Paul declares, “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’”; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those

³³ See Appendix C, Emphases of Student Ministry Philosophy.

³⁴ Eph. 4:11-12 (NKJV)

³⁵ Rom. 12:3-8 (NKJV)

members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.”³⁶ There are numerous benefits to involving students in the ministry and mission of the church. First, students have a biblical responsibility to contribute to the body of Christ. When students discover their gifts and abilities, they need to be able to use those gifts to build up the rest of the church. It would be unbiblical to not allow students who are professing believers to serve somewhere in the church. It may not be wise to ask them to drive church bus, but there is some area of ministry in which every professing believer can serve. Next, students develop a sense of ownership as well as partnership with the rest of the church. Students understand that as believers, they are not consumers of the church’s services. Instead, they are stakeholders in the sense that they have a vested interest in the success of the church’s ministry and mission. Third, students discover the importance of putting the needs of others ahead of their own. Paul declares, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”³⁷ Serving in some capacity within the church encourages students to develop a Christ-like attitude toward others.

Student pastors not only equip students for the work of ministry, they equip them for a very specific mission to make disciples. While their role within the disciple making process may differ from one another, the entire body is working together with a common purpose of making disciples. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the

³⁶ 1 Cor. 12:20-22 (NKJV)

³⁷ Phil. 2:3-4 (NKJV)

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.”³⁸

Students who are involved in the church body through ministry and missions have an increased sense of belonging and purpose within the church. When students move away for college, student pastors can continue to encourage involvement through ministry and missions by assisting students in finding a local church or campus ministry within their first month at college. The habits developed by students within the first few weeks of attending college are likely to set the trend for their entire college career.

Student pastors must consider resourcing students for ministry and missions by continually expanding the opportunities for students to serve. Student pastors can look within the student ministry for opportunities to serve, but can also consider where students can serve within other ministries in the church such as the children or worship ministries. It is not enough to merely assign a task to a student. The role of the student pastor is to equip students for the work of ministry. This includes helping students discover their spiritual gifts, identify a place to serve, train them for their ministry, provide them with resources for success, and hold them accountable for their commitment.

Involvement in the church body through ministry and missions addresses all three categories of disengagement. Students who are involved through serving have discovered the challenges of priorities, busy schedules, and challenging situations. Their commitment to a particular area of serving prepares them for life changes and situations. Students who are serving within the church are building relationships with others in the church. Student leaders are not only taking responsibility for their own spiritual growth, but are considering how their serving

³⁸ Matt. 28:19-20 (NKJV)

can assist in the spiritual growth of others. Finally, students who are serving are developing a biblical worldview that focuses on the needs of others.

Tithing Commitment/Stewardship

Stewardship is more than managing finances, although it certainly includes finances. Stewardship is in part acknowledging God's rightful ownership of all things. "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein."³⁹ God is not merely concerned with 10% of an income, but desires for the entire 100% to bring honor to Him. Christian stewardship is managing all things for the glory of God. The development of this discipline is similar to that of involvement in ministry and missions. Peter writes, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."⁴⁰ In the same way that God has entrusted spiritual gifts, He desires for His followers to be good stewards in all areas of life. The apostle Paul emphasizes this truth, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men."⁴¹ Paul makes clear that stewardship is not only the actions of the believer, but his own body as well. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."⁴² The emphasis of stewardship is that God is the rightful owner and that believers are to manage what belongs to Him in such a way that it brings glory to God.

³⁹ Psalm 41:1 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ 1 Pet. 4:10 (NKJV)

⁴¹ Col. 3:23 (NKJV)

⁴² 1 Cor. 6:19-20 (NKJV)

Student pastors must resource students with tools that will educate and encourage stewardship. One area of stewardship has already been addressed through encouraging student involvement in the church body through ministry and missions. Another obvious area is to encourage students to begin to develop the discipline of financial giving. Getting students excited about developing the habit of financial giving can be extremely difficult. Doug Fields suggests resourcing students with audio lessons on stewardship, giving envelopes, and a container to collect money for an offering.⁴³ Incorporating lessons on stewardship within a small group setting where students can discuss other ways to develop the discipline of stewardship would be beneficial. Ultimately stewardship is an act of worship. It is managing all areas of life in a manner that brings glory to Christ.

The development of the discipline of stewardship flows from a maturing biblical worldview. When the believer begins to understand that all things belong to God it will impact how they view relationships, school, finances, and every other area of life. If the number of young adults who disengage from church for religious, ethical, or political reasons is going to be reduced, they must develop a biblical understanding of stewardship. Young adults who disengaged because they became too busy because of the demands of school, work, or even family have failed to develop a biblical understanding of stewardship. The development of the discipline of stewardship impacts all three categories of reasons for disengagement.

Scripture Memorization

The final spiritual habit is the discipline of Scripture memorization. Dallas Willard, wrote, “Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose

⁴³ Fields. *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, 170.

between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth?

Memorization.”⁴⁴

There are many benefits to the Christian for memorizing Scripture. Chuck Swindoll identified several benefits when he wrote, “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture.”⁴⁵ He continues, “No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.”⁴⁶ Willard and Swindoll's quotes help identify two fundamental benefits of Scripture memorization. First, memorizing Scripture leads to a transformed life. Scripture can help the believer resist temptations, make better decisions, and provide strength and comfort to the believer. This is especially important in preventing young adults from disengagement. For the believer to become more like Christ, they must spend time looking at Christ. The apostle Paul wrote, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” James emphasizes the importance of closely examining Christ through God's word and then remembering that image:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

⁴⁴ Dallas Willard. “Spiritual Formation in Christ for the Whole Life and Whole Person,” *Vocatio*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2001, 7.

⁴⁵ Chuck Swindoll. *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 61

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”⁴⁷

Memorizing Scripture is a tool for helping the believer remember what they have seen and heard in Christ and then living it out. The second fundamental benefit of memorizing Scripture is that it strengthens all other spiritual disciplines. Christians cannot be “hearers only” and merely read God’s word.⁴⁸ Devotional reading and Bible study are beneficial to the believer, but without the ability to recall and apply what has been read the believer has stopped short of life transformation. Scripture memorization helps the believer internalize and live out the time spent in God’s word. Time in God’s word helps the believer understand the importance of accountability within the life of a believer. Memorization helps transform the mind of the believer to the mind of Christ and consider the needs of others ahead of their own. God’s word is central to all other spiritual disciplines.

Student pastors must understand that resourcing students for Scripture memorization will enhance all other spiritual disciplines. One of the ways to accomplish this is for the student pastors to identify what Scripture passages are to be memorized. With the understanding that developing these six spiritual habits will reduce disengagement among youth group graduates, passages that encourage these disciplines would prove beneficial. Therefore, the student pastor should select passages that encourage reading God’s word, prayer, accountability, Bible study, ministry and missions, as well as stewardship.

Developing the discipline of Scripture memorization will prepare students for handling life changes and circumstances. Students will have the benefit of God’s word in navigating the challenges that life presents. The Holy Spirit will help the believer recall God’s word for the

⁴⁷ James 1:22-25 (NKJV)

⁴⁸ James 1:22 (NKJV)

appropriate circumstance. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”⁴⁹ The discipline of Scripture memorization will also prepare the students for healthy relationships. Students will have a proper understanding of how they are to relate with others in the church. Scripture memorization will encourage them to have the mind of Christ in all of their relationships. Finally, memorizing God’s word will produce a biblical worldview that will assist the believer in a better understanding of faith and the world in which they live.

Developing these six spiritual habits within the life of each student in a church youth group has the potential for producing lifelong followers of Christ. Hanging out with God through time in His word and prayer, accountability with peers and through inter-generational relationships, Bible study, involvement in ministry and missions, tithing/stewardship, and Scripture memorization provide the framework for reducing the number of students who disengage from the local church. These six habits address all three categories of reasons given for disengagement. Student pastors who develop a strategy for engaging students in spiritual habits will produce lasting fruit (cf. John 15:16). Doug Fields wrote, “Why does a spiritual life fall apart when the safety of the youth group is gone? I’m sure there are several answers to that question, but the most apparent answer is that most of these students who graduate from their faith didn’t learn how to grow on their own during their teenage years.”⁵⁰ Students who develop these six spiritual habits before they graduate high school, will not graduate from their faith.

⁴⁹ John 14:26 (NKJV)

⁵⁰ Doug Fields. *Help! I’m a Student Leader: Practical Ideas and Guidance on Leadership*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009) 52.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

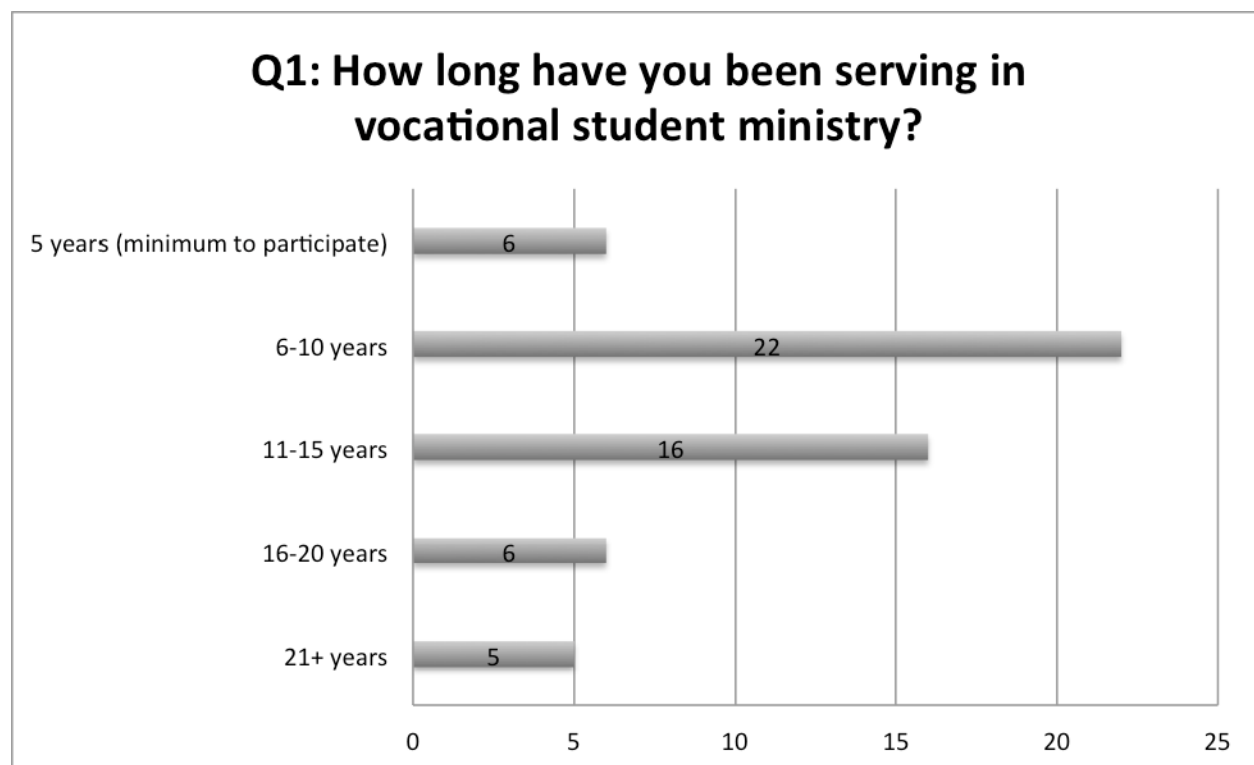
1. How long have you been serving in vocational student ministry?
 - a. 5 years (minimum to participate in survey)
 - b. 6-10 years
 - c. 11-15 years
 - d. 16-20 years
 - e. 21+ years
2. On average, how many high school students graduate from your student ministry each year?
 - a. 1-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21+
3. On average, how many of those graduates remain active in a local church post-high school?
How do you know?
 - a. 1-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21+
4. Does your student ministry have a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation? If yes, please describe.
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
5. Do the students in your student ministry attend worship services with adults on Sunday mornings? Please describe.
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
6. What is your process for developing a student's spiritual life?
7. Does your process for developing a student's spiritual life consider life stages? Explain.
8. Please describe your student ministry philosophy.
9. How does curriculum play a role in the development of a student's spiritual life?
10. What are the greatest factors in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school?

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH SUMMARIES

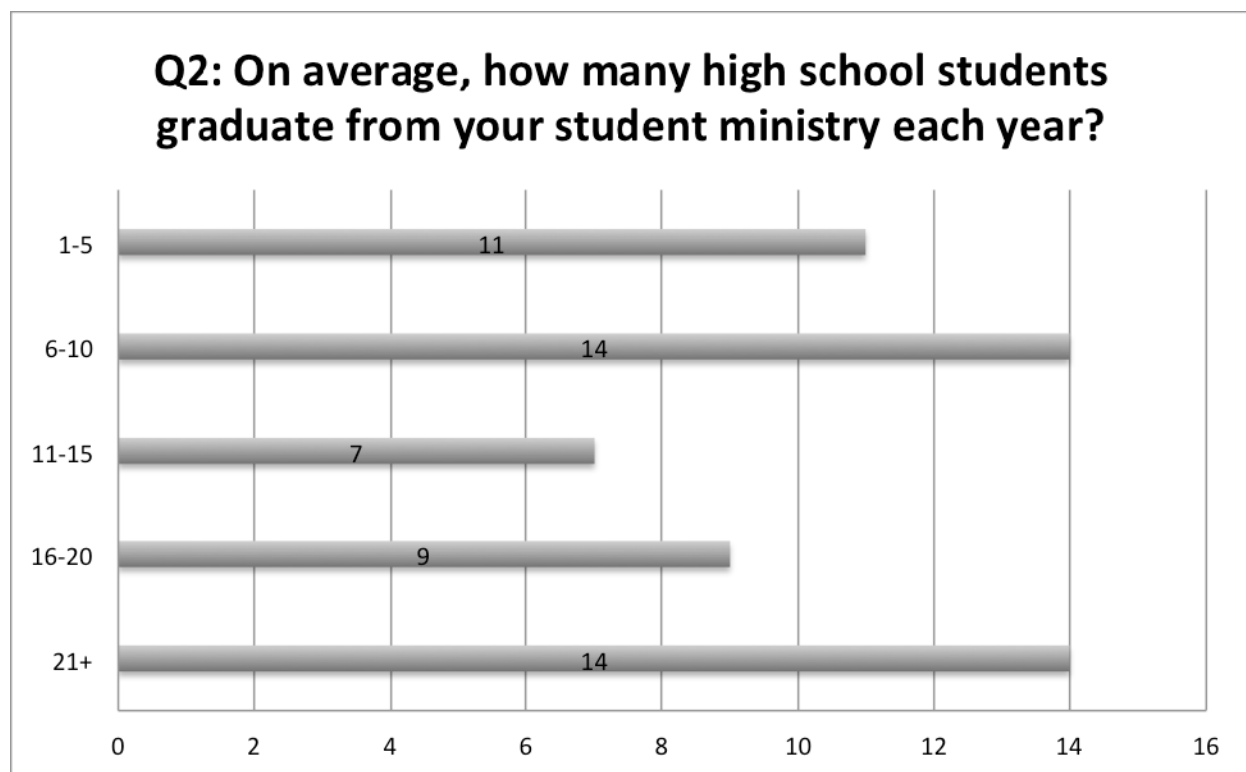
Q1: How long have you been serving in vocational student ministry?

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
5 years (minimum to participate in survey)	6	10.91%
6-10 years	22	40%
11-15 years	16	29.09%
16-20 years	6	10.91%
21+ years	5	9.09%
Total:	55	100%



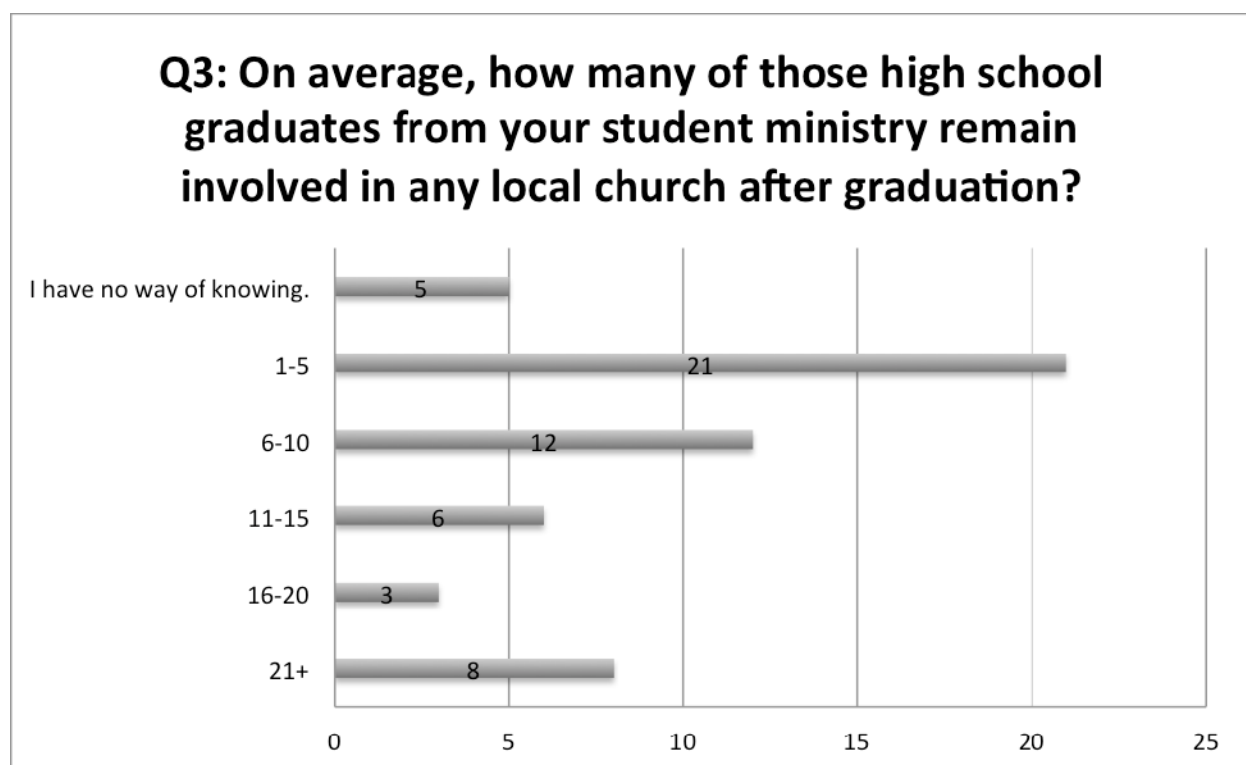
Q2: On average, how many high school students graduate from your student ministry each year?

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
1-5	11	20%
6-10	14	25.45%
11-15	7	12.73%
16-20	9	16.36%
21+	14	25.45%
Total:	55	100%



Q3: On average, how many of those high school student graduates from your student ministry remain involved in any local church after graduation?

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
I have no way of knowing.	5	9.09%
1-5	21	38.18%
6-10	12	21.82%
11-15	6	10.91%
16-20	3	5.45%
21+	8	14.55%
Total:	55	100%



Answer Comparisons between Q2 & Q3	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
I have no way of knowing.	5	9.09%
Reduction in their answer between Q2 & Q3	29	52.73%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (1-5 graduates)	10	18.18%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (21+ graduates)*	8	14.55%
No reduction between Q2 & Q3 (6-10 graduates)	3	5.45%
*Some with 21+ graduates indicated they still experienced a reduction even though current participants are greater than 21.		
Total:	55	100%

Categorical Analysis of Comments	Number of Responses
Our College Ministry follows up with them.	10
They currently attend or serve in our church.	10
They are tracked through church database.	3
Youth Pastor makes personal contact (no method given)	23
Youth Pastor makes personal contact when they are home during breaks.	3
Youth Pastor stays in touch through social media.	8
Youth Pastor stays in touch through their parents.	7
Youth Pastor helps to connect them to a local church/campus ministry in their college town.	8
Church members stay in touch through letters, care packages, etc.	3

Q4: Does your student ministry have a strategy, process, or plan for high school graduates to remain involved in a local church after graduation?

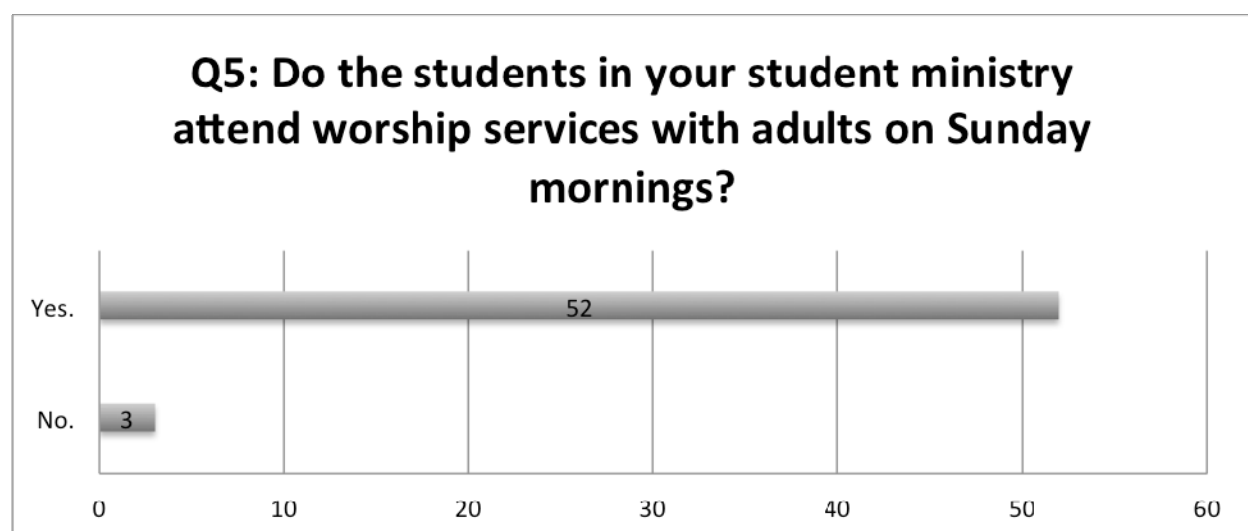
Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Yes.	34	60.78%
No.	21	39.22%
Total:	55	100%



Major emphases of their strategy, process, or plan for retaining high school graduates.	Number of Responses
Emphasize College Ministry and Student Ministry partnership.	14
Emphasize serving in the church.	15
Emphasize church members building relationships.	8
Emphasize proper discipleship (including personal spiritual growth)	7
Emphasize graduates finding a local church/campus ministry in college town.	8
Emphasize parental involvement.	1

Q5: Do the students in your student ministry attend worship services with adults on Sunday mornings?

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Yes.	52	94.55%
No.	3	5.45%
Total:	55	100%



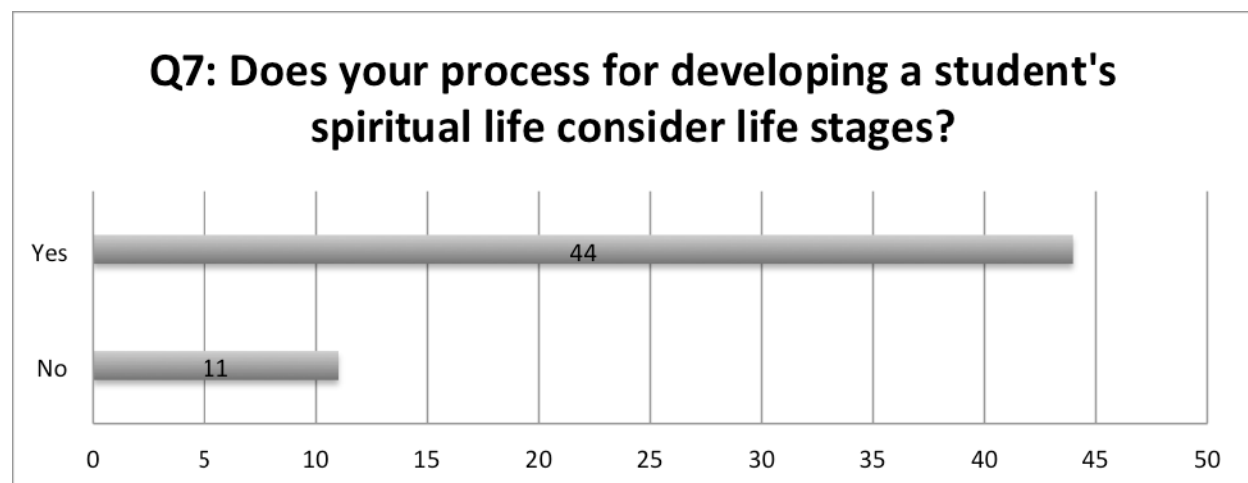
Categorical Analysis of Comments	Number of Responses
All weekend worship services are inter-generational.	38
Students have the option of attending a student weekend worship service in addition to worshipping with parents/adults.	7
Students and parents/adults worship in different services.	3

Q6: What is your process for developing a student's spiritual life?

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Small Groups	28
Educational component (discipleship, teaching, preaching, etc.)	24
Inter-generational component (adult small group leaders, mentors, prayer partners, etc.)	19
Personal spiritual disciplines (quiet time, personal Bible study, prayer, Scripture memory, tithing/giving)	12
Missions component (mission trips, evangelism training, missional, multiplication)	11
Serving component (discovering spiritual gifts, leadership development, serving on ministry teams)	10
Peer relationships (fellowships, events, retreats)	8
Parental involvement	6
Accountability component (peers or adults)	5
Worship component (Gospel-centered, Christ-focused)	5
Transitional component (elementary to middle to high to college/career)	1

Q7: Does your process for developing a student's spiritual life consider life stages?

Answer Choices	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Yes.	44	80%
No.	11	20%
Total:	55	100%



Categorical Analysis of Comments	Number of Responses
Process emphasizes a comprehensive consideration of life stages from childhood into adulthood (elementary, middle, high, college/career, adulthood) and cooperation between ministries.	4
Process emphasizes life stages and age appropriate teaching within middle and high only (considers cognitive development, emotional development, sociological development, etc.).	22
Process emphasizes transition into youth group and life stages within middle and high school. Cooperation and coordination with children's ministry.	1
Process emphasizes transition into college/career and still considers life stages within middle and high school as well.	2
Total:	29

Q8: Please describe your student ministry philosophy.

Major emphases of student ministry philosophy.	Number of Responses
Emphasizes the importance of equipping and empowering students, parents, and leaders for the work of ministry (Eph. 4).	25
Emphasizes Great Commission, Matt. 28:16-20 (making disciples, multiplication, missions, teaching), Great Commandment, Matt. 22:36-40 (love God, love others), and/or New Commandment, John 13:34-35 (love one another, relational ministry).	26
Emphasizes the importance of alignment with church's overall philosophy.	3

Q9: How does curriculum play a role in the development of a student's spiritual life?

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Very Strategic: The youth pastor developed curriculum that considered content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.), scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcome), and pacing (the amount of time given to particular concepts, principles, etc.).	6
Strategic: The youth pastor writes or purchases curriculum that is focused primarily on content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.), but has also given some thought to scope and sequence (learning objectives and when they will be taught), goals (desired outcome), or pacing (the amount of time given to particular concepts, principles, etc.).	7
Somewhat Strategic: The youth pastor writes or purchases curriculum that is focused primarily on content (doctrine, life application, theology, etc.).	24
No Clear Curriculum Strategy: The youth pastor is unclear of the purpose of curriculum.	11

Q10: What are the greatest factors in retaining active young adults in the local church post-high school?

Categorical Analysis of Answers	Number of Responses
Relationship with others in the church (small group leaders, college pastor, caring adults, etc.).	23
Equipping them and helping them discover their role within the body and serving (spiritual gifts, investing in others, sense of purpose/belonging, needed and valued in their ministry role).	19
Taking ownership of their faith (developing personal disciplines that are not dependent upon a program).	10
Healthy discipleship that gives them the proper knowledge of the Christian faith and an environment to ask challenging questions.	5
Parental involvement.	3
Connecting young adults to a local church or campus ministry in their college town.	2
Alignment of the student ministry with the church's overall mission.	1

APPENDIX C

SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION LIST

Hanging Out with God (Quiet Time/Prayer):

1. 1 Kings 19:11-12, "Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."
2. 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."
3. Psalm 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, not stands in the path of sinners, not sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."
4. Psalm 34:17, "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles."
5. Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"
6. Psalm 119:9, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."
7. Psalm 139:1-2, "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off."
8. Psalm 139:7-8, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there."
9. Psalm 139: 23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
10. Jeremiah 33:3, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."
11. Matthew 6:6, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."
12. Matthew 6:7, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think they will be heard for their many words."
13. Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."
14. Mark 1:35, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."
15. Luke 11:9, "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."
16. Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."
17. Colossians 4:2, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."
18. 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."
19. James 4:8a, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

20. Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Accountability:

1. Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
2. Proverbs 16:28, “A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.”
3. Proverbs 18:24, “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”
4. Proverbs 27:6, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”
5. Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”
6. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.”
7. Matthew 7:12, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”
8. Matthew 18:15-17, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”
9. Galatians 6:1-2, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
10. Ephesians 4:25, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.”
11. Ephesians 4:26-27, “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”
12. Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”
13. Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”
14. Philippians 2:3-4, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
15. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”
16. Hebrews 10:25, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”
17. Hebrews 12:14-15, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”
18. James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

19. James 5:19-20, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.
20. 1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

Bible Study:

1. Deuteronomy 11:18-19, "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."
2. Joshua 1:8, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."
3. Psalm 119:11, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."
4. Psalm 119: 18, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law."
5. Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path."
6. Proverbs 3:1-2, "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you."
7. Matthew 4:4, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"
8. Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."
9. John 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."
10. John 8:32, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
11. Acts 8:30, "So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'"
12. Acts 17:10-11, "Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."
13. Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."
14. Ephesians 6:17, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."
15. 2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
16. 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
17. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "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."

18. Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."
19. James 1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."
20. Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near."

Involvement in Ministry and Missions:

1. Psalm 96:3, "Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples."
2. Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."
3. Matthew 9:37-38, "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"
4. Matthew 28:19-20, "'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.' Amen."
5. Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
6. Mark 16:15, "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'"
7. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
8. John 9:25, "He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.'"
9. John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"
10. Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
11. Acts 13:47, "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"
12. Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
13. Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
14. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
15. Romans 10:9, "that if you confess with you mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
16. Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"
17. 1 Corinthians 9:22, "to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might be all means save some."
18. Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

19. 2 Timothy 1:7-8, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.”
20. 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Tithing Commitment/Stewardship

1. Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”
2. Proverbs 16:3, “Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.”
3. Matthew 6:19-20, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”
4. Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
5. Matthew 25:40, “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”
6. Mark 4:19, “and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”
7. Mark 12:30, “‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,’ This is the first commandment.”
8. Luke 12:48b, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”
9. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”
10. 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
11. 2 Corinthians 9:7, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”
12. Ephesians 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
13. Philippians 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
14. Colossians 3:23, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”
15. Colossians 4:5-6, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”
16. 1 Timothy 6:7, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”
17. 1 Timothy 6:9, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

18. 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."
19. James 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."
20. 1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atkinson, Gordon. "Parting Shots: When Church Members Leave." *The Christian Century* (September 2009). <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2009-09/parting-shots> (accesses January 18, 2014).
- Barna, George. *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001.
- Barrick, Audrey. "Survey: Reasons Why Young Adults Quit Church," *The Christian Post* (August 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-reasons-why-young-adults-quit-church-28813/> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Bounds, E. M. *Power through Prayer*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1979.
- Christie, Les. *When Church Kids Go Bad: How to Love and Work with Rude, Obnoxious, and Apathetic Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2008.
- Clark, Chap. *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Clark, Chap and Kara E. Powell. *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World: Not-So-Secret Findings about Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2006.
- Dean, Kenda C. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dean, Kenda C. and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2005.
- DeVries, Mark. *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do about It*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Dudley, Roger L. "Indicators of Commitment to the Church: A Longitudinal Study of Church-Affiliated Youth," *Adolescence Magazine*. Vol. 28, No. 109. <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-13885818/indicators-of-commitment-to-the-church-a-longitudinal> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- _____. "Youth Religious Commitment Over Time: A Longitudinal Study of Retention," *Review of Religious Research*. Vol. 41. No. 1. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3512430?uid=3739776&uid=2129&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21103291956577> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Dudley, Roger L. and Randall L. Wisbey, "The Relationship of Parenting Styles to Commitment to the Church Among Young Adults," *Religious Education*. Vol. 95, Issue 1.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0034408000950105#.UtrOyrROlhE>
(accessed January 18, 2014).

- Duin, Julia. *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing*. Colorado Springs, CO: Bondfire Books LLC, 2013.
- Dunn, Richard R. *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students: A Guide for Youth Workers, Teachers, Pastors, and Campus Ministers*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Dyck, Drew. *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith... and How to Bring Them Back*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010.
- Elmore, Tim. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010.
- Fields, Doug. *Help! I'm a Student Leader!: Practical Ideas and Guidance on Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2005.
- _____. *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: Nine Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1998.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.
- Garvey, John. "Why People Leave the Church: Don't Blame the Zeitgeist," *Commonweal Magazine* (April 2007). <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/why-people-leave-church-0> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Geiger, Eric and Jeff Borton. *Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Green, Matthew. "Why Are So Many Christians Quitting Church?" *Charisma Magazine* (December 2012). <http://www.charismamag.com/spirit/church-ministry/7279-the-church-dropout> (accessed January 14, 2014).
- Ham, Ken, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard. *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*. Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009.
- Joiner, Reggie. *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009.
- Joshua Project, "Great Commission Statistics." <http://www.joshuaproject.net/great-commission-statistics.php> (accessed February 15, 2014).
- Julian, Kent. *101 Ideas for Making Disciples in Your Youth Group*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007.

- Kinnaman, David. "Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts," Barna Research (November 2011). <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts> (accessed January 14, 2014).
- _____. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church, and Rethinking Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.
- Kwon, Lillian. "Young People Leaving Hypocrisy, Not Traditional Church," *The Christian Post* (February 2007). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/young-people-leaving-hypocrisy-not-traditional-church-25912/> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- McConnell, Scott. "LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18-to-22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church," *LifeWay Articles* (August 2007). <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Pew Research, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population." <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/> (accessed February 15, 2014).
- Powell, Kara E., Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford. *Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2011.
- Rainer, Sam. S. III. "Squaring Off with the Church Dropout Rate," *Sermon Central*. <http://www.sermoncentral.com/articleb.asp?article=Sam-Rainer-Squaring-Off-Church-Dropout-Rate&ac=true> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Rainer, Thom S. and Sam S. Rainer III. *Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.
- Robbins, Duffy. *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples: A Small Book About a Big Idea*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2011.
- _____. *The Ministry of Nurture: A Youth Worker's Guide to Discipling Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990.
- Root, Andrew and Kendra C. Dean. *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.
- Roosen, David A. "Church Dropouts: Changing Patterns of Disengagement and Re-Entry," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3510682?uid=3739776&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21103291956577> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Rudd, David. "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church and Why," Slide Share, (August 2007). <http://www.slideshare.net/daverudd/church-dropouts-how-many-leave-church-and-why> (accessed March 6, 2013).

- Ryder, Gina E. "Church Dropouts: Why Are Young People Skipping Out On Church?" *The Christian Post* (October 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-dropouts-why-are-young-people-skipping-out-on-church-57853/> (accessed January 14, 2014).
- St. Clair, Barry, Jim Burns, Paul Fleischmann, and Bo Boshers. *The Magnet Effect: Designing Outreach Events That Draw Kids to Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994.
- Schapiro, Jeff. "Study: Why Young Christians Leave the Church," *The Christian Post* (September 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/study-why-young-christians-leave-the-church-56722/> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Stanley, Andy and Stuart Hall. *The Seven Checkpoints: Seven Principles Every Teenager Needs to Know*. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Co., 2001.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1983.
- Taylor, Barbara B. "Faith Matters: Leaving the Church," *The Christian Century* (June 1999). <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-10/leaving-church> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- U.S. Census Bureau. "Table: S0101 – Age and Sex: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_S0101&prodType=table (accessed January 20, 2014).
- Vu, Michelle A. "Interview: Drew Dyck on Why Young Adults are Leaving Christianity," *The Christian Post* (January 2011). <http://www.christianpost.com/news/interview-drew-dyck-on-why-young-adults-are-leaving-christianity-48414/> (accessed January 18, 2014).
- Wayne, Israel. "What is a Christian Worldview?" *Christian Worldview*. <http://www.christianworldview.net/> (accessed March 7, 2014).
- Willard, Dallas. "Spiritual Formation in Christ for the Whole Life and Whole Person," *Vocatio*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2001.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.
- Worldometers, "Current World Population," <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/> (accessed February 15, 2014).

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 29, 2013

Christopher D. Dortch

IRB Exemption 1705.102913: Best Practices for Retaining Youth Group Students in the Local Church Post-High School

Dear Chris,

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

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY
 UNIVERSITY

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971