

**HOW TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE IN MINISTRY WITH  
THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**  
DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUALIZED INTERGENERATIONAL  
CHURCH THROUGH MILLENNIAL OUTREACH

A professional project submitted to the Theological School  
of Drew University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Ministry

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May 2015

## **DEDICATION**

To my mother who was a great inspiration throughout this process and would have loved to see it come to fruition. Rest in Peace

To my wonderful wife and daughters whose love, support, and encouragement catapulted me to the finish line. When I didn't think I could finish you believed for all of us.

## ABSTRACT

### HOW TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE IN MINISTRY WITH THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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This dissertation examines various aspects of people between 18-34 years of age as they pertain to affiliation and involvement within the local church. The initiative and project that was undertaken in order to help populate this study will be dissected into three different parts: the process, the participants, and the efficacy.

Millennials are increasingly leaving religion and church membership as was known in the modern era. Having entered postmodernity, a broad view of the social, educational, spiritual, and economic conditions of the millennial generation will be explored as to how these various factors have impacted church involvement and affiliation among the generation. As this generation is viewed as a distinct group of people, the church must seek to learn the realities of their cultural context.

This study additionally seeks to establish a theological construct that supports and affirms the identity of those within the millennial generation. Drawing from historical biblical figures and additional parallels within scripture, it will be argued that millennials have the capacity for greater involvement and leadership within the local church while participating in intergenerational ministry.

This study draws on a variety of sources, including books, periodical articles, and first-hand interviews. Further, it seeks to share best practices with local churches involved in young adult outreach.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability and viability of the local church is at stake due to the decreasing affiliation of the millennial generation within the mainline church. Cathy Lynn Grossman affirms, “Young adults today are less church-connected than prior generations were.”<sup>1</sup> The millennial generation is defined as persons between the ages of 18 and 34. The reality of the preceding statement should be heeded by churches of all shapes, sizes, hues, denominations, locations, and ethnicities. Why are young adults running from the religious institutions that have been in existence for generations? What is lacking within vast numbers of churches that is repelling young adults and not attracting them to join? This disturbing trend is the catalyst of this research and project, namely, how can churches engage in effective ministry with young adults?

The question of engaging with the millennial generation is one that crosses denominational lines. Adam J. Copeland, a young Presbyterian pastor in Minnesota, reflects on this topic, “I am pastor to a Presbyterian congregation that is certain of its identity as Presbyterian--but unsure what to make of that identity in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context.”<sup>2</sup> That is the million dollar question: how does the church identify and seek to

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<sup>1</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Young Adults Today are a ‘Less Religious’ Bunch,” *USA Today*, February 17, 2010, final edition.

<sup>2</sup> Adam J. Copeland, “Generational Ties: Bridging the Gaps,” *Christian Century* 127, no. 3 (February 9, 2010): 10.

maintain effectiveness and relevancy in the postmodern era when engaging with the millennial generation?

Within certain limitations, this study seeks to address the above considerations. The particular groups studied in this project are young adults, the majority of whom come from an American Baptist background, while some find themselves outside the circle of Christianity as a whole.

### Scope and Purpose

The purpose of this project is defined as follows:

1. To provide a rationale for understanding the various factors that impact the millennial generation's current living conditions. These factors include social transformations, information sharing technologies, and perceived lack of church affiliation.
2. To present an inclusive theological argument that provides basis from scripture on the inherent value of young adults within the Body of Christ.
3. To assess young adult needs and attitudes toward church affiliation and explore opportunities for local churches to make necessary adjustments and changes.
4. To track the project methods that were implemented throughout the duration of the project and gauge their effectiveness in meeting the aforementioned goal of engaging in effective ministry with the millennial generation.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter one, "Effective vs. Successful," seeks to lessen the anxiety that many church leaders may have when contemplating instituting a new ministry or endeavor. Instead of the focus being on the secular understanding of success, the focus will be on

being effective in reaching and developing relationship with young adults within a given faith community. Additionally, this chapter delves into some of the assumptions that are made about the problem of effective ministry with the millennial generation.

Chapter two seeks to explore the current condition of the millennial generation as it pertains to social standing, financial insecurities, and use and growth in technological advances. This chapter will provide pertinent background material for the local church to understand in order to shape and frame the plan in engaging in this type of focused outreach and ministry.

Following these fundamental chapters, chapter three will explore the plan for this project in engaging in ministry with the designated population. The plan for effectiveness chapter centers on two main items, preaching and practice. Further explained, this chapter will present the rationale for churches to engage in missional preaching that uses a narrative approach and to provide multiple opportunities for service.

The next chapters highlight a number of areas, including: the theological framework from which this project was birthed, the ministry context in which this project took place, and the recollection of the actual project, presenting the various methods and aspects that were put into practice.

The final chapter reflects on the extent to which the presented outcomes have been attained. In addition, this chapter will explore the changes and growth that have taken place both within the local church and within me as it pertains to ministry in the future.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EFFECTIVE VS. SUCCESSFUL: UNDERSTANDING GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

It is very important to stress the difference between being effective and being successful. The idea of successful ministry has muddied the waters of what it is that churches and, more specifically, individual Christians are called to, and that is to be a follower of Christ. Seeking after successful ministry, many churches have forgotten that we must seek to be effective in ministry. The term “effective” is defined as being able to produce an intended goal or result. This definition fuels the self-reflecting questions that local churches must ask themselves: What is the desired result of the ministry in which we are engaged? How are we able to measure our level of effectiveness? Lowell Erdahl says, “If the Christian message means anything, it means that none of us needs to stay as we are.”<sup>1</sup> Effective ministry is one that continually pushes and prods both pastor and congregants to continue to grow in the grace and love of Jesus Christ. We are called to be followers of Christ and to live as His body here in the world. As we strive to engage in effective ministry, we may be called to leave behind some things, ideas, and people who hold us back from moving into the future to which God is calling us. L. Roger Owens, in a column in *Christian Century*, says, “The releasing is hardest for me when the thing that God is inviting me to release has gained an identity, so much so that it’s beginning to function for me as a god.”<sup>2</sup> There are some habits and practices of ministry

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell O. Erdahl, *10 Habits for Effective Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1996), 13.

<sup>2</sup> L. Roger Owens, “Living By the Word,” *Christian Century* 130, no. 17 (August 2013): 21.



that have ceased to be effective long ago, yet we still cling to them because of the fear of letting go and moving into something new. Effectiveness requires an honest view of the current condition and meaningful reflective dialogue in hopes of improvement. Our focus on effectiveness will allow space for innovation, reinstitution, and contextual growth; never solely using numbers as the barometer of perceived progress. “The dangers inherent in the church growth movement are many, and the crucial issue in assessing those dangers is whether we are talking about becoming Christians or about building institutional membership.”<sup>1</sup> These words from Ralph Elliott, although written in 1981, still ring true in 2015. Success is a concept that is best left outside of the church and an ethic of effectiveness should continue to take root.

At the onset of this project it is important that certain assumptions be clarified before moving forward. Cathy Lynn Grossman shares that “...they may be less religious, but not necessarily more secular than the Generation Xers or Baby Boomers who preceded them.”<sup>2</sup> This observation continues to draw into question both the practice and effectiveness of traditional local churches. It is not that young adults do not believe or want a relationship with God and others. Instead, they are yearning for a religion that is more deeply rooted than church attendance, bake sales, and seat assignments. There is not a lack of seeking to answer the great existential questions that humanity has asked for generations; millennials simply are put off by what they have come to view as something that is not essential for spiritual discernment and discovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph H. Elliott, “Dangers of the Church Growth Movement,” *Christian Century* 98, no. 25 (August 1981): 801.

<sup>2</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Young Adults Today are a ‘Less Religious’ Bunch,” *USA Today* (February 17, 2010): 10.

Another assumption that must be clarified is that not all young adults are fleeing the church; the ones that stay are often those that have been raised in disciplined Christian environments and were shielded from much of the outside world. It can come as a surprise to persons from these environments that there are people who do not share their view of God and church. Jim Henderson describes this experience: “One evening after an Outsider Interview clip was finished, a young lady in class blurted out, ‘I can’t believe people think these things about us!’ She genuinely had no idea that most outsiders had low views of the church and religion.”<sup>3</sup> How can churches prove themselves to be a viable entity when approaching the subject of God? What are the methods that can be used to bridge the gap between various generations and the church?

Attempting to draw young adults to church in traditional ways will no doubt end in failure. In order for the local church to effectively engage with the millennial generation, first we must become educated about the concept of generational differences. According to David Roberts, “A generation is defined as individuals of a particular age group who share common experiences, values, communities, and sense of identity, all of which are shaped by major national and/or world events or social trends.”<sup>4</sup> The millennial generation does not and should not be expected to function, act, or process information in the same way that generations previously have because their experiences are not the same. Additionally, they should not be held to standards that have been unrealistically imposed on them from generations who do not fully understand their plight. Second, efforts must be made to learn more about the generation and not to

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Henderson, *The Outsider Interviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 83-84.

<sup>4</sup> David Roberts, “Twelve Tips for Facilitating Millennials’ Learning,” *Medical Teacher* 34, no. 4 (April 2012): 275.

operate on preconceived notions about young adults that have been fueled by popular culture, media, and other entities. What are the obstacles for young adults in 2015?

What things about the world have changed and thus effected the development and maturation of young adults? What are millennials looking for within a faith community and do we have the ability to meet their spiritual and relational needs?

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MILLENNIAL CONDITION

In hopes of understanding this generation as it pertains to ministry and church affiliation, the conversation must investigate with specificity the issues that young adults are currently facing. We must be cognizant of a tendency to be dismissive of the various concerns that young adults have and seek to be inclusive in searching for as many resources as possible to understand the issues. Affirmation of place in life is a great place to begin when discussing millennials and the most effective way to engage them.

Richard Waters claims, “The Millennial generation has emerged as a force that is shaping the social and economic dynamics of the next decade.”<sup>1</sup> What are the factors that are causing this generation to become a social and economic force? This is an important question to raise as we seek to understand the millennial condition. Numerous studies have noted how the millennial generation values balance between work and life. Additionally, there is a high proclivity towards entrepreneurship; young adults are not hesitant in striking out on their own and seeking to take ownership of their careers and outcomes and financial success.

There is reliance upon convenience in the millennial generation and that has shown itself in where many in the generation choose to live. “As millennials continue to come of age and control an increasing share of the economy, understanding how their diversity and values play into their lifestyle and purchasing preferences will be essential

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Waters, “Can We Talk About the Direction of this Church?”, *Journal of Media and Religion* 11 (2012): 200.

to appeal to this generation of consumers.”<sup>2</sup> Young adults are choosing convenience instead of dreams and goals that were established by previous generations. Millennials are choosing to live in urban areas as opposed to the suburban living; young adults want to be close to work, social settings, and, for the intent of this study, church.

It is important to affirm the financial realities of millennials due to the suffering economy that tumbled in 2008. In an article about employee benefits, Neil Howe says, “According to the 2012 MetLife study, millennials are the most worried about every kind of unforeseen financial risk, from sudden income loss...to uncovered medical costs...to illness and disability.”<sup>3</sup> This is a generation that understands the calamities that can be caused by financial stress and has witnessed the implosion of the national financial market. This reason coupled with the rising costs of college, housing, and food, has developed an underclass of young adults who are financially struggling without great support systems. Catherine Newhouse further affirms, “Working millennials are more vulnerable to poverty and unemployment.”<sup>4</sup> Because the route to college has become increasingly much more difficult for many to attain, millennials are finding the future even more uncertain.

This uneasiness about financial situations forms the basis for many young adults to be ashamed of their economic standing and left wondering what is wrong with them. The rise of social media only intensifies this feeling of inadequacy because it provides a false notion that everyone across their social platform is doing exponentially better than

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<sup>2</sup>“Millennials Prefer Cities to Suburbs, Subways to Driveways,” Nielsen Newswire, accessed January 15, 2015, [www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/millennials](http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/millennials).

<sup>3</sup> Neil Howe, “How the Millennial Generation is Transforming Employee Benefits,” *Benefits Quarterly* 30 (2014):10.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Newhouse, “The Forgotten Millennials,” *Christianity Today* 57, no. 5 (June 2013): 16.

themselves. However, the majority of technology does not lend itself to thoughtful reflection about life. Finding meaning and power in one's individual narrative is a process that demands patience and varied times of pausing, in order to step back and think about the occurrences in one's life. According to Carol Merritt, "Young adults often think that everyone else is living the good life, spending their free time day trading and watching their Microsoft stock catapult through the roof of their McMansions."<sup>5</sup> Although this sentiment may seem extreme, the underlying principle is true: too many young adults are mistakenly made to feel as if they are failures as opposed to the norm. This environment demands that the church step in and provide authentic love and encouragement along with affirmation about the current situations in which many find themselves.

As more intimate knowledge is gained about the social, economic, personal, and spiritual aspects of the millennial condition, the seeds of holistic ministry are allowed to grow. Engagement is centered not simply on church attendance but rather on the whole person and it is possible to see the image of God within each person. Churches must seek to live the words of the Apostle Paul,

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Carol Merritt, *Tribal Church* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2007), 40.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23 (NIV).

Flexibility in approach is crucial in reaching and engaging in ministry with the millennial generation. As Jim Henderson says, “We need to find common ground with people, we need to become co-sufferers, and we need to admit that we don’t know.”<sup>7</sup>

The Church must be willing to meet young adults where they are and not simply reference them as commodities. Millennials have needs, concerns, and wants right now, and Christians must be willing to stretch themselves in these areas. Catherine Newhouse affirms, “Young adults are crying out for someone to pour into their life, especially those who don’t have much parental support...they need guidance that is much more direct and personal.”<sup>8</sup> Millennials are not averse to relationships or the need for mentors, pastors, and Christian friends; however, it is a delicate balance because, as Henderson says, “human beings resist being preached at or talked down to. We’re most open when we’re treated with dignity and respect.”<sup>9</sup> Young adults must be affirmed in their place in life and respected as individuals who have much to offer.

### **Family Structure**

It is important to understand the methods and types of familial relationships that millennials have enjoyed throughout their lives. According to John Mabry, “The parents of Millennials were dubbed, ‘helicopter parents’ because of the close attention they gave to every aspect of their children’s lives.”<sup>10</sup> This presents a distinct difference in how many previous generations were parented and explains the effect that it had on the development of the young people. The immediate generation before, Generation X, had

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<sup>7</sup>Henderson, 132.

<sup>8</sup>Newhouse, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Henderson, 132.

<sup>10</sup> John R. Mabry, *Faithful Generations* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 151.

experienced parenting in a very different way; many young people within Generation X were known as “latchkey kids.” As those within Generation X entered their child rearing days, many vowed that their parenting style would be more hands on and involved. Often the relationships between millennials and their parents are strong, loving, and caring. It is interesting to note that although many within the millennial generation view themselves as having strong relationships with their parents, they have not blindly followed their parents and others of their generation into practicing faith in the same way. Mabry reports, “In fact, 94% of Millennials said that they greatly respect older generations.”<sup>11</sup> What does that say about this generation, that overwhelming numbers of young adults respect and value their relationships with older adults but will not be swayed into their religious belief without examination and questioning?

The parenting of the millennials has resulted in a generation that is profoundly relational. The majority of the young adult life centers around how various interests, responsibilities, and jobs contribute to or takes away from relationships that young adults view as necessary. This idea of “quality of life” can be clearly seen in the careers and professions that the millennial generation pursues. Jobs are not simply a matter of how much money can be made; instead, the questions of work-life balance, time for exploring various interests outside of the workplace, and professional development opportunities are viewed as just as critical. The church must take notice of the requirement that the millennial generation is demanding: more intentional opportunities to develop meaningful and lasting relationships both within and outside of the local church. This generation is proving that they see no point in simply meeting with a group of people for

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 152.



sixty minutes on a Sunday if they are never willing to go the extra mile and work on relationships at other times as well.

### **The Rise of Technology**

“What has shaped the Millennial experience of the world is not an event, but an evolution—specifically, the evolution of technology.”<sup>12</sup> This statement by Mabry points to the fact that the technological advances that have taken place within the last twenty years have altered the landscape of how to engage in effective ministry and outreach. Phone calls have been replaced by text messages, letters updating happenings in life have been phased out in favor of various social media outlets—in short, the world has changed. To be without a computer or access to the internet is to be left out of the information superhighway that is racing along at a record pace.

The impact of the internet, specifically social media, cannot be discounted and is on par with the impact that Gutenberg had on the world when he invented the printing press in 1445. Gutenberg revolutionized how books were made and also how information was able to be accessed by the masses. Because his press could produce books quickly and with relatively less effort, bookmaking became much less expensive, allowing more people to buy reading material. Much in the same way, the internet has made the world much smaller, in that people can now communicate in seconds from across the world in a much more efficient, quicker, and accessible format. The sheer pace of information sharing was unfathomable twenty-five years ago.

David Kinnaman reports, “Generational shifts are reinventing many sectors of our society, arenas that have until recently been dominated by institutions. Replacing these

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 154.

institutions is a hyper connected, eyes-on-the-scene social network that skips the middleman.”<sup>13</sup> Included in this definition of technology is the broader role that media plays in the lives of the millennial generation every day. Spielberg has replaced Gutenberg. Every day the internet and associated technology is used to conduct business, to extend and broaden relationships, and to socially interact with the world. The postmodern culture has embraced the work and advancement that has been generated in the Silicon Valley and beyond and integrated it into our daily lives. The millennial generation, specifically, has mastered this new technology and uses it with an ease and a mastery that often makes modernists and others uncomfortable in seeking to relate to young adults using these various means.

Additionally, social media has increased the expectations within interpersonal relationships. The phenomenon of Facebook has simplified the process of sharing multimedia information. In addition, Facebook has allowed conversation of a variety of topics to continue around the clock. However, it would be a mistake to think that social media is encompassed in only Facebook, contrary to the thought is the reality of various social media outlets, including Twitter and LinkedIn, revolutionizing how young adults interact with one another and with the world at large. Television, albeit a technological breakthrough of a previous generation, is slowly losing steam with the millennial generation because there is a plethora of ways to share and view video content. Namely, YouTube easily allows users to upload and share videos while also providing the ability to search, locate, view, and comment on other people’s videos. Although YouTube is still the prevalent means by which videos are shared, the list includes Flickr as well, in addition to the rise of Hulu and Netflix, which allow individuals to only pay for the

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<sup>13</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 49.

shows that they wish to watch. Churches must be willing to engage and learn the technology of the day as one aspect of the effort to engage in meaningful and effective ministry with the millennial generation.

One of the pitfalls of the media-saturated culture that is prevalent in the postmodern United States is that many persons mistake entertainment for truth. Graham Johnson says, “Postmodernity blurs the lines between commercial and product, actual event and fiction, and news and entertainment.”<sup>14</sup> The millennial generation has matured in an age where images have replaced words, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. However, there must be integrity, openness, and honesty in how the images are portrayed and offered and the absolute truth that they point to or explain. People cannot come to church and feel that they are being scammed or taken advantage of, which is often the aim of the secular media. Christians are called to a higher standard in terms of integrity and honesty in how we use what we have.

An additional downside of technological use within the local church is the misconception that a little technology will solve all of the problems of reaching young adults and the millennial generation. An article by the Alban Institute on the use of technology warns, “This powerful technology can give congregations many new tools, but these tools must be accompanied by processes to move ministry and mission forward.”<sup>15</sup> Technology must be used in an intentional way that allows for growth and expansion of the church’s overall mission and effectiveness. Social media allows for

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<sup>14</sup> Graham M. Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 49.

<sup>15</sup> “CENTERview: Choosing Technology That Forwards Mission and Ministry,” Alban at Duke Divinity School, October 23, 2009, accessed February 2, 2015, <https://alban.org/archive/centerview-choosing-technology-that-forwards-mission-and-ministry/>.

faster and more convenient relationships to evolve. How can the church leverage this capacity with helping to meet the mandates of Jesus in sharing the gospel and helping those that are in need? Praise songs on the screen and images used throughout the preaching moment are nice but only if they are enhancing the quality of worship for all persons who attend. The goal of ministry is effectiveness, and the power of technology helps to move the mission forward.

The millennial generation has grabbed hold of the technological advances of the previous years and has mastered the use and ease of the system. The conversation of the uniqueness of this generation readily begins with their mastery of technology. “They use networked digital communications more quickly and effectively to accomplish a wide variety of personal and professional tasks.”<sup>16</sup> The internet is not only used for email but also for a plethora of tasks and options. As Gail Martin states, “Social media also makes it easy to share your information without geographic boundaries.”<sup>17</sup> Millennials use their cell phones to listen to music, download movies, send text messages, check social media status, and snap pictures, among other uses. Because of the technological advances that the millennial generation as a whole possesses, many churches often view the ministry with young adults as only needing social networking presences, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, etc., in order to be successful in engaging millennials. However, the mastery and effectiveness of use of technology must take on a broader approach due to the breadth of functions under the umbrella of technology.

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<sup>16</sup> Richard D. Waters, “Can We Talk About the Direction of this Church?” *Journal of Media and Religion* 11 (2012): 200.

<sup>17</sup> Gail Z. Martin, *30 Days to Social Media Success* (Pompton Plains: Career Press, 2010), 155.

Use and mastery of technology is expected among the millennial generation, and the church cannot afford to be unlearned in the latest technology. The church must engage and use technology efficiently and effectively. Mike Hayes affirms, “We need to construct Web sites, blogs, podcasts...to transmit our messages...as opposed to merely assuming that young people will grasp them from the pulpit.”<sup>18</sup> Social networking and technology advances are the norm, and to not have them is to be dismissed as unacceptable. According to Sarah Guldalian, manager and producer of Evangelism Training for Lutheran Hour Ministries and herself a millennial, “As people, Millennials are self-expressive and highly inspired by fashion and pop culture. Their communication preference is technology. If you want to connect with a Millennial, go the virtual route over one-on-one communication. You will constantly find them multi-tasking with their various technology media.”<sup>19</sup>

Multi-tasking is a trait of the millennial generation that is shown in how they use and master technology. Although consistent multitasking can often make focus on one specific item more difficult. The millennial generation has mastered the ability to handle a variety of tasks at once. Therefore, the church must be aware and understand the need to consistently provide multiple opportunities for young adults to participate in ministry and within the life of the church. Additionally, multitasking can be viewed as strength and a benefit to the body of Christ, in those individual persons can participate in more than one area of the local church ministry without feeling burned out.

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<sup>18</sup> Mike Hayes, *Googling God: the Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s* (NY: Paulist Press, 2007), 144.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Guldalian, “The Millennials: Reflections on Reaching a Lost Generation for Christ,” *Missio Apostolica* 21, no. 1 (May 2013): 42.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PLAN FOR EFFECTIVENESS

In order for the local church to effectively engage in ministry with young adults, we must focus on two main areas: preaching and practice. It is important to note that one without the other will leave us at a disadvantage as we seek to grow in numbers and influence.

#### **Preaching**

“How can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?”<sup>1</sup> Paul’s words to a fledgling band of Christians in Rome points out that, although there are many important things that take place within the local church--the singing of hymns, the sharing of trials and testimonies, communal prayer, greeting each other and the fellowship hour, and so on-- the preached word is most necessary and takes precedence in the body of Christ. In the American Baptist tradition, the preached word is given the most credence and position of importance within the worship experience.

The importance of this moment is gained because in that time, the preacher has the ability to ignite the minds and hearts of the parishioners. “The...central task is an imaginative one. By that I do not mean a fanciful or fictional task, but one in which the human capacity to imagine--to form mental pictures of the self, the neighbor, the world, the

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10: 14-15 (NIV).

future, to envision new realities--is both engaged and transformed.”<sup>2</sup> This is not simply the time to share the love and grace of Jesus Christ; it is also the moment when persons can grapple, struggle, and grow in the knowledge of what it means to be a Christian. What issues am I called to speak out against? How am I called to love my neighbor? What does it look like to forgive and move on? How blessed is the Christian community?

Within our preaching, concerns and obstacles cannot simply be stated without the emphasis that additional help and support are available. According to David Roberts, “Many Millennial learners were raised by so-called ‘helicopter’ parents who hovered nearby, making themselves available to assist with any type of need or challenge.”<sup>3</sup> A by-product of this style of parenting is that many young adults feel very comfortable asking for and receiving help with a variety of issues in their lives. This direction and guidance has the ability to be provided by a number of persons, including the preacher. As a participant in Micah Group, which is a program centered around various clergy coming together to discuss issues of justice and mercy, I was struck by a statement shared by Mark Lamberton: “Before the preacher is a leader, an organizer, a counselor, or more, the preacher needs to be a person who lives in and for communion with God that overflows into the communion with people.”<sup>4</sup> It is important for the preacher to understand how God wants and desires for all people to enter into fellowship and partake in service with God. Preachers must engage and practice the spiritual disciplines that they encourage others to partake in. One of the most important values of the spiritual disciplines for the

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1993), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, 276.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Lamberton, “Communion: Why Are We?” *Micah Group Reader*, accessed September 14, 2015, [Micahgroups.net/course/2014f/communion](http://Micahgroups.net/course/2014f/communion).

preacher is nourishing a life of intentionally abiding in the presence of God. This time of intimacy with God opens our eyes for the sacred presence of God in all aspects of society and life. Instead of us being solely concerned with the management of programs and events, we must seek to be sensitive to God's presence and recognize that the presence of God has always been and is the greatest reality ever known.

Additionally, as the preacher seeks to engage the 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodern listener, it is imperative that he or she be well versed in the art of storytelling. Jeff Cloeter says, "Story is a powerful method in conveying the gospel, particularly within the culture of those coming of age in these early decades of the twenty-first century."<sup>5</sup> The history of Christendom is painted with the importance and effectiveness of storytelling. In the Old Testament, storytelling is found repeatedly in the life and history of Israel, as the oral tradition sought to provide a historical framework of how the triune God had worked in their lives: "God also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, The Lord, and the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'"<sup>6</sup> Additionally, in the New Testament, the early Christians consistently told the story of how the world had changed and the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ: "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all."<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that, "God's grace was so powerfully at work," as the apostles continued to share and testify to the story of Jesus Christ. The compelling story of conversion is often a characteristic of revival or "outpouring" of the spirit that is about to take place. Henry Emerson Fosdick,

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<sup>5</sup> Jeff Cloeter, "On Millennials and Story," *Missio Apostolica* 21, no.1 (May 2013): 48.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 3:15 (NIV).

<sup>7</sup> Acts 4:33 (NIV).



the founding pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, was an advocate for narrative preaching because “he claimed that those who preach are greatly mistaken if they assume that people come to church with a burning desire ‘to learn what happened to the Jebusites.’”<sup>8</sup> Instead, Fosdick believed that people come with human questions that are born out of human situations and experiences. Therefore, it is imperative that the preacher speak to specific human situations. According to Henry Mitchell, “The transformative power of the story lies in the hearer’s identification with the main character and her or his vicarious appropriation and practice of the behavior sought.”<sup>9</sup> Fosdick prepared sermons not simply focused on the biblical stories; but also incorporating real life stories and happenings of regular life.

Within postmodern preaching, there is validity and simplifying the message. This is not to say that the gospel needs to be “dumbed down”; rather, I am suggesting that the gospel be repackaged in a way that millennials can understand and grasp, with the goal of making it relevant in their lives. Sarah Guldalian affirms, “The message that resonates with their hearts is that God loves them, Jesus seeks a personal relationship with them, and true freedom from bondage and addictions is found only in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Practice**

Catherine Newhouse describes “The so-called millennial generation (born from 1980 to 2000), a group numbering 80 million that surveys show is beyond the reach of traditional churches. According to a recent Pew Forum survey, millennials are the least

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<sup>8</sup> Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer, eds., *What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>9</sup>Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>10</sup>Guldalian, 43.

religiously affiliated Americans of any living generation.”<sup>11</sup> This information that has been provided by the Pew Foundation notes an important understanding: the millennials still believe in God but are turned off by what they perceive as a lack of meaning in traditional religious settings.

Contextualization is imperative in understanding the millennial attraction to ministry and outreach in the postmodern era. Increasingly, young people want to be active in ministry and not simply sitting and hearing about the Christian life. Mike Hayes explains, “Young adults are not, by and large, looking for something more ‘conservative’, rather, they often seek a theology that is more contemplative and even more demanding of them.”<sup>12</sup> There is a misconception that the millennial generation is lazy and wants everything, including religion, handed to them. However, just the opposite is true: the millennials have taken the time to survey the societal landscape of their time and have realized what they want and don’t want as it pertains to life. They have decided that if they are going to be engaged in organized religion, then that religion must offer something more substantive than just singing songs and hosting bake sales. The religion that the millennial generation espouses is one that demands a totality of them as people and a calling to not only speak the right words but to live authentic actions.

There must be an understanding and balance between these dual approaches to ministry, preaching and practice. A self-centered church will always be dismissed by the millennial generation because they see the needs throughout the world and in their own communities and are compelled to help. David Boshart, in his book, *Becoming Missional*, offers a new term: “centered-set.” “A centered-set church is one that

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<sup>11</sup>Newhouse, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Hayes, 4.

embraces a ‘non-negotiable set of core convictions, rooted...ultimately in Jesus Christ.’ Because the congregation has this clear self-definition, the church is freed from fixating on boundaries of exclusion and can be inclusive, hospitable to others, who are welcome to explore the community.”<sup>13</sup> This understanding of church lends itself to a more cooperative style of ministry that can reach out to others without being judgmental or needlessly rigid. In general terms, as long as the church is confident in her core beliefs of Jesus Christ, then the scope of ministry, outreach, and service will grow organically.

Al Tizon continues this train of thought in his book, *Missional Preaching*. “In God’s Rule through a Spirit-Empowered Church, the disciples were not left as orphans, as the very real presence of the Holy Spirit strengthened and emboldened them.”<sup>14</sup> Tizon further notes that the disciples not only were blessed with the power of the Holy Spirit but with a clear mission as to what to do. “He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”<sup>15</sup> The disciples were sent to share the good news of the resurrection of Jesus and to invite those who heard into the family of God. However, as we know from the book of Acts, the disciples did not just preach; instead, they performed signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit and they intervened in the lives of “the least of these.” This understanding of ministry is what millennials are yearning for, and they seek to be actively engaged in the lives of others instead of confined to the walls and seats of the church building. The millennial generation has grasped the ancient words and heart of Saint Francis of Assisi, encouraging us to allow our actions and genuine concern for humanity serve as the barometer of how effectively we share the

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<sup>13</sup> David W. Boshart, *Becoming Missional* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock), 16.

<sup>14</sup> Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 16:15 (NIV)

gospel of Jesus Christ. Young adults seek to live out the words of the apostle James, who implored original hearers of the message, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”<sup>16</sup>

We can therefore conclude that traditional church settings are too concerned with the traditional approach to ministry, which closes them off from what a more meaningful experience of Christianity and ministry looks like. In David Kinnaman’s words, “The faith too many of them [millennials] have inherited is a lifeless shadow of historic Christianity, which insists that following Jesus is a way of life, not a laundry list of vague beliefs that have little meaning for how we spend our lives.”<sup>17</sup> The millennial generation is searching for a faith that is sincere, life changing, and requires the actual “doing” of ministry. This is where the juncture of millennial religion and religion of previous generations collides; the question that many young adults struggle with is how to avoid a religion that seems shallow. According to Barbara Brown Taylor, “Somewhere along the way we have misplaced ancient visions of the church as a priestly people--set apart for ministry in baptism, confirmed and strengthened in worship, made manifest in service to the world.”<sup>18</sup> The ministry and faith of this 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodern generation is not to be set apart from the world but to jump wholeheartedly into the world and seek to bring about positive change. The churches that will be effective in engaging in ministry with young adults will be those that stress living a life that matches up with what they believe. Additionally, churches that will experience effectiveness will be those that seek to reach out past the walls of the local church and to become involved in the happenings of the

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<sup>16</sup> James 2:17 (NIV).

<sup>17</sup> Kinnaman, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Brown Taylor, 27.

greater community. Jim Henderson says, “Any talk you give will be more like a soundtrack to a movie---it adds a lot, but it’s not the movie. Your spiritual life counts more than your spiritual talk.”<sup>19</sup> What are the ways in which a spiritual life can be shown? What does it mean to live a life of dedication and faith to ideals that are greater than oneself? The image of spiritual maturity is not simply who has given greater amounts of money to the church or who has the best attendance on a Sunday morning. Instead, spiritual maturity must be realized and understood in terms of who is most willing to sacrifice and give for the sake of others. Mabry defines spiritual maturity as “a continuum moving from apathy towards commitment to transformation and concern for the welfare of others.”<sup>20</sup> To be able to give to those in need is one of the greatest signs of spiritual maturity. Herein lies the understanding of how the millennial generation views Christian responsibility and how they understand the commitment of being a Christian.

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<sup>19</sup>Henderson, 133.

<sup>20</sup>Mabry, 101.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?

The rich history of the Cohansey Baptist Church of Roadstown is littered with evidence of the presence of God in our midst. The testimony of 325 years speaks for itself in that this specific congregation has been sustained by God and replenished generation after generation. Presently, God is at work in this congregation by continually doing new things and providing new opportunities for growth within our midst. As the first African-American pastor in the history of Cohansey Baptist Church, I can confirm that we are in the midst of revival in terms of spirit, missions, and attendance, and we have sought to ensure that we give credence and honor to God throughout. As Paul Hazelton assures us, “God is the only source of revival, and He gives revival only to those with humble spirits and contrite hearts.”<sup>1</sup> I am witness to the growth and willingness to change, adapt, and reconsider what is currently happening in our context. God is growing the congregation numerically and is extending the outreach of the church in many different ways.

Additionally, God is at work in my personal life and ministry, and my growth as a pastor is evident. From the beginning of my pastoral tenure until now, I have made great strides in my practice of the spiritual disciplines, in addition to my interpersonal, time management, and self-care awareness. Gradually I have become more comfortable through this project and Christian maturity to share the work load at the church and be

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<sup>1</sup> Paul N. Hazelton, *7 Steps to Revitalizing the Small-Town Church* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1993), 19.

more inclusive. I have followed the advice of Louis Bloede, who offers: “The minister needs to ask, Is there anything I’m doing that does not need to be done at all? While some tasks can be delegated to others, some other tasks the ministry is doing can be eliminated.”<sup>2</sup> No longer am I burdened with the self-imposed expectation to do everything myself; instead, I am gladly seeking help in accomplishing the work of the ministry of the church.

As the congregation has grown and gradually branched out from being primarily a family church, it is clear that we must find new ways to proceed in ministry due to our growth as an intergenerational church. Therefore, I balanced the idea of my project with the work that God has already been doing in our midst. Our young adult segment is growing, and we must be intentional about how we engage in effective ministry with this population.

The theological assumptions that have guided this project are found concretely in the revelation that “God is love.”<sup>3</sup> Agape love, the love God, is defined by the Apostle Paul: “Love is patient, and love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.”<sup>4</sup>

As I shared with the LAC at the onset of this endeavor, our entire project, objectives, and outcomes must be saturated in the love of God. Patience must be put into practice throughout the duration of the project. Patience must be extended to ourselves,

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<sup>2</sup> Louis W. Bloede, *The Effective Pastor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:8 (NIV).

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV)

to our goals, to our activities, and most importantly towards our outcomes. Being able to wait without becoming annoyed, frustrated, or restless is the definition of patience. Everything may not go as planned, but love allows us to engage in this work without becoming annoyed, frustrated, or depressed.

Love allows us to be kind towards others' ideas, actions, level of participation, and contributions. Love allows us to not overwhelm anyone with our ideas and the success or lack of contribution by certain persons. Love helps us to not become angry, to celebrate when certain truths are uncovered, to hope that things will work out, and to push forward in the face of uncertainty or setback towards the goals that have been established.

As the project has come to a close and evaluation has taken place, I can confidently say that the theological beliefs that were laid out in the beginning of this process have been confirmed and greatly enriched and emboldened.

1. God values diversity.
2. All people within the congregation have gifts and talents that can be used in ministry.
3. The experiences and contributions of all people must be celebrated and affirmed.

Throughout this project God has consistently been revealed as someone who encourages collaboration and partnership. Throughout the scriptures, God is consistently reinforcing the understanding that together great things can happen. Moses and Aaron, David and Jonathon, Joseph and Mary--the list continues to identify situations throughout the Bible that underline the importance of togetherness. Waldkoenig and Avery confirm the importance of this level of partnership and cooperation: "In place of individualistic competition between local churches, the practice of cooperatives suggests the ancient idea of the parish as a place...an area ministry to whole communities and not only to



congregational members.”<sup>5</sup> In my estimation, God is not calling churches to stay within the four walls of the church; instead, God is calling a generation of Christians to live out the mission of sharing the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is called to meet the needs of the people within and outside of the congregation, and the result is a congregation actively involved in the life of the community in which they exist.

It has been proven throughout the course of history that the Triune God values diversity. Throughout the creation account in Genesis, the reader witnesses a God who consistently insists on diversity throughout.

And God said, “Let there be light,” . . . and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called, “night” . . . Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seeding bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds” . . . And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly” . . . God created the great creatures of the sea and every moving thing . . . God made the wild animals according to their kinds.<sup>6</sup>

The postmodern age requires that all people regardless of age, ethnicity, race, and gender be able to find a faith community of which they feel a part and in which they find the ability to develop authentic relationship with God and humanity. All too often various persons are unable to make these connections and engage effectively within the traditional mainline church. Thus, many people with a yearning for God, or those who keenly sense that they would like a relationship with God, fail to connect and find comfort within many churches.

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<sup>5</sup> Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig and William O. Avery, *Cooperating Congregations* (Herndon: Alban Institute Publication, 1999), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:3-5, 11, 20, 24 (NIV).

Throughout scripture, there are numerous images of young adults being used greatly in ministry. One of the greatest examples can be seen by the exploration and examination of the life of King Josiah. “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem.”<sup>7</sup> Here is an example of a young person who was mightily used by God, regardless of the age he was when first chosen. Having succeeded his father and grandfather who did “evil in the sight of the Lord,” Josiah made his own decisions about how he would serve God. Exploring the text reveals that, “he did what was right in the sight of the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

At the ripe age of 26, Josiah begins to take steps in determining how to lead his people in serving God. Understanding that those who had come before him had failed in this duty, Josiah resolves to lead a return back to the ways of God. It could be said that postmodern young adults are leading a return to the truth of God with their emphasis on actions, serving, and lifestyle. Josiah had commissioned repairs to the “house of the Lord” and wanted all those who were working on the project to be fairly compensated. And this is the watershed moment: “The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, ‘I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.’”<sup>9</sup> It was with this discovery that the king decided to institute numerous reforms within Jerusalem and to seek out a meaningful way to serve God. It is important to note that the majority of the narrative that we know about Josiah is dominated by discussion of the reforms that he instituted. However, the main reason for including this discussion is to lay the foundation

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Kings 22:1 (NIV).

<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings 22:2 (NIV).

<sup>9</sup> 2 Kings 22:8 (NIV).

for the argument that age is not factor in how effectively someone can be used by God for the wellbeing of the community of faith.

There is no greater example of a young adult being used by God to bring about better circumstances than Jesus Christ himself. “Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus as a young man, recently out of his twenties, begins to undertake a ministry that would change the world. He was not satisfied with ministry as it had been and saw that there were huge gaps in what the religious said and what they did. Therefore, he begins to engage in ministry of both preaching and practice. “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus did not limit his ministry to simply preaching; instead, he became actively involved in the lives of the people with whom he was able to interact.

In the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica, he states another important factor in community/relationship building: “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”<sup>12</sup> It is important for a Christian community to find ways and explore options as to how each person can be a positive presence in the corporate life of the church. Selfishness must be put aside and instead be replaced with the understanding that others are just as important, if not more so, than oneself. Being agreed about how to care for one another allows for an amazing thing to happen: trust begins to develop. However, in the event that there are some on one page and some on another, conflict is provided the conditions it needs to rear its ugly head.

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 3:23 (NIV).

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 9:35 (NIV).

<sup>12</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV).

Philippians encourages us to be “like-minded,” united in spirit and in mind. I would submit that the spirit portion of Paul’s encouragement is rather easy to attain because we have all been saved by the same God. However, I believe that becoming like-minded is slightly more difficult because every person believes that he or she knows what the right course of action is and how this issue should be approached. We must cultivate an understanding that everyone has something to contribute to the life of the church.

The Judeo-Christian scriptures provide templates on how to engage with “young” people in an effective way through the emphasis on relationship with God and others. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>13</sup> The utter dependence that the Christian has on Jesus is reflective of our need to work together to accomplish certain goals. Jesus describes that the purpose of our lives is to develop and produce fruit. Lovett Weems affirms, “The transformed life, guided by the counsel of God and the sound judgment arising from the mind of the believer, is a fruit that bears fruit.”<sup>14</sup> As we seek to bear fruit in ministry, we cannot lose sight of the reality that together we can produce exponentially more fruit. More lives can be changed, more needs can be met, and more people can experience the love of God if we are willing to work together and not apart.

The love and sovereign ability of God needs to be trusted when engaging in ministry with people in general and young adults in particular. Since the love of God is a gift, then we within the church must be willing to surrender and rely on the power of God. Youth expert Mark Yaconelli says, “To carry the good news is to trust that God’s

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<sup>13</sup> John 15:5 (NIV).

<sup>14</sup> Lovett H. Weems Jr., *Bearing Fruit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 4.

love is present and available to our young people.”<sup>15</sup> There is not a need to be overbearing in sharing the love of God and thereby seek to force young people to love God or in turn for God to love our young people. God’s love exists throughout creation and is available to all of humanity. We must be willing to trust that the Spirit of God has the ability and power to change all people and calls us to a ministry of justice, love, and concern for others. In the words of Yaconelli, “To share the Christian life with young people means to let God be God, and trust that our desire to share our faith will be enough. To surrender means to recognize that we don’t control how God lives and moves. We don’t control our churches. And we certainly don’t control the spiritual lives of our young people.”<sup>16</sup>By focusing our efforts on God, we have a greater opportunity of success because God has the ability to bring about the change that is sought.

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<sup>15</sup>Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **WHERE THE WORK TAKES PLACE**

Cohansey Baptist Church of Roadstown has a long and rich history of ministry in the American Baptist tradition. The Cohansey Baptist Church had its beginnings during the colonization of our land. In about 1683, Baptists from Tipperary County, Ireland, made their homes along the Cohansey Creek. They banded together for worship, meeting in their homes. The Reverend Thomas Killingsworth, who had assisted in the organization of the Middletown Church in 1688 and the Piscataway Church in 1689, came to Cohansey precinct and helped organize Cohansey in 1690. Thus Cohansey became the third oldest Baptist church in what is now New Jersey. The first meeting house was built of logs on the south side of the Cohansey Creek.

Historically a leader within the American Baptist denomination, in 1707 Cohansey was one of five founders of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, believed to be the first Baptist association in the Colonies. Through the work with the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Cohansey “embraced churches in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.” Joined with PBA but also willing to branch out alone due to a strong focus on missions and evangelism over the course of the last three hundred and twenty-five years, Cohansey has planted several churches throughout the southern New Jersey area:

Salem, First 1755

Dividing Creek 1761

Daretown 1771

Canton 1818

Bridgeton, First 1828

Greenwich 1849

Cohansey's strong zeal for evangelism and mission was due to the small number of Baptist churches in the area. "Prior to 1700, Baptists in America were few and widely scattered. Their largest numbers were located in New England, with small contingents beginning to appear in the regions around Philadelphia."<sup>1</sup> Seeking to continue the spread of Baptist doctrine, which encourages personal salvation and accountability, Cohansey has long been defined by her mission and outreach capacity.

Currently, the church is a strong supporter and member of American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and the West New Jersey Baptist Association. It is a source of pride to the congregation that our current associational principles were established long ago through our groundbreaking work with the PBA, as noted by Everett Goodwin: "It is true that the mainstream of Baptist life developed its principles of polity, matters of style, and basics of doctrine under the Philadelphia Baptist Association's influence."<sup>2</sup>

The same desire to spread the gospel and engage in ministry continues to be present at Cohansey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A recollection by Eldon G. Ernst helps to frame the historical belief of Cohansey Baptist Church. In sharing about Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Ernst says, "The seminary's halls reeked proudly of Walter Rauschenbusch's

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Goodwin, 10.

great social gospel legacy, a legacy that some American Baptists detest.”<sup>3</sup> Although not staunch advocates of a social gospel, the parishioners of Cohansey were committed to serving others through the sharing of the gospel and helping to meet basic needs. However, in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, due to struggling attendance and congregational discord, the church had lost focus on her history of evangelism and missions and solely focused on how to meet the most basic of needs within the congregation.

Cohansey Baptist Church is located in a rural community in Hopewell Township, on the outskirts of Bridgeton, NJ, where an agricultural economy still exists. According to the 2010 United States Census, Hopewell Township had 4,571 people, 1,662 households, and 1,200 families living in the township. Additionally, the geographic area had a largely homogenous population; the racial makeup was “84.38% White or Caucasian, 6.58% Black or African American, 2.17% Native American, 0.57% Asian.”<sup>4</sup>

A number of economic obstacles impact Bridgeton, New Jersey. The unemployment rate is 10%, nearly 30% of the population has a reported income of less than \$20,000, and recent job growth has been reported at -0.82%. These economic conditions have contributed to a shrinking population and an influx of immigrants, namely those of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent.

CBC is traditional and conservative by nature; however, throughout the last twenty years, congregants have become willing to listen and explore different viewpoints. Currently, I serve as the first African-American pastor in her 325-year history. While the church is in a rural area, I currently live in an urban area. Since I became pastor in 2012, Cohansey has increasingly embraced the idea of women in ministry, inviting female

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>4</sup> “Bridgeton, New Jersey,” Wikipedia, accessed October 14, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgeton,\\_New\\_Jersey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgeton,_New_Jersey).



clergy to preach and engage more fully in the life of the church. In addition, we have made a concerted effort over the past three years to be more mission minded, and that is evidenced through establishing a permanent mission board, engaging in outreach and service programs within the Greater Bridgeton area, and continuing support of six missionaries around the world, in addition to various other programs.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RESEARCH TOOLS**

Prior to engaging in research around this topic, I heeded prudent advice that had been provided to me: “Beginning researchers should examine reviews of literature found in journals...peruse...publications to learn about current or emerging issues in their field, and talk with experts for their judgments about crucial issues.”<sup>1</sup> As a local pastor, I did not consider myself an expert about the issue; therefore, I engaged other pastors, educators, counselors, and young adults themselves before I began with the project. Although I have extensive experience working with young adults in other disciplines, namely education and workforce development, I understood the need to immerse myself in intentional study and fact gathering around the subject. Listening to the community is one of the first steps in being able to successfully conduct research and lead a program. Yaconelli agrees: “The first task of the facilitators is to talk with as many people as possible...these conversations can take place in informal settings...or more formal settings.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of these types of conversation is to gain a working knowledge of the subject matter and to gain this information from as many viewpoints as possible. Furthermore, this information gathering process provides an opportunity to gather advocates for the work in which you are about to engage. Advocates have the possibility

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Yaconelli, 150.

of being an invaluable support within the project and ministry overall, as they help to foster connections between the project and the partners who can assist in the process. In addition to gaining these personal viewpoints, I sought to read and research what has been written about the topic in order to gain a solid working foundation.

One research component that was used throughout the duration of the project was the problem-solving theory. This theory states, “The stipulated activities begin with the identification of a problem by some individual or organization in need of a solution, not by a research investigator.”<sup>3</sup> The question being addressed through this research was, “How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation.” The projected outcomes of this project are to help solve the problem of mass exodus of young adults from traditional church settings and to help generate various ideas and thoughts on the issue.

This is the juncture where social-interaction theory can be seen, because the premise of this theory is to encourage a “marketplace of ideas.” According to Robert Yin, “In this milieu, utilization ultimately occurs because the continuous flow of communications increasingly leads to good matches between existing needs and emerging new research.”<sup>4</sup> It is important to keep the dialogue going as to how to continually work for greater effectiveness in ministry. Furthermore, it must be noted that no one person has all of the answers; instead it is in the variety of conclusions, research, and inspiration via the Holy Spirit that the church will be able to combat the issues with which she is presently confronted.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

One example of research being done on this issue comes from data provided by the Barna Group. The Barna Group is a leading research and resource company located in California that focuses on the intersection between faith and culture. According to its website, “The company has worked with thousands of non-profit organizations and churches across the country, including many Protestant and Catholic congregations, denominations, and faith leaders.”<sup>5</sup> Further, the president of the Barna Group, David Kinnaman, wrote a book, *You Lost Me*, which highlights the struggles of young adults with organized Christianity. He states that “many twentysomethings are not hesitating, as have previous generations, to burn the bridges that once connected them to their spiritual heritage.”<sup>6</sup>

There are five strategies that the Barna Group suggests in order to better connect with millennials: “Make room for meaningful relationships, teach cultural discernment, create reverse mentoring opportunities, teach connection between vocation and discipleship, and facilitate a connection with Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> At the onset of this project, these five areas were reviewed and we sought to incorporate them into our activities, programs, and mindset. In addition to the research and application that took place, we engaged in intentional and corporate prayer about the project, outcomes, and participants. Through our prayers, we were able to establish a strong foundation of peace and focus in order to effectively engage the subject matter.

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<sup>5</sup> “About Barna Group,” Barna Group, accessed January 21, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/about/about-barna-group#.VP9g7tt0yM8>.

<sup>6</sup>Kinnaman, 92.

<sup>7</sup>“5 Ways to Connect with Millennials,” Barna Group, September 10, 2014, accessed January 21, 2015, [https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/682-5-ways-to-connect-with-millennials#.VD7q\\_PldWDQ](https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/682-5-ways-to-connect-with-millennials#.VD7q_PldWDQ).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED: THE PROJECT UNFOLDS

In an effort to provide the church congregation, and specifically the millennial generation, a service opportunity, we decided to partner with the Family Promise organization to help combat homelessness in Cumberland County. Family Promise has created the Interfaith Hospitality Network, which brings together service groups from churches and other faith organizations. Family Promise describes its mission: “In response to this crisis, the Interfaith Hospitality Network brings the faith community together to help families regain their housing, their independence, and their dignity. IHN is a partnership of congregations within a community helping families who are facing homelessness. It offers an opportunity for volunteers of all faiths to reduce homelessness and transform lives.”<sup>1</sup>

We made a concerted and conscious effort to help combat homelessness within families. Through our partnership with Family Promise, we became the first church host in Cumberland County and provided housing for one week at a time on the church premises. In our Lay Advisory Committee we committed to hosting two separate weeks throughout the duration of the program: February 16<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> and July 6<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>. Hosting the families required us to provide breakfast and transport the families to the day center in nearby Pennsville, NJ, where the children would be picked up by the bus for school

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<sup>1</sup> “Interfaith Hospitality Network,” Family Promise, accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.familypromise.org/program/interfaith-hospitality-network>.

and the parents would either go to work or engage in one of a number of programs that included job readiness training, substance abuse counseling, and GED courses. In the evening, we would transport the families back to the church and provide dinner. We were fortunate to be able to partner with two area churches to assist us in providing the meals each evening: Marlboro Seventh Day Baptist Church and Greenwich Presbyterian Church.

During the evening meal that we served to the families, powerful experiences and greater depth in relationship took place. Frank Ridzi, in an article in *Humanist*, reflects on what can happen when people of different faiths, economic levels, cultures, and so on share a meal together:

I find that meals are a way to reach into the core of humanness. Is it not the shared Seder that reminds our Jewish brethren of the Passover exodus from Egypt--reliving the importance of ancestral struggles and unity as a nation? Doesn't the Islamic month of Ramadan devote much of its practices to the attention of shared meals? Wasn't it Christianity's Jesus Christ who held a supper for his friends before he was to die for them on the cross?<sup>2</sup>

It was not enough to simply share time and provide a bed for those transitional homeless persons who slept at our church. We determined that, in the sharing of meals, we would forge a relationship between those within the church and those who were leaving at the end of the week. Each night we played with children who were not ours but who still maintained a large amount of energy and zest for life. These evenings provided a moment of levity for all of our volunteers and shone a light on our tendency to complain when these persons with no homes did not. The joy and encouragement that took place around

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Ridzi, "Do You Want to Come Over for Dinner, Friend?" *Humanist* 59, no. 4 (Jul/Aug 99): 29.

the table as food was distributed and stories of difficulties and triumphs were shared served as an inspiration to all who participated.

The program has taken on a life of its own, and we are pleased to have been the first church in Cumberland County to commit to this ministry and witness the dramatic change in the lives of the participants. CBC led the way in locating and renovating the “day center” that Family Promise uses in Cumberland County where the homeless families are based throughout the day. We were instrumental in acquiring the van that is used to transport participants in the program. The Executive Director worked out of our church offices until her personal office was completed and ready to be occupied. In summary, we have jumped in feet first in partnering with this ministry, and the entire church has been blessed and is better for participating in it.

The Lay Advisory Committee was adamant that our volunteers be multigenerational, and it was wonderful to observe how well our volunteers worked together. The volunteers varied in age, gender, and abilities; however, through our working together we were able to grow closer as a church family and provide a solid foundation for future endeavors. Additionally, we were able to observe the importance of “practicing” our faith, as many young adult volunteers took part in the mission project and overall people enjoyed working together.

### **Intentional Relationship**

The second portion of my project centered on finding ways for young adults to form intentional relationships, both with other young adults and with those in different age groups in the congregation and community. The human psyche has essential needs

for its development. These needs may not be as clearly defined as nutritional needs are for the body, but they are necessary and important nonetheless. Psychologists may differ in their understanding of the order of these primal needs, but there is consensus concerning the needs that must be met so that the human psyche can mature and develop in an appropriate way. If any of these needs is not met, serious social, psychological, and personal repercussions may occur. One of the most important needs of the human condition is the need for meaningful relationship.

Throughout my project, an area that I focused on was in the development of intentional and meaningful relationship. Essential to the overall human condition is the need to have strong peer relationships as well as mentoring relationships within the Christian community. Many in the millennial generation have struggled with the concept that no one understands their plight and struggle. Many lack a support network that assures the young adult that he/she is not alone and that others are facing similar experiences. Through our Lay Advisory Committee, we sought to live out our relational theme by providing a two-fold opportunity: mentoring relationships and peer relationships.

Mark Yaconelli supports the need for relationship: “A ministry done with others is a ministry of presence...Jesus reminds us that if we’re to reveal the reality of God, we must be grounded in relationship”<sup>3</sup> The mentoring relationship allows for honest dialogue with persons who have slightly more life experience and no preconceived ideas of the young adult’s life, successes, and mistakes. This type of relationship provides safety to explore issues that can be difficult to navigate (i.e. marriage, relationships, vocation, and independence) without the pressure of having to get everything right.

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<sup>3</sup> Yaconelli, 143.



Understanding the importance of relationship, we coined a phrase, “The relational is foundational.” That is to say that before we can make headway in other areas, we as the LAC must first begin to nurture relationship and then we can focus our energies and activities on helping the relationships of the group grow stronger.

Additionally, providing a forum to nurture and cultivate peer relationships was a promising aspect of our development of the “Baptist Believers.” Peer pressure is a major factor behind many of the decisions, choices, and feelings of young adults. In the social media age, there can be the feeling that the lives of others are more exciting, fulfilling, and attainable because of the posts that are found on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and the like. Wanting to assimilate with others can lead many young adults down the path of drug abuse, alcoholism, and depression; however, if they are able to develop a peer accountability environment, there is a chance for healthy relationships and esteem. Efrem Smith claims, “Positive peer accountability can provide support and combat negative peer pressure that young people face.”<sup>4</sup>

The Baptist Believers met in the home of two of our church members once per month, with the sole purpose of helping young adults to develop meaningful relationships with persons in their same age bracket outside of the normal church offerings. Small groups, although a new concept for Cohansey Baptist Church, have been in existence for many years. According to Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler, “The existence of smaller gatherings and house churches continued beyond the apostolic era, becoming the common form of assembly in areas and cultures where church buildings were

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<sup>4</sup> Efrem Smith, *Raising Up Young Heroes* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 56-57.

nonexistent.”<sup>5</sup> Using this historical lens as a guide, we sought to foster intentional community and relationship within the millennial generation of our local church as a means for growing disciples and connection with the local church. The biblical evidence is clear: human beings are created for spiritual community with both God and one another. This is the reasoning behind the establishment of the Baptist Believers.

Intentional relationship is not spoken of only in regards to person to person but also person to God. Leonard Sweet describes relationship this way: “To speak the truth about God, you must know God. And to know God you must love God. And to love God you must be in relationship with God. Christians are relational fundamentalists: We put the primary relationship at the beginning, making it the foundation of all else we do and say.”<sup>6</sup> This gathering of young adults, although focused on developing relationship, took a radical shift when the young adults present, along with their older adult participants began to explore the idea and power of prayer. I had not anticipated at the beginning that the group would want to explore and know more about prayer, but it was a welcome surprise. Looking back on this situation, I am reminded of the words of Mark Yaconelli, who shared in his book, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, “I’ve become convinced that the more we engage in contemplative prayer, the more we are able to present to young people.”<sup>7</sup> It is amazing to recollect how once the focus on prayer began to take shape within the group, an openness and awareness of self and others began to permeate in a real and meaningful way.

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler, “Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no.1 (Spring 2014): 119.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Sweet, *What Matters Most* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Yaconelli, 99.

The first meeting took place on January 23, 2014, and the group continued to meet once per month throughout the duration of the project on the following dates:

February 27, 2014

March 27, 2014

April 24, 2014

May 22, 2014

June 26, 2014

The attendance in the group remained six persons throughout the duration of the program, except in the welcome times that one of the regular attendees brought along a friend. The fact that some of the young adults felt comfortable enough to invite their friends was a sign that we were on the right path. Although I would have hoped for others to attend, the consistency in attendance revealed that the people who gathered each month appreciated and valued the relationships that they were building. Additionally, the group on their own initiative gave themselves the name, Baptist Believers, and will resume their meetings beginning in October 2014. Not only are they continuing their meetings, but the group has morphed to include other young adults in the community as well.

Additionally, we have reached out to two neighboring churches in hopes of partnering with them and their young adults to continue to grow the ministry. I took the opportunity to gather some information from the attendees of this program on an anonymous basis.

When presented with the following questions, the respondents answered in the following ways:

- I. What do you want or need from a Christian community?
  - To learn more about the Bible and meet good people.
  - Nothing at the moment. I have everything I want now.
  - Love, grace, and compassion. Friends.
  
- II. What can churches do to appeal to young adults?

- Have more fun events.
- Be active in the community. Provide sports teams for the church.
- Have other young adults join. Be welcoming when others come.

III. Does church attendance help in your personal life? How?

- Yes, gives you good life lessons.
- Learn more about the Bible and make friends that believe in what I do.
- Helps when I am feeling down or when I need advice

### Preaching Series

Seeking to use preaching as a means to engage more fully the millennial generation while also emphasizing intergenerational ministry, I embarked on preaching a series around certain topics. Historically, I am not a series preacher; I tend to lean towards the lectionary in addition to certain themes throughout the year. According to Lovett Weems, however, “Planning the sermon series will require an investment of time and effort...while initially time intensive, this planning will save the pastor hours in the efficiency it will create.”<sup>8</sup> One possibility as to why I have shied away from preaching series is the busyness of my life and the multiple demands on my schedule. Finding the time to intentionally focus on sermon preparation for 3-4 weeks at a time is something that I simply did not have the discipline or time to do. Lowell Erdahl elaborates:

Two problems in time management are especially significant for pastors. On the one hand, we personally manage our own time. We don’t punch a clock, and there is no one telling us exactly what to do every hour of the day. On the other hand, expectations come at us from many directions, and many people are, in effect, trying to tell us what to do<sup>9</sup>

Although my life as pastor, husband, father, and student is hectic to say the least, we launched a preaching series from the book of Psalms, focused on the idea of how different generations relate to certain circumstances in different ways. This sermon series

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<sup>8</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr. and Tom Berlin, *Overflow* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Erdahl, 77.

was a learning experience, and I was able to more fully grasp the discipline that is needed when embarking on this style and mode of preaching.

Throughout the preaching series, I sought to make effective use of storytelling as a way to personalize the material and connect with various age groups. I was inspired by Mark Miller: “Story is your path to creating faith...People value their own conclusions more highly than yours. They will only have faith in a story that has become real for them personally.”<sup>10</sup> It was evident as we traveled along in the sermon series that there were opportunities for all age groups to relate to the various psalmists at different points in their lives. Through this sermonic journey, I was seeking to accomplish a number of items, mainly to allow all who were in attendance to see the common threads of life and experience how those threads wove through the congregation.

This sermon series was reflective and allowed for a methodical step in building my case for truth. “...effective preaching generates a nod of recognition, which is a feeling of familiarity, a sense of being at home.”<sup>11</sup> Being able to tap into the uniqueness of situations that take place in people’s lives is humbling and pressure laden. For when a hearer is able to hear, see, picture, and imagine themselves in the images and words of the sermon, I have accomplished much of what I had set out to do under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

One of the lessons that I learned throughout this process was how an effective story can deepen and further cement the main points of the sermon. Stories hold similar functions to other types of sermon illustrations but add an additional layer of

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Miller, *Experiential Storytelling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011), 127.

effectiveness, inviting the listener to find his or her place within the story as well. Bruce Salmon explains, “They can be used to clarify what has been stated, to provide concrete examples of more general assertions, to allow for listener identification, and to provide relief –comic or dramatic.”<sup>12</sup> Context played a large role in my ability to use stories and narrative because I am from an urban environment and pastor in a rural environment. Many of the images that I may use in an urban setting must be changed or adjusted for my audience. It was important for me to expand the focus points of my stories in order to have the greatest effect on the listeners in the congregation.

Additionally, within this sermon series I continued to advance my use and understanding of semiotics. According to George Aichele, “Postmodern semiotics holds that meaning of any text lies, not in the text as such, but rather in the intertextual operations of reading.”<sup>13</sup> In order for semiotics to be best used, I had the responsibility to identify the text and images within the text in ways that those images are presently known. It was important for me in this process to try to be the most effective preacher I could be, in order to ensure that the biblical stories of the canon were transmitted in such a way that the meaning of the text was not lost. The church must be willing to engage the postmodern society in way that embraces flexibility and effectiveness in all areas of ministry, including preaching. Aichele explains, “Stories from the Bible have not disappeared from this future world, but they have been transformed.”<sup>14</sup> Transformation is an idea that needs to be embraced by the postmodern church, for without fully grasping

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce C. Salmon, *Storytelling in Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 49.

<sup>13</sup> George Aichele, *The Control of Biblical Meaning* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

this concept, we walk tediously close to the edge of becoming irrelevant and minimally impactful. Transformation calls for us to go through a type of “metamorphosis” that embraces the freedom of expression, story, and image within the sermonic moments in our churches.

### **Personal Interviews**

Finally, drawing from the book *The Outsider Interviews*, we sought to interview two young adults and ask questions from which we could gain invaluable insight. There have been numerous studies and statistics that have been offered about why millennials are not coming to church; however, sometimes simply looking at numbers does not provide the entire story. I wanted to “tell some of the stories behind these stats, to capture some of the hearts behind the charts.”<sup>15</sup>

I was fortunate to be able to sit down with two young adults, Megan Girock, a 19-year-old Eastern University student, and Garrett Lippie, a 19-year-old William Patterson University student, and discuss the issues at hand as they relate to church and young adults. It was eye opening to listen to them as they described how they view the local church. Their responses possessed both engaging critiques and encouraging testimonies of their personal experience in local churches. While both of these young adults grew up in church, their honest viewpoint on the church affiliation of millennials reinforced to me a notion that was presented in David Kinnaman’s book, *You Lost Me*: “Many young Christians are struggling less with their faith in Christ than with their experience of church.”<sup>16</sup> Through this exercise, it was clear that young adults are still open and

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<sup>15</sup>Henderson, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Kinnaman, 27.

receptive for a relationship with Jesus Christ; however, many have been stung or confused by the faith that is practiced in many churches and simply have decided to engage in their faith journey in a different way.

The issue of interpersonal relationships was brought up and struck a meaningful chord with our participants. It was important that there be persons at the church in their age bracket but even more so was the desire to be able to be in community and relationship with such persons. They reinforced the notion that people were created for community. Further, they not only expressed an interest in forming relationships with their peers but also those who are older than them, especially within the ages of their parents. Additionally, the participants spoke in glowingly terms about the encouragement and support that they received in the local church. Although engaged in critiquing their church experiences, the participants had been positively molded within Christian community throughout their lifetimes.

Many in the church are frightened or angered by the new ways in which the millennial generation chooses to practice their faith in community. However, that is the wrong stance to take for a church seeking to be effective in ministry with this new generation. Instead, we should be encouraged by the new expressions of worship and community and seek to glean best practices and engage in partnerships with other organizations in order to bring about a positive result within the community.

### **What Does A Pastor Do?**

Understanding that this project required many new functions and skills for both me and the local church, it was imperative that I exercise a certain amount of initiative in making sure that the project ran well and was instituted effectively.



The first area that needed to be accomplished was the formation of the Lay Advisory Committee. However, I did not want persons who would simply join the LAC and then not be engaged once the project was over; instead, I wanted to look for people who would be able to continue the mission when the project had come to completion. Paul Hazelton advises, “Programs must never be viewed as ends in themselves, but always as means to some higher end. Good programs are never our purpose, but they will help us fulfill our purposes.”<sup>17</sup> In preparation for this undertaking, I engaged in intentional prayer and observation about who would be effective and willing to participate on the committee and to continue in carrying forth the mission of the project. Mentally noting the need to have a diverse group of persons in terms of age, length of membership within the church, and gender, I extended an invitation to the persons listed below, and they all agreed to participate.

Albert Davenport, 46 years old, Criminal Investigator

Polly Davenport, 45 years old, Human Resource Worker at Federal Correction Institution

Amy Frantz, 26 years old, Licensed Social Worker

Mark Willis, 49 years old, Educational Technology Program Coordinator

Megan Girock, 19 years old, student at Eastern University

Second, it was important to me that the project not only focus on the context of our local church but also be able to learn from and institute best practices for engaging millennials in effective ministry. Therefore, I reached out to Wesley Theological Seminary and became a part of the Lewis Fellows program. The Lewis Fellows program is a post-graduate, post-ordination leadership development opportunity for young clergy offered by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary,

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<sup>17</sup> Hazelton, 24.

supported in part by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. The Lewis Fellows program brings together outstanding young clergy persons (generally those under the age of 35) for intensive leadership development activities and sustained peer interaction.

The program began in 2005 as part of Lilly's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative. In 2012, the Lilly Endowment awarded the Lewis Center another grant through its Transition into Ministry Initiative to continue the program through 2016. To date, over 190 clergy from over a dozen different denominations have been Lewis Fellows.

Through this program, I was fortunate to visit with churches across the country, including The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, KS; Georgetown Presbyterian Church, Washington D.C.; and a number of churches in Miami, Florida. At all of the stops I inquired about what the churches were doing and how successful they were in engaging in ministry with the millennial generation.

Third, in an attempt to better prepare the LAC for the work of the project and to better understand the situation, we partnered with American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Philadelphia, and New Jersey in the ministry initiative, YATMA (Young Adults Together in Ministry). The YATMA initiative made it a goal to begin a collaborative ministry using online education tools, social media networking and educational/ministry gatherings to start an ongoing ministry with the sole purpose of reaching 18-29 year olds. The basis of this ministry was to help churches understand what this age group deems important to our world and how it intersects and connects them to Christ.

As a member of the core planning committee and a representative from New Jersey, I was heavily involved in putting together the webinar sessions that were attended

by our LAC members and other local ABC church leaders throughout the three adjoining regions. The sessions listed below were made available via the web during the duration of the project and continue to be offered for training purposes.

**February 20, 2014**

Caleb Breakey is a former journalist and the author of *Called to Stay*. Caleb is a frequent conference speaker with a sincere passion to lead, challenge, and inspire others in discussions about relationships, the church, and radically following Jesus. He lives in Washington State with his wife, Brittney.

**February 27, 2014**

Ron Tinsley lives in Philadelphia with his family and has had years of experience working with youth and young adults in church and para-church settings. Ron Tinsley started Prophetik Soul, a media consulting company that has 20+ years of experience in youth development and visual communications. He has won numerous awards in graphic design and education. Prophetik Soul focuses on logo design/identity and creating effective youth initiatives.

**March 13, 2014**

Samuel Chez has almost 20 years of experience reaching the emerging generation as a youth pastor and campus minister in Baltimore, at Grove City College, and recently at Princeton University. He spent most of his career with the CCO (Coalition for Christian Outreach), a regional campus ministry that partners with churches and colleges to develop men and women who live out their faith in every area of life. Sam established the CCO's presence in Metro Philadelphia. He holds his Bachelor's in Christian Ministries from Messiah College and his Master's in Higher Education from Geneva College. He is blessed daily by his wife and three children (15, 14, & 9).

### **April 3, 2014 “Grappling with the Smartphone Generation”**

Should you smash the cell phones? Jonathan McKee is president and founder of [www.thesource4ym.com](http://www.thesource4ym.com), a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing free, cutting-edge resources for youth workers across the world. Jonathan is an author, speaker, and trainer who began his career speaking on campus to unchurched middle school students. He continues to speak at school assemblies, events, and camps in addition to training adult and student leaders nationally. He's also author of *Do They Run When They See You Coming: Reaching Out to Unchurched Teenagers*.

### **May 15, 2014 "Millennials and Culture Making"**

Andy Crouch is the author of *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, published in October 2013. His book *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* won Christianity Today's 2009 Book Award for Christianity and Culture and was named one of the best books of 2008 by *Publishers Weekly*, *Relevant*, *Outreach* and *Leadership*. In December 2012 he became executive editor of *Christianity Today*, where he is also executive producer of “This Is Our City,” a multi-year project featuring documentary video, reporting, and essays about Christians seeking the flourishing of their cities. Andy serves on the governing boards of Fuller Theological Seminary and Equitas Group, a philanthropic organization focused on ending child exploitation in Haiti and Southeast Asia. He is also a senior fellow of the International Justice Mission's IJM Institute. His writing has appeared in *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and several editions of *Best Christian Writing* and *Best Spiritual Writing*. He lives with his family in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

## **Did Anything Change? Project Evaluation**

There was a great impact on the people in the context of ministry, both during and after the implementation of the project. First, it provided an opportunity to introduce new ministry opportunities for the church. Family Promise and ministering to the homeless population in Cumberland County has had a great rallying effect on the people within the church. Penny, one of the persons who has become a leader of this ministry had this to say about her involvement:

I enjoy it because it is a ministry that is helping those who are trying to help themselves. Everyone in the church can be involved regardless of age, gender; there is a way that they can help. Prayer, money, buying food, staying overnight. A good ministry for the whole church. I feel like I'm really helping people. Helping them get an education, homes, and even self-esteem.

It is very telling that the ministry continues to exist in our local church even now that the project has concluded. In addition, we have spearheaded the renovation of a dilapidated building in the center of Bridgeton to serve as the office of the Family Promise director and provide a space for the families to go to during the daytime hours. We are gathering supplies for the bathrooms, holding trainings for additional volunteers, and scheduling and gathering new volunteer churches to participate in the program.

Furthermore, through our participation in Family Promise, we have found a renewed focus and vigor towards actively being involved with mission programs as an entire church. We continue to collect food for our food bank, which helps to support the Emmanuel Cancer Foundation; raise money and awareness for the Atlantic City Rescue Mission; provide support for the Cornerstone Pregnancy Center; and knit hats, gloves, and other clothing items for the Murrow Indian Children's Home in Muskogee, Oklahoma in addition to the various missionaries that we financially support. I am so

proud and honored to serve in a congregation that values the missional service aspects of ministry.

The Young Adult group, “Baptist Believers,” also continues to meet and the attendees are looking forward to gathering together again this fall. Relationship is evident among the people who are involved, and the sincerity with which they continue to reach out to others is palpable. Additionally, as the group has continued to meet and grow, our leaders within the “Baptist Believers” have consistently looked for ways to grow the group and to continue to grow in influence. According to an article by Egli and Wang, “Small group growth is advanced by all four small group measures: the prayer life of the leader, outreach focus, caring relationships, and empowering leadership.”<sup>18</sup> We have sought to be intentional in our prayer time as well as in identifying additional leaders within the age range who can continue to lead outreach efforts and grow the group both numerically and spiritually. One highlight through this program is that our church is fielding a coed softball team this spring, and it has been spearheaded and organized by the persons within the small group. One additional byproduct of the project and the formation of the group is that people within our local church are searching and identifying new ways and opportunities for community and relationship.

### **What Was the True Value?: Congregational and Personal Reflection**

The true value of my project was that it forced our church to take a naked and authentic look at how we are engaged in ministry with young adults. Prior to my engaging in this project, I believed that there were varying ideas of how well we were involved in this area of ministry. To my surprise, we had never truly asked the young

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<sup>18</sup> Jim Egli and Wei Wang, “Factors that Fuel Small Group Growth,” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no.1 (Spring 2014): 149.

adults who attended church regularly if their relational and spiritual needs were being met within our congregation. Sweet cautions, “Relationships die without communication, and communication is hardest in the midst of conflict.”<sup>19</sup> It was imperative that we as a congregation learn to listen and engage with the millennial demographic or risk the alienation of them in the future. Once we genuinely engage in conversation and relationship with the millennial generation, we will be able to gain more insight into their views on life and relationships. John Mabry recounts a conversation that he had with a young female millennial in which she shares her thoughts on the difference between spirituality and religion. “Spirituality is people wanting to have something bigger, wanting to connect to divine mystery, but not wanting to get tangled up in all the mistakes and bad things that religions do sometimes.”<sup>20</sup> Our local church, through this project, has come to a place where we are able to have honest conversations with one another about ministry and life, conversations that I believe we would not have been able to have without this initiative.

Furthermore, this project provided a platform and launching pad for our involvement in a number of various outreach ministries. The mission board of the Cohansey Baptist Church has always done a nice job of supporting missionaries throughout the world; however, it has only been in recent months that we have made an intentional effort to step up our outreach efforts in our local area. In addition to the outreach that we engaged in throughout the project, our emphasis on “doing” has continued to take shape, and now we are a leading congregation in the city of Bridgeton for our latest mission outreach during the Code Blue Initiative. The Bridgeton Code Blue

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<sup>19</sup> Sweet, *What Matters Most*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Mabry, 176.

Program, started by Bridgeton Mayor Albert Kelly and several local congregations, was created to provide "Warming Centers" as a way for homeless persons in the community to find shelter from frigid overnight temperatures during the cold winter months. The Cohansey Baptist Church is proud to help to staff this ministry on various nights throughout the winter, and amazingly, those who have volunteered are from a variety of ages and help to live out our goal of intergenerational ministry.

I have learned a great deal from my time implementing this project. Among the lessons learned are: being intentional in meeting the needs of the community, the importance of partnerships within ministry, the need to focus on effective ministry as opposed to successful ministry, and the importance of listening to the concerns and needs of others as I engage in ministry.

I also found that flexibility is essential to being engaged in ministry. Some ideas may work well and some ideas may not work as well. It is imperative that we be willing to cross barriers and change approaches in hopes of reaching different people. The words of the apostle Paul remind Christians of our need to be flexible: "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot."<sup>21</sup> There is not one fool-proof idea about what works when engaging in ministry. Christians and churches must be flexible and willing to explore various methods in reaching those who do not know Christ. In our willingness to be flexible, the church will be able to gauge our passion in ministry and our focus. Craig Groeschel describes the passionate church: "With people so passionate, they're driven to become innovative. They'll become like others or do unusual things to reach those who are far from Christ or to help those who are hurting. Like the four men who broke

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<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 (NIV).



through the roof to get their crippled friend to Jesus, motivated believers don't see obstacles. They create opportunities."<sup>22</sup>

Passion fuels creativity, thus requiring the local church to be flexible and open to various new ways of engaging in ministry. The Cohansey Baptist Church is traditional and often slow to embrace new forms and methods of ministry. However, I found throughout the course of this project that they were passionate about reaching others for Christ and therefore invested in being more flexible in how we engage in ministry. Being intentional in meeting the needs of the community requires an ability to listen and observe the needs of the congregational context. As Lovett Weems shares in his book *Bearing Fruit*, "We are accountable for accomplishing outcomes that move us toward the mission. We also know that church leaders are called to be faithful and fruitful."<sup>23</sup> Churches must be focused on ministry that bears real fruit. However, in order to fully grasp what the needs of the community are, churches and, more specifically, pastors must be willing to engage their community context. In my particular situation, I started this process of learning my contextual needs by walking through the greater Bridgeton area and engaging in organic conversation with persons that I met. It was amazing to see how easily relationships were able to develop simply by making myself available to others.

Partnership within ministry is a crucial component of effective church ministry. According to Craig Groeschel, "It's something that God gives-more of a partnership of people with deep love committed to a single mission. You're more than friends. You're

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<sup>22</sup> Craig Groeschel, *It* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 98.

<sup>23</sup> Weems, *Bearing Fruit*, 45.

a team.”<sup>24</sup> As God exists in community as God the parent, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit, humanity was also created to exist in community, working together, sharing together, and serving God together. The Triune God provides an effective template for how to understand and practice mutuality. Mutuality insists on a certain level of respect being shown towards various persons’ gifts and abilities. Therefore, Christians are called to partner with one another because “there is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.”<sup>25</sup> We have the same basis and the same faith, and therefore we must be willing to come together to combat the same issues that confront all of us within the community.

It is important to note that this idea of mutuality and partnership should not only be directed to or benefit those who identify themselves as Christians. Throughout the implementation of the project, I realized how imperative it was for the benefactors of our efforts to not only be Christians but also members of the community at large. As we entered into partnership with Family Promise and also local churches in our area, we were able to meet a need of Cumberland County; not only the Christians of Cumberland County but all of the people. Through our partnership we were able to mobilize our church members for missionary outreach in the community. Through our partnerships we were able to live fully because “faith without works is dead.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, our outreach provided a new ministry opportunity for all ages, from teens to seniors; provided additional church visibility within the community; established a safe haven for

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<sup>24</sup> Groeschel, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 4:4-6a (NIV).

<sup>26</sup> James 2:24 (NIV).

unchurched families and provided somewhere for them to go when needs arise or when looking for a church to attend; and continued to allow us to build relationships.

Within our local church, it is imperative that we be open to idea of forming new relationships and new customs within community. Carol Merritt, in her book, *Tribal Church*, notes, “If the members become intentional about ministering to younger generations, they will move away from assimilating people into existing customs and begin a process of forming new communities.”<sup>27</sup> The formation of these new communities within the larger community is important if the local church is going to thrive in the twenty-first century.

Therefore, I must be willing to listen to viewpoints that maybe opposite of my own, because through disciplined and active listening, I can become acutely aware of the needs and concerns of those within my congregation and in the community. As I progress in ministry, I am continually seeking to become more of a connector. Jim Henderson predicts, “Connectors might replace traditional evangelists in the coming decades...evangelists have speaking skills; connectors have listening skills. Evangelists win people to Christ; connectors woo people to Christ...Evangelists engage in debates; connectors engage in dialogue...”<sup>28</sup> Engaging in ministry in the postmodern age is different than in generations past--not better, not worse, just different. Therefore, it is imperative for those within leadership across denominational lines to allow ourselves to be open minded to new ideas, different techniques, and other voices within the Christian diaspora. We must seek to connect persons to the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>27</sup> Merritt, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Henderson, 69.

In closing, I am reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul who wrote to the church at Corinth:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith...to another gifts of healing...to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy...all these are the work of one and the same Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

God has provided all that we need within the local church to help meet the needs of those within our context. Various persons, regardless of race, gender, or age can be used to be to the glory of God in effective ministry. To those who are lacking in interpersonal relationships, we must seek to be a friend who is able to show genuine concern. From those who have become disenchanted with the monotony of church, we must seek guidance and input as to what helps them to feel closer to God. For those who want to serve locally or internationally, we must find the opportunities both inside and outside of the church for them to gain fulfillment in ministry. For those who are tech savvy, we must increase and master our technological advances. In short, we must harness, like Paul, the flexibility, adaptability, and responsibility to be all things to all people in order that we might win some

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4-11a (NIV).

## APPENDIX

**Sermon – June 20, 2014**

### **Psalm 71**

We are going to pick up reading at verse 17 and read through the close of the chapter. Psalm 71, verses 17 through 24:

Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come. Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God. I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you--I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.

The Lord has blessed his word. For the next few minutes, friends, I will share with you from the subject, “Seasoned Wisdom.” Let us pray, “Father God, bless us now, bless these words, bless your people, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

If you can, just look to someone that is near you and say, “It’s really good to see you.” Last year for Children’s Day, I read Dr. Seuss. I have to admit, I couldn’t find a book that was as good as that one, plus I told you that we were going to preach from the Psalms and I couldn’t go back on my word. But thanks are to God, there is always a word in the time that we need it, because when you’re young, it’s good to have that energy that you always want to have. I remember when my children were born and I told

my father, “Dad, they just have so much energy, they never stop.” After he finished laughing, he said, “Al, be thankful, for you see, if they didn’t have that energy, you would call me and say something was wrong. Your telephone call would be something totally different if they couldn’t move, or do things that would cause you a little difficulty.” So you see, young people, middle-aged folks and older folks, it is good to be young. Someone has said along the way that youth is wasted on the young because we don’t know what we don’t know. We don’t know all that is to be. We don’t have the benefit of being able to live a little longer and look back on some of our youth and see the areas that we were able to improve on. And so it’s very important that people that you recognize--not just your parents, but your grandparents, your aunts, your uncles, your friends--see you here in the church. They may not know your experience as a teen, but the amazing thing is they have not gotten to whatever age they are by passing “Go” and getting \$200.00. They have not skipped years. Every person who is seated here has had to live every single moment of every single day of every single year they have been alive. They have been able to go from being seven to being eight and from eight to nine and from nine to ten, ten to eleven. They weren’t able to just skip from eleven to twenty, which is sometimes what we are prone to want to do as children.

I still remember myself when I was riding a bike. We used to take our bikes apart, you know, move the chain, add some things to it, get some different parts for it, and have a bike with all of these mismatched parts, and it made you somehow cool. But when I was about twelve or thirteen, I said, “I can’t wait to drive.” Little did I know that even when I got my license, I would have no car to drive. I wanted to drive so much, but I still had to keep living those years, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, till my

father took me to learn how to drive. And he never wanted to do anything easy, so he decided that he was going to teach me how to drive on a stick shift. Why? We didn't even own a stick shift. We had to borrow a stick shift, but the way my father looked at it was that if he could teach me to drive on this, I could drive anything. I would never be able to say, "Dad, I don't know how to drive this." I knew how to drive this. See, that is "Seasoned Wisdom." For you see, when I didn't see the point of it, my father was looking ahead. That is the same thing that you must do now: enjoy the time at the age you are now, enjoy the baseball, enjoy the ice cream, enjoy the summers off, and enjoy it! Leave it up to those who have lived a little longer and always provide you with some insight about the roads ahead. And be smart enough to listen. Even though you think you know everything in life, some things will happen. The same holds for everyone else, so don't feel bad. For you see, every generation has gone through what this generation goes through. It's the cycle of life. But sometimes we forget what it was like back when we were ten. As if all of a sudden we just became these people who sit still in church and are quiet. We never did anything that we shouldn't have done, never said anything that we shouldn't have said. We look back at those memories and we see them through rose tinted glasses. "I don't know why the children do what they do today," "I never did what they did today." Oh, come on.

But there is a word from the Lord that speaks about seasoned wisdom, wisdom that you could only have by having some age, by learning some things. You see here, the psalmist says, young people hear me: "Since my youth, you have taught me and to this day, I declare your marvelous deeds. Because even when I am old and gray, you do not forsake me." What do you see here, young people? You see a transition, a man who was

able to look back on his life, and now that he is old and gray (his words, not mine), he can see that God has blessed him all throughout his life. Even in those accidents I had that caused my parents to not be able to breathe as they took me to the hospital in the middle of the night, I see, now that I am an old man, that God has blessed me. And so what does that tell me? It tells me, Brother Greg, that God's guidance is not age restricted. It tells me, young people, that when I pray to God, I feel a connection with God. When I talk to him and take time to be with him, though I might not have all of the pretty words or know all that I am saying, I still know that God is there. I don't want folks to leave here saying, "Awww, it was just Children's Day; there wasn't any word for me." The word is not age restrictive. What is good for the young people is good for the old. And so when God says, "If you will just quiet yourself awhile, you will hear God talking to you," he's talking to all of us. One of the most dangerous things in life is peer pressure. Don't think that it stops when you stop being thirteen or nine or whatever that age is; there is always going to be a group that decides what you ought to do and their ideas seem better than your life. See, adults, you have that happening now. "Aw, man, you shouldn't go home to your family. Stay with us for a brew." But those friends are not there when the wife is mad and the children are asking, "Where is Daddy?" They're not there. When you have to get up and go to work the next day, there is always going to be peer pressure. "Aw no, you don't have to go church, you went to church last week." Have you ever noticed, Brother Ed, that no one ever says that about food? Have you ever noticed that? Sister Marilyn, have you ever noticed that they never say, "You ate last Sunday, you don't need to do that again. What's the point on having food on Tuesday? No, everything is going to be all right." But young people, I know how it goes, because



again, everyone here has been the age that you are, dealing with the issues that you are dealing with. Sometimes you may have friends who say, “Hey, let’s go here, let’s go there, let’s do this, let’s do that, it doesn’t matter if we tell the whole truth, say this to your dad, don’t listen to your daddy, it doesn’t matter what he says.” But the psalmist says that now that he has lived for a while, “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me.” This lets us know, young people, that even in the space of your Vacation Bible School, Sunday School classes, BYF, Boy Scouts, choir practices, baseball and all those spaces, you need to have your antennas up so that you can see what is God showing you. What is God giving us today?

Some folks don’t need to be Little League coaches. Why? Because they haven’t gathered yet that it’s about the kids. It’s about what they see, it’s about what they hear, and it’s about what they watch. It’s always about the children. We live in a time in which sports has taken on such a life of its own., People think they are going to go the professional leagues, that what happens on a Thursday night in July with seven year olds is going to dictate whether the child goes to the major leagues. And they fail to realize that God is allowing us to be there to teach them, to show them, to be a word of encouragement to them. “O God, you have taught me and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.” Stop and think for a minute, saints. Use your sanctified imagination and go back and stand on the porch of the years that have gone by. I want you to find yourself at a space before you were so grown. A space before you had all of this money, before you had all of these cars, before you had all of these big jobs. I want you to stand on the porch of history and find yourself at twelve, and see how God blessed you. Maybe you dealt with a parent passing before it was his or her time, and you became the man or

woman of the house way before it was your time. Maybe it was like a story that Brother Ben Turner told me. Brother Ben likes to go hunting, and he said he used to get on his bike and ride with his gun across his rack. He would go up to Shiloh Market and get some shells, ride his bike, and then go out hunting. And he said, "You know, I can't do that anymore. If I rode around with my gun on my bike, people would think I was crazy." When he was telling me this story, I heard something inside me say that this was a blessing to him. When he was a young boy, he was able to enjoy himself and find things that he liked to do without people stopping him from doing those things. He wasn't breaking any laws, he was just enjoying life. And sometimes kids just want to have a little fun.

Now, I am the first one to agree that there is a time and place for everything. I am the first one to agree that everything doesn't go in church. But I must say this, saints, they are still children. They're going to want to run around, they are going to want to be a little loud, but that's all right. Because if they recognize that at church they can be themselves, that no one is going to judge them, that they have a safe place here, you know what happens? They turn into grown men and grown women who say, "I got to get to church because I want my children to understand what I understand, that people in church will welcome me when I walk through the door and love me for whom I am." The psalmist says, "God, you have taught me marvelous deeds, those deeds that took place long ago. O God, do not forsake me." Young people hear me and hear me good. God will never leave you. You may not know it now, and you may only remember part of this as you continue to get older, but remember this: God will not leave you. For you see, in Psalm 37 it says, "I was young, but now am old, but I have never seen the

righteous forsaken.” The Lord has seen many bred. Some of us need to hear that, and sometimes I have to preach to myself, because sometimes in life you just want to say, “Is anyone around, does anyone care, does anyone know what is going on in my life?” And the answer is “yes,” because God said, “I will be there.” Look at what the psalmist says: “Do not forsake me, O God.” So as you keep on living, as you keep on growing, as you keep on developing, remember what the psalmist says: “Don’t forsake me because I still have work to do.”

Sometimes we say that evangelism is simply for those with leadership jobs within the local church--the pastor, trustees, deacons, and so on. I have shared with you once, and I will share it with you again: you have people with influence that I simply do not have. You have relationships with others that I don’t have. Sure, you can have me over for some roast beef, or some chicken and greens or whatever you are going to cook, and I am going to eat it, all right? (Just don’t make Brussels sprouts. I would eat them, but I don’t love them.) You have spaces in your life in which you have the opportunity to work with some people that I will never have. And look what it says: “Keep me going, God, till I declare the power to the next generation.” It is not just happenstance that we have all of these children walking around here. It is not simply coincidence that they are here in the balcony, in the front, in the back. It’s not a coincidence that they should find themselves in the educational wing. You see, it’s our job to do what? Show the marvelous deeds of God to the next generation. And you know what happens next, Sister Polly? The next generation, as the days and years keep going, will tell it to the following generation. And all of the sudden you will have what some of us have here today: “My family has been going here for a long time, pastor.” Helen Perry told me, “I have been

going here for, I don't know, 300 years, a long time." That just doesn't happen by happenstance; it happens by us sharing the word of God. And not just sharing the word of God, but having them understand it, even if it is in the small pieces like "Jesus Loves Me." Have you noticed that you don't even need a book for that song? There are some hymns that come up on the screen and you still need the book, but you don't need any of that for "Jesus Loves Me." You learned that a long time ago. And sometimes that is all you need to know, "Jesus loves me." Isn't that amazing that Jesus loves me? And I love what the hymn writer did. I'm not sure if it was a male or female who wrote the song, but it could have been "Jesus Love Us." That would have been true. But the hymn writer said that Jesus loves me! When you really understand that Jesus loves you, it changes the way you walk, the way you talk, and how you go about your daily business. The psalmist wants us to know that "I want to share the marvelous deeds of God and you might to all who are listening." Righteousness reaches to the sky. Sometimes when you are out having fun with your friends, young people, just look around for a while and see how blessed you are. See how blessed you are to run in the fields, to ride your bike. See how blessed you are to hang out with your friends, go get some ice cream. See how blessed you are to go to Rita's. See Megan, she works at Rita's, y'all. Go to Rita's, get a pretzel, have some water ice--it's such a blessing! Why? Because it says the righteous will go out to the sky, and as we go out and enjoy our time, we're able to see that God is blessing us in the midst. God has done great things.

The reality, young people, is that you keep getting older. I wish I could tell you something different, but I don't like folks who lie to me and I am not going to lie to you. . And even right now, you might deal with some obstacles. It's best that you understand

that right now, instead of playing these games like they don't exist, like somehow children are immune to obstacles. Shucks, we've been praying for Gia Krummaker for how long and we look at those situations and say that obstacles don't wait until you get older. They don't just say, "OK, you are at the age that you can handle it now." What does the psalmist say? "Though you have made me see trouble. . . ." Some of us may say that we have seen more trouble than we wish we would have seen. "Though you have made me see trouble." My friends, I may have done some things I shouldn't have done, and I may not know what is going on in my own home. "Though I have seen some trouble, many and bitter." See, this tells us that we are not going to see just one trouble; we will see two and three and four. But what it says is that he will restore you again. Someone ought to say "Amen," because that tells us that when the difficulties come, young people, God will keep on giving you what you need. You may say you can't make it on the algebra test, but who do you think made algebra? It was God. Now don't be silly and not study. When the teacher asks if you studied, will your answer be, "No, I just prayed to God"? Make sure you study, all right? But I want you to see that when the obstacles come, God will restore your life again. The key word is "again." Regardless of the version you may have, "again" gives the connotation that it will happen over and over. What if God only forgave us one time? I would be in bad shape if God only gave me five forgiveness's. Lord, it wouldn't work, it surely wouldn't work. But it says that God keeps doing it again, so I just want you to depend on God again. When you pray at night, ask God to bless you, and you know what? He will keep doing it again and again and again.

Now this is for a little older crowd coming up. It says, “You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth, you will again bring me up.” Notice the transition there in verse 20: “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.” Some things are a little more difficult than others because there are some obstacles that seem like we have gone under the earth. But see what God does--he still decides to bring us back up. God restores and God provides. It’s a time to reap. In my spirit, I feel that someone really needs to hear this. Sometimes you feel as though you are underneath the ground, it’s got that bad. The psalmist tells us saints that God can bring us up again. It’s not one time and one time only; he will do it again and he will keep doing it again. And see, you can only learn these things after you have been around for a while. Seasoned wisdom. “You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.” Now here is where it gets good, young people: “I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O God, I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praise to you-- I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long.” Sometimes, in local churches of all denominations, we find ourselves in the midst of worship wars. One person says, “I like church this way,” another person says, “I like church this way,” the young folks say, “We want church this way,” and the older folks say, “We want church this way.” Then we get to arguing about how best we are going to do church. But you see, sometimes in life, if God has taken you from underneath the ground and brought you up again, and you have seen his faithfulness from a young age into an old age, sometimes your expression of praise will come out in ways that no one understands. But that’s OK, Karen, because it’s your praise. I imagine

that in the psalmist's day, there was someone who didn't like the harp, Nola. Somebody played the harp, nonetheless. There might have been some people who didn't like the lyre, but somebody would say, "God brought me from underneath the ground, and you may not like the lyre, but I will praise him to the top of my lungs." Young people, there might be someone who say they don't like that song that you like, but sing that song anyhow. They may not like what's going on, but you like what's going on. That's all right because it's your praise. I know that some folks don't like the way I preach, but that's all right with me. Why? Because I preach because God saved me. I preach because God blessed me, I preach because he brought me from underneath the ground again and again and again. So when I say "hallelujah," when I say "thank you Jesus," when I say "glory to God" and lift my hands, I don't know if you like it, but I know that God has blessed me and that is the praise that I give back to him. There are some things you learn in my ripe age of 35, but I will say to you, there was a time in my life that I wouldn't have lifted my hands, and I didn't want anyone to hear me say "hallelujah," I was a little nervous about what my friends might think. I was nervous because I didn't know how they would look at me. My life continued to keep moving on and I could see God in my life, blessing me with good parents, blessing me with a family, blessing me with friends, taking care of my needs, and keeping me doing all of these things. One day it just got to the point where I just had to lift my hands and say, "Thank You, Jesus." If it hadn't been for the Lord, I wouldn't be here today standing in front of you. If it hadn't been for him, I would have maybe lost my mind, and if it wasn't for the Lord, I may not have been in the work that I'm in right now. But God saw the places he wanted me to go, and he made it happen. And God is going to bless you, too. He is going to bless you,

too, and you won't even know all the blessings he is going to bring to you. You're not sure if life will work out, but he will keep on blessing you. There is going to come a day, and I pray that I am here to see it, that you say, "Thank you Jesus." God bless you and keep you. Amen.

### **Sermon - August 24, 2014**

#### **Psalm 73**

We are going to look at Psalm 73. You may want to ask, "What are you going to do with all of the psalms that are still left in the box?" Well, maybe we will do them next summer or maybe not. That's the best I can give you right now, OK? But we are in Psalm 73 today, Psalm 73. It is pretty lengthy, but we are going to read the whole psalm. I am reading from the New International Version, and it reads as follows:

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. If I had said "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and



ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

The Lord has blessed the word. For the next few moments I will share with you from the subject “The Relief for Frustration.” Let us pray: “Father, bless us now, bless your people, and bless these words. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Who has ever been frustrated? Any time of life, doesn’t matter what the situation is, what the conditions were, frustration has reared its ugly head. Maybe it’s a situation of your spouse never picking up his or her dirty socks. Maybe it’s a situation of people knowing how to load up the dishwasher but never pressing the “on” button. Maybe it’s the person who consistently drives slow, you are in back of them, you need to get to work, you are late, and they will not, go two miles above the speed limit, and you are saying “Please, help me” with those frustrations. Maybe it’s a situation of the checkout person at the grocery store never knowing the codes of the produce that they are checking out.....frustration. Often there is frustration in trying to live a chaste life. Oh, you don’t hear that much anymore; it’s the idea of trying to live a life holy unto God, separated unto God. A life of not trying to be with the crowd, not trying to fall in with the masses, but rather a time of life that says, “God, I will commit myself to you, I give myself to you, I will give my heart, my mind, my soul...I will give it all to you, so that you might do with it as you see fit.” Sometimes that life is frustrating, especially when you see others--peers, colleagues, friends, family members-- who because of decisions they have made decide that they don’t want to live that type of life style. “I don’t want to wake up and go

to church every Sunday,” “I don’t want to carve out the time that I might pray at a steady time every day, no, I choose not to,” “I don’t want to be in a committed marriage or relationship, no, I choose not to.” I don’t want to be in certain things and restrict myself in certain ways because I am but human. So therefore, as a human, I will indulge in what I want to. Sometimes, when you strive to live in a certain way and there are others who have decided they will not live that way, you ask yourself the question, “What is the point?” If everything keeps going great for them and they don’t care anything about God, when everything keeps going bad for me and I am trying to live as God would have me live, why do it? I am wasting my time, there is a Saturday night with my name on it, and there is no cutoff time. We went to a friend’s house last night, and all the preachers in the room pointed out, “You know you have to get up in the morning, right?” We were playing a game called “Taboo.” The men lost the first game and I was mad--we needed a rematch. The only reason I left was because I had to come to church. See, there was a time in my life that being in a room with a bunch of preachers was not “taboo,” and I will leave it at that...right? Maybe you have been playing “Taboo” with a bunch of preachers for a long time, but I haven’t.

The issue here in the Psalms, with Asaph, is that he is frustrated. At the end of the day, you see him angry. Now, who is the man? Well, number one, you have to understand some things about him. As an officer in the Jerusalem religious system, he has some things that are reported to him because of his responsibilities. He has the ability to be in certain places, to meet certain people, and have certain conversations. It is the old adage of having connections, being in the know, with the in crowd: this is Asaph. The book of Psalms credits him with writing twelve psalms. These psalms often have the

same characteristics: there is a great calamity, there is a solemn tone, there is a pervading melancholy, this idea of he wasn't too happy with some of the choices that he had made. Sometimes that is us as well. We think back over the course of our lives and we say to ourselves, "What decisions have I made that I wish I had not made?" Sometimes I ask myself that question in regard to different things, one of which is the decision of where I went to college. I love Colgate, right? When they hear that you went to Colgate, they automatically think, "Oh, he's smart, right?" But sometimes now I listen to my friends and they talk about when they went to college and all of the fun they had, "Man, I was stuck in the middle of the valley that had snow for eight months out of the year!" And I am not just talking a little snow; I am talking big snow! So there was no going outside, there was no Frisbee.....no, no, no....it was freezing. We think about our decisions, what have we done, what have we decided, and that frustrates us at certain times. Asaph is the same way: he had a struggle, a crisis. There is a word, apostasies, that speaks of someone on the verge of abandoning and/or deserting political or religious beliefs. That is where Asaph finds himself today-- on the edge of apostasies, of saying "what is the point," throwing his hands in the air. "My life is frustrating, all these folks, all these people who don't care anything about God are blessed, and I'm not." And you know what, it's not right, it's not fair, but as Asaph begins to think; his faith wouldn't give him away too soon. It's the same thing with us. You have trusted God for a long enough time, trusting and praying to God and reading your Bible and going to church and just believing in God for a long time. Even in those spaces where you have these crises of faith, remind yourself, even if it is just a little inkling or a little nudge, that God is good." "I can't give it all up right now; I have been serving him too long."

So what we see in the onset of Psalm 73 is that Asaph makes a conclusion before he gets to the litany of his problems. His conclusion in verse 1 is, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” The Psalmist first states this confident conclusion which comes during his supreme test of faith. Oh, I want someone to get this today, this understanding that God is surely good; he’s surely good to Israel. Asaph came to this realization when he was having a supreme test of faith, when he was at the point of no return, when everything was going against him, when he didn’t want to deal with it, was at his breaking point. Hallelujah....that is when the word “hallelujah” came. He said, “I know God is good.” But you know I can’t disregard what I am feeling on the inside. I tell people all the time, you have to own your feelings, own your feelings. What does that mean? That means that you feel the way you feel and-- you know what-- own it. If you are mad, OK, you are mad. If I love you, I love you. The reality is how you feel and you don’t have to justify how you feel. No one has to agree or ask why you are mad.” You are angry, you are sad, you are happy, all of these things. We don’t have to qualify our feelings to someone else. Well, Asaph here, even in the midst, he says, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” But the big problem is what you see in verse 2: “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped.” Asaph said this after his confident conclusion that God is good. Notice that he uses the Hebrew participle, the same Hebrew participle when he said “Surely God is good,” You can translate that as “Now, God is good,” “Truly, God is good,” “Only, God is good,” “After all, God is good.” It is like an apostrophe with an “ak” there. So when I say, “Surely”, I know it’s the truth. But let me take it one step further. I can say, “Now, God is good,” “Truly, God is good,” “Surely, God is good,” “Only, God is good.” “After all that I have dealt with, the mess that I

stepped through, God is still good.” Can someone say an “Amen?” Aww....see that blesses you, because as Asaph gets to understanding and he comes to this realization, he works through his problems. I don’t have all day to go through all of his problems, but you can see what they are. His first problem in verse 3 was what? He was envious, envious of whom? The arrogant, the wicked. You know what, I have a guilty confession: I like to watch stories about the Mob. Guilty as charged. I have probably seen every Mob movie there is, and I like to watch them on the History Channel, like Pythons, and last night I was watching one. Awww....wait, I am a preacher, I can’t watch the Mob, I am sorry. So, I am watching this show, and it was talking about the rise of certain people through history. They were talking to a retired FBI agent who that it is so amazing that in America there is such a fascination with people who are committing such dastardly crimes. It’s amazing because somewhere on the inside there is this desire to do whatever you want to do, walk wherever you want to walk, knock over any door you want to knock over, eat what you want and not have to ask for it, be with all of the people that you want to be with. And there is this envy that says, “Oh, even in my mind, I wish I could be that person,” “I wish I could do those things.” So look in your Bible and look at Asaph. What does he say? He says, “I envy the arrogant.” Think about this concept for a second: “when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” He has been striving to live this holy life, but all around him he sees prosperity through all of these wicked things, and he finds himself saying, “What is the point?” Doesn’t it seem this way sometimes? Look at verse 4. Now, I know this is the Bible, I know this is the Psalms, and I know this is so holy, but tell me this: isn’t it true right now? There are folks that we look at sometimes, and we think that their lives are just so amazing, they have no

struggles, they don't have any problems, life is just so good, their bodies are healthy and strong, they have money, they don't get sick, they don't have these issues, they are free from burdens, they are not plagued by human ills. As Asaph speaks, all of the way from verse 2 through verse 12, he is frustrated about the prosperity of the wicked. And because of his envy of what they had, these physical things, these earthly things, he is in danger of complete apostasy and turning his back on God. Turning his back on God. He describes their arrogance, their freedom from suffering, their pride and their mockery of God and this is where he finds himself. He tries to hold on, and he says... He says, "God is good, he is surely good." And then he says, "I can't lie, I'm mad. I want some of things that they have, I want some of the release of the headaches that they have, I want the car that they have, I want the house that they have, I want the shoes that they have, I want the wife that they have, I want the husband that they have, I want the children that they have." He finds himself in the midst of that struggle. He continues on that not only is his problem consistent, it consistently turns into a temptation. Pick up with me in verse 12: "This is what the wicked are like – always carefree, they increase in wealth." And he begins to look at himself in verse 13: "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence." What is the point of being a Christian if God is going to treat you like this?

I will still remember and I will never forget if the Lord keeps blessing me to have the mind that I have right now, the Wednesday that we thought that Ava was not going to be born. I will never forget it. My wife called me and we had already dealt with some miscarriages. She was five/six months along, the police had to drive her from her job to the hospital because she had all of this blood coming out of her, and she called me to

meet her at the hospital. I go the hospital, go the room, it just seems ridiculous, and I think the baby is gone. But they put the ultrasound on and Ava was doing back flips in the womb. What is the point of me telling you this? So that you can see the power of God in my life, and then you can see the power of God in your life. I will tell you this, I called Brother John and said, "Brother John, I need someone to teach Bible Study," and after everything was situated, and I went home that night and got into an argument with God. I am talking angry! It went something like this (and I will save you some of the details): "I don't want anything to do with this if it is going to be this hard. I will go get another job, I will find something else to do with my life, and I want absolutely no part of it if it is going to be this difficult." It is not easy to stand up in front of you all and continually, even in the space of your own struggles, tell you that God is good, because sometimes you question: "Well, if I am so good, why this?" What came to me was a psalm, and the psalm consistently repeated that God's loving kindness endures forever. Why do I tell you that? Because when I was in the space like Asaph, where I felt that all of this was for nothing, I still had to deal with it, and God said, "I can love you through it. Come to me, all who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, I am meek and lowly." God is not running from your anger, he is waiting for it. Some folks say, "I'm mad at God, so I am going to go this way." God says, "If you are mad at me, come on, let's talk about it, let's be together and deal with all things that are happening, because you know what? I love you, and I love you enough that I am not going to turn my nose up at you when you say something to me." Do you have any friends like that? They are your friends until you say something to them that's kind of "ugh" and they say they don't want to be friends with you anymore. God is not like that.

He says, "If you are mad at me, let's talk; let's deal with it because my love will swallow you up." Realize that you are still in relationship with God even if you are mad. Even with all of these things going on, God still says, "Come to me. Don't go to other folks because they may not be able to help you, come to me. "If you need some money, come to me. If you need some peace, come to me. If you need love, forgiveness, joy....I want you to come to the throne of grace." Their needs will be met. Let's look again at Asaph's situation. He says, "Surely in vain, why am I doing this?" Don't we feel like this sometimes? "My life doesn't mean anything; I have been doing these things all day long."....All day long we are plagued. Folks are talking about us, dollars are not making sense, your money is short, folks are not talking to you, family members are mad at you, and friends don't want to be around you. Asaph wrestled every morning with these questions and these ideas about being punished and thinking of all of these terrible things that were happening to him. Look at verse 16: "When I tried to understand all this.", When we try to understand it with human minds, it doesn't make sense. The things of man are not the things of the spirit, and the things of the spirit are not the things of man. When I try to understand all of this, it is oppressive to me. Try to make sense of some of the things that have happened in your life, even now or before. It just feels like a weight, and you say, "I need some Tylenol," "I need something to help me with this," "my head is hurting. "Look at what Asaph did. These things were oppressive until when? "Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."



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