

**A SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE**  
A STUDY INTO THE REASONS WHY THE ADULT CHILDREN OF MEMBERS  
FROM THE BROOKLYN AND LIVERPOOL UNITED BAPTIST CHURCHES  
QUIT PARTICIPATING

by

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A Thesis Presented  
to the Faculty of Theology, Acadia Divinity College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Ministry

Acadia Divinity College  
Acadia University  
Spring Convocation 2014



This thesis by STEVEN BROOKE HOPPER was defended successfully in an oral examination on 20th March 2014.

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## **Abstract**

The Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches have experienced growth over the past four years. The increase has primarily been a result of conversions and to a lesser degree transfers of membership. Surprisingly the church has benefitted very little from biological growth. Children, who were brought up in the church, attended its programs and were baptized at a young age, are choosing not to be involved as adults. Their decision to not return to church is a disturbing trend and needs to be reversed.

Research gathered from interviews with eight individuals, who attended one of the two churches as children but no longer regularly attend as adults, showed that with the exception of one person, all left church in their mid-teens. This decision was based more on rebellion than any other factor. Unlike their decision to leave, their reason for not returning was well thought out. They have serious reservations about attending a church that, from their perspective, is not active enough in meeting the social needs of local residents. Their rationale for not returning, for the most part, was unique when compared with other literature.

The biblical and theological testimony shows that the church should practice a holistic mission that involves displaying social responsibility and concern for Christian witness. Practicing this intertwined mission means that the two churches will need to broaden their vision. By following a specific plan they can change their culture and place themselves in a better position to retain their youth.

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## Acknowledgements

I want to say thank you, first of all, to those who agreed to be interviewed. Thank you for allowing me to probe into your life. Your willingness to share your religious experiences and opinions made this project possible.

Another word of appreciation goes to my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Robert Wilson, a family friend who journeyed with me through most of my post-secondary education. Thank you for never giving up on me. I am also indebted to Rev. Brian Wallace, who epitomizes Proverbs 18.24. He, Rev. Paul Ross and Rev. Wayne Fevens served as my team of peer reviewers.

My appreciation is also extended to my eldest daughter, Carlie Van Amerongen, who read and edited all my work, friend Carol Smith, who displayed extraordinary patience when proofreading my writing and Mama Marie Lamrock for transcribing the interviews. I could not have completed this project without any of you.

My gratitude also goes out to my church family, Liverpool United Baptist Church and Brooklyn Baptist Church. Your gifts of time and finances along with your prayers and words of encouragement have helped carry me through this process.

My Ministry Assistant, Donna Dexter, arranged my schedule and my golf buddy, Judy Dexter, looked after many ministry details so that I could have more time to write. Thank you both.

I want to express my gratitude to God for the Christian heritage that has helped shape my life. This includes my grandfather, Licentiate Carl Kenneth Hopper who once said to me, "Get your education Stevie, it is not heavy to carry around." and my parents, Laddie Roy and Donna Jean Hopper who modeled missional living each day of my life. I especially want to thank my wife Diane whose love and support cannot be measured. I love you.

I would be remiss if I did not say thanks to my Springer Spaniel, Penny, for patiently listening to all my ideas when you would rather we had gone running. I owe you an ear scratch and a long run on the beach.



## INTRODUCTION

The Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches are located in Southern Queens County on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. They are typical Baptist congregations for this part of the province. The congregations share a pastor and hold weekly services in a traditional style sanctuary with a membership top heavy with seniors. The services offer traditional hymns as well as contemporary songs and both have excellent choirs, which sing an anthem each Sunday. A worship team leads the congregation in the singing of worship choruses in the Liverpool church. The congregations combine their efforts for ministries to children and youth. These two present-day churches have a long history.

The first Baptist church in the area was formed at Sandy Cove in 1821. It served the communities of Milton, Liverpool and Brooklyn. Construction on a new building at Shipyard Point was started in 1834 and opened in 1837. In 1842, a building was erected in Milton. The members resolved in 1850 to divide into two churches and a new building was completed in Liverpool in 1853 on the site of the present church. In 1872, a building was erected in Brooklyn and the pastorate was again divided.<sup>1</sup> Throughout their history the churches have experienced fluctuation in attendance. In 2013, attendance frequently reached 45 in Brooklyn and 100 in Liverpool. They have experienced growth over the

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<sup>1</sup> Liverpool United Baptist Church Photo Directory 2013, p. 3

past five years. The increases have primarily been a result of conversions and to a lesser degree, transfer growth.<sup>2</sup> This growth is surprising given the local context.

This growth runs against the trend in a county where most congregations face declining numbers and smaller annual budgets. Many are struggling to employ a full-time clergyperson while others have decided to go with part-time or lay leadership.<sup>3</sup> Most of the churches have a Sunday morning attendance of fewer than 50 people and senior citizens make up the vast majority of the membership. Still others have lost viability and closed.<sup>4</sup>

Rural churches on the south shore of Nova Scotia have been in decline for years, mainly because of a declining population base. For example, in Queens County, between 2001 and 2006, the population declined by 4.2%.<sup>5</sup> Student population numbers are down, as are registrations for many of the children and youth programs. Many of the young adults have migrated to Halifax or other urban centers in Canada for university and employment.

The local economy has not fared well in recent years. Local industries have downsized or closed. The fishing industry has diminished as quotas have been slashed because of decreased fish stocks. The local economy relied heavily on the tourism industry, which was mostly dependent on US traffic. The downturn in the economy of the United States has meant that much of that industry has evaporated. This, in turn, has led to an exodus of skilled workers who have moved elsewhere to seek employment.

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<sup>2</sup> Transfer Growth occurs when people have moved to a new area, start attending the church and transferred their membership. (Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, Ill.: Eerdmans, 1970, 98)

<sup>3</sup> South Queens Ministerial Roundtable Discussion, May 2013.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Port Mouton United Church.

<sup>5</sup> Communities in Crisis: Liverpool, Nova Scotia. Accessed on December 5, 2011.  
<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/sites/default/files/liverpool-english-communities.pdf>, 3.

Growth in these two churches has been surprising, not only in light of the other area congregations, but also in contrast to what is being reported in the rest of Canada. In his book, *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada*, Reginald W. Bibby notes, “People observing the Canadian scene between 1960 and 2000 were virtually unanimous in viewing organized religion as being in irreversible decline.”<sup>6</sup> After conducting a 2003 survey of Canadians, Susan Catto concluded, “Canada is no longer a nation of church-goers. Attendance at religious institutions – the old-fashioned kind, with altars and steeples - is in decline.”<sup>7</sup> Some social scientists have predicted that Canadian culture will follow Europe into secularism. They argue that religion does not have much of a future in highly developed societies.<sup>8</sup>

Astonishingly, Brooklyn and Liverpool Baptist Churches do not fit within this pattern. These two congregations are reaching new people and growing numerically. They have benefitted, however, very little from biological growth.<sup>9</sup> Adults who were taught to follow Jesus as children are not practicing a church-based faith. Donald McGavran, a church growth specialist, says they have become “lost to the world” or are “sucked back into the other community.”<sup>10</sup>

This is what happened in the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches. Children, who were brought up in the church, attended its programs and were baptized at a young

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<sup>6</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada*. (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2012), 4

<sup>7</sup> Susan Catto, “In Search of the Spiritual”. Originally published in *Time Magazine*, November 24, 2003, <http://www.christianity.ca/page.aspx?pid=9400> (accessed on November 25, 2013.)

<sup>8</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*. (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada Books, 2011),

<sup>9</sup> Biological Growth occurs when those born into Christian families make a decision to follow Christ and join the church. Transfer Growth occurs when people have moved to a new area, start attending the church and transfer their membership. (Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*. (Grand Rapids, Ill.: Eerdmans, 1970, 98)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

age, are choosing not to be involved as adults. A simple answer to this problem could be that the children grew up, went away to university and have never returned to Southern Queens County to seek employment. While that is true in many cases, there are also a number of children who, as adults, still live in the area and could attend if they so decided. Additionally, not only have those who reside in Liverpool stopped attending the church of their youth, but also those who have moved are not attending churches in other locations. Their lack of involvement is a grave concern for parents who often question why the contemporaries of their children, some who had little, if any, church background, are attending church while their children are not.

Parents understand the importance of doing everything possible so that their children follow Christ. God commanded his followers to pass on their faith to the next generation. *"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up"* (Deuteronomy 11:18-19).<sup>11</sup> Many of the parents wondered if there was something they could have done differently that would have prevented their adult child's self imposed exile from church. The answer to this question required an in-depth examination.

The research attempted to discover the answer to this question by separating it into two parts. The first is, "What issue caused them to leave church?" The second is, "What caused them to stay away from church?" Although the answers to these questions could be different, my theory was that they were the same. They left the church and

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<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise stated all scriptural quotations are taken from the New Living Translation, Second Edition.



refused to come back for the same reason. They were not interested in Christianity as it is practiced in faith communities today.

The hypothesis that will be tested is, “The unwillingness of the churches to practice mission integrally is both the reason they left the church and the reason for their present reluctance to reunite.”<sup>12</sup> From their perspective, the church has abandoned its emphasis on demonstrating the gospel to the needy within their locale. Instead they see the church focus only on preparing people for eternity.

### **Methodology**

The first step taken to test the hypothesis was human subject research. It began with exploratory conversations with members from the Brooklyn and Liverpool Baptist Churches beginning in the summer of 2009. Often with tears in their eyes, parents related their concern that their children were no longer active in a church. Many told stories of how their grandchildren were not brought to Sunday School and did not even know the wonderful Old Testament stories in the Bible.

In the course of the conversations, these church members were asked their opinions on why their children had dropped out. They blamed the secularization of Sunday as the main reason. There were just so many other things that had to be done on Sundays. If only the stores were not open, they would attend church rather than shop. If only the recreation departments did not plan sporting events on Sunday, their children would attend rather than travel. If work commitments did not involve Sunday, they would attend.

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<sup>12</sup> Integral mission is one that practices both the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Some parents related painful stories of the tragic deaths of their children's friends. They thought that these horrific events made their children question how a loving God could let this happen. Unable to wrestle this question to resolution, they gave up on church. Lifestyle issues inconsistent with the church's teaching, such as alcohol and/or drug use and cohabitation, were also seen as reasons for not returning. Parents also talked about how their children's faith was destroyed at university. They were not equipped to deal with the lifestyle freedom or the challenges to their faith that scholastic study introduced.

Next, the parents said that the church members themselves might have been a cause for the drop out. The children witnessed conflict among the members and saw how poorly they often got along. They told of members who avoided other members and it caused an emotional scar that they carried into adulthood. If this was the way the membership treated each other, their children wanted no part of it. Other parents told emotional stories of how the judgemental attitudes of older church members toward their children's choices contributed to their refusal to attend. Another idea that the parents contributed was the transience of today's adults. Their children move from location to location and never seek out a church to attend. In effect, they have no malice toward the organization but simply got out of the habit of attending.

Conversations were also held with the adult children themselves. Opportunity for these discussions took place when they came home to visit their parents or, for those still living in the community, during everyday encounters. As they became more comfortable talking to the pastor, they talked openly about their reasons for non-involvement. Most of the reasons their parents mentioned were brought up in the discussions. The clear

impression given was that they would be involved if they saw something significant happening in church. They expressed an unwillingness to be part of a holy club that only met together to better themselves. These conversations proved that the research was viable but would require more in-depth analysis.

In order to study the issue deeper, more specific data were needed. Adults who grew up in either the Liverpool or Brooklyn Baptist Church but who were not currently attending anywhere were interviewed. With the assistance of members of the faculty of Acadia Divinity College, it was decided that eight people would be an adequate sample size for in-depth interviews.

The following assumptions were the theoretical foundations of this project: first, the adult children could be identified. Second, there was a concrete reason for their lack of involvement. Third, the reason for their lack of involvement is discoverable; that is, they would talk about it. Fourth, changes could be made to the ministry of the churches that would affect their attendance patterns. While the first three of these assumptions were verified, the final assumption will take years to prove. If the program for correcting the issues is followed over the next decade, the trend may change and prove this assumption correct as well.

A list of individuals who attended the church with their parents over the past 50 years was compiled by talking to the church clerks, former Sunday School superintendents and teachers as well as older members of the congregations. A pre-interview survey was used to narrow the field of potential interview candidates.<sup>13</sup> To be suitable candidates, participants needed to be between the ages of 18-59, and to have attended Liverpool or Brooklyn Baptist Church regularly during their formative years.

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<sup>13</sup> The Pre-Interview Survey is included in the appendix.

Additionally, their parents had to be or have been committed Christians and active members during this same period. Finally, they needed to admit to dropping out of church as an adult.

Once the list was pared down, fourteen individuals were contacted before eight agreed to be take part in a one-hour interview. Upon getting their consent, these interviews were conducted during September 2013.<sup>14</sup> The interviewees were comprised of four individuals from each gender. Their age brackets were as follows: one was 20-29, two were 30-39, three were 40-49 and two were 50-59. The marital status was: four single, one divorced and three married. Four were parents. All of those interviewed graduated from public high school. Three had attended a community college and one had attended a Christian university.

This qualitative research was gathered through interviewing adults who had attended either the Brooklyn or Liverpool Baptist Churches for at least part of their formative years. Five attended only these two congregations before dropping out. Three mainly attended these churches during this period. For a brief interval their attendance was disrupted as their families attended in another location. The average age of seven out of the eight dropouts was fifteen when they stopped attending church. The remaining interviewee stopped attending as an adult because of ill health.

The questions were divided into four sections. The first section gathered some background facts. In the second section the dropouts were asked about their childhood and teenage religious experiences. The following questions were used in this discovery: how did they personally experience God? Was their conversion a result of a sudden

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<sup>14</sup> The interview questions are included in the appendix.

spiritual experience or gradual awakening? What was the depth of the spiritual instruction they received at home, including how consistently their parents practiced their faith? What was the impact of their friendships on their faith? What effect did training at educational institutions have on their faith? Finally, they were asked how the church, either positively or negatively, impacted their spiritual development?

In the third section the questions focused on their religious experiences as adults. How did they identify themselves in terms of religious affiliation and did they practice spiritual disciplines as adults? What were the reasons they decided to leave and to stay away from the church? Did their spouse and close friends influence their decision to stay away? What are their current theological beliefs and did they remain orthodox in spite of not attending church? Finally, what was their understanding of the role and mission of the church in contemporary society?

In the last key division of questions were comments on the research presented in other studies that included the reasons people from other locations in North America give for dropping out and for not returning. In addition, their opinion of others' explanations of the role of the church in contemporary society was explored. Finally they were asked to comment on the reasons others give for their inactivity.

The interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed to ensure accuracy. Care was taken to protect the privacy of those interviewed. Once typed and transcribed, the interview was assigned a number and the interviewee assigned a pseudonym, both of which were used for the duration of the study. All of the data transcribed from the interview were saved on my laptop in a password-protected file. A second copy was

saved in a password-protected file on an external hard drive, which was locked in my office desk. When the project is completed, all research data will be destroyed.

All of the interviews were done in my office with the exception of one person who was not able to come to the study for physical reasons. That person was interviewed in their home. All participants were asked to sign a consent form. The interviewees were informed that they were under no obligation to participate and could stop the interview at any time should they wish to do so. Even after the interview, if they had a change of heart and did not want their information included in the study, they could have contacted me and I would have destroyed all of their data. None did.

Care was also taken to insure that the interviewee would not be singled out by any identifiable information. The fear was that a parent or family friend would read the thesis and be able to figure out the dropouts' identity. Each was warned that this was a possibility but was not bothered by the remote possibility of it happening. They were happy to be involved in the study and being given the opportunity to participate. Some even told their parents that they were part of the study.

The next step taken in testing the hypothesis was literature research. The data gathered from the human subject research were compared to contemporary literature. There are a variety of reasons given in other research for why people decide to leave the church. They were considered, as these two churches difficulty in holding on to their youth may have been just a reflection of a larger pattern that is happening across North America. If that is the case, lessons learned from other studies could be applied to these two churches to help rectify the current situation.

The results were then analyzed in light of Scripture. Exegeses on relevant scriptural texts that explain the mission of the church formed the heart of the scriptural study. This exploration was divided into three sections: the Old Testament witness, the Gospel testimony and the apostolic message. A unifying principle for the church's holistic mission was sought.

Following the scriptural study, the mission of the church as detailed in theological thought was reviewed. There has been great debate concerning the nature of the church's mission. One extreme teaches that the church should focus all of its attention on evangelism. The other believes congregations should focus their attention on improving social problems in our culture. In between these two is a group that teaches a holistic or integrated mission.<sup>15</sup> Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.<sup>16</sup> It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission proclamation has a social consequence as people are called to love and repent in all areas of life. Our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

These theologians also teach that the mission of the church can only be properly understood in light of the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> It was to announce that His kingdom was present whenever someone submitted his or her life to His reign. The church is to continue to work to implement His kingdom and make society a better place, a more godly location.

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<sup>15</sup> The Micah Declaration. September 2001. Accessed on November 25, 2013.  
[http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn\\_integral\\_mission\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. (Nashville, TE: Broadman, 1994) 654

The research was discussed with leaders in each church. A team of three individuals acted as peer reviewers and made revision suggestions. Dr. Robert Wilson, the Thesis Supervisor, reviewed the work and enlisted the help of some of his colleagues to analyze the data pertaining to their field of study.

A ministry plan and an implementation schedule for the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches grew out of the research. It seeks to help the members develop a renewed vision for the church, as an organization, to locally and globally continue the holistic mission as practiced by Jesus. Focus will also be placed on the transmission of faith from one generation to the next through supporting the efforts of parents and assisting with the ministry of the church so that teens are equipped to withstand the pressures of adolescent rebellion. The specific details of the ministry plan are included in the appendix.

Some may question the validity of asking the dropouts' opinion of the current state of the church since they do not attend. Thom Rainer asks a good question, "How can the unchurched evaluate the relevancy of a church service if they never or rarely attend?"<sup>18</sup> How can they comment on an organization of which they are not a part? As is the case with this study, how can they evaluate the effectiveness of a church's missional ministry when they do attend? There are several reasons why the results are reliable. One needs to understand small town dynamics. It is a close-knit community where people know each other well and talk freely. In this context the church can quickly gain a reputation. If it starts a new ministry, you may hear of it at the local coffee shop or restaurant. All of the people interviewed have family members who attend. The church

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<sup>18</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 137



is often a topic of conversation in the home. The dropouts still occasionally attend special services at Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day or Thanksgiving. They learn about its ministry through the announcements and bulletin. Funerals and weddings also provide them an opportunity to come inside the building. These functions almost always include a reception where people talk about the church.

Often those who do not regularly attend still serve the church as they work alongside members doing repairs, cleaning up or setting up for special services, loaning their possessions to the congregation periodically, and offering their unique services to the church. All of this provides them with ample opportunity to hear from the members about what the church is doing in ministry.

Finally, members occasionally talk to the dropouts about their faith and lack of involvement in church. Most of them have gotten to know the minister well enough that they are comfortable talking to him casually in the community or professionally in the office. All of these conversations give them insight. All of the dropouts were open to talking to the pastor about their religious experience during their formative years and during adulthood. A sufficient amount of data were gathered to accurately expose the reasons for departure from church and the underlying cause for their refusal to reengage with the congregation.

Others may also question the validity of focusing on the church's weakness rather than its strengths. Really it is a matter of philosophical approach. One method is to focus on its strengths, which is practiced by George Bullard. By capitalizing on what the church does well, the vision spreads and the organization grows. The other approach, practiced by Christian Schwartz, targets the weakest area and seeks to strengthen it believing that

the church will only grow as strong as its weakest link. This research uncovered areas that the church can improve on and, in turn, should lead to growth.

The hypothesis will be tested first on other contemporary studies by looking at the reasons people offer for leaving the church and also those they give for continuing to live their life apart from church.<sup>19</sup> This examination will provide some context before chapter two narrows the focus and provides an analysis of those who have dropped out and remain uninvolved in the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches.

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<sup>19</sup> The hypothesis was, “The unwillingness of the churches to practice mission integrally is both the reason they left the church and the reason for their present reluctance to reunite.” (p. 5)

**CHAPTER 1**  
**AN EXAMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY STUDIES OF CHURCH**  
**DROPOUTS**

In 1985, Don Posterski wrote, “young people between the age of fifteen and nineteen are turning away in large numbers from church attendance and from participation in church life.”<sup>20</sup> Twenty-eight years later, we see this trend continuing because North American congregations are not succeeding at retaining their young members. Children, brought up in the faith, are continuing to turn their backs on their spiritual heritage when they become adults.

Christian parents cling to the belief that during one of the major transition points in their lives, their children will choose to participate again in church. Biblical support for this belief came from a superficial understanding of Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (KJV) However, three Project Canada studies found scant support for this concept (1975, 1980, and 1985). In *Fragmented Gods*, Reginald Bibby analyzed the results of these studies and said that there was evidence to indicate a slight increase in attendance among adult children of

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<sup>20</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Friendship: a Window On Ministry to Youth* (Lethbridge, AL: Project Teen Canada, 1986), 65

church members when they marry and have children of their own.<sup>21</sup> That was in 1985 and it seems that this is not the case today.

Parents keep waiting for their children to wander back into church life, yet they stay away. Many have attended university, begun careers, gotten married, bought houses, had babies, all apart from their family legacy of faith. This stark reality is not the case just in Liverpool, in Nova Scotia or in Canada. This sad commentary is true about churches and families all over the industrialized world. If Bibby is correct, however, it is perhaps an even more crucial issue in Canada. He has recently written, “Conservative Protestants numerical stability and growth are tied primarily to their ability to retain their own people, their children.”<sup>22</sup> This chapter will explore both the reasons why people left the church and why they continue to live their lives as if the church was never part of the social fabric of society. These will be broken into five categories: Cultural Reasons, Philosophical Dissimilarity, Theological Differences, Disagreement over Social Issues, and Practical Excuses.

### **Cultural Reasons**

Society has changed so fast that religious institutions have had a difficult time keeping stride. After being away from church for a few years, coming back to the traditional services can feel like stepping through a time warp. The subculture that includes the music, language, dress, customs, architecture and sermon all seem foreign compared to the rest of their lives. Bruce Fawcett has said, “Failure of many churches to stay relevant in terms of facilities, programming and vision have all contributed to

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<sup>21</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Irwin Publishing, 1987), 237

<sup>22</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 197

creating a faith transmission problem.”<sup>23</sup> One generation does not pass the message to the next.

One way to measure relevance is a church’s willingness to address the issues of the day. Emerging adults are not as interested in how faith helped people trust in God as London was being bombed in World War II.<sup>24</sup> They want examples from today, for example, testimonies about how faith helps South Korean Christians who live daily with the threat of nuclear war. They see relevance through a church’s willingness to address the tough social issues of the day, providing practical guidance for expressing one’s faith during the week and demonstrating a solid understanding of today’s culture.<sup>25</sup> David Kinnaman’s research revealed that those outside the church see Christians as boring, unintelligent, old-fashioned, and out of touch with reality.

Outsiders think Christianity is out of tune with the real-world choices, challenges, and lifestyles they face.<sup>26</sup> It appears that believers live in a world of their own. Granted, staying current is a difficult task for the church. John Stott has said, “It is comparatively easy to be faithful if we do not care about being contemporary, and easy also to be contemporary if we do not bother to be faithful. It is the search for a combination of truth and relevance, which is exciting.”<sup>27</sup> With the involvement of a whole generation of Christ-followers at stake, the church needs to place considerable effort into this task.

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce Fawcett, et.al. *Effective Evangelism in Atlantic Canada Experience*. (Gaspereau, NS: Gaspereau Press, 2005), 167

<sup>24</sup>Emerging adults are between the ages of 18-29 and feel caught between adolescence and adulthood. (J. J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the late Teens Through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist*, 55 (2000): 469–480.)

<sup>25</sup> Don Posterski and Erwin Barker, *Where's a Good Church* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1993), 38,39

<sup>26</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*, Reprint ed. (Nashville: Baker Books, 2012), 122

<sup>27</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 154

Societal change has also affected the church's reputation as the source for biblical truth. The ready access of information through electronic forms means that the emerging adult has more access to new ideas than ever before. Bibby writes, "They are increasingly exposed to thoughts and ideas from around the globe, which feed into pluralistic values and may lead to disengagement from faith."<sup>28</sup> Whereas once people turned to the church for religious instruction, now it appears this is changing and they are looking elsewhere. Instead of joining Sunday School classes or small groups to learn about Christian doctrine and tools for spiritual growth, young adults are turning to the internet. No longer is church the authoritative voice for instruction.

This has caused a dramatic change in a contemporary person's understanding of the permanence of truth. Robert Wuthnow contends that the impermanence of information has created a "throw-away" society. We learn that the ideas and opinions that are here today or available through one source may or may not be present tomorrow.<sup>29</sup> The church in contrast teaches just the opposite. The essentials of the faith will stand forever. For example, Jesus is the Divine Son of God, fully human and fully man.<sup>30</sup> This has been a core teaching of Christianity since the apostles taught it during the first century and it was reaffirmed in the Nicene Creed in 325AD.<sup>31</sup> The emerging adult, who was brought up in the church to believe this, may change his belief to something based on Arius's theology found on a website to which he was directed by a Facebook friend. He may never have met this friend face to face but he respects him and sees him as a peer on

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<sup>28</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation Is Leaving Behind* (Toronto: Ecw Press, 2006), 14

<sup>29</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), kindle loc. 1424

<sup>30</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1998), 738

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: an Introduction* (Edinburgh: Tandt Clark, 2000),

his spiritual journey. Bibby says, “Information knows something of a sacred status in our society.”<sup>32</sup> Regular worship attendance is optional for today’s emerging adults. They prefer to worship at the altar of the internet and expose themselves to the ideas of chat rooms.

Change within the lives of the young adults similarly has an adverse affect on their church involvement. These include: divorce of parents, death of a family member, birth of a child, relocation or job loss, transition of a pastor or lay leader, and end of an educational stage. Smith explains that the reason for this is that transitions, by definition, break patterns and routines. Establishing new ones that are very similar to the ones practiced earlier is more difficult than either simply continuing with the same ones or completely changing them.<sup>33</sup> For example, it is easier to keep attending your home church than to seek out a new one in a new community after you move away from home.

Smith’s research indicates that children need stability if they are going to stay involved in church as young adults. The ideal would be for a child to grow up in a stable home, unaffected by divorce, and to live in the same community surrounded by family and friends who share the same spiritual convictions. They would attend the same couple of schools in the community for all their developmental years. The church leadership, including pastors, youth leaders, camp staff and Sunday School teachers would all remain consistent. They would not experience the death of someone close to them, nor would they experience any economic upheaval caused by job loss or career change.

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<sup>32</sup> Bibby, Reginald W., Sarah Russel, and Ron Rolheiser. *Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change and Choice*. (Lethbridge, Alberta: Project Canada Books, 2009), 100

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., kindle Loc. 1791

Families in our society fall far short of this ideal. Divorce continues to rock relationships. The National Center for Health Statistics in the United States reported that in 2008 thirty-six percent of marriages ended in divorce.<sup>34</sup> During that same period Statistics Canada reported that twenty-one percent of Canadian marriages ended in divorce.<sup>35</sup> These statistics do not mention the families that are made of couples who cohabit. It is not uncommon for a child's mother or father to have different relationship partners who move in and out of the home several times during their lifetime. Further, the mobility of our society has caused families to get moved from one location to another while parents pursue other career ambitions. All of this upheaval will have a negative effect upon a child's ability to continue in their faith.

The local congregation and its network were once the limit where a person searched for a spouse. It was not uncommon for believers to meet and marry someone from within Christian circles. With the declining influence of the church in our culture, this occurrence is rare. Believers date those from other locations, sometimes from great distances through internet dating services, and they may not share their faith. They fall in love and get married. An eventuality of this situation is that the Christian will come to realize that, by not sharing in a common faith, there is a piece of the puzzle of intimacy that is missing. Although there is every reason to believe they can still enjoy a great marriage, it will always be missing this spiritual ingredient. Over time the believer's passion for their faith diminishes and they stop attending church.

There is the possibility that the Christian spouse can have real spiritual influence into their partner's life. Smith, when he talks about life transitions, seems to indicate that

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage\\_divorce\\_tables.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-209-x/2013001/article/11788-eng.htm>



a change in marital status does not necessarily equate to the loss of faith. He states, “Getting married can still associate positively with religious involvement.”<sup>36</sup> A couple can get married and begin a life of faith instead of a life of apostasy. Thom Rainer discovered that family members had the greatest influence upon a person’s decision to come to church. His team interviewed 306 people across North America between 2001 and 2003.<sup>37</sup> They discovered that husbands were not effective in reaching their wives but that wives were extremely effective in reaching their husbands.<sup>38</sup> Yes, people leave the church because they marry an unbeliever but sometimes the opposite occurs, a conversion takes place and both partners become spiritually active.

The church used to be seen as the center of a person’s social network. The shift in North American culture has meant this is no longer the case. Friendships are important to emerging adults. Millennials say that there is nothing more important to them than their friends.<sup>39</sup> But they don’t see church as a place to go and meet their friends. Instead, worship services are eschewed because they take up valuable time that could be spent with friends.

Emerging adults are distracted from religious commitment by the very task of transitioning from dependence to independence. Christian Smith says, “Personal autonomy is considered a core value of emerging adults.”<sup>40</sup> They are seeking to establish themselves, learning to stand on their own financially and otherwise. Attending church on

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<sup>36</sup> Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, kindle loc. 6766

<sup>37</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 18

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 205

<sup>39</sup> Bibby, et.al. *Emerging Millennials*, 24

<sup>40</sup> Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, kindle loc. 1666

Sundays, reading one's Bible, praying, and other faith practices are not considered relevant to achieving autonomy.<sup>41</sup>

Most young adults have entry-level jobs that do not pay well and are required to take shift work. This can create uncertainty and instability for some. Having to be totally available to their employer often means that church attendance shifts to the background.<sup>42</sup> On a very practical level, they will stay home from a worship service because they want to be available on the chance that the boss asks them to come in for an extra shift.

Another societal change is the belief among emerging adults that spirituality is best developed privately and personally. They avoid the one place once universally regarded as where to turn if you want help in your spiritual journey: the church. People refuse to attend because they think it will not make a significant contribution to their spiritual life. They avoid it because it teaches a religious system that claims to know the truth with absolute certainty. A postmodernist on a spiritual journey, piecing together beliefs from various sources, does not approve when anyone says with certainty, "I know the truth." Yet the Bible teaches that Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31b, 32 NIV) The church appears to be on a collision course with popular culture. Post modernity teaches that such an assertion of truth is nothing more than an attempt to control and coerce people. The church's comprehensive doctrine of truth makes people

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<sup>41</sup> James Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church*. (2011) <http://tgcfcanda.org/hemorrhagingfaith/>, Accessed January 10, 2013, 16

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

bypass it.<sup>43</sup> Pop music icon, Madonna, spoke of this when she said, “I don’t think there is anything wrong with the teachings of Jesus, but I am suspicious of organized religion.”<sup>44</sup>

Young adults see themselves as spiritual individuals who communicate with God their own way and do not need the interference of the church. If they want to get closer to God, they can go for a walk on the beach and look at the ocean, walk in the woods and look at the trees, or go into a room, close the door and practice meditation. If they want to learn about God, they can do a search on the internet and have answers to all of their questions in seconds. James Penner writes,

Many emerging adults profess they love Jesus but not the church. They believe that being part of the congregation is optional. Many young adults argue they can grow in faith just as much or even more, by reading their Bibles and praying at home as opposed to attending church.<sup>45</sup>

This mentality should not surprise anyone because it is just an attempt to carry into religion a desire for radical autonomy that is present in the emerging culture. Young adults want out from under the demands, controls and power of others.<sup>46</sup> Membership in a church brings with it certain responsibilities. It means agreeing to an ecclesiastical hierarchy that gives someone else a measure of control. If the church restricts the person from moving in and out of the organization as freely as they wish, they will not be back.

### **Philosophical Dissimilarity**

People stay away from church because they have philosophical differences with the institution. The first example occurs when people stay away because they do not need

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<sup>43</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 12

<sup>44</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 73

<sup>45</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 41

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

its help to develop moral standards. It has been widely accepted that our standard for right and wrong is from the Bible. The late Chuck Colson stated, “The basis for the Christian worldview, of course, is God’s revelation in scripture.”<sup>47</sup> As the postmodern society has moved away from seeing the Bible as the standard for truth, people’s confidence in the church as the custodian of the truth also waned.

Today people believe that the church does not provide a single, coherent package of moral values.<sup>48</sup> Bibby writes, “The findings also make it very clear that religion is not the only source of civility. Far from it. Without question people can be good without God.”<sup>49</sup> Individuals create their own moral compass based on spiritual beliefs that come from a variety of sources. These beliefs and morals are in a constant state of flux depending upon whatever the newest influence is upon the journeying pilgrim.

Not only have postmodern adults built their own moral compass but they have also given others the right to build their own, even if it differs from theirs. There is no universal right and wrong in this new worldview. Sociologist Christian Smith says,

Whatever anyone else wants to believe is fine with him or her. But this also means that none of what is distinctive about any given religious tradition, history, worldview, worship style, and so on matters all that much to emerging adults. They suspect that these particularities might separate people of different religions, might bring into question the equal value of different cultures, and might imply implicit judgments against others who are different. Such an implication does not seem inclusive but rather exclusive and judgmental and so does not sit well with the majority of emerging adults.<sup>50</sup>

Young adults feel that Christianity is restrictive. The moral relativist refuses to wear a moral straightjacket fitted by a third party and leaves.

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live? Study Guide* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 14

<sup>48</sup> Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 157

<sup>49</sup> Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 160

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, kindle loc. 81

Second, some emerging adults leave church because they do not like organized religion. This contrasts with the traditional view of older generations who were committed to it out of institutional loyalty. The postmodern<sup>51</sup> world views churches with great suspicion. Reggie Joiner writes, “Some say it is time to give up on the church, or at least abandon the idea that the church in the form of an organized institution can have any lasting effect on the next generation.”<sup>52</sup> The congregations themselves could have contributed to this very ideology. From the 1950s to the 1970s there was numerical growth in churches across North America. Churches developed a healthy organizational structure, set budgets, held services, conducted Christian educational and outreach programs. Through the 1980s, 1990s and into the new millennium, the membership numbers began to drop. Congregations had mixed motives for recruiting members. The church was still concerned about the spiritual state of unbelievers but they were also concerned about the state of the institution itself. They wanted new people to fill the boards, contribute toward the budget and keep the organization moving forward. Soon those outside the church picked up on these mixed motives. Recruitment of new members would keep the organization afloat. They felt used rather than loved and began staying away, exploring other ways of connecting with God.

The church also adopted some recruiting methods that some saw as suspicious. The Church Growth movement<sup>53</sup> began, using scientific techniques and diagnostic data to

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<sup>51</sup> Postmodernity recognizes how much of what we know is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and aesthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intellectually held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims of being true or right. [D. A. Carson. *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 27]

<sup>52</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 25

<sup>53</sup> Church Growth is a movement that aims to develop methods to grow churches through scientific study and diagnostic analysis. [Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth, Rev.ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980.)], vi

see why some churches grew and others did not.<sup>54</sup> The goal was to discover some commonalities among the dying churches and also among the growing churches. The philosophy was that churches would grow if they avoided what the dying churches were doing and copied what the growing churches were doing. While not all of this was bad, in extreme cases growth became vulnerable to manipulation. Non-members often felt like pawns used as nothing more than a number, helping the church meet its growth projections. The church developed a suspicious reputation that was counter-productive to growth.

Further, the role of a pastor began to change. No longer seen as just a shepherd who cared for the flock, the new job description often contained elements more suited for the CEO of an organization.<sup>55</sup> Clergy would now need significant organizational and administrative skills if they were to be effective. In doing so, they often took a step further away from the people. Appointments with the pastor were booked in the office instead of the traditional means of connecting with people through home visits. All of this reinforced the notion that the church was nothing more than a religious organization.

Clergy contributed to this problem as well. Ministry appointments became more competitive. It was not that pastors did not consult the call and will of God when making a decision to move to another church, but they became concerned about career advancement as well. Instead of being committed to smaller pastorates, there were examples where the pastoral call to a larger church appeared to be a promotion. People began to notice that professionals were ministering to them. Many viewed clergypersons

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<sup>54</sup> Wagner, *Your Church can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982), 41

<sup>55</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 79

as competitive professionals who would abandon one congregation when an opportunity to climb up the ecclesiastical ladder presented itself. This turned some people off.

Physical attendance is a third area that illustrates a contrast in philosophical ideals. Traditional church members often attend out of a sense of duty or commitment to the organization, whereas emerging adults see attendance as no longer necessary in today's technologically advanced society. The construction of many Baptist churches in Atlantic Canada occurred during an era when transportation was difficult. God-fearing people erected a building in each small community making worship more accessible. Today, young adults have taken this a step further. Technology has enabled them to worship without ever leaving the confines of their home. Penner noted this in his survey and commented, "Regular church attendance may be too demanding for today's emerging adults who prefer to express their faith more intuitively."<sup>56</sup>

Bibby noticed this trend almost thirty years ago and addressed it in his book, *Fragmented Gods*. It is not that people are less interested in worship but technology has simply transformed the manner in which many worship.<sup>57</sup> In the 1980's people could watch worship services on television or listen on the radio instead of going through the hassle of getting ready to go to church. The growth of technology has presented even more worship options. People have progressed from listening to services on cassette tapes, to videotapes, to DVDs, to watching simulcast services on the internet. It is possible for people to have a worship experience at any time of day, any day of the week, at a different church each time. For fellowship, they can visit their favorite chat room.

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<sup>56</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 15

<sup>57</sup> Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 32

The fourth area of philosophical dissimilarity is public policy. Dedicated members feel the church is the conscience of society and should speak out to influence public policy. Emerging adults refuse to attend because they sense that sometimes the church is too involved in politics. Kimball states that emerging generations, particularly in the United States, have a strong sense that most churches are fundamentalist and are influencing the government in ways with which they are not comfortable. Kinnaman's research revealed that over sixty percent of the people he surveyed described present-day Christians as being too involved in politics.<sup>58</sup>

Are Christians winning political battles but losing the spiritual war? Pressure from the religious right has changed public policy. The cost of this action is that the church is alienating those it is trying to reach. Kimball writes,

We should be known for helping the needy, looking out for the marginalized, and being good neighbors. Instead, when people hear about Christians or church leaders in local and national media, either we come across as smug and angry, pointing fingers at others, or we come across as being so cheery, smiling rehearsed smiles that we seem artificial.<sup>59</sup>

These impressions make a lasting impact, creating distrust and causing young adults to drop out.

Admittedly, this is more of a problem in the United States, but organizations like the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have affected the church's public image in Canada, albeit to a lesser degree. Their vision statement defines their mission as follows:

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is committed to making a positive contribution to this nation. The EFC fosters discussion on the application of biblical principles to contemporary issues. Bringing together Christians with expertise in a variety of areas, the EFC develops resources such as

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<sup>58</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 155

<sup>59</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 79



background and position papers, fact sheets, government submissions and forums.<sup>60</sup>

This is not to say that these organizations do not do an important work. But, their efforts may have a negative effect on emerging adults.

### **Theological Differences**

Many young adults refuse to attend church because of a negative experience with a Christian evangelizing them. Kinnaman postulates that outsiders generally do not get the impression that Christians have good intentions when it comes to ministering to others. Over 64% of respondents said that they didn't believe Christians were genuinely concerned about them.<sup>61</sup> Instead, they feel that believers just want to convert them. Aggressive evangelistic campaigns turn these people away from Christianity. They feel the only time believers talk to them is when their church is recruiting. They don't necessarily want to become best friends but, at the very least, emerging adults demand to be engaged in a two-way conversation.

Perhaps in the multicultural society of Canada we are not as overt in our proselytizing efforts as in the United States. Evangelism programs, like Evangelism Explosion (EE), are generally not very effective in Canada.<sup>62</sup> It seems that Canadians feel they are being set up when asked the EE's diagnostic questions, "Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you can say you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven?" and "Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/page.aspx?pid=264>

<sup>61</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 68

<sup>62</sup> The ministry has had to scale back efforts in Canada by closing its bookstore, laying off staff and relocating its head office.

would you say?” Canadian young adults prefer the question, “What are your spiritual beliefs?” It is a question that engages them in conversation rather than tells them what to believe.

But, loving and helping people is not enough. Emerging adults will still leave a church that just resembles a social agency. It takes more to keep them than altruism. Don Posterski identified this as an issue when he said, “It is not enough for adult leaders simply to be caring and sympathetic in their relationships with young people. Part of the challenge of youth ministry is developing an appreciation for God’s truth and sound teaching.”<sup>63</sup> If the church is going to attract people, its message needs to be comprehensive enough to include the proclamation of gospel truth in the milieu of genuine concern for the individual.

Outsiders also perceive religious institutions as being anti-scientific and so they stay away. Kinnaman says, “Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible.”<sup>64</sup> So they opt out of church. Congregations have not done a good job at showing how science and theology can coexist. Christian scientists, who use their craft as a way of exploring the mystery of God’s created world, could mentor young believers. Science would then reinforce a young student’s faith rather than destroy it.

The church’s lifestyle standards also keep people from attending. Emerging adults know enough about its teaching to understand the moral expectations. Knowing that their lifestyle is not in line with what the church teaches keeps them from attending. Smith comments, “Most of them want to party, to hook up, to have sex in relationships, and to

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<sup>63</sup> Posterski, *Friendship*, 94

<sup>64</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*. kindle location 1367

cohabit; or if they do not want to do these things now, many at least want to keep them as options for the future.”<sup>65</sup> They are not prepared to place any limits on their lifestyle choices at this stage of their life. Emerging adults are on a mission to become independent. Experimentation is part of this process.<sup>66</sup> Attending worship, recommitting themselves to the faith of their childhood and becoming church members are activities that restrict their choices.

The church teaches that mature believers are to disciple new followers. Inconsistent role models, however, have kept some from joining. They watched and saw parents who were one person while involved in religious activities and another at home. They picked up on the inconsistencies. They noticed that matters of faith did not have a big influence on their mothers and fathers. What they did see left them wondering, “Why bother?” or “What is the point?” In a survey, Tom Rainer asked the unchurched, “What Christians have been influential in your lives?” Only twenty-three percent responded that it was a Christian parent.<sup>67</sup>

When parents consistently model their faith on a daily basis before their children, it makes a powerful impact, regardless of the emergent culture. The impact on the children is greater when church members reinforce the parents’ lifestyles and when its ministries teach the biblical rationale behind them. Bibby says, “The most notable determinant of adult affiliation and attendance is parental and church socialization in childhood”<sup>68</sup> He goes on to quote Sean O’Sullivan, “Faith, after all, is not something that

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible*, kindle loc. 1986

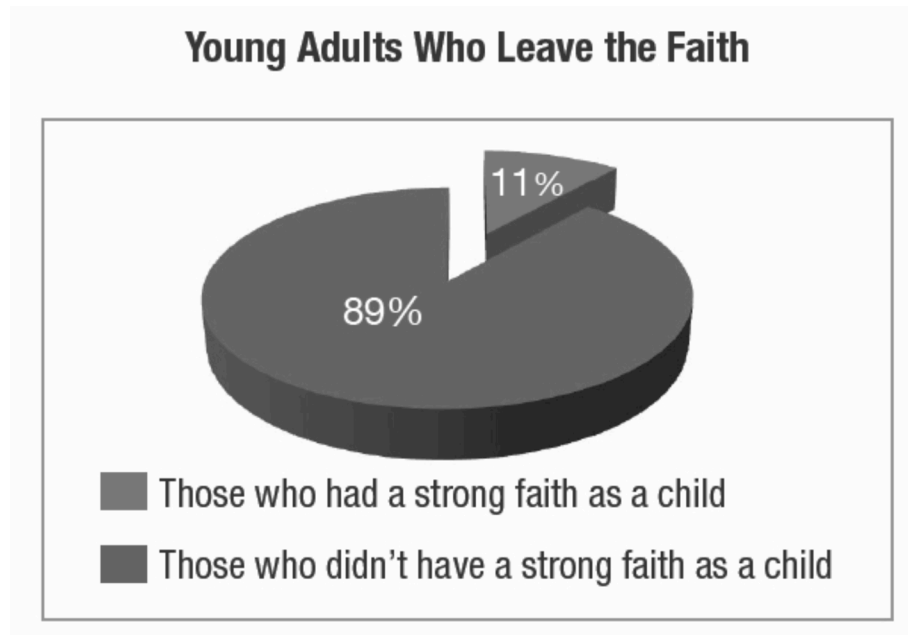
<sup>66</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 17

<sup>67</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, 205

<sup>68</sup> Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*, 236

comes suddenly or grows in isolation: it is passed on in large measure by the simple, devout faith of parents.”<sup>69</sup>

There are no guarantees. Some emergent adults who grew up in homes where they watched their parents live out their faith without compromise will still rebel. Studies



**Figure 1.1**

have shown, however, that adults who grew up in homes with healthy Christian role models are more likely to believe than those who do not. As shown on Figure 1.1, only 11% of those who had a strong faith as a child dropped out of church as an adult.<sup>70</sup>

Parents who invest their lives spiritually mentoring their children will usually see positive results when the offspring reach adulthood. The transmission of faith from the parents to their children is not automatic but it can have an impact, good or poor, depending upon its vibrancy.

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<sup>69</sup> Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*, 236

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Hess and Glenn T. Stanton, *Millennial Faith Participation and Retention*. Focus in the Family Findings. (August 2013). [Accessed on October 15, 2013.](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/millennial-retention.aspx)  
[http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about\\_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/millennial-retention.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/millennial-retention.aspx), 5

The commission Jesus gave His disciples involved a teaching element. They were to pass on to others what they had learned from Him. The church today is supposed to carry on that tradition. Unfortunately, in a society where fewer and fewer want to be taught, some churches have reacted by emphasizing only parts of the gospel and using secular methods to do so. Instead of successfully attracting new people, the opposite has occurred. People have refused to attend and have accused the church of teaching a shallow faith. Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ.<sup>71</sup> In an effort to reach the masses, the church has often been guilty of “dumbing” down the message. Teaching has stressed the benefits of faith in such a way that it has overshadowed the cost. Christianity has been taught as self-improvement rather than self-sacrifice.

Emerging adults do not see enough evidence that the local congregation places a priority on ministering to the poor. They believe that God is committed to the poor and since the church appears not to show the same compassion, they refuse to become involved. The sick, deprived, downtrodden, marginalized, voiceless, powerless, penniless and oppressed, “the poor”, occupy a special place in the Biblical Kingdom.<sup>72</sup> Jesus’s ministry had a special focus on the poor, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18, NIV) Young adults notice that the church does not have the same priorities as Jesus. In response to the question, “Why do you not attend

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<sup>71</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location 1363

<sup>72</sup> Al Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective (regnum Studies in Mission)* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 142

with your wife?” one husband replied, “I do not go to church today because when I was a child my family was poor. We did not own dress clothes. I went to Sunday School and the teacher sent me home because I was wearing jeans and rubber boots rather than dress pants and shoes. I was hurt and will never go back.”<sup>73</sup> The example of failing to minister to the poor explains why some young adults turn away from local congregations.

The church historically has taught that God created people in His image as part of His family. This theological truth impacts an individual’s sense of self-worth and identity. Many now reject this teaching and stay away from a church that still teaches it. People also took great pride in their religious identity. To be an Evangelical, a Baptist, or a Catholic told something of who you were as a person. No longer can the church assume that it is one of the dominant voices in a person’s identity development.

Instead, today young adults turn their backs on the church and develop their identity from other sources. They search after a broad range of life experiences to assist them in this process. They may travel to other countries, seek educational opportunities a great distance from home, join relief organizations, live in other cultures and change jobs, all in effort to discover their identity.<sup>74</sup> When the church condemns this exploration it removes any opportunity it could have had to minister to the searcher.

Jeffrey Arnett has identified a new developmental stage in the lives of young adults called “Emerging Adulthood”. It describes young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who live in advanced industrial societies.<sup>75</sup> He writes,

Because marriage and parenthood are delayed until the mid-twenties or late twenties for most people, it is no longer normative for the late teens and early

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<sup>73</sup> This story was told me by one Deacon’s husband when I asked him why he did not attend.

<sup>74</sup> J. J. Arnett, “*Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the late Teens Through the Twenties*,” *American Psychologist*, 55 (2000): 474

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

twenties to be a time of entering and settling into long-term adult roles. On the contrary, these years are more typically a period of frequent change and exploration.<sup>76</sup>

A key feature of emerging adulthood is that it is the period of life that offers the most opportunity for identity explorations in the areas of love, work, and worldviews.<sup>77</sup> During this stage many turn away from the church because it hinders, rather than helps, them establish their identity. No longer are they willing to accept an identity handed down to them; they want to develop their own. Through their life experiences their individuality gradually evolves.

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* (John 14:5, NIV) Theologians understand this to mean that Christianity is exclusive. Granted, other religions may teach some truth but Christianity is the only true religion. The church has driven people away because of the way it presented its message. Emerging adults respond to Christ-followers who claim that all other religions are wrong, by leaving. Religious exclusivity is not a popular message in a society that approaches religion with a consumer mentality. Kinnaman says, "They have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity's claims to exclusivity are a hard sell."<sup>78</sup> People want the freedom to experiment with choices.

Christianity's bold claim to be the only truth is also not popular in a pluralistic society. People believe that all religions have virtue. Many think that as long as you believe sincerely in your god and do your best to follow your beliefs, you will go to

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<sup>76</sup> J. J. Arnett, "*Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the late Teens Through the Twenties*," 469

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 473

<sup>78</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location 1376

heaven. To quote Madonna again, “I do believe that all paths lead to God. It’s a shame that we end up having religious wars, because so many of the messages are the same.”<sup>79</sup>

There can be no doubt that Christianity claims exclusivity. But so do other religions. Why is Christianity singled out so vehemently for its declaration? Kimball points out three reasons for this negative reaction. First, because of the way Christians talk about their faith in the absence of relationship. A Christian simply holds up a sign that says, “Jesus Saves” or passes out a “Four Spiritual Laws” tract. Many are quick to tell about the dangers of hell but are slow to enter into another’s life and become a friend. Secular people do not want to hear a lecture so they avoid Christians by staying away from church.

Second, a Christian’s attitude can cause a negative reaction when they are discussing their faith.<sup>80</sup> Unbelievers know enough about the Bible to realize that Christians are to exhibit love and humility (Philippians 2:5-8, John 13:34, 35) but their experience is different. They are not bothered as much by Christianity’s claim of exclusivity, as they are by the arrogance of Christians when they talk about their faith. Their message does not see any value in other faiths; it dismisses other religions and promises a fiery judgment to all who disagree.

Third, Christians’ ignorance of other religions bothers people. Too often when Christians talk about their faith it is a monologue not a dialogue.<sup>81</sup> They will only talk about their belief system. They cannot carry on a conversation about the religions they reject and they will not engage the other person in conversation about their beliefs or opinions. Often, this is because of their complete ignorance of other religions. They

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<sup>79</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 177

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 178



know other religions are wrong but cannot tell an inquirer why they are wrong. They have never learned about other religions in their churches. Perhaps people would be interested in their message if they knew that they had seriously considered others and could explain why they rejected them.

Further, the assumption that since the basics of another's belief system are different from theirs everything about the other religion is bad turns people away. They are unwilling to see value in the other person's faith.<sup>82</sup> Not all religious teachings are bad. Duggan, a young man interviewed by Dan Kimball commented, "Christians don't seem to appreciate the beauty in another's faith. They seem so close minded and even look at other religions as enemies."<sup>83</sup> Kimball says, "The predominant impression is that we aren't open-minded, that we aren't loving and that we strike out at other faiths, which, in the end, are all pretty much the same."<sup>84</sup>

The church also teaches the doctrine of stewardship. Believers understand that, in a sense, they do not own anything. Everything belongs to God and we are stewards called to look after what belongs to Him. God has given us much to enjoy and only asks that we generously use these resources to help others. Normally this occurs as people financially support the ministry of the local congregation. This is sometimes not understood in our culture.

On his blog, Pete Brookshaw listed 10 reasons why he felt people did not go to church. One of the excuses was that the organization just wanted your money.<sup>85</sup> In this day of declining membership, the church frequently challenges the remaining members to

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<sup>82</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 165

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 177

<sup>85</sup> Pete Brookshaw, "10 Reasons Why People Don't Go To Church", *Pete's Blog*, August 10, 2012, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.petebrookshaw.com/2012/08/10-reasons-why-people-dont-go-to-church.html>

give more. Mature Christians usually see giving as a spiritual discipline and accept the challenge to give generously. The same message, however, gives a different impression to the uncommitted. They see it as an organization that values their participation only in terms of their willingness to donate their money.

In addition to other expectations, the church has taught the doctrine of sanctification. Believers understand that God's will for them is to no longer live by human passions, but by the will of God.<sup>86</sup> When a person claims to be "born again," a radical reorientation of the person's thoughts, motives, and actions occurs. In the opinion of the un-churched, this does not often characterize the lives of Christ-followers and causes them to want nothing to do with the organization. George Gallup confirms this, "After years accumulating research from various sources, church attendance it appears, makes little difference in people's ethical views and behavior with respect to lying, cheating, pilferage, and not reporting theft."<sup>87</sup> Society has noticed that Christian faith does not radically change the lives of its followers and wants no part of it.

Worse than lives unchanged by the gospel is the hypocrisy that the world sees in the behaviour of some believers. Two particular studies support this conclusion. Tom Rainer stated that 11% of the respondents to his survey said they did not attend church because of the hypocrites.<sup>88</sup> David Kinnaman's research revealed that society's perception of Christians is that they say one thing and do another.<sup>89</sup> As long as the perception is that conversion does not produce a distinctive lifestyle, people will stay away from church.

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<sup>86</sup> David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, and J. I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 613

<sup>87</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today's World* (Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: IVP Books, 1989), 21

<sup>88</sup> Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, 138

<sup>89</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 41

In contrast to perceived hypocrisy, some emerging adults see Biblicism among churchgoers as a huge problem.<sup>90</sup> It gives the perception that Christians are fundamentalists who have weird beliefs. People are reluctant to attend worship services because of this. They are highly suspicious of anyone who uses the word ‘literal’ to describe how they view the Bible.<sup>91</sup> Their impressions come not from personal interaction with other Christians but from television and newspapers, from street preachers and from people who equate Christianity with a political party.<sup>92</sup> The media is giving the church such bad press that many people see all believers as fundamentalists who take the Bible “literally” and go on crusades and campaigns to verbally beat the hell out of those who disagree with them.<sup>93</sup>

However, Christians cannot completely blame their bad reputation on the media. They are deserving of some of the bad press. Many within the church take the Bible so literally that they refuse to use the most basic tools of interpretation such as literary genre, historical context, culture, or grammar. Christian Smith, in his book *The Bible Made Impossible*, calls this belief bibliolatry. It refers to people who worship the Bible rather than the God of which it teaches. He says proponents of this teaching believe,

The Bible teaches doctrine and morals with every affirmation that it makes, so that together those affirmations comprise something like a handbook or textbook for Christian belief and living, a compendium of divine and therefore inerrant teachings on a full range of subjects including science, economics, health, politics and romance.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Biblicism is a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability. (Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*. Kindle location 62. For a complete explanation of the term refer to Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*. Kindle location 206.)

<sup>91</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 187

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 188

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: kindle location*, 223

This treatment of the scriptures is one of the things that has created a whole Christian subculture in the United States. Kimball says,

They [emerging adults] think the people who were always saying negative things about the world, are anti-gay, take the whole Bible literally, are card-carrying Republicans, are pro-Israel, read end-time novels and endorse snake handling and fire-and-brimstone preaching. They think of King James, finger-pointing, tee totaling, vengeful people who credit God for using natural disasters to punish people for sin, who use Christian jargon, and are arrogant and unloving toward anyone but themselves.<sup>95</sup>

If Kimball is close to right about this perception, one can understand why people refuse to attend church.

As mentioned earlier, the church has taught that believers need to live godly lives. There have been many instances, however, when they have tried to press non-churched people to adopt the same lifestyle even if they had not committed to the gospel message. This has caused many people to view Christians as negative, judgmental people who are always complaining about something. They don't want to become like them so they refuse to attend. One mother said, "I didn't want my daughter to be like Christians in the church I knew. They were always complaining about everything and I wanted my daughter to grow up in a positive environment."<sup>96</sup> The common theme that ran through stories shared with researcher David Kinnaman was that Christians often err on the side of being quick to judge others, even fellow believers, feeling as though they know the answers, as though they know what God must think.<sup>97</sup>

How did the church gain such a negative reputation? One reason could be its impersonal methods of evangelism. When a person witnesses in the absence of

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<sup>95</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 188

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 96

<sup>97</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 186

relationship it opens itself to misunderstanding.<sup>98</sup> Mass evangelism, tract distribution, gospel banners, and emotionally charged movies are not bad in and of themselves but are all examples of how evangelism can be done in the absence of relationship where people are not given the opportunity to discuss what they hear, read or see.

The marketing of Christian slogans is another cause of the church's negative reputation. They appear on shirts, bumper stickers, church signs, billboards, tattoos and a variety of other places. What are the motives behind selling these? One of the main ones is profit but there are some who buy them in an effort to advance the Kingdom of God. But, does it really work? Consider the story told by Dan Kimball of a lesbian who found a Christian tract under her windshield wiper that said, "Homosexuality is the social cancer of today – Repent or go to Hell."<sup>99</sup> What will be her reaction the next time a friend invites her to church?

The careless comments of believers are a third cause for the negative reputation afflicting the church. Too often personal opinions characterize their convictions rather than biblical rationale. It is not that they are trying to be intentionally hurtful; they are often just repeating what someone else has taught without thinking it through critically. Kimball has written, "When we make careless comments based on personal opinion, people easily get the impression that we are judgmental and critical."<sup>100</sup>

### **Disagreement over Social Issues**

Differences of opinion concerning social issues have kept some from attending worship services. One area of concern was over gender equality. The evangelical church

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<sup>98</sup> Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1981), 22

<sup>99</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 140

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

has not always enjoyed a good reputation when it comes to this dispute. Males have dominated the positions of leadership. Accusations of inequality are leveled against local congregations because they restrict the role of women. One lady commented:

I feel the church is very sexist. From what I have observed, women in the church basically sit on the sidelines and are only able to work with children, answer the phones, be secretaries and serve the men. They seem to have no voice. The church seems pretty much like a boy's club for adults.<sup>101</sup>

Many do not want to be part of an organization that does not practice gender equality.

When visitors attend church and look at the different tasks people are doing, what kind of impression does it make upon them? Kimball has correctly pointed out, "Our viewpoint of women's ministry may be so ingrained in our particular church culture that we forget to look at how it comes across to people outside the church and outside our understanding of what we believe and why."<sup>102</sup>

Whatever the church's theological stance, it should carefully consider the reception it gets from those who do not attend. If handled poorly, it could become a major reason why young adults choose to distance themselves. The emerging generation is open to female pastors. This is an important issue in our society. The church cannot afford to overlook this fact. Women have fought hard for equal rights and are hesitant to be part of an organization that does not practice gender equality. The same holds true of men who agree with the equal rights position.

Another social issue of concern is racism. There are people who don't attend church because it has supported racism in the past. Philip Yancey's books contain stories of what life was like for him growing up in the United States' Deep South where racism existed. He writes:

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<sup>101</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 115

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 118

Racism was an integral part of the church subculture. I regularly heard from the pulpit that blacks were subhuman, uneducable, and cursed by God to be a “servant race.” Almost everyone in my church believed that Martin Luther King Jr. was a “card-carrying Communist”; we cheered every time a southern sheriff hit them with the nightstick or locked them in the jail.<sup>103</sup>

Today, evangelicals cringe just reading that this once happened. The church cannot change the past but we can and have owned up to the sins of our forefathers. Sometimes those who level this accusation are simply not aware of all the work that the denominations have done to correct this wrong. For example, the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, at the Annual Assembly in 1991, passed a resolution condemning racism. In 2006, the denomination appointed a working group to study the issue and they produced a document “The Sin of Racism.” In 2012, another step was taken with the appointment of a director of Intercultural Ministries.<sup>104</sup>

At other times, accusations leveled against the church are actually on account of the appearance of racism. It is possible that young adults could interpret the Church Growth principle of “Homogenous Units”<sup>105</sup> as a form of latent racism. To be clear, these churches are not opposed to having people attend from outside the identified group. All people of all races are welcome. They do not intend to be racist. But from the outside, looking in, an English-speaking, white, middle class church may seem to be racist.

Homophobia and sexual repression are an even more pressing area of social concern. Some people refuse to attend church because of the organization’s view on homosexuality. While not all Christians believe homosexuality is wrong, the vast majority of evangelicals consider the Bible’s prohibition on same-gender relationships as

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<sup>103</sup> Philip Yancey, ed., *Church: Why Bother?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19

<sup>104</sup> ([http://baptist-atlantic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/sin\\_of\\_racism.pdf](http://baptist-atlantic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/sin_of_racism.pdf))

<sup>105</sup> Churches built according to this principle are those whose membership is composed of basically one kind of people. (C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982), 110)

a universal command.<sup>106</sup> In other words, the Bible teaches that homosexuality has always been wrong. The young adults find this attitude repressive. Religious rules on sexual mores feel stifling to their individualist mindset.<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps this would not have been a big concern if it were not for the way the church has propagated the message. People turn away when they hear hate-filled sermons against homosexuality that reflect more of the preacher's feelings than of God's judgement. Kinnaman's research indicates that people outside the church have the perception that Christians are against gays and lesbians, not only objecting to their lifestyles but also harboring irrational fear and unmerited scorn toward them.<sup>108</sup> The church therefore is seen as a hostile environment for homosexuals in the eyes of some.

The balance between grace and truth is completely missing in much of the preaching on this topic. Instead of focusing on the positive message of sexuality, this preaching focuses on the negative – that God hates homosexuals. If the message was that homosexuality is one of the many natural sins that some people are drawn into as a result of living in a fallen world, and talked about in the context of various sexual temptations, people would perhaps feel less compelled to stay away from the church because of it.<sup>109</sup>

The problem grows larger when research into the church's position is sloppy. Kimball says, "In the past the teaching on homosexuality in many churches has been somewhat shallow, quoting a few verses with no questions or discussion allowed."<sup>110</sup> To

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<sup>106</sup> In the Old Testament the Bible states, "Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin" (Leviticus 18.22). In the New Testament it repeats the same message. "Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians, 6.9,10).

<sup>107</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, Kindle location 1372

<sup>108</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 92

<sup>109</sup> Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 142

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 137



ignore context when quoting Bible verses is dangerous. It affects the credibility of the church when its leaders cannot explain its beliefs. People will not attend where preachers hide behind proof texts and refuse to explain the reasons behind their beliefs.

The church’s credibility also suffers when the unchurched realize how little Christians know about homosexuality. Too quickly Christians have said the behaviour is wrong without understanding the depth of the issue. Figure 1.2 illustrates how the church’s image has suffered because of the harshness with which it has addressed this issue. It shows that over 91% of the people the church would like to reach, see it as an organization that is anti-homosexual.<sup>111</sup> The amount of information that is available on the internet leaves Christians with no excuse for not have a thorough knowledge of the issue. Emerging adults turn against a church that shows ignorance of such basic knowledge.

	Among Americans ages 16–29	
	Outsiders	Churchgoers
antihomosexual	91 %	80 %
judgmental	87	52
hypocritical—saying one thing, doing another	85	47
old-fashioned	78	36
too involved in politics	75	50
out of touch with reality	72	32
insensitive to others	70	29
boring	68	27
not accepting of other faiths	64	39
confusing	61	44

**Figure 1.2**

<sup>111</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 34

The church has also driven people away because it has not realized the breadth of the cultural shift our society has experienced. Leaders have not understood changes in values and worldviews.<sup>112</sup> In the past, a message against homosexuality would not have caused any uproar as most everyone in society agreed with the message. But that is no longer the case and the church has not understood the implications of this fact. It is not just homosexuals that feel outraged by anti-gay rhetoric but also those heterosexual people who have gay friends and family members. The emergent culture is becoming increasingly open to homosexuality. Almost everyone today has a gay friend, family member, or workmate. When the church makes homosexuals feel uncomfortable at worship services it develops a bad reputation and people stay away.

### **Practical Excuses**

There are some practical reasons for people's lack of involvement in church. First, people refuse to attend because they find the worship services boring. There is perhaps no worse commentary on worship than for a person to leave thinking it was so boring they are never going back. Sadly, this is what the emerging generation is saying about their experience. Lee MacDonald noted that the most frequent response to the survey question, "Why do people come to church?" was "a desire for an overwhelming experience with God."<sup>113</sup> They come searching for a life-changing experience through an encounter with God and leave disappointed.

One answer given is that the service is too traditional. In an effort to increase the excitement level, churches have incorporated many new components into their worship

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<sup>112</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 149

<sup>113</sup> Bruce Fawcett, et.al. *Effective Evangelism in Atlantic Canada Experience*, 17

services. These include drama, art, testimonies from celebrities, dance, stage lighting, electronic projection systems, and innovative messages, to name a few. Could it be that these initiatives are counterproductive? Except for a few cases the church just cannot match the quality of the secular world.<sup>114</sup> Young adults still leave disappointed and look elsewhere for a spiritual experience.

Another answer given is that young adults do not understand the intent behind worship. Philip Yancey reminds his readers that God is the audience of worship.<sup>115</sup> The church does not exist to provide entertainment...but to worship God; if it fails at that, it fails. "I learned that the ministers, the music, the sacraments, and the other trappings of worship are mere promptings to support the ultimate goal of getting worshipers in touch with God."<sup>116</sup> The young worshipers want to experience God but have not learned how this happens in the midst of worship. They miss the connection, worship appears empty and void of meaning, so they leave bored.

Citing Solomon as an example, Erwin McManus says that he traveled far from where he began only to return there in the end.<sup>117</sup> He continues, "We do the same. Having searched the whole world for meaning, he concludes that life is meaningless without God and that only in God will we ever find the meaning our souls long for."<sup>118</sup> Emerging adults have not reached this point in their spiritual search. They miss the connection in worship and move on to experiment with other means of spiritual enlightenment.

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<sup>114</sup> One example of a church that does match the secular world in quality is Lakewood in Houston Texas. Joel Osteen pastors it. After visiting there, Hermant Mehta described it as having the atmosphere of a rock concert. [Hermant Mehta, "*I Sold My Soul on eBay: Viewing Faith Through an Atheist's Eyes.*" (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 124.]

<sup>115</sup> Yancey, ed., *Church: Why Bother?* 24

<sup>116</sup> Yancey, ed., *Church: Why Bother?*, p. 25

<sup>117</sup> Erwin Raphael McManus, "Meaning" in *Soul Cravings*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), entry 3

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

Second, a busy calendar keeps people from attending church. Emerging adults live busy lives. The norm in our society is for both husband and wife to have busy careers. Their children also live busy lives dominated by school activities, sports, community groups and the arts. Life is lived like a juggling act, trying to keep each family member where they need to be at the right place, at the right date and time.<sup>119</sup> There is precious little down time, as weekends become a time used to catch up on unfinished chores, transporting children and domestic responsibilities. They find themselves needing to balance school, work and play, while making sure everyday tasks are completed such as grocery shopping, paying bills and car repairs. All of these require time and energy. For the overwhelmed, it is difficult to figure out how church attendance could fit within the constraints of their already packed schedules.<sup>120</sup>

Technology has also made life busier. Smart phones, tablets and laptops have forced employees to take work with them everywhere. It is not uncommon to see a parent answer work emails on a smart phone while watching their children at a sporting event. Multi-tasking is now the norm. A family night home watching a movie is often done while a parent finishes a report while balancing a computer on their lap. Reg Bibby writes, “What many of us didn’t count on was the simple fact that technology would dramatically alter people’s expectations of us, namely the speed with which we could turn things around. Those high expectations in turn, are adding a lot of pressure to our lives.”<sup>121</sup> Rather than freeing up more time for church attendance, technology keeps people away.

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<sup>119</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14

<sup>120</sup> Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, kindle loc. 1811

<sup>121</sup> Bibby, *The Boomer Factor*, 45

People are busier than ever before.<sup>122</sup> Many adults are feeling overwhelmed by the time pressures placed on them. It is not that they hate church or disagree with its teachings. They are too tired to attend by the time Sunday rolls around. It seems that worship is the easiest thing to cut from the schedule. James Penner's research also shows that busy schedules are an impediment to church involvement. Young people he interviewed told him they are too busy to attend. He writes, "Emerging adults are busy. They are learning to stand on their own."<sup>123</sup> He adds, "they are trying to balance this schedule: go to school, write papers, carry a job, pay bills, maintain an apartment, find a reputable auto mechanic and keep on top of their social life. When it is all said and done, there just isn't enough time for church."<sup>124</sup>

Third, there are some young adults who are not involved because they feel it is not worth the effort. They crave relationship and long for a place of belonging. Unfortunately, many young adults don't consider the church to be that place for them.<sup>125</sup> They find the baggage that goes along with joining makes forming friendships too risky. They do not get anything out of worship. The music fails to stir their heart. The preaching does not inspire them to grow spiritually or to develop new ideas and passions. The scripture reading does not speak either words of conviction or encouragement into their lives. The public prayer seems dry, rehearsed and not all that relevant. For many it is an hour wasted in boredom, an obligation that does not offer enough benefit to keep them interested. Penner writes, "The vast majority of non-attenders say that church is

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<sup>122</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

pointless and not worth the effort. For many of them, worship services are just an empty obligation or routine. The returns are of little value compared to the investment required.”<sup>126</sup>

These people also do not understand the significance of the church or its mission. Too often young adults interpret their parents’ faith as involving little more than sitting around studying the Bible in small groups that rehash all the same doctrines, and regurgitate what has always been taught. Rob Bell in the Nooma Series Video *Trees* tells of the time he was driving in a rental vehicle while listening to a radio preacher say that Jesus was going to return. He agreed with that but also took away from the message that Christians are to sit around hoping and waiting for the day Jesus returns. They were to do nothing more than hang around until a future date. He went on to state that he needed a faith that helped him live on earth today.<sup>127</sup> Sitting, hoping and waiting is not reason enough to keep people interested and so, they drop out.

Fourth, people do not attend because it does not cater to their needs. Many view the church as a product to consume or a service to meet the needs of the consumer. They do not attend for much the same reason that they do not shop at certain stores or go to certain restaurants. Penner writes, “To be worth participating in, church must gratify the needs and expectations of its members; in short people have to get something from their participation to make it worthwhile.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Penner, et.al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 53

<sup>127</sup> Rob Bell. Nooma: DVD Series Volume 003(*Trees*). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006.

<sup>128</sup> Penner et.al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 14.

This generation does not have the same loyalty to the organization that characterized their grandparents, the Silent Generation.<sup>129</sup> The young adults would never tolerate a preacher they disliked, be a member of an ineffective board, put up with poor facilities, or send their children to second-rate programs all for the sake of the organization. Instead, they would leave, perhaps attend another that meets their needs, but more often than not they would write the organizational church off as an icon of a past generation.

Many churches have attempted to design ministries around meeting the needs of the worshippers. These innovative church planters have designed services that, like computer programs, are user friendly. They have done social research to find out the likes and dislikes of the people they were trying to reach. If the people liked country music, they wrote Christian lyrics to country tunes and sang them at the worship services. The preaching was intentionally relevant to people's lives and extremely practical. Rick Warren is one of the best-known contemporary preachers who attempted this. He says, "We have to show the Bible's relevance by applying its message personally to people's lives."<sup>130</sup>

The results were mixed. Some churches have really grown with this strategy, as has the influence of their founding pastors. Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Andy Stanley and Mark Driscoll all fall into this category. Worshippers became church shoppers who went from one congregation to another, depending on which one offered the best deal. Others attended until the novelty wore off and then turned their back on the organization. In their

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<sup>129</sup> The Silent Generation is a label for the generation of people born from 1930–1945 notably during the Great Depression and World War II. [Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1998) 69

<sup>130</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 224

attempt to be contemporary and culturally relevant some churches have lost their distinctiveness. Marc Solas says, “We’ve taken a historic, 2,000-year-old faith, dressed it in plaid and skinny jeans and tried to sell it as “cool” to our kids. It’s not cool. It’s not modern. What we’re packaging is a cheap knockoff of the world we’re called to evangelize to.”<sup>131</sup> In their attempt to be relevant some churches have come across as phony and inauthentic.

Tom Rainer reached the same conclusion in research. He interviewed 100 people who recently became believers and joined the church. The consistent theme among those he interviewed was that the leadership should not try to dumb down its doctrine in an effort to reach those in the community. He says, “churches that attempt to reach unchurched people by compromising or diluting the teachings of scripture are counterproductive.”<sup>132</sup> Even before their conversions new believers were interested in doctrine and were attracted to churches that were uncompromising in their beliefs.<sup>133</sup>

Fifth, people do not attend church because their lives are pretty full without it. They are not angry at the organization. They simply live their lives without involvement because everything is going well. Their careers are advancing. While they could always find more things to spend additional income on, they are doing well financially. They are content and do not need God. Since they are financially stable, they believe there is no need for the church. Rainer revealed that there is a very clear relationship between wealth and the attitudes of the unchurched.<sup>134</sup> He said, “While our research cannot prove the direct relationship between wealth and resistance to the Gospel, the evidence seems

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<sup>131</sup> Jim, Daly, “Ten Reasons Kids Leave the Church” April 20, 2013, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/ten-reasons-kids-leave-the-church-94366>

<sup>132</sup> Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, 199

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 81



compelling that such is the case.”<sup>135</sup> Riches seem to be indicative of the importance of faith, according to these surveys. The wealthy either walk away or never initiate involvement.

There are other common excuses that pastors frequently hear as reasons why adult children of church members do not attend. It is unfriendly. The music is awful. The preaching is poor. Christians offended me. As a child my parents forced me to go. I don’t like the dress code. These all seem more trivial in nature and do not need explanation.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter set out to test the hypothesis of other related contemporary research conducted in Canada and in the United States. Rather than proving that the unwillingness of the church to practice mission integrally is both the reason they left and the reason for their present reluctance to reunite, the examination revealed that there was no single definitive reason that led adults to leave the church and no sole issue that kept them from returning.

Kinnaman reached the same conclusion in his research and said, “Instead of one or two “biggies,” we discovered a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments that compel twentysomethings to disconnect. No single reason pushes a majority of young adults to drop out.”<sup>136</sup> The results appear to be the same across Canada and the United States.

The next chapter contains the results from testing the hypothesis on the eight dropouts from the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches. Will they fit within the

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<sup>135</sup> Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, 81

<sup>136</sup> Kinnaman. *You Lost Me*. kindle edition 1372

pattern that Kinnaman discovered or was the underlying reason they left the church and remained reluctant to return tied to the unwillingness of the churches to practice mission integrally? The dropouts were individually interviewed and asked the same set of questions. They were asked about their religious training at home and in church during their developmental years to see if there were any commonalities contributing to their decisions to leave. Questions also focused on their perception of the mission of the contemporary church and their understanding of the reason for church's existence.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH DATA AND ANALYSIS

The research data explaining the religious experience of the local dropouts is divided into six sections. The first explores what the dropouts remember about their religious experiences during their developmental period.<sup>137</sup> It sought to discover if the quality of their exposure to Christianity during childhood had any bearing on their level of involvement as adults. Their current religious experiences were explored next. The ongoing reasons for their continued absence were sought. Their present theological views are outlined in the ensuing section. If their views are different from those of their local church, it could reveal another cause for their refusal to return.

The fourth section focuses on their understanding of the church's mission. It details their understanding of its role in society and whether or not their absence is caused by their perceived failure of the church to fulfill its mandate. The next area explores the similarities between their motives for dropping out and those in the literature reviewed in chapter one. The parallels shed more light on their reasons for leaving. The last section contains their responses to the question, "Are you open to returning to church in the future?"

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<sup>137</sup> The developmental period, for the purpose of this paper, refers to life prior to age 18.

## **Religious Experiences during the Developmental Period**

One reason people drop out of church is because their faith never becomes deeply engrained during the developmental period of their lives. If they had a deep encounter with God during this period, it would, most often, leave a lasting impression. None of the dropouts with the exception of Doreen<sup>138</sup> who remembered praying for her hospitalized mom to get well, could remember any instances where they felt God's presence in their life. Doreen's mother recovered and she still attributes the recovery to answered prayer. Faith became real for her that day. Doreen was also the only dropout who talked of an instantaneous conversion experience. She remembered going forward at a service in the arena and asking Jesus to be her Lord and Saviour. The rest described their spiritual awakening as a gradual process. They could not remember a specific date when the Bible's teaching made sense and they accepted it as truth.

Most of the dropouts practiced some sort of personal religious discipline during the developmental period of their lives. Only one person did not. All prayed, most read the Bible, at least occasionally. In most instances, they prayed and read the Bible more often when they were younger. As they reached teenage years, they gradually stopped these practices and often prayed only during difficult times.

A person's life experiences can solidify their faith or crush it. Four interviewees could remember specific events that influenced their decision to drop out of church. The preaching did not engage them. It was old fashioned, extremely harsh, and critical. Sometimes it was not one event but a series of events that caused a person to drop out. Kevin shared:

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<sup>138</sup> The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect identity.

It was kind of like things happened, my best friend moved away, getting a girlfriend, smoking weed, those weren't Christian actions so I think it was a time where I was slowly losing interest in the Christian lifestyle and that is when I decided that I was going to be a secular person and see what happens.

The practice of living missionally<sup>139</sup> should begin early in life. When asked if they remembered having any sense of personal responsibility for social justice, social action or evangelism, their answers revealed childlike ways of living out faith. Almost all remembered instances where they fought for social justice by standing up for those who were not treated well by others. Some went to the defence of those who were being bullied. There were also instances where, as children and teens, they showed social responsibility by sharing their lunch with poor children who came to school without any. Kevin remembered a time when, as a teen, he organized a protest against the senseless slaughter of sharks at the derby. Most were also involved in evangelism. They invited friends to Sunday School, church, Vacation Bible School or youth group. One even remembered doing door-to-door evangelism with her parents.

During the developmental period individuals learn by example. The witness of their parents makes a lasting impression upon them. The data revealed that mothers were most likely to live missionally. They were positive Christian role models. The fathers did not talk much about their faith and, in many instances, only became active believers later in life, after the kids had moved out of the house. As children, they found the fact that their parents were in different spiritual places very confusing.

Most dropouts remember talking about sermons and Sunday School lessons in their home. All of the families only read the Bible or prayed together occasionally.

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<sup>139</sup> Living missionally refers to adopting the posture of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message. This includes social engagement as well as evangelism. (Tim Keller, *The Missional Church*, June 2001. <http://cpcnewhaven.org/documents/missional.pdf>. accessed November 1, 2013)

Grace before meals was not consistently practiced in most cases. There was no consistent Bible study in the home and few sang hymns or gospel songs together. Mothers played a more prominent role in the discussions. As the child grew older and reached teenage years, even these practices lessened.

Mothers were also more active than fathers when it came to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Most mothers read their Bible and prayed every day. Strength and direction were received from reading the Bible and praying. The dropouts either never or rarely saw their father praying or reading the Bible. Only one of the respondents said that they saw their parents having devotions together. In spite of the tentativeness of family devotional exercises, they said that their parents' faith gave them emotional stability and a positive outlook. Faith in God meant things would get better no matter how bad they appeared. They also learned the value of prayer as they overheard their parents praying for the sick.

When it came to living missionally, mothers left the greatest impression with personal evangelism. They invited friends to come to Sunday worship services. Most took a soft approach to evangelism by not "being preachy" but introducing it lovingly into conversations. Fathers were not as involved as their wives. There were exceptions where both parents tried to encourage their friends to be part of the church but this was not the norm. Fathers were more likely to show social responsibility, although their activity tended to be behind the scenes where they received little fanfare for their efforts. Both parents were often supporters of the Food Bank. Together, they also helped the less fortunate in a variety of other ways such as taking meals and baked goods to people when they were sick. Parents did not seem to be as aware of environmental concerns as people

are today. They watched to make sure that not too much electricity was used but their motivation had more to do with frugality than their being stewards over creation.

The extended family, not just the parents, influence faith development. Some dropouts reported that their other relatives had an impact upon their spiritual journeys. Grandparents appeared to have more influence than any other individuals in their extended families. Half of the dropouts said that their grandparents' faith had a positive impact upon them. One reported the negative experience of having a relative make them feel guilty for not going to church. The other half of the respondents could not recall any relatives who encouraged their spiritual development. One even reported their extended family was radically opposed to their faith and voiced their opposition boisterously.

Friends can have a profound religious impact upon each other. If a person's peer group is involved in church, there is a greater likelihood that the individual will be involved as well. They will support and encourage each other in their faith journey. All the dropouts had at least one close friend who attended with them. Many had a complete circle of friends that attended when they were children. Some reported that their friends discouraged them in their spiritual pursuits but for the most part the ridicule was light-hearted. Others reported individual friends encouraged them in their faith even though they themselves might not have privately practiced it. Unfortunately, as a group in their later teen years, they made a decision to walk away from the church.

Few said that they had friends who lived missionally. Their closest friends did not have a passion for personal evangelism. Some tried to invite friends to church and to begin a relationship with Jesus but the majority did not. All remembered instances where their friends modeled social responsibility. The respondents in the 40 and over

age bracket did not practice environmental concern. The younger respondents, probably as the result of better education, showed more concern.

Education can have an effect on a student's faith. The exposure to new ideas in class can challenge a student's belief system. None of the dropouts reported that they were ridiculed because of their faith in the classroom. Some said the Bible was never brought up in any of their classes. When ideas did challenge their belief system, they would go and talk to the pastor or another adult about it. This made their faith stronger in most instances. The teacher was the determining factor on the effect education had on the student's faith. It was reported that the teachers presented a balanced curriculum. They taught what science believed and what the church believed without making value judgments. Interestingly, it was an overzealous Christian teacher, not a secularist, which left a negative impression. Kevin reported, "He was the only teacher that talked about Christianity in the classroom. But, his presentation was so 'delusional' that it did religion an extreme disservice. It made it harder for Christian students to live and talk about their faith at school."

Often the students lived their faith secretly. Their close friends knew they went to church but others in school did not. They rarely initiated the discussion so it never came up with their wider circle of friends. Most never witnessed to their friends. When they did, their words were not always warmly received. The students may not have been active talking about their faith but they had frequent conversations about environmental care, social action and justice. Their views, although not overtly spoken as a Christian, were shared most often in the context of a class discussion. For instance, when they did a unit on third-world countries, they talked about the importance of helping the poor.



A person's experience at church during the developmental period can play a large role in determining if they will remain active as they move into adulthood. If their experience is positive, they may stay involved. If it is negative, it greatly increases the possibility of them dropping out. For the most part all of those interviewed had a positive experience and happy memories. All attended Sunday School and/or a youth group. They looked forward to going and wanted to be there. None of the dropouts had any recollection of being the focus of a dedication ceremony early in their life. Half of them were baptized as believers. One reported that it was a very meaningful experience. Two were pre-teens and remember little about the event. The fourth had a negative experience. He lost his faith during baptismal classes and went through with the event only to please others.

Their participation levels in church declined as the interviewees grew up. When they were children, they were more likely to be involved but as they became teens they were more likely to be spectators. During Sunday worship, some of the tasks they undertook included ushering, singing, helping with the sound system and as they got older working in the nursery, Children's Church, puppet ministry, drama teams, the youth choir and teaching Sunday School. Most said they were brought to church as a preschooler. The norm was for them to attend every Sunday. The frequency of their attendance did not vary much until they became teenagers. In addition to Sunday School and worship services, they attended Vacation Bible School, youth rallies and Long Lake Baptist Youth Camp. None were part of a mission trip during these years.

To the best of their recollection, the dropouts did not recall their church being very active in mission. There were individuals in the churches that lived missionally, but

the church did not have or carry out an organized plan to minister to their community that involved the congregation as a whole. The respondents had no memory of it being involved in social action or justice, or environmental care.<sup>140</sup>

The decision to drop out of church was most often the combination of a gradual decrease in attendance and a significant event. As teens, they wanted to explore other lifestyle choices. As they did so, their enthusiasm for church lessened. They began attending sporadically until they stopped attending at all. When speaking of her departure from church, Doreen said, “It was just something that happened. I just didn’t wake up one morning and say ‘I’m not going to church anymore.’”

In most instances, there was also a significant event that occurred which functioned as a catalyst that caused them to make a permanent break from the church. While their attendance was already becoming increasingly sporadic, an incident happened that pushed them out the door. The events, which caused them to dropout, varied. A family move was one of the causes. When they moved from one location to another, they did not continue going to church. One would expect this to happen when the interviewees moved away from Liverpool and Brooklyn. Interestingly, it also happened when their family moved back to Queens County<sup>141</sup> and when an individual moved home after University.

The judgmental attitude of some of the congregation was another event that pushed people out the door. Often teenagers, as an expression of their independence or rebellion, will make choices that are frowned upon by the church. If the members are

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<sup>140</sup> This did not include any missional activity that church may have supported as part of a combined effort with other churches by virtue of their membership in the Lunenburg Queens United Baptist Association or The Convention of the Atlantic Baptist Churches.

<sup>141</sup> Queens is the county in Nova Scotia where both churches are located.

willing to overlook these minor behavioural transgressions and lovingly support the teens through their experimentation, there is a greater chance that they will return after this exploration is completed. When the members are unwilling to do this, it can push the teens into greater rebellion and even hostility toward the church. Sadly, the data from these interviews revealed that harsh treatment by members caused the interviewees to make a departure. Kathy said, "I felt like I was being shunned by church members because of my personal choices. They pretty much had nothing to do with me. It was insulting."

As was mentioned earlier in the case of Kevin, it was a series of events that caused him to walk away from the church and change his faith. His girlfriend broke up with him, his best friend moved away, his experimentation with drugs and the influence of secular friends all contributed to his decision. At the same time he felt worship was boring and the messages unrelated to his life. Experiencing a disconnection between his life and his church, he walked away. He began to look elsewhere for spiritual fulfillment and upon finding it he never saw a need to be regularly involved again.

Another person reported that their decision to leave the church was impacted by the death of a close friend who committed suicide. He got mad at God because He didn't stop him. Some of the interviewees left during a time in their life when they were exploring their sexuality, two with same sex relationships. All knew these experiences went against the traditional teaching of the church, yet continued in the activity. When knowledge of this reached the membership, they could sense that some in the congregation were treating them with disdain. In extreme cases others voiced concern about their sexuality with judgmental attitudes.

They sensed that the actions of a few members were motivated by homophobia. The individuals simply did not want to go to a service with hate mongers and stopped attending. One said, “I just found there were a lot of judgmental people when I came out and said that I was gay. That’s what happened. That is what started it. Kind of – OK yea. I just had a couple people that were ignorant, don’t want to talk about it, don’t want to hear about it.” So she walked away from her church and her faith.

Post-secondary education was an enlightening experience for a couple of the dropouts. While attending one said he realized how sheltered he had been. He realized he had been taught only one point of view. Now, through other people at college he learned different viewpoints that definitely affected his faith. The exposure to new ideas at college also changed another’s thinking about Christianity. He felt brainwashed by the church and reacted by walking away. Still another saw her attendance become increasingly sporadic until it reached inactivity because of health concerns. The breakup of a relationship and the resulting questions about why God would let this happen caused another to dropout.

Conflict with a minister was another reason for ceasing to attend. Andrew told the story of how his family only had one car. When his father got a job that forced him to work on Sunday they had no transportation to church. Upon learning this, rather than reacting with understanding and arranging transportation, the minister treated the family harshly condemning them for not attending. Andrew stopped attending that day and has not been a regular at church since.

In spite of whatever negative experiences some of the dropouts had, they all identified their time in church as a positive experience. One said that it made him more

open-minded to the goodness or value of religion. It helped them learn to live with better moral principles. Another valued the opportunity to learn about the Bible and to be involved in ministry. Still another person said that church impacted them positively by providing them with a good example of the proper way to live. Finally, one remembered church as a happy place and wondered how his present views would have changed if he had not walked away as a rebellious teen. Some did have negative experiences. One dropout resented being forced to attend. Another remembered being looked down on because they were poor. Even though some of the dropouts had some bad memories of church, they still were overwhelmingly glad that it was part of their background.

### **Religious Experiences as an Adult**

Even though they no longer attend church, some of the dropouts retained the traditional definition of a Christian as one who accepted Jesus as their Saviour. Some believed that the decision they made to follow carried lifelong implications. Others, however, had redefined the word and now identified being a Christian more as a lifestyle than as a belief system. For the most part, they still thought of themselves as Christians. Not surprisingly then, they believed that you could still be a Christian without attending. Almost all of them claimed to still have faith even though they did not attend. They made a distinction between dropping out of church and walking away from their faith.

All of the dropouts still practice spiritual disciplines, which varied from person to person. The most common one was prayer. Some prayed on a regular basis while others prayed for friends that were sick. The second most common was Bible reading. Some read it only in the midst of turmoil while others tried to read it regularly. Meditation was

the third most common practice. Other spiritual disciplines were singing, journaling, and chanting. They saw no need to return to church to develop these skills.

One of the benefits of attending is that you have someone to turn to for spiritual questions: the pastor or another trusted member. The dropouts were asked whom they turned to for spiritual help. They talked to their parents, friends or kept it to themselves. The dropouts did not see a need to return to church in order to get answers to life's questions. People attend because they want to feel close to God. In the context of worship, God speaks to them. The dropouts have not been back to church because they have learned to fill this void in other ways. The most popular choices were a walk on the beach, a trek in the woods to experience nature, or watch a movie.

Only one person interviewed stopped attending as an adult. The cause was a marital breakup. The minister was not well balanced in his counsel to the couple. When it appeared that he did not take the wife's issues seriously enough and sided with the estranged husband, the wife quit attending. However, there is no lingering hostility toward the church. The minister has moved on to another location. The reason she stays away is health related and not bitterness because of how this situation was mishandled.

The influence of family can change a person's religious convictions. The three dropouts who were married all wed a spouse who is not active in church. Two of them married people who had a strong church background. They were once actively involved, even having taught Sunday School. The third person did not grow up Christian but made a decision to accept Christ as His Saviour as an adult. Their spouses had no impact on their decision not to attend as they walked away before they met their spouse. Nor did their spouses keep them from returning to church.

Even though they have walked away, the dropouts with children still wanted to have them involved in church. They were either taken by their parents or grandparents, or dropped off at age-specific programs. There was one exception. His children's exposure to church was very limited. He attributed this to his own theory that one could develop a belief system apart from the church. If his children were to be people of faith, it would be a unique set of beliefs that they reasoned through themselves without the input of the church. Raising their children to be involved, as they were, is not a significant motivator for the dropouts to attend again.

All of the dropouts had at least one parent who still attended church. Some of them had siblings who attended as well. The fact that they stopped going did not affect their relationship with the family members who still attended. At least one family member has talked to each of the dropouts about their absence from church. Most often it has been conversations with their parents or, on a few occasions, with a sibling. Most of these chats have left a positive impression. They have centered on discussing their reasons for leaving without passing judgment. The invitation to return to church was extended in a loving manner. The desire to worship with their attending family members was not big enough to draw them back.

The influence of friends played a large role in the dropouts' decision to walk away from church. But, that does not appear to be a factor in their decision to stay away. Rarely do they have contact with friends from their childhood days in church. Most have moved away making communication difficult. When it does happen it does so through the use of technology. The ones who did keep in contact with their friends were quick to

point out that most of them were not active anymore either. They had all walked away at the same time.

Religious conviction is not a factor when it comes to selecting new friends. Kathy said, "Faith is not an issue when choosing friends. I absolutely have no issue with any form of religion as long as it is not forced on me." Friendship just happens as chance encounters develop gradually into lifelong relationships. In theory, whether or not a friend practiced any religion was not an issue as long as they don't impose their beliefs. In reality, few of them had close friends who were active in church or self-identified as a committed believer. The issue of religion, faith or church just hardly ever came up in conversations with their friends. Most did not know if any of their friends regularly attend at the present time. One of them knew her boss was heavily involved in church. Andrew felt quite certain that his friends did not attend. The dropouts, for the most part, lived without thinking much about their friends' church attendance.

There are other factors that may influence a person's decision to stay away. Three of the dropouts had gone through a marriage breakup. The divorce itself had no bearing on their decision to walk away for two of the interviewees. This was not the case with the other. She felt that the pastor sided with one partner over another. This divorcee would not go back while he preached there. The divorce is not a factor at all in any of their continuing absences from church.

The dropouts were asked if their busy lives had any bearing on their decision not to attend. Half of those interviewed said that was not the case. In fact, they went further and commented that when others said this they were just making an excuse. The rest of the interviewees said that it was work that kept them from attending. They either work



Sunday morning or sleep after having worked all night. Surprisingly, not one of the respondents said that recreational activities, sports, or arts kept them from church. Other studies indicate that while many people use their busy schedules as an excuse not to attend, there are those who have legitimate reasons for not attending on Sunday morning.<sup>142</sup> Those in this study had legitimate scheduling reasons for not attending.

Life transitions, such as moving to a new location, death of a loved one, a new peer group, or divorce, can affect attendance. One dropout spoke of the affect that moving away from the community and his extended family had on him. The opportunity to attend church with them would have provided extra incentive to stay involved if they had not moved away. George said:

I think it would have been different if I had of lived in \_\_\_\_\_ all my life. Yes, certainly because there was already family involved in the church. There were things here, like Long Lake [Camp] and different things. I think Long Lake<sup>143</sup> could have been a very positive thing and has been for an awful lot of kids. But I think it would have probably been different. Circumstances certainly would have been different. Yea, I can see that I would have probably been in the church more.

Lifestyle choices were one of the factors that kept the dropouts from attending. Their personal choices are not in agreement with the church's teaching. But, now that they have lived through that phase of their life, lifestyle choices do not keep them away. There were, however, a few exceptions. The data shows engagement in homosexual relationships is seen as an issue significant enough to keep people away. This is because of the church's teaching of the inappropriateness of same sex relationships. In extreme

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<sup>142</sup> Stephen McMullin, "*Social Aspects of Religious Decline*" (PhD diss., University of New Brunswick, 2011), 233

<sup>143</sup> Long Lake is the youth camp owned and operated by the Lunenburg-Queens Association of United Baptist Churches.

cases this has been seen as homophobia. The individuals simply do not want to go to a service with hate mongers.

Another recognized that she would not be able to sit comfortably in worship knowing that her behaviour was contrary to what the church taught. It was not a reason that caused her to leave but is one that keeps her from attending now. Lynn said:

It would affect me today, yea it would because it would be like for me like a doctor smoking two packs of cigarettes a day and telling me to quit. I am not going to tend to listen to him. Let's say if I go out and drink and gamble, I am not going to feel comfortable going to church the next day.

Half of the dropouts said that although they did not always agree with their church's position, it was not a factor in their decision not to attend. Carl said, "There are a lot of positions that church takes on subjects like that, that I definitely don't agree with but I have never let that influence my position on whether or not to attend." Some felt the opposite; these same issues would keep them from regularly attending. Among other things, they did not like the fact that the church taught that sex outside of heterosexual marriage was wrong. Their view was that its teachings were old-fashioned and should be brought up to date. Alice spoke for all who held this opinion when she said:

Yes. I feel like the modern Christian has the duty of applying their life experience as someone who lives in 2013. The concept of sex before marriage, some people might deem it an out-dated thing. Divorce, abortion, gay marriage, yea I think all of that is a little out-dated. I think marriage is even out-dated. So I feel like part of it is the reason I left at that time. At that time I thought that, you know, it is OK to be gay, it's OK to have an abortion, it's OK to do all of that stuff.

Most of the dropouts said that the conflict in the church had no affect on their decision to stay away. Even as teenagers they were very aware that there had been conflict but it had no bearing on why they left and it did not keep them away as adults. There was one exception. After a period of being away at university Alice came home to

discover that a lot of the adults she had appreciated as a child had left the congregation.

She explains:

Yes. I remember that there were people that left and they didn't come back. They went to other churches and that was the people that I knew and like they were my group and they were just gone. I didn't want to go to the church they were going to either, so I left. I remember too, a second incident, there was one time where there was like a fight in church or something. Somebody said something from the pulpit that referred to everyone as a child of God and there were people who didn't agree with that and people were leaving. The church was divided. That was around the same time. I was like what is going on. That is part of why I was kind of leaving.

Some people think the church is too involved in politics. This was also not a reason that kept them away from it. One expressed the feeling that Church and State should be separated but it was not a significant issue to keep him away from church.<sup>144</sup> Another could see the importance of electing Christian politicians so that they could bring their point of view into parliamentary discussions.

There were things that the dropouts missed about church. They conveyed a genuine longing because of the really positive experiences they had before they left. Many missed the sense of camaraderie. They remembered fondly the adults who ministered to them when they were children. They missed the conversations they had together. There was a sense of security of knowing that you were part of a caring community that is rarely found anywhere but in the church. Some missed the stimulus that sermons provided. They missed being challenged by a positive message that gave them something to go home and think about. The Bible studies provided them with the opportunity to discuss ideas, which they missed. One also missed the uplifting music. Nevertheless, these longings were not strong enough to draw them back.

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<sup>144</sup> Perhaps the reason for this is that the appropriateness of Christians' influence upon political decisions is not as big an issue in Canada as it is in the United States.

Unfortunately, the dropouts had some unpleasant memories from their time involved in church. Some of them remembered being rebellious and having members be overly critical of their actions. Alice remembered the members being very judgemental and harsh in their comments to her when they discovered that some of her values were different from theirs. Kevin also recalled that the some in the congregation were really narrow-minded when it came to discussing new ideas he was exploring.

Even though many of the dropouts have a reason to be angry at the churches, they do not hold a grudge against the institution. They are all willing to attend special services on Christmas and Easter. Some were willing to attend when they go and visit extended family. If the family member's practice is to go to a worship service, they will attend with them. They will also attend special services when invited by family members. Surprisingly, one person commented that he would drop in on church occasionally because the services stimulate him intellectually. While occasional attendance was not an issue, with the exception of Doreen who is absent because of health issues, the dropouts are not willing to permanently change their attendance habits.

Technology and Social Media has changed the way we live but the dropouts were all in agreement that it will not replace the church. They did not stay away from the traditional service and replace it with the electronic version. They felt, instead, that there would always be a need for the church as a place where people can interact and study the Bible. Social media was seen as a tool that will funnel people into the church, and introduce the message but for a fuller explanation people will attend. None of the interviewees used it as a reason to explain either why they dropped out or as a reason for

their refusal to attend now. None of them mentioned using religious television programming as an alternative to church.

It was interesting to see that Kevin, the youngest of the respondents, was more open to the benefit technology could provide than all of the others. While it would not replace church, he believed that there was a definite place for it.

It won't replace every community church. I am sure there are going to be online church forums or whatever where you tune in and watch a choir sing and you can watch a preacher preach. I guess the age of technology, if you find a particular spiritual broadcast and they are totally on the same page as you, for some people perhaps that could replace church if they live in a community where they are not getting what they want out of the local options.

### **Current Theological Beliefs**

A reason that some people stay away is because they do not endorse the church's theological beliefs. The dropouts were asked about their position on some key Biblical truths. Before discussing individual doctrines, they were asked how they gained their knowledge. For the most part, they did not rely on the internet to answer their questions about God. Only one person used digital media to learn about God. He did this so sporadically that he did not even have his favourite sites bookmarked. Instead, they relied upon discussion with friends as a way of discovering truth.

The first question was about their understanding of the Bible as the word of God. Most of the dropouts lacked confidence in the Bible as the basis of faith and practice. They questioned the trustworthiness of the Bible. Did something get lost in the translation? Since one word can have many different meanings, how can we know the translators got it right? They also found the Bible hard to understand. The difficult passages affected their willingness to accept what is clear. For instance, why would a

forgiving God allow the wars that produced a bloodbath? Additionally, concerns were expressed about alterations to the Bible. It was felt that the Bible had been altered in the past to make people comfortable with their decisions. Therefore it could no longer be trusted as a historical document.

The dropouts felt that as a book the Bible was inspirational, educational, and practical. A person could read it when they were going through difficulty and it would inspire them to continue. It taught readers about other cultures. If a person needed some advice on how to handle a situation, they could find practical suggestions in it. Only one person understood the Bible as authoritative because when Christians read it, God speaks to them.

Second, the dropouts were asked about the understanding of God's nature. The majority of the dropouts had a good understanding about the character of God. The majority of the rest gave some insightful answers. God is love. God is the creator. God is the Heavenly Father. God is powerful. God is all knowing. There were a couple of beliefs that fell outside of orthodoxy; God is a positive creative force and God is everything. But, for the most part their belief in God would fit within historic Christian understanding of God's character.

The dropouts were asked, thirdly, about their doctrine of sin. They still had a strong sense of sin. They felt it was a universal condition. Many felt that deep down everyone had a sense of what was right and wrong. Sin was doing wrong. But, this sense of morality was not universally consistent. Reflecting the relativism of their

generation, they believed that everyone has a unique list.<sup>145</sup> Others were more traditional in their understanding. Sin meant to miss the mark, break the commandments, lack perfection or contradict scripture. Some of the specific sins that were mentioned were greed, cold-heartedness and self-indulgence. The effect of sin is that it makes the sinner feel bad explained one dropout. Another said sin separates people from God.

Christology was the fourth topic the dropouts discussed. All still believed that Jesus was a historical person who walked on this planet. Most believed that He was God's son. However, some found this a difficult concept to accept. Scientifically, how could one person be a God and a man at the same time? They really were not sure. Most believed that Jesus was the Saviour. He came to save the world from the punishment people deserved because of their sin. He died for sinners on the cross. He is the access to eternal life. One believed He was only a prophet. Another saw Jesus as pure love.

Fifth, the dropouts were asked about their understanding of the Atonement. The majority of the dropouts still believe the central message of Christianity. They continue to believe God will forgive people for their sin because Jesus paid the penalty for their sin through His death and resurrection. Christians claim "Forgiveness of sin comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Except for one interviewee, their understanding of Jesus's self-sacrifice has not changed. Kevin now believes that the story of Christ dying and coming back to life is a metaphor for humility.

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<sup>145</sup> Moral Relativism believes that no external code of conduct is legitimate. All morality is a matter of personal preference. [Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 39]

This does not mean that they completely understand the truth. Concern about the inconsistent lifestyles of those who accept the gospel message bothers two of the interviewees. One says, “Because He (Christ) died for our sins doesn’t mean we should keep sinning and living like we do as far as the way we treat people, because ‘Oh, it’s OK, Jesus died for our sins. Once we go to Him, we are fine’”. For another, being forgiven means that we need to be willing to offer forgiveness all the time, not just when it suits us. He had seen too many people claim to have their sins forgiven only to watch them hold grudges against others.

Most evangelical theologians teach that only through beginning a relationship with Jesus can a person have peace with God. The corollary to this truth is that all other religions are wrong when they teach a different way. The dropouts were asked what they thought about the exclusivity of Christianity. Only one person believed faith in Jesus was the only way to become part of the family of God. Two confessed they were not convinced.

More than half of the dropouts believed there were other paths besides faith in Jesus that offered peace with God. One believed that even though forgiveness was found in Jesus, a person atoned for their own sin through good works. Christianity teaches that a godly lifestyle is a by-product of faith in Jesus but not a precursor to acceptance into God’s family. It also may be that the individual was reacting to hypocrisy and secular lifestyles that characterized the adults she knew in church as a child. If their life was not changed were they really saved? All of the other interviewees were convinced that Christianity taught only one way to God, not the only way to God.



The afterlife was the sixth doctrine discussed with the dropouts. All believed there was life after death. Some were more certain than others. There is a spiritual world where an individual's soul will rest after they experience a physical death. There was complete unanimity on that truth among the interviewees. However, their understanding of heaven, hell and the intermediate state differed greatly. Some held the conservative view that these were literal places. Hell was a place of eternal torment for sinners and heaven was a place of bliss for believers and they believed in an intermediate state where the spirits or souls of the dead rested until the end of time. On the other extreme one viewed them as a metaphor. Kevin said:

All metaphor. I believe if you live a life of sin, a.k.a. not living up to your moral and personal obligations, the consequences will be a life that will not be so satisfying and maybe that life will be satisfying but that life could be called hell and vice versa.

George wondered if people weren't living in Hell and working their way to heaven. In between these two extremes were those who believed it was a place that the Bible used extremely graphic language to describe.

One dropout believed in a form of reincarnation. Kevin said, "I think I will be regenerated into the earth somehow. Will I come back as a horse or something, I doubt it but I think it is totally beyond my understanding." Doreen based her belief in the afterlife on an out of body experience.

I had an out of body experience when I had my gall bladder surgery and they called the family all in because they were losing me. I went through this tunnel, this most beautiful crystal tunnel. I went through it and on the other side; it was like this waiting area. It was water and it was so bright blue/green. It was beautiful and there were people waiting. Everybody goes to the same place, I think and then God, when He comes back to do your judgment, that's when you go to heaven or Hell. Oh, yeah. I heard a voice like it was God saying "It's not your turn yet" and I had to come back. I came right back into the room and

the woman next to me said, “Where did you go?” I was actually above myself looking down.

Even though the dropouts questioned the authority of the Bible and Christianity’s claim of exclusivity, for the most part their theological views were quite conservative. Not one of them said they would not come back to church because of a theological issue. The only exception was on sexual ethics. Their disagreement was really over biblical hermeneutics.<sup>146</sup> How should the Bible be interpreted as it applies to issues like homosexuality?

### **Current Understanding of the Church’s Mission**

The dropouts were asked if they thought the church still had a role in contemporary society. Only one dropout thought it did not have a vital role in society. All the rest thought that it had one, but struggled when it came to defining what its role in contemporary society. There were those who restricted its role to traditional practices of worship and Christian education. Others thought its role was to provide guidance to people on how to live properly. Another thought it should be a haven for hurting people.

While there was not much agreement on the church’s role, there was on how it should carry out its role. The organization needs to resist the trap of being heavy handed in the way it teaches. It was too negative in the past and this hampered its influence upon the community. The congregations must be completely accepting, non-discriminatory and non-judgmental towards any lifestyle or spiritual belief system as it fulfilled its mandate. A critical, judgmental and dictatorial church would be a repellent to the dropouts.

The dropouts were asked their opinion on what the mission of the church should

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<sup>146</sup> Hermeneutics – the science of interpreting the Bible. [Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: a Textbook of Hermeneutics*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1980), 11]

be in our society. They had many different answers to this question. These included: helping hurting people, being a positive presence in society, bringing people to God, encouraging peace, explaining the biblical message, visiting the sick, and showing hospitality. It was felt that the mandate of the church should be extending beyond exclusively bringing people to God. Carl said, “I believe the mission: even though warning people of the dangers of Hell is still a small part of it, I think it should be based more on positive aspects of having a positive relationship with God.”

According to the dropouts, personal evangelism is a part of the church’s mission in which members should be involved. It should involve inviting people to worship and other special services where the gospel message of salvation would be communicated. Personally sharing the good news, one-on-one, is also part of this task. Their only hesitation was caused by memories of people being too pushy when sharing the message. George said, “Yes, my only issue comes when I say ‘I don’t want to talk today about something’ and they continue to be persistent. That is where you start to lose people.” Kevin also said that when a believer approaches a stranger to talk to them about their relationship with God, it is a “huge turn-off”.

The dropouts were asked if they thought the church should be involved in discipleship - that is, teaching people more about their faith and how to more consistently practice it. All but one thought it should be exercising this ministry. Concern was voiced that this be done in a positive manner. Apparently, in the past the pulpit had been used to condemn people who were not maturing in their faith. A positive approach, teaching members how to develop the practices would be much better. The one individual who

was opposed to discipleship ministry did not feel that a church should help a person develop spiritual practices. Instead, they would learn best by self-discovery.

The church should show itself to be socially responsible according to the dropouts. This should be expressed by helping the poor. No mention was made of helping out in justice issues.

Alice expressed the desire to see it involved in social activism when she said:

I think the church would win over a lot more people if it were that way [willing to help the disenfranchised, poor and sick]. If instead of focusing on spiritual issues, focus on issues that are affecting people day-to-day, social issues. Not always being on a social issue that is saying 'you shouldn't be doing this because', for example, abortion or gay marriage. Those aren't the issue I mean, I mean more like the poverty because we have huge poverty issues in this country. Those are the issues I think the church needs to be tackling.

With one exception, all of the dropouts thought that environmental concern and care was part of its mandate. The one exception was one who wanted to restrict the church's mission to telling people about God. The rest thought that God wanted them to consistently take care of the earth by picking up garbage, planting trees, conserving electricity, and car-pooling.

### **Comparison with other Studies**

The dropouts were asked to comment on the reasons others listed for their decision to stay away from church. There were very few points of agreement. There were four points on which they agreed. There was strongest agreement on the value the dropouts placed on friendship. The main factor influencing their decision to walk away was their friends. They turned their back on the church because they wanted to spend more time with their friends. It appears that their largest and most influential group of

friends were those who did not attend. For some reason they did not feel connected to the people who attended.

The problem was not that the church wasn't friendly. They disagreed with their peer group when it came to the friendship factor. People from other studies said the church was not friendly. This was not the case in Liverpool and Brooklyn. The adults made them feel as part of the family. But, they were looking for people their own age to befriend them. Like many today, these two churches did not have many teens attending. In the middle teens, their strongest friendships were made with peers who did not share a common interest in church. Unfortunately, their attachment to church was not strong enough to sustain the pressure of their peer group influence.

There was also agreement that the church and faith did have to be combined. As they wrestled through the implications of their decision, they came to believe that you could have faith without the baggage of attending. Walking away from the church meant that they no longer had to observe the hypocritical example of members. They had seen people who attended but lacked a distinctive Christian lifestyle and wanted nothing to do with such hypocrisy.

Further, they agreed that moral values could be developed apart from church. In the other surveys many people said that the church was not needed to help the individual with their identity formation. They could figure out who they were and what moral values would direct their life without its input. The local dropouts said the same thing. Both groups thought that the church was homophobic and sexually repressive. This belief contributed to their decision to walk away.

The local dropouts felt that the church's teaching on sex was out-dated. Our society is different from that of the biblical eras and so our sexual ethics need some adjustment. Their opinion was that sexual ethics should be left as a private matter. It should be open to accepting all regardless of whether or not they are having sex outside of a heterosexual marriage union. The ones who thought it was judgemental and negative felt that way as a reaction to the church not altering its teaching in this area.

Last, they agreed that Sunday had become secularized. Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches are in communities where the Mersey Paper Mill once undergirded the local economy. It ran seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. The employees were shift workers who frequently had to work Sundays. Five of those interviewed grew up in homes where their father often worked on Sunday mornings. Three of the males interviewed frequently work on Sundays and the fourth did before he retired. Two of the females often work Sundays and a third did until recently.

This explains why the half that was currently employed on Sunday said worship did not fit in their schedule. They are either working Sundays or sleeping after working through the night Saturday and into Sunday. For the other half, this is not an issue since they can go to church any time if they so choose. Therefore, on this point these results are in agreement with the results from the other surveys. Their lifestyles are too busy to attend.

In all the other areas the local dropouts disagreed with the reasons given for not attending in chapter one. For the most part those interviewed for this survey disagreed with the latest data from other parts of the Canada and North America. This could have been because the research in this study was not age specific. It also could be that the

people on the South Shore of Nova Scotia have different reasons for their decision to walk away from the church.

### **Future Involvement**

The dropouts were open to returning to church at some time in the future. The likelihood of this happening would increase if some of their issues were addressed. Those who worked on Sunday said that the church would have to provide other worship options if they were to return. One said a return would be more likely if it changed its teaching and allowed homosexual relationships. Another said if the church was less dogmatic in its presentation of truth, he would return. The sermons would have to become more practical for another to consider a return. If the members were friendlier, less judgmental, others would ponder attending. Still another said they would return when their health improved.

### **Data Analysis**

The research was conducted to prove this hypothesis: the reason that adult children have dropped out is because they do not have an adequate understanding of the mission of the church. The analysis of the data has revealed that confusion over its mission was not the main factor in the dropouts' decision to leave. They gave the impression that they had not developed an understanding of what it meant to live missionally at the time of their exodus. While the absence of a strong sense of mission, taught and practiced in the home and at church may have been a contributing factor, it was not the sole cause.

## The Decision to Leave

In doing his research for the book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, David Kinnaman reached the same conclusion.

We were looking for a single smoking gun. Instead, we found many. I suspected that our investigation would uncover one big reason that young adults disconnect from the church or walk away from their faith—maybe two or three. Instead of one or two biggies we discovered a wide range of perspectives, frustrations and disillusionments that compel twentysomethings to disconnect. No single reason pushes the majority of young adults to drop out.<sup>147</sup>

This appeared not to be the case with the dropouts interviewed in this study. They admitted that the underlying cause of their decision to leave was rebellion. As they flexed their independence, church was one of the first things they eliminated from their life. Carl was an example of this. He looked back at this time and said that he resented being forced to attend. As a teen he rebelled against his sheltered upbringing and adopted the secular viewpoints of his friends. Kathy shared a similar experience, “Personal choices in high school made me want to just dabble in other things.”

All but one of the interviewees stopped attending in their mid-teen years. The average age of the person when they dropped out of the church was eighteen. The exception stopped attending two years ago because of health reasons. When she is removed from the equation, the average age falls to fifteen. It was therefore between Junior and Senior High School that these teens left the church. As the interviewees reached their middle teenage years, their enthusiasm for attending lessened. This was often combined with the exploration of behavioural and lifestyle choices that were inconsistent with its teaching. Not wanting to be hypocrites or not wanting to be made to feel guilty, they stopped attending.

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<sup>147</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location 1338



Some teens rebel but do not abandon the church. There were several factors that contributed to make the dropouts so rebellious that they walked away. The first was the influence of their friends. Peers played a significant role in their decision. During the developmental years youth are much more likely to follow the crowd. Their friends' decisions not to be involved in church heavily influenced them. They shared a common search for independence. They pushed similar boundaries, rejecting their parents' rules and values as they experimented with new lifestyle choices. As a group, they got involved in other things and made a decision to walk away. Kevin said, "We went to church together and kind of dropped out at the same time."

Social pressure is a major influence on the decisions that people of all ages make. However, this is especially intense for adolescents.<sup>148</sup> This influence can be positive. George reported:

I had a very close circle of friends I have known since my childhood years and we were all involved in church to a high degree. We regularly attended Sunday School and church, we attended meetings with other congregations, we used to go to youth rallies quite often.

If a person's peer group is involved, there is a greater likelihood that the individual will be involved as well. This was the case with most of the dropouts in their childhood. Many had a complete circle of friends that attended with them. The fact they attended church, however, did not mean they actually lived out their faith. Few reported having friends who privately prayed and read the Bible or lived missionally. Their faith was event-oriented. That is, it was shaped by something they attended rather than a relationship that was internalized.

The second contributing factor to the severity of their rebellion was the depth of

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<sup>148</sup> Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling*. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980.), 286

their belief system. A strong faith and spiritual maturity will help teens weather the storm of this period with their belief system intact. Sadly, the data revealed that these teens did not develop the depth of faith needed to keep them grounded. Bill Hull has written that this is a pattern in contemporary Christendom. “Today’s Christians lack the spiritual depth of character from which to draw during very difficult times.”<sup>149</sup>

The local church plays a role in creating a process where the content of lessons becomes more developed as the child ages. It is not enough to entertain, befriend the youth. They start out as children learning Bible stories but gradually they need to have substance added to their lessons. This was not always the case. Kevin was an example. He said,

[Church] was made up of a bunch of friendly people like a home filled with grandparents...I felt like I wasn’t really taking anything away from it. It was very watered down, a very watered down kind of feeling, compared to at church camp where I felt it was very real, like I really felt it. I went to church out of the sense that I had a Christian duty to do but I did not really take anything away from it.

This was not enough to keep him engaged. In addition to the acceptance and love he felt from the people, he needed to be taught some foundational biblical truth.

In the book, *Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear*, David W Anderson and Paul Hill argue that one of the principles of life in the church is that faith is caught more than taught.<sup>150</sup> Discipleship must augment the classroom instruction with experiential knowledge that is learned as more mature Christians train younger ones. An example of what happens when this is not done occurred in Kevin’s life. He says:

I was baptized but it was only a physical baptism. I lost my religion

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<sup>149</sup> Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others On the Journey of Faith*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 54

<sup>150</sup> David W. Anderson and Paul Hill, *Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing Discipleship in Home and Congregation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003), 153

during baptismal lessons. I said, “This isn’t going to be a real baptism because I don’t feel right. I am losing my faith, like it’s gone” ... Physically a man dipped me in the lake. Were there any spiritual intentions? Not at the time of the baptism.

This could have been prevented if he had a mature believer to talk to about his doubts.

A third contributor to the dropouts’ spiritual maturity during the developing years is the Christian training they receive in the home. Rather than being taught in a traditional classroom setting, they learn best in the context of family through observation and practice. James Houston says, “We also live in an information society where knowledge is readily confused with ‘thinking about things.’ We forget that the nurturing and caring relationship is effective in teaching.<sup>151</sup> When asked if their parents were consistent Christian role models they all replied, yes. George said, “I guess I appreciated the positive outlook that having faith in something gives you because that certainly is there.” He observed how they handled problems with faith, believing God would work things out. This positive outlook stayed with him for life.

However, when one looks at the Christian nurturing that went on in the homes, one sees that it may have lacked some crucial elements. The first concern was lack of consistency. Parents were more likely to pray during tough times than have a regular devotional time. The families only read the Bible or prayed together occasionally. Grace before meals was not consistently practiced in most cases. There was no consistent Bible study in the home. As the child got older and reached teenage years even these intermittent practices lessened.

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<sup>151</sup> James M. Houston, *The Disciple: Following the True Mentor (volume 5, Soul's Longing Series)*, New ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 24

A Focus on the Family study concluded:

Religious outcomes flow quite predictably from formative influences that shape persons' lives in earlier years. The religious commitments, practices and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, make a difference. Parents who provide a home where faith is vibrantly practiced, even imperfectly, are remarkably likely to create young adults who remain serious Christians, even as they sometimes go through bumpy spots in the road.<sup>152</sup>

Consistency is a key to developing this type of home.

Second, the parents were not always of equal influence. Mothers appeared to be more mature spiritually and took more of a leading role. They were more likely to read the Bible personally and pray than their husbands. In the homes, they took the lead in talking to the children about the Bible, church, and sermons. They were more likely to evangelize. In many instances, fathers only became active believers later in life, after the kids had moved out of house. As children, they found the fact that their parents were in different spiritual places very confusing.

The dropouts' choice to rebel during their teenage years caused their departure from church. It was not a well thought out process. Gradually as they experimented with a more secular lifestyle they attended less and less. Their rebellion could have been mitigated, possibly even stopping their departure, if their faith had been stronger and more influenced by both their parents and church. Attention will now be turned to their reasons for staying away.

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<sup>152</sup> Hess and Stanton, *Millennial Faith Participation and Retention*, 5

## The Decision to Stay Away

The dropouts seem not to have had a lot of exposure to a church that practised a missional mandate. In the book, *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, David Kinnaman says, “Exiles are dissatisfied with a church that is a weekend event, not a movement of God’s people on mission for Christ.”<sup>153</sup> They are not just interested in going to a weekly performance; they want to be part of something bigger. They will rearrange their schedules to be part of something that really matters.

The interviewees remembered a church that was not active in mission. There were members that lived missionally but the congregation did not have an organized plan. The respondents had no memory of it being involved in evangelism, social action, justice or environmental care in their community.<sup>154</sup> Their comments speak for themselves:

I feel like you went to church to sing to God and to just kind of talk to, uh, you have to maintain a regular practice, I felt that was the only mission, there wasn’t a greater mission than that. I didn’t feel like there was any real thing that was working towards like making sure everyone was engaged. I don’t have any recollection of the church as a whole doing anything like that in the community. It was more of just a, you know, ‘hey Christian people in the community let’s sing together because that is something we all do and no one else does.’ (Kevin)

I probably wasn’t engaged enough to know for sure but outwardly I’ve always felt that, even as a kid, that they weren’t looking past the church walls. It’s awful but that has always been my thought. (George)

It [missional activity] might have happened. I don’t think so. (Lynn)

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<sup>153</sup> Kinnaman. *You Lost Me*. Kindle location 1140

<sup>154</sup> This is not concrete evidence to say that the church was not involved in these missional activities. It is simply the perception of these eight dropouts. There is a possibility that they existed and the eight persons interviewed were simply were unaware. However, follow-up conversations with older church members have led me to believe that there was never a long-term, well-coordinated plan for the Liverpool community. Some pastors emphasized supporting the local food bank, volunteerism at the hospital, Association and Convention projects, etc. and members responded but these efforts were intermittent.

At the time, no, in general, there were a few that would [live missionally] but not as a whole [congregation mobilized to do local mission work].  
(Kathy)

Encouragingly, the dropouts all thought the church still had a role in society. They did not think the building was a museum or a monument to the past.

There was a difference of opinion among the dropouts on whether or not the church should place a large emphasis on bringing people to God through the proclamation of his Word. Some felt the church should as long as it wasn't too pushy and allowed for lots of dialogue. It was also to provide a place for worship and Sunday School. Others thought the church should be socially responsible. It should have a helping ministry. It should care for the poor and the sick. Most thought it should also be a leader when it came to caring for society.

If the church understood its ministry holistically, it would be more attractive to the dropouts. Some of them seemed surprised that the church should look after the environment. They all would like to see an organization that spoke out on justice issues for those who do not have a voice. An attractive church would be a socially responsible one that cared for the poor and the hurting. It would need to understand its mission not only in terms of saving souls, holding a weekly worship service, maintaining a building and upholding a level of holiness until Jesus returns. Rather it would be a church that helps people get right with God, serve others and foster a just society.

The research results also revealed that the dropouts had other, secondary issues, which also affected their attendance. The first was work. They were either scheduled to work on Sunday morning or all night Saturday and slept Sunday morning. Even if they

wanted to go to church, they would not be able to attend because Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches do not schedule worship services on other days of the week.

The second issue was that the church appears to be out-of-date with its teaching. When their beliefs differ from the traditional teaching of the church, they jump to the conclusion that the doctrine is old-fashioned. It could be more liberal in its thinking. They reasoned that if it can change its position on gender equality or racism it should be able to do so on issues like homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia.

A third cause in the dropouts' hesitancy to return is the church's teaching that faith in Jesus's sacrifice is the only way to have eternal life. They had no issue with it being one of the ways to discover peace with God but they were disturbed by Christianity's exclusive claim. It was one thing for them to believe that Jesus paid the penalty for their sin. It was quite another to require everyone to believe the same thing. This was another example of "rejecting absolutes" that is characteristic of our relativistic culture.

A fourth reason was their view that the church was too dogmatic in its thinking. The dropouts reasoned that instead of telling people what to do, the church could provide options and let the people decide what they want to do themselves. They felt the church is archaic in the way that things are taught and discussed. Some dropouts felt that there was little time for discussion. Church should offer a strong sense of community where people gather to make sense out of life, a place where there is freedom to have conversations. They wanted an opportunity to have a two-way discussion as opposed to sitting and listening to a lecture.

This seems like a lot of difficult issues to be resolved. In spite of this, the general consensus was that if the church practiced a missional mandate in its local community, the dropouts would be more open to coming back. None of these issues were strong enough to keep them in exile. It was hoped that the church would be open to discussing them after they were involved but none would keep them away.

### **Conclusion**

The hypothesis was tested on the eight dropouts from the Liverpool and Brooklyn Churches to see if the underlying reason they left and remained reluctant to return was tied to the unwillingness of the congregations to practice mission integrally. Unlike the conclusions from other contemporary studies that revealed there was no single issue affecting people's decision to leave and stay away, these interviews revealed that there was an underlying cause.

First, all but one of the interviewees admitted that while trying to make sense out of life, they left the church as rebellious teenagers under the heavy pressure of secularism. They followed their friends, in rebellion against authority (church and parents) to pursue other lifestyle choices. While not a new discovery, the research revealed that these dropouts left the church because of adolescent rebellion.

The hypothesis, however, was wrong on this point. Their choice to leave had nothing to do with the church's understanding of mission. They admitted that their decision was not well reasoned. They never gave much thought to the church's practice of mission. Their decision to leave was reactionary. They strove for their independence and



pushed away anyone or any institution that prevented them from behavioural experimentation.

The hypothesis was correct, though, when it came to their rationale for staying away from church. The underlying factor was, that from their perception, the congregation does not practice holistic mission. They believe that the church should be doing more than just preparing people for heaven. The interviewees said they were more open to coming back to a congregation that was fulfilling its mandate to minister holistically.

In light of this conclusion it is critically important that the church understand holistic mission. If the interviewee's perception is correct, the churches need to capture a fresh understanding of their mandate in order to be honour God and draw the dropouts back into fellowship. Attention will now turn to the study of some Biblical passages that are key to developing a holistic theology of mission. As evangelical churches we must be true to Scriptures and so themes will be traced through the Old Testament, the Gospels, Paul's writings and that of the other apostles. Unifying principles that undergird a missional mandate for the churches will be identified.

## CHAPTER 3

### A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR HOLISTIC MISSION

The research has revealed no clear-cut, single reason why people have dropped out of the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches. An underlying cause, however, was discovered for their refusal to return to church. Their reasons to leave were heavily influenced by the desire to experiment with a secular lifestyle practiced by many of their friends. As adolescents, the decision to walk away was influenced more by rebellion than logic. Their faith was ill prepared to face the doubts, temptations and pressures of adolescence. As adults, they are not interested in a local church that appears to measure religious success in terms of attendance rather than personal devotion and caring ministry to others.

A close examination of Scripture is the key to developing a holistic theology of mission. The Bible teaches that the integral<sup>155</sup> mission of the church is to advance the Kingdom of God. This means that as children of God, as citizens of another world, believers are to live out all dimensions of their lives following the example of our King, Jesus. Christians must announce that God is a loving God who forgives those who turn to

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<sup>155</sup> Holistic and Integral are used interchangeably in this paper when describing the mission of the church.

Him in repentance. He is also a God who desires justice and asks His people not only to live justly but also to champion the cause of the poor and the powerless.<sup>156</sup>

### **The Old Testament Witness**

A Biblical perspective on evangelism begins with the Old Testament. Many assume that the Old Testament does not present a balance between evangelism and social action. Because the Old Testament, for the most part, deals with God's work among the Jewish people, it was heavily weighted to social action and justice. There are numerous passages that speak of the need to promote justice and look after the poor. They are well attested in the literature, but for the purpose of this study, some of them will be briefly mentioned.

God's mandate to His people began in the Garden with the role of caretakers over creation. *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it* (Genesis 2:15, NIV). They were His stewards over the environment. Rather than abuse it for profit they were to care for it as a servant looked after a master's property. From this flow the ideas relating to justice and social action.

Israel was commanded to show compassion to all people. Zechariah reminded them of this in chapter 7:9-10 when he said, "*This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. And do not scheme against each other.*" The Israelites were to show love to those who had nowhere else to turn.

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<sup>156</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 24

Israel was also to fight for social justice. To a wayward nation, Isaiah said, *“Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows”* (Isaiah 1:16-17). They were not to take advantage of those who were not in a position to stand up for their rights.

Many passages combine justice and mercy as actions that cannot be overlooked. Micah, in his oft-repeated call, says, *“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”* (Chapter 6:8, NIV). Others include Jeremiah 22:15-16, Hosea 6:6 and Deuteronomy 10:18-19.

God’s people were never to oppress others by selling them for profit. *This is what the LORD says: “The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and I will not let them go unpunished! They sell honorable people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample helpless people in the dust and shove the oppressed out of the way”* (Amos 2:6-7). They were to stand up for the dignity of all people because all were made in God’s image.

The wealthy were never to use their money to buy them a favorable decision in court. *Don’t rob the poor just because you can, or exploit the needy in court. For the LORD is their defender. He will ruin anyone who ruins them* (Proverbs 22:22-23). The poor and rich were both to expect the same justice.

Furthermore, the wealthy were to provide for the hungry so that they would not starve. *“When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your*

*grape crop - do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10).* In a day without a social safety net, where the government provides welfare services, this was crucial.

Another dimension of God’s mandate was intergenerational welfare. Children were to honor their parents by showing them proper respect. This was so significant that it was one of the Ten Commandments. *“Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).* This also implied that a child would not turn their parents away when they were old. Instead, they would see that all of their needs were met.

There were also many cases where peace and reconciliation were to be part of life. The story of Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery is a great illustration of peace and reconciliation. Joseph could have sought revenge but instead set the example by forgiving his brothers and looking deep to discover God’s will. *But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them (Genesis 50:19-21).*

These are but a few examples of what the Old Testament says about mission. In spite of the insular interpretation the Jewish leaders gave to God’s dealing with Israel, evangelism was not a new concept that Jesus introduced. It was also woven into the covenant God made with His people. Israel was to be a blessing for other nations. There are verses that speak of the importance of reaching out to other people groups so that they

may discover that God is worthy of praise. A more in-depth look at these allows us to see the breadth of God's plan.

In the Abrahamic covenant, while not understood by the Jewish people for many centuries, the idea of evangelism was implied when the people were told God's blessing would spread to other nations through them. *I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you* (Genesis 12:2-3).

These verses find their context in the story of Abraham's life, Gen 11:27-25:11. They are located right after Abraham's genealogy and form his call to the ministry. He must leave his homeland and his family for a new land. The promises of land, descendants and protection dominate the subsequent story, but the "blessing to the nations" theme is also highly significant. This was God's solution to the calamities that have befallen mankind in Gen 1 - 11.<sup>157</sup> Within these verses the word "blessing" is used five times. Interestingly, each mention of the root "to bless" in this passage is a paronomastic<sup>158</sup> allusion to Abram's name.<sup>159</sup> This literary device was probably used to draw attention to this pronouncement so that it would be easily remembered. The fivefold use of the word "bless" would negate the five curses on man and his world pronounced in the preceding chapters (3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15* (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1987), Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>158</sup> The word *Paronomasia* refers to a play on words where the consonants or vowel pointing is changed slightly. It is utilized in the Old Testament to arouse curiosity or to heighten the effect of a particularly solemn or important pronouncement, in this way permanently and indelibly impressing the proclamation upon the memory of an audience. (Barry J. Beitzel, Exodus 3:14 and the divine name: A case of biblical paronomasia. *Trinity Journal* 1 Trinity Evangelical Divinity School NS, 1980, 5)

<sup>159</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*. Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

The Hebrew term used here comes from the root word *barak* translated here as blessing, which means to provide the ability for success.<sup>161</sup> God's favour was manifested most obviously in human prosperity and wellbeing; long life, wealth, peace, good harvests, and children are the items that figure most frequently in lists of blessing.<sup>162</sup> Behind the fourfold promise of nationhood, a great name, divine protection, and transmission of blessing, echo hints of royal ideology. What Abram is promised here was the hopeful result of the idealistic reign of many an oriental monarch.<sup>163</sup> "Families" as used here, can also be translated "clan". It referred to a social grouping between a tribe and a father's house. Not every individual was promised blessing in Abram but every major group in the world would be blessed.<sup>164</sup> For the Christian, this is literally fulfilled in the New Testament with the understanding that the great commission referred to the same groupings of people as "the world".

Looking back at history, one now knows that this blessing would ultimately be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. In Him the nations were to be blessed. A blessing so great that its effect extended to all the families of the earth can only be thought of in connection with the promised Savior. This word, therefore, is definitely Messianic and determines that the Messiah is to emerge from the line of Abram.<sup>165</sup> God's promise to Abraham had an evangelistic fulfillment.

Another great example of evangelism in the Old Testament is the call to followers to fan God's fame. The phrases, "make known throughout the nations" or "may the

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<sup>161</sup> R Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 132

<sup>162</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Volume 1*, 13th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 413

<sup>163</sup> Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*. Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Volume 1*, 413

nations praise you” or something similar was repeated several times in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms.<sup>166</sup> Psalm 67:1-3 provides an excellent example of such expectations. *May God be merciful and bless us. May His face smile with favor on us. May your ways be known throughout the earth, your saving power among people everywhere. May the nations praise you, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise you.*

Psalm 67 starts with a prayer that God might be gracious to His people, bless them, and make His face shine upon them so that His ways may be known on earth and His salvation among all nations. The Psalmist quotes from the priestly benediction of Numbers 6.<sup>167</sup>

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:  
'May the LORD bless you and protect you.  
May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.  
May the LORD show you His favor and give you His peace.'  
Whenever Aaron and His sons bless the people of Israel in my name, I myself will bless them (Numbers 6:22-27).*

By pronouncing the Aaronic blessing, he was expressing his desire for the nations of the earth to share in the favour of God. The shining forth of the face of God among His people was a metaphor for His goodwill and blessing. A shining, bright face reveals a person of good disposition and was a sign of inward pleasure.<sup>168</sup> The blessing manifested itself in different ways; it empowered growth, fertility, and prosperity. It consisted of God’s ongoing presence in life, His sustaining of the well being of the world, and His providing for family. A. A. Anderson remarks, "In a sense God's blessing was not an

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<sup>166</sup> See 1 Chronicles 16.24, Psalm 18.49, 96.3, 105.1, Isaiah 12.4

<sup>167</sup> G A F Knight, *The Psalms (Daily Study Bible) Volume 1* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1982), 304

<sup>168</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 20, Psalms 51-100*, (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1991), Olive Tree Bible Software.



independent force, but rather the active help of God himself, so that one could not have the blessing without the giver."<sup>169</sup> The presence of God comes with His blessing.

The phrases “may your ways be known throughout the earth” and “your saving power among people everywhere” are examples of poetic parallelism. Together they sum up the twofold blessing. The first overflow from Israel’s own blessing will be the spread of life-giving knowledge.<sup>170</sup> “May nations praise you” is repeated twice for emphasis. The Psalmist’s earnest desire was that people from every nation would confess God as the Lord.<sup>171</sup> He wanted God to bless them with a missionary purpose that would only be satisfied with the salvation of other people groups.

The desire behind the prayer was for people who lived in other countries to recognize that Yahweh was the only true God and to stop worshipping their own gods.<sup>172</sup> The prayer had an evangelistic trust. *The New Geneva Study Bible* says, “The psalmist’s desire to see peoples from many nations praise the Lord was begun in a new way when the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ broke down the middle wall of separation (Ephesians 2:14).”<sup>173</sup>

The Prophets are the Old Testament books where evangelism is strongly emphasized. It was understood to be part of a prophet’s call to faithful service. Isaiah is a good example. Isaiah 6:8 says, “*Then I heard the Lord asking, ‘Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?’ I said, ‘Here I am. Send me.’*” He answered the call to stand before the people as God’s representative. Isaiah’s response

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<sup>169</sup> A.A. Anderson as quoted in Marvin E. Tate. *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 51-100*, Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>170</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 237

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 236

<sup>172</sup> Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 1970), 487

<sup>173</sup> *New Geneva Study Bible: Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1995), 825

stands in contrast to those who refused the call during the time of Ezekiel when no one came forward to stand in the gap. *“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one”* (Ezekiel 22:30). He was even referred to as the evangelical prophet because he was always prophesying about the coming Messiah. (Isaiah 6:9-13, 7:14, 8:14, 11:1-9, 28:16, 40:1-6, 49:6, 53, 61:1,2.)

In his crucial *Servant Song*, Isaiah explained that the second task of the servant was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. *He says, “You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth”* (Isaiah 49:6). He would fulfill the call given to Abraham. Today we understand that the ascended Christ brings the gospel to the nations through the church.<sup>174</sup> But, the evangelical prophet Isaiah had foretold this many years ago.

One should not think that this prophecy only applied to the Messiah and excused Israel from evangelistic activity. As is the nature of Old Testament prophecy, it has different layers of meaning. There was one obvious literal meaning that applied to Israel and another hidden meaning that was revealed in the New Testament era. Walter Kaiser once said, *“This prophecy was applied first to Israel and second to the Messiah.”*<sup>175</sup> He goes on to say that Israel was called God's son and His first born in Exodus 4:22. The

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<sup>174</sup> *New Geneva Study Bible: Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture: New King James Version*, 1112

<sup>175</sup> Walter Kaiser, *The Great Commission and the Old Testament*, International Journal of Frontier Missions, Vol. 13.1 Jan – Mar. 1996, 6

identity of the Servant of the Lord was a composite concept of both the nation and the Messiah.<sup>176</sup> They are both to evangelize the Gentiles.

Nor should one think that the focus of the missionary activity would be upon the nation of Israel. E.J. Young said, “The servant’s work was greater than the redemption of Israel.<sup>177</sup> The Hebrew word for Gentile used here is *goyim*.<sup>178</sup> There can be no doubt that the mission focused outside Israel to foreigners. God’s people were not to be so self-absorbed that they had no time for others.

John F.A. Sawyer points out, “This is an amazing statement when you think about how the prophets suffered at the hands of their own people.”<sup>179</sup> If their own people treated them so poorly, they could only expect worse treatment at the hands of foreigners. No wonder Jonah tried to go in the other direction when God told him to travel to the enemy city of Nineveh. Yet, God calls the nation to reach out to other countries while trusting in Him for protection and guidance.

There were two key parts to the servant’s evangelistic efforts. First, He was to be a “light to the Gentiles.” Second, He was to “bring salvation to the end of the earth.” Again, this is a parallel statement. Light is intimately connected with salvation.<sup>180</sup> The light was to be the servant himself as was revealed in the New Testament when Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). The Gentiles were thought to be in spiritual darkness and would be saved by being delivered into the light. Salvation, as translated from the Hebrew word *yeshu’ah*, means an act of divine intervention on behalf of

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<sup>176</sup> Walter Kaiser, *The Great Commission and the Old Testament*, 65  
<sup>177</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 275  
<sup>178</sup> Kaiser, *The Great Commission and the Old Testament*, 6  
<sup>179</sup> John F.A. Sawyer, *Isaiah: Bk. 2 (Daily Study Bible)* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrews Press, 1986), 120  
<sup>180</sup> Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3*, 276

another.<sup>181</sup> Israel was God's chosen nation. He dwelt among them and they experienced His blessings. They were intended to be a blessing to the nations around them. Israel was to have had an intense desire for other nations to see that life in the covenant is good. They were to be the light to show them the way of salvation.

While Isaiah had the wonderful revelation of God's message for all humankind and willingly commits himself to following God, Jonah was the Old Testament's reluctant evangelist. As an Old Testament practitioner of evangelism, he was slow to figure it out; to be the people of God is to be a people for the world.<sup>182</sup> He stood as an example of someone from the nation of Israel making a verbal proclamation of God's will to those outside the covenant community.

The prophet's attitude can be seen as a caricature of the nation of Israel. God's people had lost their sense of calling. They had forgotten about the implications of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. Other nations were the enemy not the mission field. Lesslie Newbigin said, "The meaning of Israel's election and of its misunderstanding of it is depicted with supreme dramatic power in the story of Jonah, which is perhaps the most moving interpretation of the missionary calling of God's people to be found in the Bible."<sup>183</sup>

After running from God, getting caught in a storm, and being thrown overboard from a ship, God rescued Jonah by having a great fish swallow him whole and spit him up on dry ground, thereby giving him a second chance. Jonah reluctantly went to the Ninevites and called the people to repent.

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<sup>181</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 121

<sup>182</sup> Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: the Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), Kindle location 1472

<sup>183</sup> Lesslie Newbiggin as quoted in Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey C. Warner, "Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament" in *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2.1 (2008), 49.

*Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you." This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow (Jonah 3:1-6).*

The narrator reminded the reader that the city of Nineveh was colossal in size. It had a population of 120,000 (Jonah 4:11). Jonah had a huge task. He travelled to the center of the city and announced that God's judgment would fall on them in 40 days. The results of his preaching were astounding. The people believed the message and their response shocked Jonah. They repented of their sin. The evidence of their repentance was to wear sackcloth and to fast. These were traditional signs of repentance for that period.<sup>184</sup>

He thus became an example of an evangelist. He left his people and went and spoke to another people calling for their conversion. Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey C. Warner in their article, *Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament*, make the point:

Evangelism is always centripetal as well as centrifugal because it always entails bringing people into community as well as sending people out from community. The double movement is constitutive of evangelism: people are sent out in order to return with others. In this way Christian community extends itself in order to remain itself...In evangelism, the church preserves itself only by giving itself away, remaining hospitable and gracious to all....<sup>185</sup>

Jonah learned this lesson and became an Old Testament example of a missionary evangelist who left his own people to seek the salvation of another.

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<sup>184</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah (New International Commentary On the Old Testament)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 224

<sup>185</sup> Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey C. Warner, "Jonah and the Imitation of God: Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament" in *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2.1 (2008), 66.

Interwoven throughout the Old Testament, therefore, was a message of hope for those outside the covenant community of Israel if they would listen to God's spokespersons. This would be fulfilled with the Messiah who would save God's people. Other nations too would come to Him to receive salvation. Israel was to be God's vehicle to tell all the others about the God they worshipped. There is no doubt that they were called to be an evangelistic nation as well as a righteous nation. Unfortunately, history shows that they were not always responsive to the call or successful in the proclamation. As the prophets so often reminded them, they did not treat each other justly, they did not look after the poor and they worshipped idols rather than making God's name known among the nations.

### **The Gospel According to Jesus**

Where Israel was a colossal failure, preaching the good news and doing good works found perfect synergy in Jesus's life and ministry. That He saw the monumental task and undertook to be obedient to God's call is clearly seen in a number of His discourses. An example of this happened at His homecoming. When Jesus visited the synagogue in Nazareth, He did the unexpected as a returning famous son and introduced himself by quoting the prophet Isaiah. (61:1-3)

*The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favour is at hand (Luke 4:18-19).*

These words are carefully chosen from the scroll He had been handed that day. By quoting the prophet He was declaring himself to be authorized by someone in

authority.<sup>186</sup> The Sovereign Lord sent Him. Two images were used to establish His credentials. The Spirit of God was upon Him; it operated through Him to transform reality. Also, the One with authority anointed Him; set Him apart for a task by a liturgical act.<sup>187</sup> He was more than a representative. The Son carried the authority of the Father.

His task was to preach and proclaim. The Greek word translated here comes from the term *euangelizo* that is transliterated in English as “evangelism”. It is used fifty-two times in the New Testament. It means to announce the good news. In the Old Testament (Septuagint) it was used in ancient times to refer to a runner returning home with news of a victory. Luke used this term to sum up Jesus’s entire ministry.<sup>188</sup> *Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the good news about the Kingdom of God* (Luke 8:1).

J.I. Packer defined evangelism this way, “It is the work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces for God’s message of mercy to sinners.”<sup>189</sup> Jesus taught that God was merciful and would forgive all sinners who repented of their wrong and trusted in Jesus’s message. But, there was more to His message. Jesus was not just concerned with a person’s spiritual nature. He was concerned about the whole person. Commenting on this passage, David Watson says:

Here we see at once that the proclamation of good news was linked directly with a demonstration of that good news. Jesus was sent by His father to this world not merely to conduct a preaching tour, but to show the reality of the living God in a way that powerfully met the personal

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<sup>186</sup> Rene Padilla and Tetsunao Yamamori, *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: an Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Kairos, 2004), 74

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Gerhard Kittle, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 268

<sup>189</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1961), 41

needs of people. Thus although the verb “to evangelize” when strictly translated, means no more than to announce good news, it is unthinkable in the ministry of Jesus to separate the active verb from the action in which it is set.<sup>190</sup>

He goes on to say, “The Gospel records make it abundantly clear that you cannot separate, in the evangelistic ministry of Jesus, proclamation and demonstration, preaching and acting, saying and doing.”<sup>191</sup>

Jesus also proclaimed that now was the time for the people to experience the Lord’s freedom and healing. The Greek word translated as proclaim is *kerusso*. It means to preach with conviction. It was used in the first century to describe a herald or town crier speaking with passion and authority while making an announcement for the king, such as an emphatic declaration of an event, games, or feast. The stress of the word is on the dynamic aspect of the proclamation. They show emotion, such as crying out loud, or yelling as they speak.<sup>192</sup> In Isaiah, this passage in Hebrew used three verbs: heal, console and comfort. The first is found in the phrase, “comfort the brokenhearted.” The Hebrew word translated here as comfort is *chabash* and it literally means, “to bandage”.<sup>193</sup> It was used to refer to wrapping up a wound. Those who are crushed by life’s adversities will experience healing.<sup>194</sup> Jesus would care for those who were so discouraged by their lot in life that they could not help themselves.

The second phrase, “the time of the Lord’s favour has come”, is a clear reference to the year of jubilee.<sup>195</sup> *Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of*

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<sup>190</sup> David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 27

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>192</sup> Kittel, et. al *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 432, 433

<sup>193</sup> R Laird Harris, et. al *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol.1, 261

<sup>194</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah - Volume 2 (chapters 40-66)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 1971), 321

<sup>195</sup> Sawyer, *Isaiah*, 189



*you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan* (Leviticus 25:10). Jesus would come to the defense of the poor who were oppressed by the wealthy.

The final phrase is, “a joyous blessing instead of mourning.” Those who in the time of sorrow were dressed in sackcloth and ashes would be given a crown of beauty and a garment of praise. They would sing festive praise instead of dirges and laments. The blessing was pictured as the oil of gladness. On occasions of joy, men would anoint themselves with oil.<sup>196</sup>

Jesus was concerned about the totality of a person’s being, not just their spirit. Esteban Voth, a translation consultant with the United Bible Society, writes, “All of these verbs are important because they indicate and define ministries towards the poor, the marginalized, the handicapped and the powerless, with the purpose of restoring them as human beings.”<sup>197</sup> Jesus was not just going to teach them how to prepare for eternal life; He was going to enable them to have an abundant life on earth.

Luke says that the primary audience for Jesus’s message was not the privileged few of His day but the disadvantaged, the outcast, the sinners. The Lucan account should not be spiritualized to refer to those who were poor in spirit. Nor should it be limited to refer to those who in economic terms were the working poor or worse. For Luke, the poor were those who experienced a diminished status in society.<sup>198</sup> A situation that could have been caused by a number of factors, such as: education, gender, family heritage, vocation, and economics. Jesus opened the door of salvation for those who were ignored by the

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<sup>196</sup> Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3*, 461

<sup>197</sup> Yamamori and Padilla, *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation*, 75

<sup>198</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 211

religious structure of His day. He gained the reputation as the friend of sinners by offering them the forgiveness of sins. *The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners'* (Matthew 11:19). His message was good news for the masses. He spoke about a God who was acting for their salvation, who offered them participation in His Kingdom and who would accept them unconditionally.

The way He lived His life and conducted His ministry was in extreme contrast to the majority of religious leaders of His day. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees "... *love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplaces* (Luke 11:43). They loved the attention of the wealthy and spoke to them as their primary audience. Jesus made time for needy people and spent time alone in the wilderness. With His background, He was more comfortable with a lower socio-economic class of people. Scholars agree that Jesus himself was not wealthy. Philip Culbertson says Jesus was born into a typical lower middle class family.<sup>199</sup> He did not exclude the wealthy and privileged from being His followers, but most of them found His teaching too hard. An example of this is found in Mark 10 and the story of the rich young ruler.

*Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," He told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away very sad, for He had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God"* (Mark 10:21-23).

Jesus taught that at the end of time He would judge the nations. He described this time as a period of separating people into two groups; the sheep on His right hand and the

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<sup>199</sup> Philip Culbertson as quoted by Stanley Grenz in *Theology for the Community of God*, 374

goats on His left. The sheep will spend eternity with Him and the goats will be evermore estranged from Him. The deciding factor would be whether or not they ministered to the poor. It is hard to understand this passage because it seems to teach a salvation by works which stands in polar opposition to Paul's teaching of justification by faith. Jesus said:

*For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me. "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' "And He will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters; you were refusing to help me'" (Matthew 25:42-46).*

R.T. France clarified this when he says:

Matthew is not writing systematic theology, and the present passage brings to its fullest expression his conviction that when the Son of Man comes He will "repay every person according to what they have done." (16:27) This is the ultimate outworking of the Matthean motif of reward for those who have lived according to the will of God. And that will is here spelled out in terms of the way people have responded to human needs.<sup>200</sup>

### ***The Great Commission***

The ultimate articulation of a missional approach to life for His disciples is commonly referred to as the great commission. At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned His followers. Matthew's Gospel records it this way:

*Jesus came and told His disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).*

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<sup>200</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 959

Jesus, because He held sovereign reign over God's Kingdom, had the authority to command His disciples. The commission is recorded in four different places. As John Stott reminds us, "Jesus seems to have repeated it in several forms on several occasions."

<sup>201</sup> On each occasion the emphasis seems to be on evangelism. Stott goes on to say:

The cumulative emphasis seems clear. It is placed on preaching, witnessing and making disciples, and many deduce from this that the mission of the church, according to the specification of the risen Lord, is exclusively a preaching, converting and teaching mission.<sup>202</sup>

This point appears even clearer in Mark's version of the commission where the emphasis was clearly on a verbal witness. *And then He told them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:15-16). There can be little doubt that the great commission teaches that the mission of the church involves preaching the gospel. Grenz writes, "Evangelicals have simply equated evangelism with the verbalization of the good news, asserting that the outreach mandate of the church lies squarely on the task of declaring the gospel message throughout the world."<sup>203</sup> But, does that sum up the totality of the commission?

Matthew's version contains the phrase; "*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus use of the word "everything" would imply that there was more to the task than just verbal proclamation. The Greek word used here for "command" is *entellomai* and it means to "give you orders."<sup>204</sup> Jesus gave a directive to His disciples to continue on His ministry. The command involved "everything" they heard Him say and watched Him do. His meaning was most clearly explained to the

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<sup>201</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 22

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>203</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 653

<sup>204</sup> Kittle, et. al *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 234

disciples in a post-resurrection conversation with Jesus. He said to them, “*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you*” (John 20:21).

The only way to understand our mission is to understand His. John Stott says, “Deliberately and precisely He made His mission the model of ours.”<sup>205</sup> Jesus was born to die as the final sacrifice for the sins of their world. Again Stott says, “We cannot copy Him in these things.”<sup>206</sup> But, Jesus also came into the world to serve others. *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). The church is to model this depth of service. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, modeled equality, stood up for the oppressed and comforted the sad. The church is to carry on His ministry by doing the same thing today.

Jesus taught the principles of incarnational ministry. Stott says, “It comes more naturally to us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think ourselves into their culture and their problems and to feel with them in their pains.”<sup>207</sup> Jesus was accused of eating and drinking with sinners. He practiced an inclusive table fellowship, a countercultural and controversial act in a Mediterranean world where hospitality was strictly determined by social class and religious credentials.<sup>208</sup> If it is to carry out His mission, the church must penetrate its culture with His love and mercy.

Evangelism is not just as an event; getting someone to make a decision. We need to see it as a process or a journey where people are transformed by having a relationship

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<sup>205</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 23

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>208</sup> Terry Smith, ed. *Wordeed: An Integral Mission Primer*, (Picking, ON: Castle Quay Books, 2012), 69

with Christ. This transformation spreads to impact and influence the world in which they live. The well-known missiologist, Rene Padilla says:

The reduction of the Christian mission to the oral communication of a message of otherworldly salvation grows out of a misunderstanding of God's purpose and of the nature of human beings. It is assumed that God wants to "save souls" rather than "to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20) and that the human being only needs to be reconciled to God rather than to experience fullness of life. In the final analysis, this is a reduction related to ideas taken from Greek philosophy, not from scripture.<sup>209</sup>

Voth is even more pointed when he says, "The 'great omission' [ministry to the poor] should become the 'great mission' so the church can truly carry out the 'great commission.'"<sup>210</sup>

The great commission also teaches the value of discipleship. Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, "Go and make disciples." The Greek word, translated as disciple, is *mathetes*. In the Greek world, it was used to refer to a pupil who was engaged in learning as an apprentice. The trainee gained skill while under their expert guidance. In religious instruction, the followers formed a community as they lived and traveled together. Instruction was given informally over shared meals. The students were given opportunity to ask questions after public lectures. These groups were so solid that they were known to continue after the instructor died. In this way the teaching outlived the teacher.<sup>211</sup> Jesus followed this custom and commanded His followers to do the same.

As Stanley Grenz says, "The goal of evangelism is disciple-making."<sup>212</sup> Jesus did not give the church the task of making converts. Instead, it was a call to discipleship.

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<sup>209</sup> C. Rene Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 33) Pattaya, Thailand, 2004, 15

<sup>210</sup> Yamamori and Padilla, *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation*, 76

<sup>211</sup> Kittle, et. al *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 556

<sup>212</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 656

Grenz goes on to say, “Jesus’s call to discipleship lay within the context of His proclamation of divine reign.”<sup>213</sup> They were to join a community of disciples who were to live in accordance with the principles of the Kingdom. These local groups were to then work toward implementing Christ’s reign in society until His return.

Rick Warren, in his popular book, *The Purpose Driven Church* makes this point, “The word go in the great commission is a present participle in the Greek text. It should read as you are going.”<sup>214</sup> It is the church’s responsibility to place disciple making at the very center of everything it does. It is not just a program. It defines the mission and purpose of the church. Members are to mentor others in what they have learned in their own Christian journey. The teaching is to be in-life, on-life training, not exclusively classroom teaching. New believers are to learn from more mature Christians the nature of the mission, and they are to do good and serve others by sharing the good news and practicing good works.

R.T. France points out that the sentence structure of this verse emphasizes this point. “The main verb in the imperative, make disciples, followed by two uncoordinated participles, baptizing and teaching, spells out the process of making disciples. The commission is expressed not in terms of the means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to make disciples.”<sup>215</sup> He goes on to say:

The order in which the two participles occur differs from what has become common practice in subsequent Christian history, in that baptism is, in many Christian circles, administered only after a period of teaching. It can become in such circles more of a graduation ceremony than an initiation. If the order of Matthew’s participles is meant to be noticed, He is here presenting a different model whereby baptism is the point of

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 104

<sup>215</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 1115

enrollment in the process of learning that is never complete; the Christian community is a school of learners at various stages of development.<sup>216</sup>

The great commission was given to compel Christ-followers to intentionally practice missional living where the mature followers mentor new disciples to follow all the teachings of Jesus.

### ***The Great Commandment***

Some evangelical churches have placed so much focus on the great commission that they have neglected the great commandment. Other churches have reversed the priority and placed their focus on a social gospel. It is as if a church makes a choice to pick one of these passages as being more important than the other and build its ministry around it. The Canadian Baptist Ministry booklet, *Wordeed*, also points out that churches have wrongly chosen the commandment they prioritize when they should have been obedient to both. If churches are to have missional ministries, they must see each as part of an intertwined mandate.

One example of a congregation that sought to be obedient to both is Saddleback Church in California. The church was started with a five-fold purpose statement that is drawn from these two passages.<sup>217</sup> One of the values in the church's mandate is ministry. It is defined as, "Demonstrating God's love to others by meeting their needs and healing their hurts in the name of Jesus."<sup>218</sup> It is derived from the great commandment, "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" (Luke 10:28). This significant ministry has grown to influence people and churches around the world. Not all evangelicals have been happy with the

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 102

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 104



emphasis of the church, particularly in its willingness to be in dialogue with non-evangelicals.

Jesus gave the great commandment as part of a conversation where He was asked to identify the most important command. *One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking Him this question (Luke 10:25)* The man who asked the questions was a lawyer. To be a legal expert in Jesus's context was the equivalent to a theologian today.<sup>219</sup> The lawyer referred to Jesus as Teacher. The Greek word translated here as teacher is *didaskalos*. It was a title equivalent to Rabbi.<sup>220</sup> The lawyer showed Jesus respect as he addressed the question to Him. He comes to test the credentials of the One who claims to speak the mind of God. Mark records the rich young man asking Jesus the same question (Mark 10:17)

He wanted to ask Jesus a question that would test the depth of his knowledge and intellectual ability. The Greek word used here as test is *ekpeirazo* and emphasizes the complete thoroughness of the test.<sup>221</sup> This was not a simple question. He asked a very complicated one hoping that Jesus would give a wrong answer. The question should be understood as a challenge.<sup>222</sup> *"Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life"* (Luke 10:25)? The Greek word translated as life is *zoe*. It was regularly used in the New Testament to refer to life in the coming age.<sup>223</sup> John Nolland writes, "Eternal Life is an eschatological notion, first appearing in Daniel 12:2 and becoming frequent in Jewish

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<sup>219</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke (New Century Bible)* (London: Oliphants, 1974), 160

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

<sup>221</sup> Kittle, et. al *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 822

<sup>222</sup> John Nolland, *Luke. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 35a, Luke 1:1-9:20* (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1989), Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>223</sup> Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, 160

texts.”<sup>224</sup> He was really asking, “What should I do to ensure that I am a part of God’s future Kingdom.”

Jesus would have heard this question debated many times. The attempt to identify fundamental principles that would encompass the whole will of God is as old as the Old Testament itself and continued to play an active role in Jewish thought.<sup>225</sup> It would have come up many times in His theological discussions with His contemporaries. Jesus turned the question back to the legal expert. He replied, “*What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?*” The Greek word translated here as read does not mean the act of reading as such but the perceiving of the sense of the text being read.<sup>226</sup> E. Earle Ellis feels that Jesus was referring to the daily recitation of the *Shema*, the basic Jewish creed.<sup>227</sup>

*Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).*

The man answered Jesus and recited the first part of the *Shema*.<sup>228</sup> “*You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind*” (Luke 10:26). His answer was not surprising since Rabbinic Judaism regularly sought to reduce the Law to the greatest or all-embracing directive.<sup>229</sup> In Greek, the word used here for love is *agapeseis*. It comes from the root *agape* and means to prefer one above another. The word means that the God-fearing person will not worship any idols

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<sup>224</sup> Nolland, *Luke. Word Biblical Commentary*, Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, 160

<sup>228</sup> Nolland, *Luke. Word Biblical Commentary*, Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>229</sup> Ellis, *The Gospel Of Luke*, 160

such as money (Matthew 6:24b). It calls for total commitment and total trust.<sup>230</sup> The *Shema* commanded people to love God with their entire being. Loving God with the heart requires a response from the innermost center of our being. Loving God with our soul refers to the place of a person's vital life force. Loving God with all of our strength introduces the element of energetic physical action. Loving God with the mind identifies the importance of moving beyond the emotional.<sup>231</sup>

The lawyer extended his answer to include, *love your neighbor as yourself*, which was based on Leviticus 19:18.<sup>232</sup> “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*” He called it second in importance only when compared to the supreme command to love God with all of our being.<sup>233</sup> As used here, the word love means to do good, that is, to give of ourselves actively and constructively to serve our neighbour's welfare.<sup>234</sup> There is no doubt that the call for love of neighbor had come to occupy a significant place in Jewish ethical summary well before the time of Jesus.<sup>235</sup>

*“Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live”* (Luke 10:25-28). The legal expert gave exactly the answer that would have been Jesus's own answer. Jesus called only for what the Jewish law itself called for. Jesus's call for loving God expressed His own passion for intimacy with God and fidelity to God. His call to love of neighbor was illustrated by His life as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He sought service of others as His sacred calling.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Kittle, et. al *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 8

<sup>231</sup> Nolland, *Luke. Word Biblical Commentary*, Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>232</sup> Ellis, *The Gospel Of Luke*, 160

<sup>233</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>235</sup> Nolland, *Luke*. Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

The legal expert wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus to explain further who exactly was his neighbour. William Hendriksen writes, “There were Jews in the first century who perverted the command of Leviticus 19:18 into meaning love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”<sup>237</sup> In God’s vocabulary, however, our neighbour includes our enemy.<sup>238</sup> Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to deal with this issue. A neighbour was anyone who was found in need, friend or foe. The church is to carry on this commandment to love.

Jesus sent the church into the world to serve. The service includes both words and works. Stott defines this as, “a concern for the hunger and for the sickness of both body and soul, in other words, both evangelism and social activity.”<sup>239</sup> These two elements combined in His illustration to be the salt and light of the world given as part of the Sermon on the Mount.

*“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world - like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:13-16).*

Mission describes everything the church is sent into the world to do. Mission embraces the church’s double vocation of service to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. God sends His people into the earth to be its salt and sends His people into the

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<sup>237</sup> William Hendrikson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, 11th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub Group, 1978), 591

<sup>238</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

world to be its light.<sup>240</sup> If we truly love our neighbour we will minister to his or her entire being. Stott says,

How can we possibly claim to love him if we know the Gospel but keep it from him? Equally however, if we truly love our neighbor we will not stop with evangelism. Our neighbor is neither of bodiless soul that we should love only his soul or a soulless body that we should care for his welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from society. God created man, who is my neighbor, a body-soul-in community.<sup>241</sup>

If we merely preach it and are interested only in souls and have no concern for the welfare of people's bodies, situations and communities, the Gospel lacks both visibility, and credibility.<sup>242</sup>

The gospel that Jesus lived, taught and commanded His followers to emulate was a holistic gospel that involved good works and good deeds. The doctrine of salvation included not only rescue from the penalty of sin, but also rescue from the effects sin had upon society. Again using the words of Rene Padilla:

The purpose of salvation is not merely endless life of individual souls in heaven but the transformation of the totality of creation, including humankind, to the glory of God. Mission is faithful to scripture only to the extent to which it is holistic...with the intention of transforming human life in all its dimensions.<sup>243</sup>

### **The Gospel According to the Apostles**

Some people see a dichotomy between Paul's writings and Jesus's teaching concerning the mission. It has been shown that the mission for Jesus focused on the arrival of God's reign. The evangelism of Jesus was not an invitation to accept Him as Savior or Lord but a call to Israel to accept the reign of God as having come near and to

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<sup>240</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 30

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>243</sup> Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, 15

take seriously its subversive implications for life together in the world.<sup>244</sup> He announced that it had arrived and invited others to become part of it through the process of repentance and faith. Bryan Stone says the characteristics of God's reign [as Jesus taught it] were liberation, healing, resurrection, and good news to the poor.<sup>245</sup> Through miracles He proved He had the power to defeat the Kingdom of darkness and showed the implications that the teaching had on changing society.

Things appeared to change, however, after Christ's death and resurrection. A shift was made from Jesus "the proclaimer" to Jesus "the proclaimed".<sup>246</sup> The church now announces the good news of God's reign within the framework of its belief in the resurrection of Jesus and out of the experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>247</sup> His followers, empowered by His Spirit, were to carry on His work by announcing what He had accomplished and seeking to implement it in their lives as individuals and within society as a whole.

The central features of the message remained unchanged. The apostolic church insisted that, in the person of Jesus, God's reign had come near, the world would never be the same, and a whole new way of living was now necessary and possible.<sup>248</sup> They invited others to embrace this message personally, by making Jesus their personal Saviour and Lord and then, as part of a new family, advance Christ's reign in society.

No one can deny that this message was done through proclamation. It is impossible to read the book of Acts and the New Testament epistolary literature without

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<sup>244</sup> Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 91

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>248</sup> Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, 107

being struck by the centrality of preaching in the early church's evangelism.<sup>249</sup> But it would be a mistake to see the apostles' mission as solely a preaching campaign. Stone points out:

Just as important as verbal witness for the Christian communities was the character of a life together before a watching world. The reign of God does not disappear or get replaced but it is instead impressed upon their worship, their economic practices, their fellowship, their crossing of social boundaries and their joy and boldness; it shows up daily in the patterns and practices of the new life together.<sup>250</sup>

The life that Jesus had modeled before them, the doctrine that He had taught them, and the mandate He had given them all remained constant. The only change was that He was no longer present with them. Instead of Jesus predicting how His reign would be accomplished, the disciples approached the message as an event that had already occurred.

Paul thought through the implications of the message as they applied to both the Jews and Gentiles. He had a mind that was able to think deeply on key matters. He may have even been the church's first theologian. His prolific writing ministry had a great impact. This does not mean, however, that Paul radically altered the basic elements in the way the message was transmitted.

Paul's personal mandate had been revealed to him dramatically on the Damascus Road and had changed His life. He says; *Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey Him, bringing glory to His name* (Romans 1:5). He was convinced he had been commissioned by Jesus to focus his attention on telling the Gentiles to place their faith in Jesus as Saviour and be obedient to Him as Lord. Paul saw

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

his mission to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Jesus's name among all nations.<sup>251</sup>

As an evangelist to the Gentiles, Paul announced the good news as Jesus had done before him. (Luke 4:43) As a disciple of Christ, he faithfully and passionately repeated to others what he had learned from his Lord and Saviour. The content of his good news was the same as that of Jesus's message. The reconciliation of people to God in Christ was central to his proclamation. Evangelism according to Paul was going out in love, as Christ's agent in the world, to teach sinners the truth of the gospel with a view of converting and saving them.<sup>252</sup>

J.I. Packer says Paul saw himself as a commissioned representative of Christ.<sup>253</sup> First of all, he saw himself as a steward of the truth. He transmitted it exactly as it had been passed down to him and he entrusted it to others unaltered. Second, Paul evangelized as the commissioned representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw himself as Christ's herald. He saw his life's work as one who made public announcements for his Saviour King. He had been given a message, the *kerygma*, and announced it passionately with the exact detail he had been taught.<sup>254</sup> Finally, he considered himself Christ's ambassador. He was Christ's authorized representative and spoke with Jesus's authority. When he spoke, his message carried the same weight as it would have if Jesus were speaking himself.

Jesus taught the people to repent and exercise faith. (Mark 1:15) Paul echoed the same message. *I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either*

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<sup>251</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 1998), 160

<sup>252</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 53

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-44

<sup>254</sup> *Kerygma* is a Greek noun that refers the message announced. *Kerysso* is a Greek verb that is translated in English as to announce. It was the activity of a 1<sup>st</sup> century herald who blazed abroad what had been told to him. (J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 43)



*publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike- the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus* (Acts 20:20-21). Paul also stressed the importance of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was the Lord. He reigned over the earth. His sovereignty was now hidden but would one day be revealed.

Paul's message, the good news was the same as that of Jesus. But that was not the end of their missional similarity. The apostle through his message and his example incarnated the message. He practiced "Good Works" as a loyal citizen of a heavenly Kingdom. He sought to do more than put people in a right relationship with God; he worked toward improving their relationships on earth. Part of that mandate was to be a peacemaker for the reconciliation of man with God which must extend to all human relationships, especially in the church.

Jesus taught, "*God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God*" (Matthew 5:9). He was the Prince of Peace and His Kingdom would be different from earthly Kingdoms because it would not be militarily enforced. To that end, he blessed those who worked to end hostility wherever it existed. Paul followed Jesus's example.

When the church at Corinth fell into factionalism, splitting over which leader they would follow, Paul stepped in to broker a peaceful resolution. He reprimanded them and reminded them of the importance of unity.<sup>255</sup> "*I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose*" (1

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<sup>255</sup> C.J. Wright, What is holistic mission? (May 2012) Accessed on November 26, 2013 <http://www.wycliffe.net/resources/missiology/globalperspectives/tabid/97/Default.aspx?id=2723>

*Corinthians 1:10*). There would be no hope for convincing the church to love their neighbour or to love their enemy if they did not love other members of their Christian family. Paul went beyond the admonition of believers to live at peace to the use of supernatural means to demonstrate Christ's claims.

Jesus healed many people. He had compassion on those who suffered. Their pain frequently moved Him emotionally. (John 11:34-36) There would be none of this pain in His Kingdom. This was John's vision of the New Jerusalem. *"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever"* (Revelation 21:3-4). There was another motive behind Jesus's supernatural activity. He is Lord over the world. He demonstrated through His mighty works that He was the long awaited King. Through these visual examples He proved that the Kingdom of darkness was being defeated.<sup>256</sup>

Paul followed Jesus's example when it came to the supernatural. He performed miracles to demonstrate the power of Christ's reign. The book of Acts provides many examples. Paul performed miracles in Iconium (14:3,4). At Lystra, he healed a crippled man (14:8-18). He exorcised an evil spirit from a woman (16:18). Paul performed miracles in Ephesus (19:11,12). In Troas, Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (20:8-12). He also healed those on Malta who were diseased (28:8-9).

Another way Paul consistently followed the pattern set by the Master was in mentoring others. Jesus followed a rabbinical tradition and chose men (twelve disciples)

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<sup>256</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 141

to follow Him. The Apostle Paul demonstrated the importance of disciple making in the course of his ministry. He invested his life in the other members of his team, Timothy, Titus, and Apollos, including writing letters to them to remind them of all he had taught them and to encourage them in faithfulness.<sup>257</sup> He helped local churches choose gifted leaders to carry on the work of the Kingdom as local churches. They were to lead the church in reaching out to the needy in spirit and in body.

Jesus showed great concern for the poor. Rene Padilla said that Christ's attitude to the poor was summed up in the Beatitudes, which teach, "*God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs*" (Matthew 5:3).<sup>258</sup> Jesus taught His followers the need to stand in solidarity with the poor rather than ignoring them as an inconvenience. He set this example with His concern for blind Bartimaeus. (Mark 10:46-52) Liberation Theology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century held God's preferential option for the poor as a central tenant. Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez first articulated it in his landmark work, *A Theology of Liberation*. He asserted that a preferential concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the poor is an essential element of the Gospel.<sup>259</sup>

Paul ensured that material and economic sharing was practiced among the churches. Paul's collection for the relief of poor Christians in Jerusalem figures significantly in his own writings.<sup>260</sup> For example:

*But before I come, I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there. For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. They were glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since*

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<sup>257</sup> Wright, *What is holistic mission?*

<sup>258</sup> C. René Padilla, *Mission between the Times*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2010), 187

<sup>259</sup> John Dear (November 8, 2011) *Gustavo Gutierrez And The Preferential Option For The Poor*. National Catholic Reporter. Accessed 18 November 2013.

<sup>260</sup> David G. Pederson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Pillar New Testament Commentaries. Olive Tree Bible Software, Acts 24.17

*the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the good news from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially (Romans 15:25-27).*

Clearly Paul had learned from Jesus to show special attention to the poor.

Paul also had a passion for justice. Matthew wrote that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, "*I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations*" (Matthew 12:18). But the prophet regarded all the world's peoples as having worth before God, and it would be the function of the servant of whom he writes to make sure that justice is done for them.<sup>261</sup> Jesus fought for justice for all. An example is his attitude to children.

*One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so He could lay His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering Him. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." And He placed His hands on their heads and blessed them before He left (Matthew 19:13-15).*

Paul followed in Jesus footsteps when it came to seeking justice for all. This was the motivation behind his coming to the defense of the runaway slave Onesimus. *He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord* (Philemon 1:16). Philemon was told to treat his slave like a brother, stressing equality for all. He also was willing to be whipped in Philippi to stand in solidarity with his friend Silas who was not a Roman citizen. He could have avoided the scourging as a Roman citizen but rather than claim his rights he accepted the punishment.

Jesus taught that believers should be willing to submit to civil authorities, which included paying taxes. He said, "*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God*

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<sup>261</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Pillar New Testament Commentaries. Olive Tree Bible Software, Matthew 12:18

*what belongs to God.”* (Matthew 22:21) He also explained to his followers that God himself placed the government in power. *"Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" Then Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above* (John 19:10-11). When announcing His reign, Jesus made no attempt to overthrow the existing authorities.

As Jesus did not try to overthrow the government, neither did Paul. He sought to work a transforming influence in and through existing political structures, challenging them all by the standard of God's justice outlined in the law. In writing to the Romans, he gave crucial direction to Christians to live as citizens, *"Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God"* (Romans 13:1). He believed God put the political leaders in position and they should rule justly. The biblical way was not to confront these structures directly but to work with them to bring more righteous order.<sup>262</sup>

In our own generation, one of the key political and social issues is the environment. The Gospels do not provide a detailed plan for creation care. This does not mean that God has no concern about the environment. After the flood He not only made a covenant with humanity never to send another worldwide flood, but He also made one with the nonhuman creation. (Gen 9:9-10) Ron Sider points out that Jesus recognized God's covenant with the whole of creation when he noted how God feeds the birds and

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<sup>262</sup> Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice*, 161

clothes the lilies. (Matthew 6:26-30) He goes on to say, “The nonhuman creation has its own worth and dignity apart from its service to humanity.”<sup>263</sup>

Paul shared this view. Not only do believers eagerly wait for the Christ to usher in God’s final Kingdom (Titus 2:13) but also all of creation longs for the curse to be lifted. *For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay* (Romans 8:19-22). In these verses creation is personified. It eagerly waits for the consummation just like believers. “Waiting eagerly” is a picturesque term describing a person’s leaning forward out of intense interest and desire.<sup>264</sup> Paul taught that the world will be transformed to be the new home for redeemed believers. This is necessary because the curse of sin affected the whole created world not just humans. Paul reflects Jesus’s teaching about creation.

### **The Witness of the Early Church**

Although less was written by James, Peter and John, their writings and practice contain teaching similar to that of Paul and thus of Jesus. Evidence shows they too embraced and taught a holistic gospel that ministered to people’s spiritual and social needs. Beginning with Jesus’s brother James, who became the chief elder of the church in Jerusalem, the early followers of “the Way” sought to be obedient to the claims of the Lordship of Christ over their lives and the church.

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<sup>263</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Just Politics: a Guide for Christian Engagement*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), Kindle edition, 169

<sup>264</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Romans (Expositor's Bible Commentary, The)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 94

As part of his understanding of “pure religion”, James taught that part of the church’s mission was to look after orphans and widows. They were singled out because they had no way of supporting themselves in that culture. *Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you* (James 1:27). The apostle was part of the discussion in Jerusalem when seven men, deacons, were commissioned to look after the Greek widows (Acts 6:1-7). He pressed the recipients of his letter to do the same.

James taught how faith and good works go together. To illustrate this he used the poor as an example.

*What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"- but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds* (James 2:14-18).

James urged the early church to show spontaneous hospitality toward those who are in need.<sup>265</sup> Where James linked faith and action, John urged his readers to look at their motivation for service.

Love is the key theme in John’s writing. If a Christian wants to prove faith as genuine, he or she must show love toward others. *And this is His commandment: We must believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us* (1 John 3:23). In so doing, John maintained Jesus emphasis on the importance of loving our neighbour. He goes on to make it is very clear that the

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<sup>265</sup> Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice*, 161

authenticity of faith does not rest on verbal witness alone. (1 John 4:2-3) Faith is proven real when it visibly demonstrates to the world the greater power dwelling in the believer.<sup>266</sup>

Peter, another of the original apostles, after his denial of Jesus and restoration became a great evangelist. Jesus told him to “feed His sheep” (John 21:17) and Peter took the task seriously. Acts 2:41 tells of Peter preaching to a large crowd. Three thousand people were converted that day. But evangelism was not Peter’s only concern. Servanthood was a common theme that ran through his writings.

Peter reminded the Christians that they were a royal priesthood. *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light* (1 Peter 2:9). All four of these titles of honor were originally designations of Israel as the people of God.<sup>267</sup> This designation was meant to remind the church that they were called to serve as well as reign. Christians were here described as sharing with Christ in kingship or sovereignty as well as priesthood.<sup>268</sup> They have been given the responsibility to display to others the goodness of God by showing compassion and caring for those in need.

These New Testament writers taught the same message as Jesus. The mission was to teach the good news and to model it through good works.

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 169

<sup>267</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 49, 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 1988), Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>268</sup> Alan M. Stibbs. *The First Epistle General of Peter: an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.)



## The Unifying Principle

The one concept that unites the Old Testament, the New Testament and Jesus's teaching on holistic mission is the Kingdom of God for it is one of the central overarching themes of the Bible.<sup>269</sup> Johannes Verkuyl has written, "Missiology is more and more coming to see the Kingdom of God as the hub around which all mission work evolves."<sup>270</sup> Arthur Glasser agrees: "A right understanding of mission focuses on the Kingdom of God."<sup>271</sup> If the church is to properly understand its mission it will see it as a single mandate containing an intertwined mission.

In the Old Testament, God's kingly role was identified with a particular people, the Israelites, with whom He established a covenantal relationship. *Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my Kingdom of priests, my holy nation* (Exodus 19:5-6). Israel was not able to keep this covenant. The pattern of straying from God, being punished and returning was repeated over and over again. In spite of this, the hope was that one day God's covenantal goal with Israel would be fulfilled. In the midst of their long history of failure, repentance and restoration, a perspective of the Kingdom can be discovered.<sup>272</sup> Although often hidden from humanity, God is sovereign. Being a part of His Kingdom demands a personal commitment to Him. His followers must see themselves as members of a servant community. God's rule is resisted and opposed. His Kingdom is futuristic. Each of these points become fully developed in the New Testament.

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<sup>269</sup> Arthur F. Glasser and Donald McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 32

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 32

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>272</sup> Arthur F. Glasser and Donald McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* 35, 36

The Old Testament enables one to believe in the unseen reality of the Kingdom of God above history, the providential power of God within history, and the consummation of His Kingdom in the last day beyond history.<sup>273</sup> In Daniel's words:

*As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into His presence. He was given authority, honour, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey Him. His rule is eternal - it will never end. His Kingdom will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).*

Daniel was allowed a glimpse of the Messianic Kingdom but as it came, it did not develop as devout Israelites expected.

After John the Baptist, the preacher of preparation for this Kingdom, was arrested, Jesus continued to preach the same message with one modification. The forerunner preached, "*Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near*" (Matthew 3:2). He preached about a future event. His task was to get the people ready for the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus began His public ministry, He preached in the present tense. People could now see and experience the long awaited Kingdom. He had good news about God's reign.

The gospel Jesus preached centered on the Kingdom; the time for the divine reign had arrived. Mortimer Arias calls this a "Kingdom evangelization."<sup>274</sup> Jesus said this was the reason He was sent. "I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). Stanley Grenz points out that the evangelical church has taught that the proclamation focuses on the plan of

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>274</sup> Quoted in Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 654

salvation.<sup>275</sup> But they have missed one important truth. The announcement was about salvation in the context of the Kingdom.

F.F. Bruce demonstrates that Jesus's announcement of the Kingdom of God did not take place in a vacuum.<sup>276</sup> The Romans ruled Palestine. Herod Antipas governed Galilee and Pontius Pilate controlled Judea and Samaria. The Roman Emperor appointed both. Taxes were paid to Rome. Citizens were commanded to worship Caesar as Lord. Into this world came Jesus announcing that the Kingdom of God was present. "... *The Kingdom of God is already among you*" (Luke 17:20-21). The NIV (1984) translated this verse as "the Kingdom of God is within you" and obscured its meaning. The Greek word in question here is *entos*. It comes from the root word *en*. When it is used with the plural or the collective singular it can be translated "among".<sup>277</sup> That would seem to be how it was used here since Jesus was referring to a group, the Pharisees, in His address. Rienecker and Rogers stated that the word could also be translated as "in the midst of".<sup>278</sup> It was translated this way in other New Testament passages. For example, "...to reveal His son to me that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles"(Galatians 1:16, NIV 1984).

Walter Liefeld, in His commentary on Luke, writes, "The NIV 'within you' is a questionable translation."<sup>279</sup> The context clearly proves this. Jesus was talking to the Pharisees. He would hardly tell them, most of who were unbelievers that the Kingdom of

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), 57

<sup>277</sup> Kittell, et. al. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 233

<sup>278</sup> Fritz Rienecker and Cleon L. Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, English ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 193

<sup>279</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke, with the New International Version of the Holy Bible (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol.8)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 997

God was inside them. Clearly, He meant that He, the King, was standing in their midst. William Barclay agrees and states, “It may mean the Kingdom of God is among you. That would refer to Jesus himself. He was the very embodiment of the Kingdom and they did not recognize him.”<sup>280</sup>

While making the announcement in different places, Jesus frequently spent time doing good and healing. John Stott points out that an example of this is mentioned in Matthew 4:23. “And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” (ESV)<sup>281</sup> Jesus evangelized by announcing the dawning of the messianic age and by demonstrating its liberating power by feeding them, healing the sick among them, and inviting them to repent and believe in the Gospel.<sup>282</sup> He announced the Kingdom of God was now present among them and then healed the sick as proof of what He said. His mission was not just a spoken message. Evangelism, for Jesus, was about presence. The gospel was embodied, credibly demonstrated, so that others could see and acknowledge the orally announced truth.<sup>283</sup> Jesus’s example demonstrates that the key to practicing an integral mission involves good news and good works. Outside of the Kingdom the mandate shrinks to simply preaching. He called for people to make a decision about the good news He announced. His messages called for the listeners to repent but it was repentance and faith within the context of the Kingdom of God.<sup>284</sup> Listeners were invited to participate willingly in the community of God.

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<sup>280</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke. (The Daily Study Bible)* Rev. Ed. Toronto, ON: Welch, 220

<sup>281</sup> Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. 24

<sup>282</sup> Orlando E. Costas, *Liberating News: a Theology of Contextual Evangelization*, Reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 2002), 64

<sup>283</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 656

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

The phrase “Kingdom of God” is not often found outside the Gospels. One reason for this is that the apostles would have had to contextualize their message so that it made sense to a Gentile world.<sup>285</sup> Although they did not mention it as often as the Gospel writers, the apostles taught a Kingdom motif. Too often the salvation that God provides is broken down into small pieces. Focus is given to important words such as justification, repentance, reconciliation and propitiation that Paul used when outlining his theology. In so doing the broader focus is lost. He taught all of these things in the context of the Kingdom.

Paul believed that Christ sits enthroned as King in majesty and will return to bring His Kingdom to its appointed fulfillment (Ephesians 1:20-23). He also taught that, because believers have been justified by faith in Christ’s work, they have been rescued from an evil empire and now live under the holy reign of Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Paul used the phrase as a synonym for heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9).<sup>286</sup> He also instructed the church at Rome about the Kingdom. *For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17-18). The apostle was encouraging the Romans to treat each other properly within the Christian community. As part of God’s Kingdom they are to treat each other Christianly.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Glasser and McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*, 42.

<sup>286</sup> W. Harold Mare. *1 Corinthians*, Expositors Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 222

<sup>287</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: a Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 90

## Conclusion

This brief glimpse of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament illustrates that the Bible is unified in its teaching on holistic mission. The message is the same; evangelism and social engagement are intertwined as parts of integrated gospel. The church has been given both the great commission and the great commandment. Today's Christians are to follow Jesus's example by seeing the church's mission as both the salvation of souls and the salvation of society. Ron Sider said, "I am absolutely convinced that this full gospel is what our broken world needs."<sup>288</sup> In its evangelistic programs, the church will invite people to embrace Christ as their Lord and Saviour. But the church will also engage society where the poor exist, the planet is polluted, justice is not being served, or the hurting are not experiencing care. In so doing, it will practice holistic mission. Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches will need to adopt the intertwined mandate of holistic mission if they are to slow down the dropout rate in this generation and perhaps even draw its dropouts back into full involvement in Kingdom work.

A complete understanding of Holistic Missiology cannot be gained by simply looking at selected biblical passages. The topic must also be considered from a broader perspective that develops from comparing the different passages with each other to form a logical system of thought. This is where the contribution of theologians and their understanding of evangelism and social engagement are particularly helpful. Four topics must be considered.

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 79

The first is the exact nature of the church's mandate. Many see the primary mission of the church to be nothing more than soul salvation. Others think that the church should occupy itself with meeting social needs and striving to reform society. A more balanced approach sees both as parts of a single responsibility. Another point to be discussed is the nature of the Christian's future hope. Some teach that Christians are to do nothing more than persevere in the midst of trials because the rapture will eventually occur and they will be rescued from this world. Others teach that the Blessed Hope is the return of Christ. Believers are to work at implementing His Kingdom while they wait.

A third issue for study is the timing of God's Kingdom. Does it refer to the age to come, popularly called heaven, or is it on earth now? Or is there a third option that teaches God's Kingdom was inaugurated by Christ during His first advent but will only be completed at His second advent? The final area of consideration is the reign of Christ. Some theologians believe that the Kingdom refers to Jesus's reign within the lives of believers, while others think that His Kingdom is manifested now in the world wherever the powers of evil are thwarted.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR HOLISTIC MISSION**

In the light of the dropouts' perception and the growing need to reach into the community, the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches must rethink their missiology because the churches are not as effective as they could be. Inadequate theology leads to partial practice. A theological basis for the holistic mission plan for the two churches is the thrust of this chapter. A balanced understanding is important for some do not understand that evangelism and social responsibility are equal parts of Christ's mandate. Factions of modern evangelicalism have been shaped by the adoption of dispensationalism, which has skewed many churches' understanding of holistic mission away from participation in this world. Finally, a full doctrine of the Kingdom is proposed as a way forward.

#### **The Great Divide: Evangelism and Social Responsibility**

Many churches have narrowed the focus of the mandate Christ gave His followers to dealing primarily with evangelism. If the great commission is to be fulfilled by the church then it should never be satisfied with just making converts. Instead, Christians should see that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit enables Christ-followers to become radically transformed disciples who are committed to sharing their faith as they minister



to people's needs and fight injustices of every kind. Liberation does not just refer to people's liberation from sin but also their liberation from the effects sin has had upon our world.

Christ's mandate was understood as an integrated mission until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An example of an integrated gospel can be seen in what occurred in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening. Masses of people repented of sin and gave their lives to God. Society began to be changed right along with the people. They wanted to stamp out societal ills wherever they saw them. Ralph Winter writes, "All kinds of changes took place. Slavery was abolished. The woman's voters' movement was launched. Women were going around with axes, bashing in the windows of saloons. By 1850 there were probably only one or two states that were not dry."<sup>289</sup>

Things began to change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The upper class evangelicals in mainline churches were in the positions of political power. A massive immigration of Southern Europeans happened between 1870-1930. They became the working class of the United States. During this time, popular evangelists such as the revivalist, D.L. Moody, attracted a large following. Millions of working class people put their faith in Jesus.<sup>290</sup> These individuals were so busy working that they did not have time to fight social evil. Their church and family became the focal point of their non-working lives.

But it was not just a matter of busy lives that changed the focus. The message that was being preached by the evangelists in the later 1800's was different from the one preached during the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800's. The eschatological

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<sup>289</sup> Ralph Winter, "Understanding the Polarization between Fundamentalist and Modernist Mission." (*International Journal of Frontier Mission* 26, no. 1 2009): 7

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

position moved from the popular post-millennial to pre-millennial position. The new message lacked social implications. David Moberg wrote, “Great revivalist preachers like Moody preached that social reform began with the individual, not with society.”<sup>291</sup> The focus narrowed to teaching people how to get right with God and how to live holy lives to the neglect of how to produce a righteous society.

Another factor adding to the separation of evangelism and social action was the modernist debate. The social gospel became linked with liberal theology, and evangelicals, anxious to separate themselves from this group, separated themselves from social action also in order to get “back to first principles.”<sup>292</sup> Beginning as early as the 1920’s, American evangelicals believed that the only valid kind of Christianity talked about heaven. Their gospel focused entirely on personal salvation. Christianity’s mission was to get everyone around the world saved.<sup>293</sup> Ralph Winter writes, “By 1958 it was still a forgone conclusion that if any evangelical talked about the Kingdom, he was branded a liberal, a modernist who didn’t believe in the Bible and had been taken in by German higher criticism.”<sup>294</sup> An evangelical did not talk about social responsibly. They did not want to be confused for a liberal who preached the social gospel.<sup>295</sup>

By the late 1950’s the evangelical church in the United States had forgotten all about the social implications of the gospel. The liberal wing dropped the responsibility of preaching the Gospel and the evangelicals stopped practicing social engagement.<sup>296</sup> Since that time because of the efforts of Carl Henry, Timothy Smith, Ron Sider and others

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<sup>291</sup> David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern*. (New York, NY: Holman, 1972), 32

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 32

<sup>293</sup> Winter, “Understanding the Polarization between Fundamentalist and Modernist Mission”, 6.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> The social gospel is a movement that applies Christian ethics to social problems. (Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 14)

<sup>296</sup> Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 37

evangelicals have slowly begun to understand this was a mistake. They are rediscovering the need for a broader understanding of the gospel.

During the first Lausanne Conference of Evangelism in 1972 the debate focused on the exact nature of the mission Christ gave the Church. Was the church simply to evangelize by inviting others to begin a relationship with God by embracing Christ as their Lord and Saviour? Or was the mission to improve the social, judicial and environmental conditions in which people live so that the quality of life for all is improved? Broadening the mandate to include engaging societal evils has been viewed by some evangelicals as dangerous because of fears that it could someday replace evangelism as the main focus of ministry. This concern still keeps many from announcing that the good news affects not only our position before God but also our relationship to other people. So there were still those who equated missions with evangelism alone.

John Stott was once one of those theologians. He felt the mission of the church was exclusively a preaching, converting, and teaching mission. But he admitted that, between the 1966 Berlin Congress and the 1974 Lausanne Congress, he had changed his position.<sup>297</sup> He helped write the Lausanne Covenant that stated:

Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread his righteousness in the midst of the unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in

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<sup>297</sup> Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, 12

the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.<sup>298</sup>

Not all of the theologians at the Lausanne Congress agreed with this position and still held to the position that evangelism was primary. Undaunted, C. Rene Padilla and others took their missiology a step further. They moved beyond Stott and taught that social action and evangelism should not just be seen as two separate parts of the mandate Jesus has given the church. Instead, they should be properly seen as two cohesive elements of one task, a real integration between the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of mission. Perhaps impatient with those who did not share their position, the unofficial “Radical Discipleship Group”<sup>299</sup> issued this statement.

There is no biblical dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made flesh in the lives of God’s people. Men will look as they listen and what they see must be at one with what they hear. The Christian community must chatter, discuss and proclaim the gospel; it must express the gospel in its life as the new society, in its sacrificial service of others as a genuine expression of God’s love, in its prophetic exposing and opposing of all demonic forces that deny the Lordship of Christ and keep men less than human; in its pursuit of real justice for all men; in its responsible and caring trusteeship of God’s creation and its resources.<sup>300</sup>

The debate continues. Since 2001, the Micah Network, a world-group of evangelical relief, development and justice agencies, has continued to promote integral mission. The Micah Declaration states, in part:

It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and

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<sup>298</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 24.

<sup>299</sup> This was an ad hoc group of about 400 participants who met spontaneously during the Lausanne Congress (As explained by Dr. Padilla in a lecture at Acadia Divinity College.)

<sup>300</sup> Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, 15

justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.<sup>301</sup>

This thinking has not been progressively taught and broadly accepted in the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches. The churches in Queens County grew out of the spiritual fervour created by revivalist Henry Alline who preached in Liverpool in the early 1780's.<sup>302</sup> Rev. John Payzant succeeded Alline and served as a pastor in Liverpool until 1834.<sup>303</sup> Throughout the history of the two churches there have been few pastors who emphasized social action but the majority of the missional energy of the churches has focused on evangelism to the neglect of social engagement.<sup>304</sup>

Even as recently as the late 1950's, there was a localized revival in Brooklyn. Evangelist, Rev. Lawrence Atkinson, preached. Church members today remember that many people, teens and adults alike, were convicted of their sin and need of embracing Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. When the invitation, an altar call, was given at the end of the service many went forward and were later baptized in the Liverpool Baptist Church. But this was the extent of the movement. Whereas individual believers may have volunteered for and financially supported social agencies, there were no broad based local initiatives started or congregational programs developed to care for visible needs. The great commission was viewed primarily as evangelism. New believers, during this period, remembered being taught the importance of spiritual disciplines, personal

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<sup>301</sup> The Micah Declaration. September 2001. Accessed on November 25, 2013.

[http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn\\_integral\\_mission\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf).

<sup>302</sup> *The Sermons of Henry Alline*, ed. George A. Rawlyk (Hantsport, N.S.: Published by Lancelot Press for Acadia Divinity College and the Baptist Historical Committee of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1986), 12

<sup>303</sup> *The Journal of the Reverend John Payzant (1749-1834)*, ed. Brian C. Cuthbertson (Hantsport, NC: Published by Lancelot Press for Acadia Divinity College and Baptist Historical Committee of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, 1981), X111

<sup>304</sup> Information gathered from conversations with older Brooklyn and Liverpool Church members.

evangelism and stewardship but received little, if any, instruction on engaging social evils.

The dropouts, probably without even realizing this, centered the underlying reason for their absence from church right in the middle of this debate. They grew up in a church that focused its mission on a Sunday event. According to them, the mission was evangelism. Church life focused on a Sunday worship event that ended with an altar call being given so that the “lost” could be “saved”. Sunday School was the place where boys and girls were told that Jesus loved them and would be their Saviour if they accepted him into their heart. Special events were held so that the unsaved could hear the gospel message.

As adults, the dropouts now perceive their church’s mandate to be little more than an elaborate effort to maintain the organization through enlisting new members. It appears as if people are valued mainly for what they offer the organization financially and in capability. The members seem satisfied in doing nothing more than waiting around in a safe environment till Jesus returns or for their death, which would enable entry into heaven. The impression the dropouts have is of a church that is too satisfied in simply trying to persuade others to get “saved” so they all can wait together until Christ returns. This mission did not excite the dropouts and became an underlying reason for their reluctance to return to church.

The idea of the church’s mission being to care for people and improve their living conditions generally surprised some of the dropouts. They simply had no concept of a church being involved in these areas because it was so far removed from their experience. (Granted, the dropouts’ perspective was limited to that of their own local church. Most of

the interviewees had little understanding of the corporative social efforts of congregations in the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches.) Yet the idea so excited them that many were willing to overlook any grievances that they had against the church so they could be part of an organization that had a vision and plan to care for others, within their community, in practical ways.

The dropouts were not even troubled by evangelism and discipleship being adjoined parts of the mandate. As long as the church was willing to present the gospel as part of a spiritual discussion rather than as a demonstrative proclamation, they would buy into it. But it could only be part of the task. The mission for them was not just about preparing people for eternity, it was also about showing love in tangible ways to a hurting world. There could be no artificial barrier between evangelism and social responsibility.

It sounds strange that the effort to reach the unsaved, including its youth, actually contributed to their decision to leave. But evangelism done in a heavy-handed manner, in the absence of social and environmental engagement did just that in these two churches. Salvation focused solely on getting people converted. Decisions were manipulated through emotionally charged preaching. If greater energy had been placed teaching the social implications of discipleship, perhaps the extent of the dropout rate wouldn't have been as severe.

### **Dispensationalism: A Cause for the Theological Confusion**

A second cause that keeps churches from practicing an integrated missiology was the influence of Pre-millennial Dispensational Eschatology. While there are dispensationalists who are engaged in holistic mission, that is often not the case.

Theology that is poorly understood can lead to poor practices. Dispensationalism was a movement imported from the United States and Britain with the rise of fundamentalism. The two World Wars tarnished the optimism undergirding Post Millennialism, which was the predominant view among Maritime Baptists up to the time of the creation of the United Baptist Convention.<sup>305</sup>

Dispensationalism spread into Atlantic Canada through a number of avenues. The huge popularity of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which propagated this view, was a major reason. Some people read and accepted the notes as truth instead of understanding them as just one opinion. Also, Moody Bible Institute and some dispensational seminaries in the United States had an influence that spread beyond the United States. Some Atlantic Baptist preachers received training there while others read books from their publishing houses that taught dispensationalism. Most of the Canadian bible colleges also adopted dispensationalism and had a strong influence. Popular writers, such as Tim LaHaye, wrote novels, which espoused the same view.<sup>306</sup> Others, such as Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie, wrote doctrinal works about dispensationalism that became popular.

The doctrine was also taught from the pulpit. Visiting evangelists persuaded people to make a profession of faith by referencing dispensational doctrine. An example of that happened at the Youth for Christ Rallies. Preachers, such as John R. Rice, would come and warn the youth that they could avoid the terrors of a literal seven-year tribulation by accepting Christ and being rescued at the rapture. Later movies, such as “*A Thief in the Night*”, were played in churches where teaching was graphically illustrated on the big screen. Television programs also gave evangelists a venue to reach many homes

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<sup>305</sup> See the 1905-6 Basis of Union Doctrinal Statement on eschatology.

<sup>306</sup> An example of this is the 16 volume Left Behind Series.



with the message. All of these illustrate that there were enough means to spread the message from the United States into Canada.

Most scholars think that John Darby developed dispensationalism in England [although some dispensational theologians debate this point, believing its basic outlines can be found in the work of Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), the famous Isaac Watts (1674-1748), and Edward Irving (1792-1834)].<sup>307</sup> Its influence was expanded to many other countries with the publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* with the notes written by a lawyer without theological education and the rise of the Bible College Movement<sup>308</sup>

Charles Ryrie, in his book, *Dispensationalism Today*, outlines the basic teaching of Pre-millennial dispensationalism this way. He states:

Pre-millennialists hold a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, they believe that the promises made to Abraham and David are unconditional and have had or will have a literal fulfillment. In no sense have these promises made to Israel been abrogated or fulfilled by the Church, which is a distinct body in this age, having promises and a destiny different from Israel's. At the close of the age, Pre-millennialists believe that Christ will return for his church, meeting her in the air (this is not the second coming of Christ), which event, called the rapture or translation, will usher in a seven-year period of tribulation on the earth. After this, the Lord will return to the earth (this is the second coming of Christ) to establish his kingdom on the earth for 1000 years, during which time the promises to Israel will be fulfilled.<sup>309</sup>

Holding firmly to these beliefs can cause followers to hold a distorted view of the church's mission.

For example, dispensationalists carefully track the evil in society because they see it as a sign of the times. They believe sin's effect on society needs to grow worse and worse before Jesus will return. Therefore, being involved in social action, to prevent the

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<sup>307</sup> Charles Ryrie. *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 71 and 73

<sup>308</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 196

<sup>309</sup> Charles Ryrie. *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (New York: Loizeaux, 1953), 12

decay of the world could actually be counter to the purposes of God. If this world is evil and it is God's plan for it to get worse before He destroys it, why work to save it? Stott writes:

This portrays the present evil world as beyond improvement or redemption, and predicts instead that it will deteriorate steadily until the coming of Christ, who will then set up his millennial reign on earth. If the world is getting worse and if only Jesus' coming will put it right, the argument runs, there seems no point in trying to reform it meanwhile.<sup>310</sup>

The dispensational doctrine teaches that the social condition will inevitably and irreversibly grow increasingly worse until the second coming of Christ. It will only be the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Christ that will cure social problems."<sup>311</sup>

Looking to the future for a millennial utopia can cause dispensational Christians to develop a defeatist attitude in the present. They believe that the church will ultimately lose influence in the world and become corrupted or apostate before the end of time.<sup>312</sup>

When the church's position on social matters is pushed aside or when Christians are refused the opportunity to voice their opinions in the political arena, it is interpreted as a sign of the times and accepted. Gradually, many Christians have chosen to isolate themselves from society. Granted, not all felt that way. In the United States some dispensationalists supported the Moral Majority, a coalition of conservative Christians founded by Jerry Falwell, which lobbied the government to pass legislation that would curb social evils. Many, however, went to the other extreme thinking that by fighting against popular opinion, believers may actually be delaying the return of Christ by making it take longer for society to become corrupt enough for the end of time to occur.

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<sup>310</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 30

<sup>311</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 37

<sup>312</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 196

Dispensationalism was born as a separatist movement with a natural isolation from and distrust of society. They have identified themselves as the heavenly people of God and the invisible church. By so doing, they disengaged from the broader society. Instead of being engaged with the world as an expression of their concern, they separated from the world in fear of contamination and apostasy. Carl F. H. Henry has stated, “Whereas once the redemptive gospel was a world changing message, now it has narrowed to a world resisting message.”<sup>313</sup>

As a result, this part of the evangelical community has fought hard to stay pure, preferring to meet in groups with Christian friends. The church building is seen as a retreat center. They enter into the evil world to earn a living and quickly shelter themselves with the religious programming offered by their church. Their mantra is, “Do not be conformed to the image of the world” and “Avoid the appearance of evil.” It became impossible to change a society that you avoided whenever possible.

In the early days of dispensationalism, its proponents preached about the affect sin had on the individual and the distress it caused society. They taught that repentance from sin was necessary to be right with God and that the new believer needed to work to remove sin’s stain from society. Marsden writes,

Many of the same evangelist associates of Moody who took the lead in preaching dispensationalism and holiness also led in preserving the tradition of evangelical social work. Though they were dedicated first to saving souls, greatly occupied with personal piety, and held pessimistic social views, their record of Christian social service in an era when social reform was not popular was as impressive as that of almost any group in our country.<sup>314</sup>

Gradually the church split into two camps: Those who emphasized evangelism

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<sup>313</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1947), 19.

<sup>314</sup> Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 28

(fundamentals) and those who emphasized social reform (liberals).<sup>315</sup> As the theological debate between the two groups heated up, the dispensationalists reacted by wrongly standing against all that the liberals stood for: social engagement. Dispensationalists contented themselves with preaching on the salvation of the individual's soul and deemphasized the societal consequences of sin such as poverty, environmental disasters, etc. Carl F. H. Henry said, "The sin which fundamentalism has inveighed, almost exclusively, was individual sin rather than social evil."<sup>316</sup>

Prophecy conferences abounded. Eschatology was often the main subject in church. Ralph Winter said, "We were confident that we had the future events all figured out. We were oriented toward heaven and to the future, toward personal soul-salvation, not social transformation, because this world was going to the dogs. Obviously, then, there was no reason to try to fix it."<sup>317</sup> As a result, many Christians see the primary mission of the church to be nothing more than soul salvation. Even the esteemed G.E. Ladd wrote, "The business of the church is primarily to preach the gospel of salvation."<sup>318</sup> Their responsibility is to warn others to flee the wrath that is to come. The responsibility to care for society and the world is left up to the government and theological liberals. Justice issues are secondary because they are temporal. Therefore the church must occupy itself with eternal issues so that; "Men and women trapped on board the shipwreck of society are offered the lifeboat of Christ."<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 31

<sup>316</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1947), 7

<sup>317</sup> Winter, *Understanding the Polarization between Fundamentalist and Modernist Mission*, 8

<sup>318</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: a Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 141.

<sup>319</sup> Al Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective (regnum Studies in Mission)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 2008), 24

Instead of seeing the corporal application of salvation, dispensationalists see evangelism through the lens of a rescue. Their commission is to get as many people into the kingdom as possible before Jesus returns. So they make quick forays into the world, raids with evangelistic efforts and then retreat again. Tony Campolo correctly diagnoses the situation when he says, “The church concentrates its efforts on getting people saved before the end of time.”<sup>320</sup>

This approach is contrary to God’s intention for the church. The holistic gospel must not only embrace personal salvation but also stress an equal commitment to work for social justice, especially on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. Carl F.H. Henry says, “Christianity opposes any and every evil, personal and social.”<sup>321</sup> The two sides to the mission were never to be divorced. Dispensationalists, with their belief that it is only through the salvation of souls that society’s problems can be solved, rationalize their singular focus on evangelism. Al Tizon writes, “Dispensational Premillennialists” preached at once the irredeemable depravity of the social situation and salvation from it through personal conversion.”<sup>322</sup>

Dispensationalists teach a unique point of view on the kingdom. They make a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. The Gospel of Matthew is the only book that uses the phrase Kingdom of Heaven. Although acknowledging that there are times in the gospel when the two terms are used interchangeably, dispensationalists teach that the Kingdom of Heaven is the political reign of God and the Kingdom of God is the spiritual reign of God within the heart of the

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<sup>320</sup> Campolo, *Letters to a Young Evangelical*, 112

<sup>321</sup> Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 7

<sup>322</sup> Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne*, 24

believer.<sup>323</sup> The missional weakness of this view and any other that sees the reign of God as inner and spiritual is that it can be used to absolve believers of any social responsibility. For example, if the kingdom is only concerned about the inner life why be concerned about the environment?

One of the greatest dangers to social engagement inherent in dispensationalism is its teaching on the rapture. They hold to a secret rapture in which Christians will be whisked away from earth. John Darby wrote, “The rapture of the saints to meet the Lord in the air, before His manifestation to the earth, and the existence of a Jewish remnant in whom the Spirit of God is graciously working, before the Lord manifests Himself to them for their deliverance...”<sup>324</sup> C.I. Scofield taught the same thing when he said, “Christ will rapture out of the world all true Christians to meet him in the air, leaving apostate Christians and unbelievers to endure through seven years of tribulation. After that Christ would return again to establish his kingdom on earth.”<sup>325</sup>

If Christians have the hope of being rescued by the rapture before the inevitable great tribulation, why work to implement the kingdom of God?<sup>326</sup> Why should Christians work toward implementing the kingdom of God and improving the social conditions of humanity if they are going to be snatched from the world before it is destroyed? Further, if these are the end times, with the world about to come to an end, there is no point

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<sup>323</sup> This understanding seems wrong when one considers that Matthew’s preference for the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is explained by the fact that he was writing to specifically Jewish readers and inserted “heaven” for “God” so as not to offend the Jewish sensibilities regarding uttering the name of God.

<sup>324</sup> J.N. Darby, *The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant*.  
<http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/PROPHET/11007E.html> (Accessed on May 15, 2013)

<sup>325</sup> C.I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1979.) 16.

<sup>326</sup> For a fuller discussion on the “Rapture” I recommend these two books: Andrew Kuyvenhoven, *The Day of Christ's Return: What the Bible Teaches, What You Need to Know* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2009) and George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: a Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990)

worrying about trying to stop polluting the planet. N.T. Wright saw another danger with rapture theology. He wrote, “The second coming is part of a scenario in which the present world is doomed to destruction while the chosen few were snatched up to heaven.”<sup>327</sup> If they are taken away from the planet why worry about ecology. If God was intending to bring the whole world to a shattering halt what was the problem? If Armageddon was just around the corner, it didn’t matter whether poisonous gases were pumped into the atmosphere polluting the air.<sup>328</sup> Tony Campolo also gives an example of this in his book, “Letters to a Young Evangelical.” Former United States Secretary of the Interior James Watt, a dispensationalist, proposed plans that could have destructively exploited oil and other natural resources in American national parks and forests. His rationale was that Jesus would soon return so there is no need to protect the environmental resources for future generations.<sup>329</sup>

Belief in the rapture can lead Christians to abandon the world. Why should they look after the environment or try to improve the living conditions of the poor if Jesus is going to come, rescue all His people and destroy everything? Why not just wait till his return to set up his final kingdom? The dropouts seem to have opted to have nothing to do with a theological teaching that Christians were to just wait and worship while waiting for Jesus to return.

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<sup>327</sup> NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. Kindle ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 119

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 118

<sup>329</sup> Campolo, *Letters to a Young Evangelical*, 117

## The Meaning of the “Kingdom of God”

A third cause for many churches not conducting an integrated missiology is their limited understanding of the Kingdom of God. The gospel was never understood as part of Kingdom theology. The nature of the kingdom is important with major implications for not seeing the church’s commission in light of a kingdom mandate.

The phrase “kingdom of God” has been translated from the Greek “*basileia tou theou*.” In the Gospels the words refer to the rule or reign of Christ. It grew out of late Judaism where the phrase referred to God’s rule or God’s sovereignty.<sup>330</sup> Rene Padilla emphasizes this point when he says; “... the words which are translated ‘kingdom’ in English are *basilea* in the Greek New Testament and *malkut* in the Hebrew Old Testament. They both refer to something dynamic: sovereignty, dominion or government.”<sup>331</sup> It refers to God’s power in action. Jesus’s ministry focused around this concept. There is almost universal agreement on this truth. Craig Evans has said, “Everyone agrees that the essence of Jesus' proclamation was the kingdom of God.”<sup>332</sup>

But there are differences of opinion over how this rule is to be understood. Does God rule only in people’s hearts as they surrender their lives to him? Is God’s rule theocratic and political? Does God rule the earth now or will He only rule when Christ returns? What is the nature of the kingdom of God? Theologians have debated these questions and have come up with different solutions.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Johannes Weiss taught that Jesus’ kingship or rule was thoroughly eschatological. He argued that Jesus’ view of the kingdom was like that of the

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<sup>330</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 63

<sup>331</sup> Yamamori and Padilla, *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation*, 24

<sup>332</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 141



Jewish apocalyptic: altogether future.<sup>333</sup> Albert Schweitzer who wrote that Jesus' teaching on the end times had little, if any, practical application to the present, made this approach famous.<sup>334</sup> Jesus's ethical teaching was not for every age but only for the brief period before the end comes. Few modern scholars accept these theories. The Gospels tell of Jesus making demands upon all those who lived under his reign. To the rich young ruler He said, "*If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me*" (Matthew 19:21) There was no doubt in the young man's mind that, if he wanted to be a part of Jesus' kingdom, it was going to cost him everything he had. Jesus summoned people to the present kingdom of God and its righteousness.<sup>335</sup>

According to Rudolph Bultmann's book, *History and Eschatology*, Jesus taught that His kingdom was imminent. Unfortunately, following the lead of his theological presupposition, he attempted to demythologize the Bible's teaching on the kingdom. For Bultmann, the Gospel records are a collection of myths that portray truths about humanity's existence rather than tell about actual historical events. In order to understand the New Testament books, it is necessary to "demythologize". In order to make the message understandable to the modern mind, he taught that Jesus was not coming at some future date but rather He comes by demanding personal response in the life of the believer. The true meaning of kingdom can only be understood existentially.<sup>336</sup>

While Bultmann's thinking countered that of Weiss and Schweitzer in stressing that God's kingdom was present in Jesus, it erred in two points. First, in his effort to make

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<sup>333</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 18

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>335</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1963), 221

<sup>336</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 58

the message palatable for modern people, he loses much of the power of the message. If the miracles were all myths, then there is little left to show Jesus' defeat of Satan's kingdom. Second, it places the sole emphasis of Jesus' reign in the present and ignores that there are future aspects. The great hope to which believers cling is that Jesus will return and usher in God's final kingdom.

The heart of Jesus' message was that the kingdom of God was already realized in His ministry. C.H. Dodd understands the apocalyptic language of the Bible to be a series of symbols standing for realities that the human mind cannot understand.<sup>337</sup> All that the prophets hoped for has been realized in history. In Christ's earthly career the kingdom has come and God's purposes have been realized.

Joachim Jeremias defended a distinctive position. He criticized Dodd's understanding of the kingdom for the way it minimizes the futuristic aspect of the kingdom. In its place, Jeremias suggested "eschatology in process of realization."<sup>338</sup> He understood Jesus's entire ministry to be an event in which the kingdom is realized. Yet, this is not all that He had to say about the kingdom. It is a dynamic, not static concept.<sup>339</sup> In the present age, the reign of God is limited and hidden.<sup>340</sup> But, in Old Testament thought, there would also be an imminent eschatological consummation of the kingdom. Jesus's death, resurrection and ascension were combined to be that event. Ladd has correctly pointed out that it is difficult to see any great differences between Jeremias' view and the view of Dodd that he criticizes.<sup>341</sup> While he points out that Jesus' reign was

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<sup>337</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 58

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 59

<sup>339</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*. Vol. 1. Trans. John Bowden. (London: Redwood, 1971.), 98

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 99

<sup>341</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 60

more than spiritual, he fails to preserve the great hope that one day the kingdom will completely come to earth.

Other scholars have wrestled with these questions: If God's reign was present in Christ, why did evil continue to triumph? Why was the church persecuted after Jesus' ascension to heaven? Why does Satan appear still to be in control of the earth? This has led theologians, such as John Bright, to understand the kingdom of God in a two-fold aspect: it has come and is even now in the world; it is also yet to come.<sup>342</sup> They hold that the present and future references in Jesus' message must be held in tension. For on the one hand, the Kingdom is a present and victorious reality; on the other hand, it is a thing of the future and far from victorious.<sup>343</sup>

George Eldon Ladd popularized the view of the kingdom as two-dimensional by describing it with the "already inaugurated - not yet consummated" paradigm.<sup>344</sup> He argues that there is a tension between the already realized and future eschatology throughout the entire New Testament. While the future Kingdom of God has already broken into the present reality, its fullness remains to be consummated with the second coming. The church therefore lives between the times. God's kingdom is in the realm of the age to come, popularly called heaven; and we shall realize the blessings of His kingdom (reign) in the perfection of their fullness. But the Kingdom is also here now. There is a realm of spiritual blessing into which we may enter today and enjoy in part.<sup>345</sup> The strength of this view is that while preserving a hope for a better day when the enemy will be completely defeated, it does so in a way that keeps believers from growing

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<sup>342</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 237

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 231

<sup>344</sup> Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 69

<sup>345</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 23.

complacent. The church has work on earth to do as it prays and works for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

N.T. Wright points out that some find it hard to accept that a kingdom could be both present and future. This problem arises when we try to understand the teaching from our 21<sup>st</sup> century frame of reference. He states, "Once we learn to think the way Jews of the time thought and indeed take into consideration the real political situation (rather than just a set of religious ideas or beliefs), the idea of a kingdom that is both emphatically present and emphatically future is not a problem."<sup>346</sup> He provides four first century examples to show that in their cultural context they thought of the kingdom as both present and future.

The Bible makes no attempt to reconcile the fact that the kingdom is both present and future. It holds them in dynamic tension. There are scriptural texts that represent each position. So there can be little doubt that Jesus reigns now and will reign in the future. The question that remains is how do we experience his reign today. Does He reign in a spiritual sense by being ruler over the lives of his followers as individuals or does He reign over all of creation?

In the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches little attention has been given to preaching and teaching on the Kingdom. Conversations with older church members reveal that they have been taught little, especially in recent years; about the Kingdom of God and its implications on the way we live. Practicing Christian ethics in society was taught as a matter of obedience to Christ rather a responsibility of kingdom citizens.

Teaching on kingdom ethics was heavily influenced in Liverpool and Brooklyn by fundamentalism. People who were members of independent Baptist churches in other

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<sup>346</sup> Wright, *Simply Jesus*, Kindle location 116-118

locations moved here and joined the Liverpool church. They brought with them a unique brand of kingdom theology that was almost totally focused on eternity. In Brooklyn, several of the members attend a bible study that is led by an independent minister. This heavily influences their understanding and is relayed to other members in discussions with the Brooklyn church.

While the church membership was willing to give up on this evil age and wait to be rescued (Galatians 1:4), their children were not. Perhaps without thoroughly understanding the present implications of kingdom theology, they longed for a church that wanted to begin implementing the kingdom now while they waited for the eschatological reign of Christ.

### **The Reign of Christ**

Integral to a full understanding of this Kingdom issue is the location of the reign of Christ. Where does it reside and is there a corporate or community sense that it includes the local church? It is another hindrance keeping the church from conducting an integrated missiology. Some theologians believe that the Kingdom refers to Jesus' reign within the lives of believers, while others think that His kingdom is manifested now in the world wherever the powers of evil are thwarted. The location of His reign is a crucial puzzle to solve because the answer will determine how Christians are to live in this world. If, on one hand, the kingdom is limited to the indwelling presence of Jesus in the life of the believer and synonymous with personal faith, it will lead to an abandonment of this world. It will mean this world is not the believers' home. They are just passing through on their way to eternity.

The church then lives in the world but does so with an uneasy existence. It becomes a holy ghetto where believers cloister together for safety until the Messiah returns to implement his cosmic reign. Occasionally, they will hold campaigns where they bravely dart into the world to make converts, but that is the limit of their contact because this world belongs to the dominion of Satan. Their efforts are like evangelistic guerrilla spiritual warfare. There is little concern for the planet since it will be recreated. The sole focus of prayer is usually about individuals and getting people saved or healed. On the other hand, if Jesus reigns over all creation, the church will work to make that sovereign rule a reality.

The debate seems to focus on the meaning of Jesus' words in Luke 17:21.<sup>347</sup> "Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (KJV) One school of thought says that Jesus' reign is solely within an individual. When we begin a relationship with God his spirit dwells within us. The apostle Paul wrote, "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16)? The NIV Study Bible explains that Luke 17:21 indicates that the kingdom is spiritual and internal rather than physical and external.<sup>348</sup> It says, "The immediate context may favor...that the kingdom is spiritual and so not visible."<sup>349</sup> That is, the kingdom is present as an inner reality, something hidden in people's hearts. L.H. Marshall agreed when he wrote, "The kingdom of God is God's rule within the individuals' soul."<sup>350</sup>

In contrast, those who teach that this verse refers to God's reign in society hold

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<sup>347</sup> A discussion of the meaning of the Greek word *entos* was covered in Chapter 3, page 136

<sup>348</sup> Luke 17.20-21 NIV Study Bible

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, 121

the opposite position. The emphasis on his presence is a sign that the kingdom is now present. Jesus, responding to the Pharisees' disbelief, says, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12:28).

The first century historical context needs to be considered in order to help solve the debate over the location of the reign. A general malaise had fallen over the Jews at the time of Christ. Pagan emperors had ruled over the Jewish people for so long that they had become extremely pessimistic about the coming Messiah. It seemed like a long time since the last prophet had promised deliverance. Rene Padilla states, "Out of this setting a concept of history emerged in Israel with an exaggerated interest in the future and a persistent scorn for the present."<sup>351</sup> They still expected God to establish his presence in the future but because of their sufferings they totally abandoned the present.

Unexpectedly, John the Baptist arrived preaching that people needed to repent for the King was coming. He preached, "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15, NIV 1984) He identifies Jesus as the one they have been waiting for. The kingdom suddenly was present in their midst.<sup>352</sup> The people were so focused on the future that they were unprepared for the type of reign Jesus brought to the earth. They looked for a military leader who would change the world by force rather a king whose reign occurred as people chose to follow him. Instead, Jesus taught the people that the Kingdom of God was within their midst, or among you. In other words, wherever He was there was the Kingdom.

Even if this opinion is wrong, it is not an excuse for abandoning this world to Satan's rule. Howard Snyder explains, "The central battleground in the struggle between

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<sup>351</sup> Yamamori and Padilla, *The Local Church, Agent of Change*, 200

<sup>352</sup> Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 101

God's kingdom and Satan's counterfeit is people's minds and hearts. It is here that the clash of wills takes place: 'The kingdom of God is within you.'<sup>353</sup> Regardless of whether the verse is translated as "within" or "among," what Snyder is saying is that the kingdom of God grows one person at a time, within each person as they yield reign of their will to Christ. Then through a person's choices, as they seek good for others, God's reign extends over all His creation. Inner sanctification always results in a righteousness that is lived out daily promoting justice and mercy.

Jesus is Lord of our lives and Lord over the world. His miracles and healings proved this truth. He demonstrated through his mighty works that He was the long awaited King. Through these visual examples He proved that the kingdom of darkness was being defeated. Craig Evans has written, "The exorcisms and healings cannot be ignored or discounted if we are to understand fully the significance and import of Jesus' bold proclamation that the rule of God has indeed arrived, and that it is the time to repent and embrace it."<sup>354</sup>

When Jesus reigns within a person, they will seek his reign in society. N.T. Wright states, Jesus rescues human beings in order that through them He may rule his world in the new way He always intended. They are charged with implementing his victory in the world.<sup>355</sup> Jesus equips believers for this task by sending the Holy Spirit into their lives so that He himself is powerfully present with them and in them. The Spirit guides, directs, and enables them to bear witness to Him as the true Lord and work to make that sovereign rule a reality.<sup>356</sup> If the church reflected this integrated view of the

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<sup>353</sup> Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1978.), 133

<sup>354</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 141

<sup>355</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 212

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 204



church, there would be a greater likelihood of the dropouts returning. The church's mission becomes an extension of Jesus's ministry as entrusted to us. It continues the mission of Jesus Himself.<sup>357</sup> He said, "*The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favour has come*" (Luke 4:18,19).

This mandate He passed on to His followers. The church was to announce that His kingdom was present whenever someone submitted his or her life to His reign. They were also to work to implement his kingdom and make society a better place, a more godly location. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

### **Conclusion**

The Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches' practice of mission will be influenced by its theological understanding of the same. The congregations will need to carefully reflect on four key teachings. The first is the exact nature of the church's mandate. Many see the primary mission of the church to be nothing more than soul salvation. Others think that the church should occupy itself with meeting social needs and striving to reform society. A balanced approach sees both as parts of a single responsibility.

The second point for consideration centers on the Christian's future hope. Many dispensationalists, when instructing about the blessed hope, teach that Christians are to be

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<sup>357</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 660

encouraged to persevere in the midst of trials because the rapture will eventually occur and they will be rescued from this world. While they wait for that day, they are to occupy themselves with personal holiness and evangelism. There is no need to waste time looking after the planet or those in it since it will be destroyed. A better approach is for the church members to be God's ambassadors who alleviate suffering and share the good news.

The exact nature of God's Kingdom is the third issue that needs to be discussed by the church members. Does it refer to the age to come, popularly called heaven, or is it on earth now? The "Inaugurated Kingdom," while preserving a hope for a better day when the enemy will be completely defeated, also teaches that believers have a responsibility to implement the kingdom of God now.

The final area of careful thought is the location of Christ's reign. Does God's Kingdom refer to Jesus' Lordship within the lives of believers or His reign in the world wherever the powers of evil are thwarted? The locality is not mere academic debate, because it affects the believers' level of engagement in the world.

Even as the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches reason through these debatable issues they will ready themselves to live out a holistic mandate. The progression is not as simple as developing a different theological understanding that will naturally lead to correct practice. It is a process of learning, imperfectly living out new practices, refining them and learning more to start a new cycle. It is a process that continues for a believer's earthly life. But, the process needs to begin somewhere and it never will without a strategy. The plan needs to contain these components: developing a new vision for missional ministry, changing the missional culture of the church,

identifying objectives, evaluating successes and celebrating accomplishments. It will set the following as ministry priorities: helping parents intentionally create a home conducive to spiritual nurture, a focus on helping children develop faith before they reach the teenage years, and new ways of implementing a holistic mission, containing the intertwined elements of evangelism and social action. The first two parts of this plan address the reasons why the dropouts left the church and the last addresses the reason why they stay away from church.

## **CHAPTER 5**

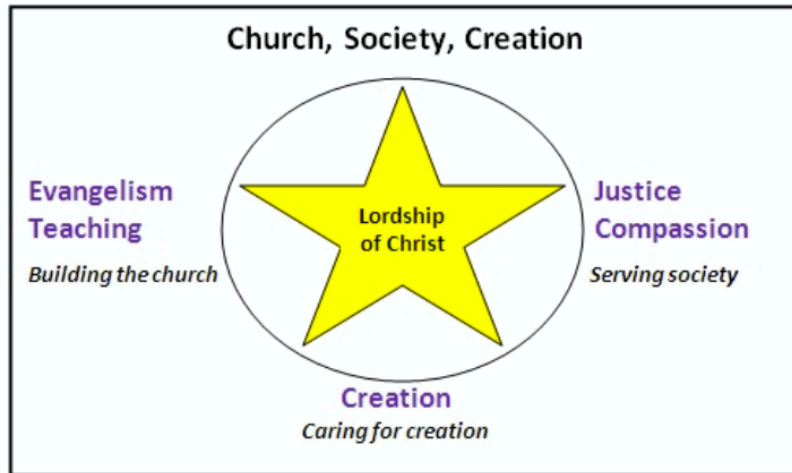
### **MINISTRY PLAN FOR LIVERPOOL AND BROOKLYN BAPTIST CHURCHES**

The research has revealed that the all but one of the people interviewed who dropped out of the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches did so because of a desire to experiment with a secular lifestyle practiced by many of their friends. As adolescents, in their mid-teens, the decision to walk away was influenced more by rebellion than logic.

Their unwillingness to return once they lived through this normal stage of maturity was carefully considered. The underlying cause for their reluctance to return was their perception of the church's refusal to practice a holistic approach to mission. They were not drawn to a church that measured religious success in terms of attendance rather than personal devotion and a caring ministry to others.

The challenge for the pastor and deacons is to provide the leadership that is necessary for a change to take place in the way the churches conduct ministry. The Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches have had a consistent emphasis on evangelism throughout their existence. It is not enough, however, just to show the congregations that they have practiced a truncated view of the mission. They will need to discover that the church no longer enjoys a dominant role in our culture. In the past it may have been able to reach people simply by sharing the gospel message. Those days appear to be over. Churches that practice ministry in this manner may eventually fade away.

The good news for the church is that in being forced to discover a new approach to ministry it will also realize that its understanding of Jesus’s mandate was not holistic.



**Figure 6.1**

Instead, it will be led to discover that evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable. The gospel is the good news about the kingdom of God. Good works, on the other hand, are the signs of the kingdom. C.J. Wright, in his lecture entitled “What is holistic mission?” used Figure 6.1 to explain the church’s mandate.<sup>358</sup>

An intertwined mission may be a difficult concept for conservative churches like Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist because the social gospel has traditionally been a hallmark of liberal churches. There is widespread belief that the church’s mandate is to save souls not to save the planet. This understanding of Christ’s mandate is a major obstacle to overcome, but the barrier is not insurmountable. A church program for holistic mission that combines education, action and evaluation can refocus a church’s efforts.

Congregants are pessimistic about the future of the church. There has been an exodus of people from Queens County because of an economic downturn and there are

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<sup>358</sup> Wright, *What is Holistic Mission?*

fewer people to attract to church. In addition they believe that the people who have remained in the area are not interested. Members have been known to say, “People are not church goers any more. We just need to accept that reality because there is nothing that can be done about it.”

This culture of defeat must be challenged. Comments like, “Our church is empty because people have moved” or “We have no young people because they are not interested in church,” places the blame on those who do not attend. Stephen McMullin comments:

It is noteworthy that most people in declining congregations believe that the main reasons for the congregation’s decline are exterior to the congregation. They do not think that it is the church’s fault that people will not attend their worship services and programs; instead, things the church cannot control (such as competition from secular activities) have led to fewer people attending worship services. Few members identified problems within the life of the congregation (boring or irrelevant services, little effort to minister to the surrounding community) as reasons why people might not be attending.<sup>359</sup>

The correct questions should be, “What do we perceive to be the calling of the church? Is it to meet people in the community through holistic ministry and thereby draw them to Christ and the church? **Reframing this question is a crucial part of creating a new vision.** Changing the members’ perception is a huge challenge. There are still people in the community that the church can reach. Not all of the young people have moved away. Again McMullin writes, “The broad consensus among clergy and people in declining congregations that the cause is external, reinforces the perception that there is nothing that they can do in response to the changing social environment.”<sup>360</sup> The church needs a vision that sees the current conditions accurately. A large part of the solution to changing

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<sup>359</sup> McMullin, “*Social Aspects of Religious Decline*”, 234

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 250

the perception is redefining the mandate to include social engagement as well as evangelism. The church must learn that its mission is broader than evangelizing its neighbourhood and financially supporting missionaries who serve in other countries.

To do so will take a complex procedure that involves the pastor facilitating the process so the congregation can develop a new vision for ministry. The churches have become ingrained into doing ministry one way. Practicing this approach for so many decades has produced tradition. Methods have become institutionalized so that members try harder with an approach that is treated as if it were sacred, even though it does not produce the desired results. Members must be led to reconsider their old approaches and to dream about new ones.

The pastor also needs to catch a new vision for the way ministry is conducted. The pastoral role will need to be altered if the ministry changes are to be permanent. New leadership practices will need to be developed where the pastor places more emphasis on being a facilitator of change than a teacher of best practices. The traditional model of a shepherd/teacher will become secondary to other, more innovative roles. Before church members can be inspired to catch a new vision for living missionally and led to discover how to live this out, the pastor needs to clearly understand his role and the necessary proficiencies.

The members will be encouraged to reflect on the findings of this research so that they can be more effective in three areas. First, they will consider how parents can be stimulated to become more intentional in their roles as spiritual mentors to their children. Second, the church will be led to think about how it can become more effective in augmenting parent's efforts with its discipleship ministry. Third, it will be encouraged to

develop a new organizational thrust for holistic ministry in its local community. The end result will see the creation of a new culture within the church insuring that the changes are permanent. This development of this new understanding will not happen without an implementation plan.<sup>361</sup>

### **A Plan for Faith Development with the Nuclear Family**

Church members, at times, act as if there is nothing they can do to prevent teenagers from leaving the church. Too often, believers adopt a defeatist attitude and simply accept the departure as a normal stage of the adolescent stage of rebellion. The first step to correcting this condition will be to emphasize parental responsibility over the development of the faith of their children. One conclusion drawn from the research data is the importance of parents building a Christian home with intentionality and consistency. It would appear that this is a key to retaining the youth. Therefore, parents need to learn how to build a Christian home. It is critical that they understand that as parents they are pastors of a small congregation, their family.

There are several keys to Christian nurturing. The training needs to begin early in the child's life. Toddlers can be taught to fold hands for prayer time and to say grace before meals. Bedtime Bible stories are important. Children also should be taken to public worship and church functions at a young age so that this can become an ingrained pattern in their life. In addition, they should accompany their parents (parents should bring them), whenever possible, when they are engaged in mission work. Something as simple as a trip to the food bank, a pregnancy center or a nursing home helps them experience faith being lived out in practical ways.

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<sup>361</sup> An implementation plan and tentative timeline is found in chapter 6.



Parents must see themselves as role models of faith, instilling Christian values not just by what they say but also by what they do. Children learn by watching parents. “Children may not remember what you say but they will remember what you do.”<sup>362</sup> They want to see consistent role models at home. The more exposure to faith and mission, the greater will be the influence. For example, if the children see their parents reading their Bibles and praying, they are more likely to see this as important in their life than if their parents just tell them to do so. As much as possible, as the children grow older, they should be involved in missions together. (The CABC offers the opportunity for a family mission tour each year as well as youth functions like Spring Forth and Tidal Impact.)<sup>363</sup>

For greatest impact, it is absolutely imperative that both parents be involved in their children’s faith development. A collaborative parental effort has not always been the case in families as fathers have often left the religious practices to the mothers. The research data found this to be confusing for the children. They wondered, “If it was so important why were both of their parents not equally committed?” Sons especially need to have masculine role models to emulate. James Dobson said, “If character training is a primary goal of parenting, and I believe it is, then the best way to instil it is through the demeanour and behaviour of a father.”<sup>364</sup>

Grandparents also have a role to play in Christian nurturing. The research data suggested that time spent in a multigenerational setting made a major impact on the children and teens. Children observe the faith practices of family members other than

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<sup>362</sup> James C. Dobson, *Bringing up Boys* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 69

<sup>363</sup> “Parent Teen Mission Tour” Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, Accessed on November 1, 2013. ([http://baptist-atlantic.ca/ai1ec\\_event/parent-teen-mission-tour/](http://baptist-atlantic.ca/ai1ec_event/parent-teen-mission-tour/))

<sup>364</sup> Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, 69

their parents. Grandparental involvement is especially important when the parents are not involved in church or practising their faith.

A natural part of faith development often includes challenging the faith of parents who should not be threatened by the questions. Kinnaman said, “Today [young Adults] have access to more knowledge content than any other generation in human history....”<sup>365</sup> As the children age, they have more questions about what they are being taught. They also will sift through information from other sources such as school, friends and media. Beliefs that are rationally held and explained will make a greater impact upon teenagers than those dogmatically announced to the next generation.

Strong families produce lasting faith. Children coming from homes where faith is practiced seriously, if not perfectly, are strongly predicated to carry that faith into adulthood.<sup>366</sup> Homes need to be a place where children learn and witness a vibrant faith that’s lived out honestly and intentionally. Perfection in missional living is not required, only diligence and faithfulness.

### **A Congregation Plan for Intentional Discipleship Ministry**

If the church is going to work at keeping teenagers engaged, the second step will be addressing the congregation’s role in assisting the mentoring efforts of parents. Kinnaman said, “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language; it’s a disciple-making problem.”<sup>367</sup> It is not only important for Christians to pray regularly and teach children through Christian education programs, but they also must find ways to engage youth in ministry. Beginning in early childhood,

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<sup>365</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location 380

<sup>366</sup> Hess and Stanton, *Millennial Faith Participation and Retention*, 5

<sup>367</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location, 215

children should be trained to be more than spectators. Traditionally the church has sometimes used children and teens in roles such as ushers and choir members. Their involvement should move beyond this, however, so that the children are engaged early in life in both local and global mission. It is not enough that they are taught in the classroom about global mission, they need to be provided with age specific opportunities to minister.

A point for consideration is the content that children and teens are asked to learn. Is it too basic and shallow with more focus on cultural identification than deep faith? Children should often hear Old and New Testament Bible stories both at home and in the church classroom. The way of salvation can be explained in age appropriate ways but, as the children get older, they can handle more complex teaching. In age appropriate ways, the curriculum should include training in apologetics, world religions, church history, cultural anthropology, spiritual disciplines, missiology and hermeneutics. This sounds like a huge task but, if taught in small blocks, it will prove to be a huge asset when it comes to resisting the societal pressures to drop out.

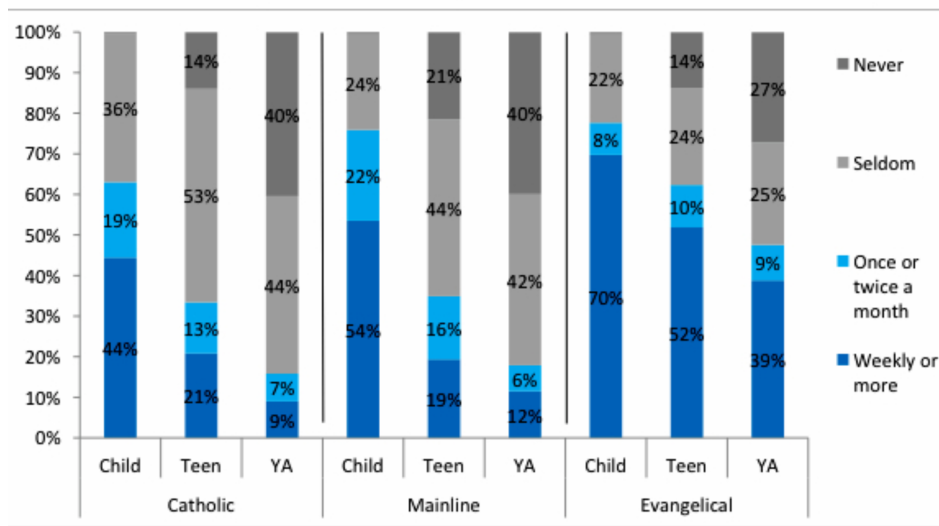
The churches could be encouraged to reflect on how they could become more strategic in the way they allocate their resources. If their mindset could be changed from traditional adult programs to focused children's ministry, they could be effective in slowing down the early dropout rate. Kinnaman reports, "Adults identify as Christians because they had formative experiences as a child or as a teenager that connected them to Christianity."<sup>368</sup>

The data from these interviews revealed that the teens dropped out of church between Junior and Senior High. Given the age of the dropouts surveyed, this reflects the

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<sup>368</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location, 215

practice in the 1970s – 1990s. Today this disconnect is happening at an even younger age. Children in Canada are now leaving church between elementary school and Junior High. James Penner reported, “The decline in attendance between childhood and the teen years is greater than the subsequent decline between the teen years and young adulthood.”<sup>369</sup> Figure 6.2, from Penner’s research, shows church attendance in three life stages.<sup>370</sup> It is now more crucial than ever that the church reach and engage these children early.



**Figure 6.2**

It is not enough to create programs to introduce the children to the gospel message. Years of this practice have proven unsuccessful in keeping children engaged in these two churches. The couple of hours per week that they attend religious programming are not providing enough exposure to faith to make a significant impact. Therefore, whole families need to be targeted in any outreach effort. Finding a need, such as tutoring, and meeting the need by providing an after school program to help children with their school work, will provide opportunities to meet and befriend the parents and eventually share the gospel. If the new vision for doing holistic mission is to be fully

<sup>369</sup> Penner, et. al. *Hemorrhaging Faith*, 21

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

realized in the two churches, then it needs to be addressed as part of the ministry implementation plan.

The church should also consider creating multiple points of impact with the children and youth ministries to maximize the opportunity for Christian influence. This could include using such ministries as Sunday School, worship services, movie nights, Long Lake Camp, rallies, mission trips and vacation bible school to increase their exposure to Christian witness.

Intentional guidance in discovering and practicing holistic mission should be a part of all these events. Even the call to make an individual decision to follow Christ should include a call to the body of Christ – that we are born again into a congregational family that practices an intertwined message of evangelism and social engagement. Rene Padilla has said:

This way of looking at conversion has important consequences for evangelism. The purpose of the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is not to change people into religious individuals who cut themselves off from the world in order to enjoy the benefits of their salvation. Rather, the purpose of evangelism is to constitute communities that confess Jesus Christ as the Lord of the totality of life and live in the light of that confession; communities that do not only talk about God's love but also demonstrate it in concrete terms, through good works, which God prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).<sup>371</sup>

If the church's sense of mission is going to be changed and expanded to include both elements of the mandate, it should be repeated in teaching at every opportunity.

### **An Organizational Plan for Holistic Ministry within the Local Community**

If the church is going to address the dropouts' reluctance to return, the third step will be considering what it means to minister holistically to the local community. The

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<sup>371</sup> Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, in Lausanne Occasional Paper, 15

ministry will include both evangelism and social responsibility as intertwined parts of its mandate. It will be characterized by several key elements. The first of these is incarnational ministry.

Stanley Grenz has written, “As the people of God we do not exist only to worship God and build up one another. We exist to minister to the world around us.”<sup>372</sup> As the two churches discover that this means more than evangelizing, they will look for a new model for doing good works. This standard will keep them from trying to help people from a distance. They should come to understand that it is not enough to give money to an agency that cares for others. Personal involvement will become a necessity. Believers will discover the different level of commitment between writing a cheque to support a pregnancy care center and being a volunteer counsellor or even opening one’s home to a pregnant teenager with no place to live.

“Incarnational Ministry” is the term that is used to describe this type of ministry. Michael Frost writes that seeing mission from this perspective implies the following: First, the church must always enter fully into the context [become a genuine part of the people group] in which it happens to find itself. Second, the congregations will identify with a target audience without compromising the truth of the gospel itself.<sup>373</sup> Third, the churches will be committed to a real and lasting presence among a group of people. Fourth, it implies a sending impulse rather than an extractational one.<sup>374</sup> This occurs when

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<sup>372</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Kingdom of God*, 653

<sup>373</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 2003), 37

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

believers are ministering for the benefit of the recipients, not the organization's profit. Finally, the people of the church look to gain an insider's view of the culture.<sup>375</sup>

Believers will find new ways to embody the gospel incarnationally here in Liverpool and Brooklyn.<sup>376</sup> They must seek ways to be personally involved in helping others through organizational initiatives or individually as they become aware of needs. Members will grow to see that there is value in helping others even when there is no opportunity to share the gospel. Stanley Grenz gives a warning about the gospel preached in many evangelical churches.

It is sadly true that the gospel proclaimed by the contemporary church often appears as good news only for the privileged, the economically well off, or the powerful. To all such persons Jesus seems to offer a comfortable existence here and the promise of heaven in the hereafter. More specifically, Jesus appears to be the paradigm for the wealthy, gifted and upwardly mobile. Evangelical life readily gives the impression that Jesus wants us respectable, successful and happy.<sup>377</sup>

The Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches need to give priority to ministering to the poor and alleviating suffering even as Jesus himself did. The blessing that God has given the churches was never meant to be hoarded but rather to be shared with others.

The second key element of holistic ministry is community building. One positive influence the church can have on its community is a sense of unconditional acceptance. A pleasant memory the dropouts had of church was the sense of community they felt when attending. It seemed like one big happy family. On the times that they have gone back, they have appreciated how the members have welcomed them. It is more important than ever that the church safeguard this important trait. Kinnaman has stated, "In an age of

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<sup>375</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 40

<sup>376</sup> Some possible opportunities for doing incarnational ministry in Southern Queens County are described in appendix 3.

<sup>377</sup> Grenz, *Theology for the Kingdom of God*, 373

family breakdown, there is a real opportunity for intergenerational mentorship.”<sup>378</sup> Young men will look for spiritual fathers among the older gentlemen in the congregation. They will look to them not just for advice but also as mentors.

The local congregations are also a visible part of the universal church. The scripture says the secular world will know believers are followers of Jesus by the way they treat each other. (John 13:35) These community churches are two families of people who have experienced reconciliation with God and in some cases each other. John Alexander has written:

We see church mostly as people hearing the word taught at worship services. We don't see churches as Jesus did, as reconciled families, which is therefore a compelling and attractive witness transforming the world not through jobs and locations but through unity.<sup>379</sup>

Believers are examples of family members who have learned how to love each other by overlooking wrong rather than retaliating and even loving people they do not like very much. As the church develops a reputation for being this type of family, people from the community whose only experience is a dysfunctional family unit will want to join. For the first time in their lives some will find a group of people who will love them unconditionally.

As part of this commitment, the churches should also be willing to care for hurting, broken families and fractured relationships. Peace and reconciliation are at the heart of the Christian faith and at the heart of integral mission.<sup>380</sup> Consideration should be given to how the churches can best help a fractured community. Perhaps seminars can be offered to help individuals, couples and families function using healthy patterns. As a

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<sup>378</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, kindle location 345

<sup>379</sup> John Alexander, *Being Church: Reflections On How to Live as the People of God*, ed. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Eugene, OR: Wipfand Stock Pub, 2012), Kindle location 80

<sup>380</sup> Smith, ed. *Wordeed: An Integral Mission Primer*, 88



starting point, these two communities of faith must deal peaceably with one another if they are to help others to live in peace. A commitment to accentuate each other's strengths and overlook the weaknesses will promote this type of harmony.

Inspiring worship is the third key element. Passionate followers of Jesus usually are the Christians with the strongest sense of mission. This lesson was emphasised for the ministry of these two churches as they used the Natural Church Development material. The lowest of their quality characteristics were "Passionate Spirituality" and "Need-Oriented Evangelism." When it was recommended by then Regional Minister, Rev. Wayne Fevens that the churches develop these areas simultaneously they perceived a direct correlation between the two. Christian Swartz in *Color Your World with Natural Church Development* also taught this principle.<sup>381</sup> As the members became more passionate about their faith, their willingness to engage in missions and evangelism increased.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, the church should continually help members to daily practise the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, and reflection.

In addition to private adoration, the church must re-examine its public worship services. First, it should look at its weekly schedule. Out of respect for the day Jesus was raised from the dead, churches have scheduled their worship service on Sunday. (Acts 20:7) The 11:00 a.m. time slot was probably chosen for the convenience of farmers who needed the time to do their chores before attending worship. The church has often made people feel guilty for not attending on this day and during this time slot. This form of motivation needs to be rethought to move from exclusion to accommodation. Southern Queens County has a long history of shift workers labouring in the paper mill on Sundays

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<sup>381</sup> Christian Schwarz, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2005), 92

<sup>382</sup> Smith, ed. *Wordeed: An Integral Mission Primer*, 87

and therefore being unable to go to church. Even with the mill closed, there are many people whose work schedule keeps them from attending. Added to their number are those who cannot attend because they are involved in recreational activity on Sunday mornings. It would appear, because of these reasons, that the church should have more corporate worship options.

Multimedia presentations and the internet could also be better utilized in church worship services. In contemporary culture, technology is seen as a right not an option. Stephen McMullin discovered that technology is a part of a young adult's life experience and must not be neglected by congregations that wish to attract and keep them.<sup>383</sup> He goes on to say that the inability and/or unwillingness of congregations to embrace and utilize the computer and the internet in congregational life will almost certainly prevent them from reaching young married adults and their children.<sup>384</sup>

The churches need to be open to use Easy Worship or PowerPoint in worship. Such things as videos, pictures and cartoons can illustrate the message. The screen could also display scripture, music lyrics, prayers and calls to worship. Congregations can use email to send reminders of special services, announcing sermon titles and worship features. Worship services could easily be streamed on the church's website. As technology expands, so should the church's use of it in order to help each individual have a more meaningful worship experience. The challenge will be to find someone within the congregation with the expertise to use technology for kingdom purposes. Perhaps one of the existing staff positions could be expanded to include this responsibility in the initial

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<sup>383</sup> McMullin, "*Social Aspects of Religious Decline*", 289

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 289

stages. Once the younger more technologically savvy dropouts begin attending they can be encouraged to become involved in this ministry.

Interactive preaching and teaching is the fourth key element of integral mission. The churches, and pastor, need to think long and hard about the way messages are delivered and how feedback is received each Sunday. The research data clearly stated that people are not interested in listening to a lecture delivered with a dogmatic tone. They do not want to be told what they have to believe even though Christianity has absolutes. To be effective, teaching must be more discussion based. The churches should experiment with the best ways of doing this within their context. One way is for the preacher to engage the congregation in topics that are of concern to them. They are not interested in hearing an exposition of scripture that does not touch some area of their life. One of the dropouts, Kevin, told of a church that he occasionally attended. “The church in \_\_\_\_\_, it’s like he’s {the pastor] talking just about human sensibility and things, how to deal with life. It’s like philosophy hour and he references the Bible. Yeah, I always, almost always take so much away when I listen to him talk.” If people are going to keep attending, the churches must raise the right questions and provide meaningful answers relative to the times and culture,

In spite of the effort to be relevant, the content of the messages must not be watered down in an effort to reach the dropouts. They are looking for substance. Millennials want their faith to be serious, not entertaining. This generation is profoundly entertained from every angle. A Focus on the Family study discovered that young people

want substance from their faith. Young people are looking for assurance and truth rather than stimulation and theatrics. Truth trumps trappings.<sup>385</sup> Preaching must be real.

The church also can be creative in encouraging feedback. In most instances, a talk back session will not work in a culture where people are increasingly becoming uncomfortable with talking face-to-face. Nor are they likely to return tear-off tabs from the bulletin with their comments. However, some are comfortable making comments on twitter using hash tags. They are willing to use instant messaging or leave a status or comment on Facebook. It is possible that they could even be persuaded to go in a chat room and discuss the message. All of these methods should be encouraged so that the dropouts realize that their opinions are important. There are still many, however, for whom technology does not play a huge part in their life. For these, traditional means of communication could still be utilized.

Again it should be emphasized that the content of the teaching needs to include messages on the nature of mission. It will take time for the existing membership to catch the broader vision. The newer converts will need to be taught from the beginning the importance of missional living. The message needs to be that repentance is much more than a private affair between the individual and God. It is the complete reorientation of life in the world in response to the work of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>386</sup> The dropouts, as they return, will need to hear messages on integral mission to be reminded that the church really has changed its ministry to reflect a larger role in the community that involves goods works.

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<sup>385</sup> Hess and Stanton, *Millennial Faith Participation and Retention*, 6

<sup>386</sup> Rene Padilla in Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: a Theology for the Whole Gospel*, kindle location 1719

The fifth key element of holistic mission is evangelism. Throughout this thesis, evangelism has been portrayed as a necessary part of an intertwined gospel. There may be a temptation for the church to deemphasise evangelism now that it turns its attention to developing the other half of the mandate. This lure must be avoided. The trap of sharing a social gospel that is only interested in improving a person's living conditions falls short of the Bible's good news. Social ministry may alter people's circumstances, but unless there is inner change, the root problems will manifest themselves in other forms.<sup>387</sup> The members of the congregation will need to be regularly reminded that they have a responsibility to share the gospel message itself with their family, friends and neighbours. Just because the church grows more conscious of its responsibility to implement the reign of Jesus does not absolve them of their responsibility to be a witness to the gospel. In a healthy church, these two go hand in hand. Training courses in witnessing can be taught regularly. People's stories shared in the worship services help attendees see it is not just paid clergy who can publically share their faith. The pastor can train members who have an aptitude for evangelism through formal instruction followed by role modelling. Next, the disciple could do actual fieldwork where the individual observes the pastor witnessing to others and eventually progresses to the point where he or she is comfortable doing the same. Pastoral encouragement is essential. As it is so unnatural to share your faith, members will easily neglect to do so unless they are regularly challenged to continue.

The other extreme to be avoided is for the two churches to practice a confrontation style of evangelism. Ron Sider reports, "A recent survey found that 44 percent of non-Christian adults who have had an evangelistic encounter with evangelicals came away

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<sup>387</sup> Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), kindle location 589

with a negative impression!<sup>388</sup> Kinnaman’s study reached the same conclusion, “Outsiders generally do not get the impression that Christians have good intentions when it comes to trying to convert them. Most people outside the church whom he surveyed rejected the idea that Christians showed genuine interest in them as individuals.”<sup>389</sup>

Rather than dogmatically repeating a canned message of salvation to a stranger, faith, almost always, should be part of a conversation between friends. This was the principle that Bill Hybels taught in his book, *Walk Across the Room*. Christians need to be willing to leave their comfortable circle and walk into the zone of the unknown and extend the hand of friendship.<sup>390</sup> Even “Evangelism Explosion” has retooled its diagnostic questions so that four sessions are spent on learning how to meaningfully connect with those outside the faith.<sup>391</sup>

This type of friendship is often developed in the context of intentionally meeting the observable needs of others. The evangelistic slogan needs to be changed from “Find a Need, Meet a Need, and Share the Gospel” to “Find a Need, Meet a Need, Make a Friend, Share the Gospel.” The members will need to learn to make this a way of life. Evidence for the importance of developing friendships with those outside of the church is illustrated by the fact that many of the dropouts said that they did not have one friend who was a believer. To facilitate this, the people involved in witnessing need an opportunity to share with and pray for one another.

In addition to the friendship evangelism carried out by the individual members the church, as an organization, will need to discover unique gospel pathways of influence

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<sup>388</sup> Sider, Olson, and Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference*, kindle location, 1153

<sup>389</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 68

<sup>390</sup> Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith*, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kobo edition, p.28

<sup>391</sup> Various Authors, *Xee - Sharing Your Faith Starts Here – Facilitator’s Handbook and DVD*. Fort (Lauderdale, FL: Evangelism Explosion International, 2008), 7

into the local community.<sup>392</sup> Intentional need-oriented ministry will involve demographic research and the development of new programs. Each church needs to find its ministry niche and work in that area. The members who work in these programs will develop friendships with the recipients of ministry and in the context of these relationships will talk about their faith. Sider agrees with this principle when he says, “Beyond simply distributing goods or services, holistic social ministries also create opportunities for Christians to build relationships with those who are served.”<sup>393</sup>

The sixth key element of integral mission is advocacy and policy engagement. It is not enough for the two churches just to minister to the poor and hurting. Attention also needs to be focused on the structures that are causing the situation. Ron Sider writes these words that are very applicable to South Queens County after the paper mill closure,

If my family dynamics are unhealthy, if all the good jobs have left my community, if my ethnic group is discriminated against, if my nation is facing a moral crisis—then my life will not be all that God intended, regardless of my individual prosperity or spiritual peace<sup>394</sup>

Christians can work behind the scenes encouraging new businesses, which pay a livable wage, to move into the area so that people can have the type of employment they need to raise families in our area. They can support businesses by buying in the local area. They can also work with authorities to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the area. Believers should not only donate items to the food bank but work to change whatever structural evil causes this reliance.

There will be times when elected officials will need to be encouraged to right a wrong through legislation. Sider writes:

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<sup>392</sup> Rev. Wayne Fevens, at a Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches Regional Seminar, first introduced this idea to me.

<sup>393</sup> Sider, Olson, and Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference*, kindle location, 626

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, kindle location, 857

Christians help shape the cultural norms in society first by their common life, then by their ideas, writings, and artistic productions. Popular books, movies, music, and art that convey Christian values create a cultural climate where good political decisions are possible. But there are also other more direct ways to do that [affect public policy]. Five are especially important: occasional official church pronouncements; educating the public on specific political issues; lobbying elected officials; promoting the election of specific candidates; and running for political office.<sup>395</sup>

Even though influencing public policy is difficult, these two congregations must learn not to shy away from it. They can articulate their views on ethnic cleansing in Syria, the Palestinian crisis, or problems even closer to home, such as unsafe work practices.

The seventh key element is health and wellness. Even health issues can be addressed in positive ways by the church. There are now over 100 million overweight people in the world, with consequently diminished lifestyles, increased health problems and shortened lives.<sup>396</sup> Within the province of Nova Scotia, the Department of Health and Wellness has tackled this problem. A list of their programs can be found on their website.<sup>397</sup> However, the churches have been silent. Obviously, part of the Province's incentive is to promote healthier lifestyles so that there is not as big a drain financially on the health care system from preventable illnesses. For Christians, motivation should be to look after our bodies because it brings God honour. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we should look after it through proper diet and exercise.

The churches should be leaders in promoting a healthy lifestyle and caring for people who experience health related issues. The congregations could start specific support groups that would minister to people dealing with a variety of issues including

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<sup>395</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Just Politics: a Guide for Christian Engagement*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), kindle location 4322

<sup>396</sup> Robert White, *Creation in Crisis - Christian Perspectives On Sustainability* (London, UK: The Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010), 1

<sup>397</sup> [http://novascotia.ca/dhw/provincial\\_programs.asp](http://novascotia.ca/dhw/provincial_programs.asp)



those battling cancer, going through divorce, or grieving the death of a loved one. A facilitator could be trained to lead each group and they could meet in one of the church buildings.<sup>398</sup> In addition, the church can focus on caring for the sick and elderly. A team of congregational care ministers from the congregations' membership could be trained to do home, hospital and nursing home visitation. A pastor or even a parish nurse could be brought on staff to oversee the training and the running of the program.<sup>399</sup>

Mental health issues are a huge concern in our society. Studies show that one in five people in Nova Scotia suffer with mental health issues.<sup>400</sup> Depression and anxiety are big problems in our society. Many congregations have developed church based counselling centers for the hurting.<sup>401</sup> People trained from a Christian perspective could provide the counselling.<sup>402</sup> Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches could look at cooperating with other congregations in South Queens in jointly supporting a fully licensed counsellor to run a clinic in this area.

Creation care is the last key element of holistic mission. In spite of the understanding of God being the creator, Christians do not have a very good track record when it comes to looking after the environment. This could have been developed from a faulty understanding of God's blessing. *Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

(Genesis 1:28, NKJV) There are some Christians who see in this story a biblical sanction for the unbridled exploitation of nature. The Hebrew words, translated "subdue" and

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<sup>398</sup> Karen Lampe, *The Caring Congregation*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2011), 24

<sup>399</sup> A program has been developed for the Liverpool Baptist Church. See the Appendix

<sup>400</sup> <http://www.mentalhealthns.ca/en/home/whatwedo/educationawareness/factsstats.aspx>

<sup>401</sup> Windsor United Baptist Church in Windsor, NS is an example.

<sup>402</sup> The liability issues need to be well researched, as churches can be held responsible when someone gave wrong advice.

“dominion”, do not teach this.<sup>403</sup> They teach that the church has delegated authority from God to be stewards of creation by making the earth fruitful.

The dropouts picked up on this and were amazed that the church would pick up garbage and look after the environment. These two congregations have an excellent opportunity to be active in caring for creation by promoting sustainable transformation. The church could initiate programs that both educate and address some of the great ecological evils of today. These include greenhouse gas emissions produced by the western world, the unprecedented increase of the global population, the unequal distribution of wealth that allows twenty-five percent of the world to control eighty-six percent of the wealth, inadequate access to water that affects over one billion people, and unsustainable agricultural practices.<sup>404</sup> Not only should the churches address global issues, they need to address how the local community contributes to these global issues. From this flows the issue of sustainability. Overconsumption in the West has depleted the resources and produced an inequitable distribution of goods and services.

The dropouts understand the importance of caring for creation. The churches could learn from them, even letting them lead in the development of this area of ministry.

Kevin relayed this story:

I made a T-shirt protesting the Shark Tournament saying basically it is genocide, like shark genocide and it was a little bit of a joke but I think it is true because a lot to them are blue sharks and no one eats them, you know. They did research supposedly but they all go in a dumpster. Nothing happens to them – not the blue shark. I feel like I have done my moral duties at that time in my life.

It is possible that the young adults have an awareness of environmental needs to which traditional churchgoers have grown blind.

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<sup>403</sup> Robert White, *Creation in Crisis*, 96

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-6

## **Conclusion**

The Brooklyn and Liverpool Baptist Churches have been attracting new people to their congregations. The growth has been the result of transfers and conversion. Very little has happened as a result of biological growth. It was postulated that the dropouts walked away because the mission of their church did not resonate deeply with them. The results of the human subject research proved that this was not the case. Children who were raised in the church and who stopped attending during their middle teenage years did so because of rebellion rather than a well-reasoned decision. They did indicate, however, that they would consider returning to church if it began to practice a more holistic mission in their local community.

Their perception revealed a weakness in the ministries of the two churches. Parents have not been inspired to intentionally develop their child's faith while they lived at home. The church itself also could have improved their discipleship ministry to better augment the parent's efforts. Further, the congregations will need to be led to discover a vision, change the culture of their church and implement a new plan for holistic mission in their community. If they are able to do these things then future generations of teenagers may not fall away from church and the present dropouts may choose to reengage.

## CHAPTER 6

### **A THREE-YEAR HOLISTIC MISSION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND TIMELINE FOR THE LIVERPOOL AND BROOKLYN BAPTIST CHURCHES<sup>405</sup>**

Changing the culture of a church is not an easy task. To move a congregation to a holistic understanding of ministry and to have it own the new concept takes both prayer and time. With that in mind, a plan and possible timeline are necessary. Like most plans involving people, especially people in a church, they must be flexible as to time and concept because too rapid a change can result in no change at all. An additional factor is that each of the churches has its own culture and issues and so they may progress at different rates. With that in mind, the following plan and timeline will need to be open to change.

#### **Create a Broader Vision (Timeline: 3-6 Months)**

The challenge is for the church to be a place that prepares parents to take more intentional ownership of the development of their child's faith seeking to stimulate that faith to a level of maturity that can withstand the rigours of rebellion. Further, the challenge is for the church not only to prepare people for eternity but also to implement

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<sup>405</sup> Three books that I found valuable in putting together this plan were: Bobb Biehl, *Masterplanning*. (Ventura, CA: Ayleen Publishing, 2005), Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: a New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), Jim Mellado, Alan Nelson, and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church (Without Killing It)* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008)

God's Kingdom now. Even though the research has identified these three areas of weakness, very little will change unless the membership catches a vision of how ministry could be done rather than accepting the status quo of how ministry is currently conducted.

As an initial step, the pastor will approach the deacons with the need to create a new vision and to dream about the congregations being agents for change in their communities and to ask them to join him in prayer for a month.

Following that period, in an effort to stimulate the rest of the congregation to think about the need of a new vision, the pastor will plan a series of Sunday messages that will center on the biblical theme of holistic mission with the final two being the great commission and the great commandment. Each of these messages will be reinforced in the small group ministry. Thought-provoking questions that grow out of the message would be prepared and given to the small group leaders. This would encourage interaction within the group giving each member an opportunity to contribute to the vision formation. These messages could introduce the concept of holistic ministry with each one demonstrating some aspect of holistic ministry without articulating a narrow vision.

After this interaction, the congregation will be led in a period of concerted prayer. The members will be encouraged to ask God to provide the vision. A variety of formats could be used to seek Divine guidance. The membership could be called to a week of prayer (and fasting for those who are so inclined). Each day they will ask God to show them how He would like His mission accomplished in Liverpool and Brooklyn. The churches could come together for a concert of prayer. Following this, members will be

asked to gather in groups of two or three where they ask God to give them a clear picture of the vision.

Next, the congregations would be asked to come together and share what they believe God has been impressing upon them. A spirit of openness is necessary so that people know all opinions are worthy of consideration at this sharing meeting. The members need to know that this meeting is not just procedural. Instead, it is their opportunity to define the vision. These will be town hall style meetings where a ministry specialist from outside the congregation facilitates discussion. The discussion will reinforce the pastor's credibility as a promoter of this new direction. Two of the areas that should be discussed are historical milestones and current practices.

The ultimate aim is to create a new vision with the input of the two congregations. By following this method, the membership is more likely to take ownership of it.<sup>406</sup> Following the instructional preaching, concerted prayer and the town hall meetings, four means will be used to further the discussion and to bring the vision into clearer focus. The first is holding a consultation with the church boards. At these meetings, a vision for holistic mission will be explored and discussed with the deacons from each church. They will be asked some key questions about the present ministry and what they would like the church to look like in five years. We will begin by examining things we are doing well and then explore what needs to change to have an effective holistic ministry. The pastor will then present the core of the research for the thesis. Hopefully a tentative working

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<sup>406</sup> In this leadership model the pastor and deacons resist the temptation to form the vision themselves and simply inform the congregation. Success of implementing a new vision is conditional upon the congregations taking ownership of it. The more people who understand and accept the concepts the greater the possibility is of the changes being permanent.

outline of a vision will emerge. Imparting the vision is a critical stage because without their support the effort will fail.

The second step is to identify other key leaders in the church and have them participate in the vision drawing. With the pastor as facilitator, they will meet with the leadership, receive the same information and be asked similar questions about vision and ministry as the boards. These will be individuals who are respected by the congregation and have influence over others. If they take ownership of the vision to minister to both physical and spiritual needs then they will persuade others. A good place to begin is with those who feel passionately about missions already.

Fourth, a field trip to other churches that have an effective integral ministry for a discovery day can be an effective means of enabling others to catch the vision.<sup>407</sup>

Another option would be to take a group on a short-term mission trip to another country and see how integral ministry is done in another context.<sup>408</sup> People will catch the vision faster if they see first hand other churches that are effectively conducting this ministry. The members can interview the pastor and the other church members in order to learn what they are doing. Then when they return home they may want to see something similar in their own congregation.

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<sup>407</sup> Highfield Baptist Church in Moncton, NB has effective integral mission programs such as ESL classes for immigrants, Clothing Giveaways, Monthly Meals, Caring Hands ministry to shut-ins. <http://www.highfieldbaptist.com/home/index.php/highfield/CommunityServices/>

Grace Memorial Baptist Church, Fredericton, NB also has effective programs that utilize small group ministry. These include: Divorce Care, GriefShare, Single and Parenting, International Students and a conversational English class. <http://www.grace.nb.ca/ministries/>

<sup>408</sup> The Kairos Foundation has a Retreat Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina where you can go on a short-term mission trip that combines study in their education center with field trips to see a Church effectively minister holistically. <http://www.kairos.org.ar>

### **Create a Culture for Change (Timeline: 3-6 Months)**

Even though the invitation for involvement has gone out to the entire membership of both churches, in all probability it will only have been the committed core that have been active in seeking the broadening of the vision. Once the vision has become crystallized in the minds of this group, it is time to move on and share it with the rest of the membership in the two congregations. The goal at this stage is for more members to take ownership of it. Care should be taken to allow enough time for the maximum number of members possible to be involved. Changing the way the congregations do mission will involve changing the culture of the church. The more who give their input and adopt the vision the greater the possibility for success.

One of the better strategies for the necessary persuasion is to create an opportunity where members can persuade other members. Persuasion is far more effective among peers than when directed by the pastor alone. The members do not have to be scholars or public speakers to be involved in this process. All they need is to be willing to share their story of what God has shown them in the last three months during the vision-casting period. The more stories and more voices telling those stories the further the message will spread among their peers in the membership.

Remembering and sharing church milestones can also be an effective approach for changing the existing church culture. At a specially planned meeting the membership is encouraged to take a look at their history and celebrate their successes in reaching out to the community and in the spiritual development their children have received both at home and as a result of church programming. By affirming what is already being done, the leadership may win over doubters in the congregation.



In addition to these sharing meetings, opportunity should be given to people in the congregation who are already involved in holistic mission to share what they are doing. Also, parents, Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be given the opportunity to share the joy they experience when their child or someone else's matures in their faith. People will hear their story and catch the vision from their peers. Hearing that one of their friends is involved will make it seem more realistic for them to get involved. These do not have to be major success stories. The thrill of being used by God to build a house for a poor family, to serve at the local food bank, etc. will be what convinces others to be involved.

Another avenue for reinforcing the message is through education. The congregations will also be asked to read books and articles or watch videos on holistic mission and discipleship in the home or in the church. These will not be books that are heavy on theory and theology but ones where people share their own stories. For example, the Canadian Baptist Ministries publication *Wordeed* would be used. Members could meet in small groups for discussion after reading each section. Videos on such themes as the plight of the Palestinians, domestic violence, the dangers of slum dwellings, the struggle of single-parent mothers, all from a first-person perspective can also be powerful tools of persuasion. Other resources that deal with discipleship would also be utilized.

In worship services the pastor should continue to periodically speak about holistic mission and discipleship. He has already spoken on the great commission and Commandment but now should develop the theme from other passages.<sup>409</sup> Continual exposure is necessary to reinforce an alternative understanding of the church's mandate.

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<sup>409</sup> These could be some of the passages discussed in Chapter 3.

These messages need to contain stories of the blessings and benefits people have received both as the beneficiaries and the benefactors. These personal testimonies are powerful tools, for not only should the results from this research be shared but also the ideas God has given to the members in their prayerful reflection and earlier discussions should be presented. At this stage, it is important the congregation realize that the vision is God-given and not just from the pastor. The messages should include stories of people who are currently living missionally and the impact they are making for the kingdom of God. To reinforce the message other guest speakers could be brought in on special occasions to speak on the same topic. As well, advantage should be taken of adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies as teaching opportunities.

#### **Write a Mission Statement** (Timeline: 1 Month)

At this point the pastor and a group of church leaders representing a cross section of the congregations should formulate a mission statement. The desire for the church to exercise a holistic missions mandate needs to be expressed in one easy to remember sentence. This sentence will be included on all church publications such as bulletins, newsletters and yearbooks. For example: Our mission is to live missionally at home, at church and in the community.

#### **Articulate Objectives** (Timeline: 1 Month)

The three areas of ministry weakness identified in the research will be individually targeted in the ministry plan. In an effort to keep future teens from dropping out and to bring back into the fellowship those who have been in self-imposed exile the new

ministry objectives for the church will be: encourage faith development within the nuclear family, stimulate intentional discipleship ministry within the congregation and develop holistic ministry opportunities within the local community.

### **Communication** (Timeline: 3 Months)

Now it is time to enlist more help in the development of a ministry plan. Up to this point it has just been the pastor and deacons who have taken leadership. Now an Implementation Task Force needs to be formed. Some of the best people to serve on this will be chosen from the group of visionaries who have been praying for the new direction for the two church's ministry. These people will be responsible for developing the strategy and actions plans. They will be the ones responsible for presenting the finished plans to the church for formal approval and seeing that they are implemented.

As well as the Mission Statement, the three ministry objectives need to be clearly and continually communicated to the congregation.<sup>410</sup> They need to be regularly given the opportunity to give input into the plans while they are being formulated. The more people who feel they contributed to the plan the greater its chance of being implemented. This will also keep the congregation from thinking the vision was nothing more than a passing fad. The need of having a plan to fulfil the vision should be brought before the people regularly.

At this stage the dropouts should be contacted for input. They have expressed a willingness to come back into fellowship if changes were made to the outreach ministry. They wanted to worship in a church that was meeting visible needs in the community

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<sup>410</sup> It may be that as the congregations reflect on how integral ministry in their community that God will expand their vision and give them more objectives.

along side its ministry of evangelism. They should be asked for their opinion as to what this should look like. If possible they should even help plan some new initiatives.

The churches should not feel that they have to do everything by themselves. Their budgets simply will not allow for it. Other agencies should be consulted to see if members could simply join in a project that is already underway. Examples of this are Habitat for Humanity builds, community recreation programs for teenagers, cooking and parenting classes for young mothers. Other churches in South Queens County also have effective programs that could be promoted such as the Men's Wellness Program, Alcoholic or Narcotic Anonymous, and after school programs.

### **Develop the Strategy (Timeline: 6 Months)**

One of the first decisions the implementation task force will need to make is whether to tackle these all at once or to stagger their implementation. In order to explain how the process will work just one area will be used as an example. The church has already identified the necessity in South Queens for a cancer support group. It will be used as a model of how the church can develop a strategy to meet a need in the community and in the process minister holistically. This same strategy can be applied to the two objectives.

Five questions will need to be answered in order to develop the strategy. The first is, "Who are we trying to reach?" will settle the issue of the target group. The support group will minister to cancer patients, survivors and then families who reside in South Queens County, Nova Scotia. With so many cases of cancer being diagnosed there is a real need for the group in this region. The group will be reached through word of mouth

and advertising through church bulletins, pamphlets in Doctor's offices, bulletin boards, community radio, Facebook, as well as local and online newspapers.

“What are we attempting to do for them?” is the second question. The answer to this question will help formulate the action plan that is outlined in the next section. The group for those whose life has been touched by cancer will seek to provide different kinds of support for individuals and their families. The support will come in three forms. First, emotional and prayer support, when requested, will be offered at the monthly meetings. Second, provincial programs that offer practical support, such as financial aid and home care support will be explained when desired. Third, practical support, such as drives to appointments will be offered when needed.

The third question is, “Who will do this for them?” The answer to this question will lead the task force to discover what personnel will be needed to complete the plan. Two trained facilitators will lead the group. In addition, a team of four volunteers will look after the sundry details such as snacks and beverages, room setup, advertising and keeping a roster of attendees. It may be that a couple of drivers are needed to transport people to the meetings.

“Where will it take place?” is the fourth question. The answer will help settle the issue of location. The Liverpool Baptist Church has offered its vestry to house the program. It is accessible, being on the same level as the street. The kitchen is near for refreshments. The washroom facilities are adequate. There is an unused filing cabinet there to keep materials so they do not have to be transported each week. It is in a central location in Liverpool. For all of these reasons it will be a great site.

The fifth question is, “How much will it cost?” This answer to this financial question will help the task force settle on a budget. The cost of the program will be minimal. There will be a donation plate put out each week to cover the cost of refreshments. The church will absorb the building costs, heat and lights. A small budget of \$1000 will need to be raised to cover the costs of promotional materials, advertising and the training of the facilitators.

### **Action Plan** (Timeline: 18 Months)

The starting point of the action plan will be to formulate goals. The goals will function as an ordered step, each of which must be taken before the next can be traversed. These will be divided into three categories: short-range, middle-range and long-range. Actual deadlines for each goal should be set. In order to accomplish this the task force will have to determine their priorities. The goals will need to be measurable so that everyone will know when they are reached or completed.

The long-range goals are to be completed within a six-month time frame. Contact the Canadian Cancer Society to see what support they will offer. Write up job descriptions for all volunteer positions. Visit other support groups and talk to other facilitators to gather information. Arrange to talk to a chaplain from a cancer ward at a Halifax hospital. Conduct some research into cancer causes, treatments and types of support needed and report findings back to the task force that all of these responsibilities have been completed.

The middle-range goals are completed within a three-month time frame. The task force will know they are completed when the following items have been finalized.

Recruit and train all volunteers and facilitators. Book a facility. Write up the advertising. Print brochures. Information about this ministry should be added to the church's website or a new website could be built to give people even greater access. Put together a method to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Develop the Annual Cancer Survivor Service. Arrange for the booking of special speakers for each month.

The short-range goals are completed within a one-month time frame. The task force will know the goals are complete when the facilitator reports that the following items have been finalized. Send out the advertising promoting the group, location and start date. The facilitator will report back to the task when all these tasks are completed. The group is now ready to hold its first meeting.

The final part of the action plan is to tackle any barriers that could block the road to completing the plan. These fall into two general categories, people and problems. There may be people who either disagree with the new program or the new direction. Others will stand against it simply because they do not understand the reasoning behind the new initiatives. Time and patience needs to be taken to try and win both groups over to the idea. Other problems that might need to be solved are practical in nature. For example, volunteers might need to be replaced, the budget might not be large enough or the facilities might not be adequate.

### **Celebration**

The victories, even the small ones, should be celebrated as goals are reached. This could be done in a variety of ways such as an act of worship or a special fellowship event. These periodic celebrations will give energy to continuing the new direction. When the

group is formed the church can celebrate the birth of a new missional program.

Periodically, individuals from the group might want to share their testimony during a worship service to share how the group has benefitted them. Annually the church will want to host a service for cancer survivors to celebrate life.

### **Evaluation (Timeline: 1 Month)**

It is important to measure the success of the new direction. Adaptations and changes can be made to areas of weakness and positions of strength can be capitalized as a new phase of ministry is entered after three years. An outside consultant could be brought in to do a formal ministry review. The cancer support group will be evaluated annually to see if there is an ongoing need and to discover if there are ways in which it could be more effective.

### **Conclusion**

Teenagers are walking away from the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches during a period of rebellion. Their reasons for doing so are not well thought out. But, their reason for staying away is well reasoned. From their perspective, the church does not effectively demonstrate the gospel through acts of kindness within their community. The church needs to consider the dropouts opinions. If correct, the church will need to broaden its vision, alter its culture and minister socially and evangelistically to the local population. In three years, the churches could look vastly different. The dropouts may return to a church that has begun to practice a holistic mission.



## CONCLUSION

There are many exciting things happening in the ministry of the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches. They are experiencing both conversion and transfer growth. The fact that the churches are growing in a community where other churches have plateaued or are in decline is amazing, as is the fact that the churches are growing numerically in a county that demographically is shrinking.

Yet, in the midst of this good news is the alarming fact that the churches are not hanging on to their youth. This needed to be addressed if the churches were to be obedient to God's mandate to practice holistic mission. The research to address this problem sought to test the hypothesis that the unwillingness of the churches to practice mission integrally is both the reason they left the church as teenagers and the reason for their present reluctance to reunite. However, the proposition proved to be only partially accurate.

The dropouts' departure had nothing to do with holistic mission. The children, when going through a period of adolescent rebellion, dropped out of church. The proposition proved to be correct when the research revealed that the underlying reason they have not returned to church was because, from their perspective, the church was not effectively demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel to the local community.

The research data has shown that if the congregations are going to reverse this trend, they will need to broaden their vision. A new dream will lead to a change in the culture of the two congregations. Parents will need to become more intentional in the spiritual nurture of their children in the home. The congregations will need to build a stronger spiritual foundation into the lives of their youth with greater intentionality. The congregations should be trained to live holistic, missional lives from childhood by being involved in activities where they either evangelize or minister to social needs or preferably do both.

If the churches follow the plan as outlined in chapter six, there will be a much greater possibility of attendees experiencing a personal faith that makes a difference in the world now, where Christ's reign is being implemented as well as preparing them for eternity. It will also increase the likelihood that they will keep their faith throughout their teenage years and into adulthood. For those who do drop out, it enhances the possibility they will return to a church that is making a difference in society.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research focused specifically on those in the Liverpool and Brooklyn Baptist Churches who, as teenagers, dropped out of church and chose not to reengage as adults. There are some adult children of church members who dropped out during the turbulent teenage years but have come back to church and attend regularly. Interviews could be conducted with these adults to see why they decided to reconnect with one of the churches when their peers have decided not to participate. If the lack of holistic ministry kept their peers from returning, why did it not bother them?

The investigation could be expanded to other congregations. The interview questions could also be asked of adults who meet the same criteria. This would help to show whether these two churches were an anomaly or if they fit a pattern that is consistent in others. Perhaps a failure to practice holistic mission is a widespread problem in churches and is responsible, at least in part, for their failure to retain their youth.

Future study could also be done in churches that have an effective holistic mission program. Are they more effective at hanging on to their teenagers or drawing their non-participating adults, who grew up in the church, back into fellowship? The data from the two studies could be compared to provide more conclusive results. Perhaps there are other factors that were involved in their re-engagement. Once researched, the data could

be compared to these two churches in Southern Queens County and used to strengthen their ministry.

Instead of accepting the fact that adolescents will stop attending during the turbulent teenage years, churches could expand their ministry to effectively focus specifically on youth. Interviewing them would provide the necessary data for program development. Questions could be asked that explore the role of youth ministry, peer pressure, parental influence and understanding of holistic mission. Answers to these questions would give a clearer picture of what the church needs to do to change this trend.

Christian nurture in the home could be another area of study. The home life of those who came back to church could be compared to those who did not. It may be that there are practices that need to be part of the family routine in order to create a home environment that is more conducive to child and adolescent spiritual growth. It could be that family devotions, family mission trips, and intergenerational ministry all play a larger part in faith development than is currently recognized.

The dropouts commented that they often found it confusing when their parents were not on the same page spiritually with each other. It could be that this has a negative impact on their spiritual development. This may have been a real problem for sons as they grew up witnessing fathers who were not as engaged in their faith or in the church as their mothers. The unintentional message could have been that faith is not a vital part of life. Study could be expanded to see if this notion is correct.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Pre-Interview Screening Questions**

These qualifying questions will be used to determine if interviewee meets the criteria of the research.

Q. Are you between the ages of 18-59?

Q. Did you attend church regularly, three or more times a month, as a child and/or teen? If so, which one?

Q. Would you call your parents committed Christians during your childhood/teen years?

Q. Has your church attendance declined significantly or have you stopped since becoming an adult?



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Interview Questions**

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am trying to discover the reasons people give for choosing to live their life apart from the church even after being brought to church as a child and as a teenager.

The interview will be broken into four parts. The first section will ask you some personal information. In the second section, I will focus on your spiritual experiences in your childhood and teenage years. In the third, I will ask about your spiritual experiences as an adult. In the final section I will ask you to rate some comments that others have made about the church.

#### **Part A – Introductory Information**

##### **Personal Data**

Q. What is your age bracket?

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

Q. What is your gender?

Q. What is your marital status?

#### **Part B – Religious Experiences in Childhood/Teenage Years**

In this section I will ask you questions about your spiritual experiences in your childhood and teenage years. Remembering details from these years may take some work. Please answer using your best recollection.

##### **Spiritual Experiences as a Child/Teen**

Q. What can you tell me about your faith in God or Christian belief as a young child and as a teen? Do you have any memories of experiencing God during this time, for example; answered prayers, miracles or healings, etc?

Q. Some people use the word “Conversion” to speak of an encounter with God, a kind of sudden spiritual awakening. Did you ever feel like you experienced something like this? If yes, please describe it. Other people speak of their encounter with God as a gradual awakening. If this more closely describes your experience, please explain it.

Q. Tell me about your own private religious practices as a child and then as a teen. Did you do personal prayers, private Bible reading or devotional readings? What specifically did you do? How old were you when you did this?

Q. Did any childhood or youth experiences solidify your faith or did anything shake your faith, cause you to lose it, or almost lose it? If yes, please describe.

Q. Even in the most basic form, did you have a sense of personal responsibility for social justice, evangelism or social action? How was this lived out? For example, did you invite friends to church events, help out at a food bank, paint a widows house, take-up for a child who was bullied?

### **Spiritual Experiences within a Family Unit**

Q. Which of the following words best describes your parents' approach to their faith? Why?

1. Fundamental
2. Conservative
3. Evangelical
4. Liberal

Q. Was Christianity a topic of conversation in the home during your childhood and teenage years? Did you talk about things you learned at church? Did you pray together, read the Bible together or practice family worship at home?

Q. How involved in church were your family members:

- Mother
- Father
- Siblings

Q. Did your family members practice spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible reading, fasting?

- Mother
- Father
- Siblings

Q. Did you have aunts and uncles, grandparents or other extended family members that encouraged your spiritual development in your child and youth years?

Q. Were your parents consistent Christian role models? What impression did this make upon you?

Q. Did you witness your parents being involved in personal evangelism, e.g. telling those outside the church about their faith, inviting them to church, etc?

Q. Did you witness your parents modeling social responsibility, e.g., helping the poor, petitioning for justice for all?

Q. Did you witness your parents showing environmental concern and care, e.g. picking up garbage, planting trees, conserving electricity, car-pooling, etc.

### **Relationships**

Q. Did your closest friends go to church or were they involved in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Christian Camping, Youth Group, etc.?? If yes, did they attend the same as you or another?

Q. Did your closest friends consistently practice their faith? Did they have private religious practices?

Q. How did your closest friends encourage growth in your faith or discourage the same?

Q. Were there any other adults that encouraged your spiritual development growing up?

Q. Did you witness your friends or other adults being involved in personal evangelism, e.g. telling those outside the church about their faith, inviting them to church, etc?

Q. Did you witness your friends or other adults modeling social responsibility, e.g., helping the poor, petitioning justice for all?

Q. Did you witness your friends or other adults showing environmental concern and care, e.g. picking up garbage, planting trees, saving electricity, car pooling, etc.

### **Formal Education**

Q. What is the highest level of education you received?

1. High School
2. Trade School
3. Community College
4. University
5. Graduate Studies

Q. What type of education institution did you attend (home school, public, private, Christian)?

Q. Can you describe how your education impacted your faith either positively or negatively? How did the exposure to new ideas in class affect your faith?

Q. Were you known as a Christian at school: In childhood or teen years? How was this for you?

Q. Were you involved in any Christian organizations during university (IVCF, Campus Crusade, Navigators, etc.)?

Q. Did you ever witness to others about your faith at school? If so, describe some of the details of the conversations.

Q. Did you ever talk about such topics as environmental care, social responsibility and justice from a Christian perspective? If so, describe some of the details of the conversations.

### **Involvement in Church**

Questions to help me know the depth of your church involvement as a child/teenager.

Q. Which church did you attend for the greatest length of time during your childhood and teenage years? What do you remember about it?

Q. Did your parents dedicate you to God as an infant/young child?

Q. Tell me about your church participation, first as a child and then as a teen. How old were you when you attended church for the first time? How often did you go to church? Were there ups and downs in the frequency of your participation? If yes, please explain further.

Q. Did you grow up going to Sunday School, boys or girls club, or youth group?

Q. Where you baptized as a believer? Describe.

Q. Looking back on your church experience as a child and youth, would you describe yourself as more of a spectator or a participant? Explain.

Q. Did you attend Long Lake Camp (or another Christian Camp), go on short-term mission trips, teach Sunday School or participate in any other church events such as VBS, church choirs or drama?

Q. Looking back on it now, was there anything about your church participation as a child or teen that really meant a lot to you? That makes you glad it was a part of your past? If yes, tell me about it. Or, looking back on it now, are there any things about your church participation as a child or youth that you wish were not part of your past? If yes, tell me about it.

Q. Did your church have a strong sense of mission? Describe how they carried out their responsibilities in the areas of evangelism, social action, environmental care and justice.

The next part of the survey deals with your spiritual understanding at the present time.

## **Part C – Religious Experiences as an Adult**

This section will explore your current understanding of personal faith, the circumstances that lead you to stop attending and the reasons that led you to make this decision.

### **Personal Spiritual Experiences**

Q. What does being a Christian mean to you? Do you consider yourself to still be a Christian? If not, what circumstances led you to no longer consider yourself a Christian?

Q. Do you think a person could not be involved in church and still be a Christian?

Q. In isolation from church, do you continue to practice spiritual disciplines? If so, please explain which ones.

Q. Who do you turn to for answers to spiritual questions?

Q. If you wanted to feel close to God what would you do? Is there a place you like to go, a book you like to read, a person you like to talk to, etc.

Q. Was there ever a time in your post-education years when your faith decreased significantly? If so, explain.

Q. If you have walked completely away from your faith, what were the circumstances?

### **Family Involvement in Church**

Q. Describe your spouse's religious background? Did he or she have a large impact on your decision not to attend? If so, please explain.

Q. If you have children, were/are they involved in church events, such as Sunday School, Vacation Bible School or a Christian camp? Why did you put them in these programs? Did you drop them off, take them or did another family member take them.

Q. If your parents are still living, do they attend church? Do your siblings still attend church? Do you have any other extended family members who attend? Does this have any affect on the closeness of your relationship with them?

### **Relationships**

Q. Tell me about the religiosity of your closest friends. Are many Christians? Is faith a factor when choosing friends?

Q. Do any of your close friends regularly attend church? If so, what is the depth of their involvement? What affect, if any, does this have on your friendship?

Q. Have you ever had a friend or family member talk to you about your lack of involvement in church? If so, give an example. Was it a positive or negative conversation?

Q. Do you have spiritual conversations with your friends and family members? If so, give an example. Is it a positive or negative conversation?

Q. Have you ever asked a friend to pray for you during a time of need? If so, describe.

Q. Think back to some of your closest friends at church during the time you were involved in church. Do you have contact with any of them now? Why or why not?

### **Personal Involvement of the Church**

Q. How old were you when you stopped regularly attending church?

Q. Was the decision a result of a gradual decrease in attendance that reached inactivity or was it a result of a conscience decision? Please, explain.

Q. Even though you do not attend regularly, is there ever a time during the year when you might attend, for example, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, etc.?

Q. Have you ever been divorced? Did this have any effect on your church involvement? If so, please explain.

Q. Some have said that life is so busy that there is no time for church activity. If this is true for you, what types of activities keep you away from church?

Q. Others have said that they have stopped attending church because of life transitions, such as moving to a new location, death of a loved one, new peer group, divorce, etc. Has this been the case with you?

Q. Lifestyle issues have led people to stop attending church. Their personal choices are not in agreement with the church's teaching. If this was part of the reason that led to your decision, please explain further.

Q. Dissatisfaction with the church's position on key issues has caused people to stop attending church. These would include: Abortion, Divorce, Homosexuality, etc. Has dissatisfaction regarding an issue played a part in your decision to leave the church? If so, please explain.

Q. Personal Conflict in the church has led some people to stop attending. Would you explain the circumstances, if this were the case with you?

Q. Some people leave because they disagree with the church's political stance on an issue. If this was part of the reason that led to your decision, please explain further.

Q. Is there anything you miss about church now that you are not involved? Is there anything you are glad you are rid of?

Q. Some people think that Websites, internet chat rooms and other forms of social media will one day replace the local community church. What are your thoughts on this?

### **Current Theological Beliefs**

Q. Tell me about your thoughts on the Bible as a holy book that teaches us about God.

Q. Who do you understand God to be?

Q. What is sin and how does it affect each of us?

Q. Who do you understand Jesus to be?

Q. Christians claim "Forgiveness of sin comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Has your understanding and commitment to these Christian beliefs changed since your childhood and teenage years?

Q. Churches teach that faith in Jesus is the only way to have a relationship with God. What do you think about the exclusivity of Christianity?

Q. Briefly describe your understanding of Heaven, Hell and Life after Death?

Q. Do you rely on the internet as a main source for theological understanding? If so, which sites do you visit.

### **Current Understanding of the Church's Mission**

Q. Do you think the church continues to play a vital role in society? Why or why not?

Q. If yes, what do think this role should be?

Q. Describe what you believe to be the mission of the church?

Q. Should the church be involved in personal evangelism, e.g. telling those outside the church about their faith, inviting them to church, etc? Please explain your answer.

Q. Should the church be involved in discipleship, that is, teaching people more about their faith and how to more consistently practice it? Please explain your answer.

Q. Should the church be socially responsible, e.g., helping the poor, petitioning for justice for all? Please explain your answer.

Q. Should the church show environmental concern and care, e.g. picking up garbage, planting trees, conserving electricity, car-pooling, etc? Please explain your answer.

#### **Part 4 - Present Understanding of Reason for Church's Existence**

In this section I will ask your opinion on comments that others have made about the church and their reasons for inactivity. Please grade your agreement or disagreement with these responses by using this scale: 1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree.

#### **A Critical Analysis of the Church**

The following are criticisms of the church that people have given in other literature as reasons for their lack of involvement.

- The church fails to adequately care for the poor
- The church does not place a high priority on caring for the environment
- The church does not practice gender equality
- The church has supported Racism
- The church is too involved in politics
- The church is not fulfilling its mandate to serve the world
- The church is judgmental and negative
- The church is homophobic and sexually repressive
- The church is too evangelistic often manipulating decisions
- I oppose all organized religion
- The church is full of fundamentalists that are hard to be around
- Church members lack a distinctive lifestyle and are often hypocritical
- The sermons are not relevant to my life

#### **The Role of the Church in Contemporary Society**

Many people question whether or not the church has a role in contemporary society. Please rate the following statements.

- A moral framework can be developed without the church
- Physical attendance at worship is no longer necessary
- The church is irrelevant and unnecessary
- Increasingly, scientific advancement is making faith unnecessary
- Truth is personal; the church is not needed to be its custodian
- My life is full without the church
- I do not need the church to help with my identity formation



- I can have a fulfilling life even if I do not follow the church's teaching
- I do not need to go to church to believe in its message

### **Practical Reasons for Inactivity**

Research in other locations has revealed that there are practical reasons that keep people from attending church. Please rate the following on the part they played in your decision not to be involved in church as an adult.

- The church does not meet my needs
- Church involvement doesn't fit in my schedule
- Church is not worth the effort
- The stuff of life distracts people from church
- The church just wants me for my money
- Family considerations lead people from church
- The church is unfriendly
- The music is awful
- The preaching is poor
- The church offended me
- I was forced to go as a child
- I don't like the dress code
- Worship services are boring

Q. Did any of the following play a role in you dropping out of church? Yes or No.

- I simply wanted a break from church
- I went to college and stopped attending
- My work responsibilities prevented me from attending
- I moved too far from church to continue attending
- I became too busy, though still wanted to attend
- I didn't feel connected to the people in the church
- I chose to spend more time with friends outside of church
- I was only going to church to please others

Q. Can you see a time in the future when you might return to church? Why or why not?

Q. Are there any changes the church could make that would cause you to reconsider your involvement?

Other comments or suggestions

## APPENDIX 3

### Possible Opportunities for Holistic Ministry

The launching of a holistic missions program begins with casting a new vision. The church must learn that its mandate is broader than evangelizing its neighbourhood and financially supporting missionaries who serve in other countries. Evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable. This will involve education including Sunday sermons, small group Bible studies, and more concentrated seminars dedicated to the topic. All of which must be undergirded with prayer.

The gospel is the good news about the kingdom of God. Good works, on the other hand, are the signs of the kingdom. This may present a challenge to catch the vision of holistic ministry because the social gospel has traditionally been a hallmark of liberal churches. There is widespread belief that the church's mandate is to save souls not to save the planet. This will be a major obstacle to overcome. However, this barrier is not insurmountable. Church ministries centered on holistic mission that combine education, action and evaluation can refocus a church's efforts in the right direction.

The work churches have done in short-term mission trips to other countries must be re-examined. Although these are started with the best intentions, they often contribute to the problem of poverty rather than solve it. For instance, the distribution of bags of rice in another country might alleviate some of their present suffering but it could also build a spirit of dependence. Instead, when short-term trips are taken, they could take on an education flavour. Organizations like the Karios Centre in Argentina offer opportunities to learn in the classroom and then to take trips into the local community to see effective missional efforts being conducted. When the church returns from the trip, members will

need to sit down and evaluate the way they have participated and see what they can do to improve the church's future ministry.

The fight against poverty also needs to be addressed. Members need to learn that there is a more effective way for us to care for the world's poor. Many of the church members have adopted a child through World Vision or Compassion Canada. The church also helps globally by supporting relief and development through Canadian Baptist Ministries' The Sharing Way. This is a step in the right direction but more can be accomplished. A far better way of helping would be to support micro enterprise.<sup>411</sup> Members could investigate if it is possible for loans to be given to help local residents start a small business, which would enable them to support themselves. Also, ways of assisting in the sales of their product could be investigated. After the loans have been repaid, the members can meet to discuss their impressions on how they were able to help others in developing countries. By sharing their story others will want to invest as well.

Another way to help is by looking at the poor who live in our community to see if we are helping them grow out of a system that breeds dependency. The learning process for the church can begin by a dialogue with some of those in need. Instead of approaching them as ones who have all the answers, we need to sit down and listen to them express their feelings on the matter. How do they believe they can break the cycle of dependency? Church members need to come to the understanding that the local food bank is a short-term answer not a long-term solution. Perhaps a local solution can be discovered, acted upon, and evaluated.

The church must also take a stand for world peace. The church can watch a film about the conflict in a country such as Iraq or Uganda. As an alternative it could watch a

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<sup>411</sup> Both World Vision and the Sharing Way have such programs in developing countries.

documentary on Syria or Afghanistan. Discussion questions could grow out of the movie. Another alternative would be to invite a speaker to come and talk about the danger of nuclear weapons and current hopes for a non-proliferation treaty. The church could then have a discussion about how Christians should respond to violent conflict. The following action steps could be taken: a peace vigil could be organized downtown, the Canadian soldiers who died in Afghanistan could be remembered in a service, and our Member of Parliament, Gerald Keddy, could be invited to meet with the church to discuss the Canadian Government's position on the arms trade. After these steps are taken the church's steps could be evaluated to see if anything changed.

Justice is another issue the church could tackle. Most of the church is ignorant to what is really happening on the ground in the Holy Land. Palestinians are having their land expropriated without compensation while the world (and church) stands by and says little. The congregation needs to be shown what is happening and what they can do about it. Messages on the justice referencing the Palestinians should be spoken during Sunday worship services.

Videos, movies, and documentaries could be shown and discussed in small groups. Bulletin inserts and newsletters could be used to keep the members updated on current happenings. Peace activists could be invited to share their experiences of the Israeli/Palestine conflict. Members could be asked to act by making this a priority in their prayer lists. A fact-finding trip to the Holy Land could be organized so that the people could see firsthand what is happening. The church could build a link with a church or school in Palestine. After these efforts were finished an evaluation process must be conducted to see if any progress was being made.

The church could develop pathways of influence within our own community. Already we have identified the needs of single parents who are marginally employed and survive on subsistence income. Often they work shifts when daycare is not available and even if it was they would not be able to afford it. Now that the focus group understands the issue the entire church family needs to be given an opportunity to learn of the single parents' plight. A plan should to be developed in conjunction with the local day care, children's services, local politicians and members of the church. In a collaborative effort an afterhours daycare program could be developed that would be heavily subsidized making it affordable for single parents. After the program is running for a year it should be evaluated to see if it is meeting the needs for which it was developed.

The congregation also needs to be regularly reminded that they have a responsibility to share the gospel message itself with their family, friends and neighbours. Just because the church grows more conscious of its responsibility to implement the reign of Jesus does not absolve them of their responsibility to be a witness to the gospel. In a healthy church these two go hand in hand. Training courses in personal evangelism need to be taught regularly. Stories need be shared in the worship services so that the members hear it is not just paid clergy who do the work of an evangelist. Members can be mentored one on one by the pastor who could take them with him while he is sharing his faith. Follow-up is crucial since it is so unnatural to share your faith, members will easily neglect to do so unless they are regularly challenged to continue.

The church also needs to be aware of the environmental disaster that is occurring in our generation. The earth can no longer support our lifestyles. Fresh water systems are being destroyed, the rain forest is being cut down, the oceans are being polluted, and

animals are going extinct while Christians remain silent. The education process can begin by watching the movie: “An Inconvenient Truth” followed by a discussion period. Sermons could highlight that the word “subdue” as used Genesis 1.28 (KJV) does not give us a right to rape the planet but instead summons us to be stewards over it. This means that we have the responsibility to rule over it justly. The membership could be moved to action by getting involved in a local tree-planting session and they could be encouraged to plant gardens. A bike or walk to church Sunday could be planned. An environmental audit of the church building could be conducted. For lent the membership could go on an eco-fast. After we have done a couple of these, members will be encouraged to gather and reflect on their efforts to protect our planet.

A final area that could be studied is the whole phenomena of multinational corporations and the transnational class. They promote the idea that the free—unregulated—market, left to itself, will establish an order of justice and peace. In practical terms this means that as long as the company’s shares in the stock market are increasing in value, then everyone is happy. What this really means is the CEO gets a huge yearly bonus and those who can afford to buy stocks have their wealth increased. If a product can be made cheaper somewhere else, then production costs can be lowered and profits increased. Behind the scenes deals are made with politicians to allow corporations to move to whatever country can provide the greatest incentive plan, the cheapest land and the lowest tax rate. Ignored is the plight of the working class, both those in the location where people are losing their jobs and those who will be pushed off their land to make room for the mechanized factories.

Very little education needs to be done with the churches on this topic. They have just experienced this as the local mill shut down, laying off workers here while the business is shifted to another location. The question is what can be done about it. This rally must be challenged at a political level similar to the way that it has begun to change in South American countries. Letters of protest could be written to company officials. Politicians could be invited to sit down with church leaders and discuss this issue. Even as radical as it sounds public protests could be planned so that the media could bring attention on this issue. Government could be pressured to pass laws that place restrictions on the movement and expansion of these companies. After these efforts are attempted the church members could meet to discuss how successful they have been.