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# Strengthening Intergenerational Bonds Through the Practice of Learning and Mission at First Baptist Church Valdese, NC

Joshua Lail  
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STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL BONDS THROUGH THE PRACTICE  
OF LEARNING AND MISSION AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH VALDESE, NC

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE:  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
JOSHUA M. LAIL  
APRIL 2020

APPROVAL FORM

JOSHUA M. LAIL

STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL BONDS THROUGH THE PRACTICE  
OF LEARNING AND MISSION AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH VALDESE, NC

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Sandra, Alan, Debbie, Aaron, and Katherine gave me hope and resolve throughout the process. We are a ministry team, without which this project would have been impossible.

It is to my family that I owe the most thanks. To my daughter, Caroline: thank you for the purity of your love for me and the way you gave me true joy throughout my long hours of work. To my wife, Crystal: I cannot express in words how much your faithful support means to me. I am thankful that you are a partner to me in life and in ministry. You are love and grace personified. I am eternally grateful for your encouragement in seasons of doubt, your kindness in times of frustration, and your willingness to share the burden when balancing school, family, and ministry seemed overwhelming. You are a true blessing from God.

Lastly, I thank God for giving me more opportunities than I deserve to serve in His name. May this project be an offering to Him in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

## ABSTRACT

An education program was designed to encourage intergenerational unity among a mixed group of youth and adults at First Baptist Church in Valdese, NC. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the program on the intergenerational experimental group. There was movement toward intergenerational unity from the pre-test to post-test in the experimental group. Insights were learned from the data, particularly that there were different rates of growth between the youth and adults, and the observation that participants may have liked the *idea* of working together more than actually working together. The younger participants showed more growth in both intergenerational unity and perceptions of their own standing within the congregation.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Ministry Problem**

Generational divides are ever present in society. Local congregations are not immune to this problem. Decades of program ministry that divided generations into specific groups, though well-intentioned, has created a wide chasm between generations in the American church, particularly since World War II.<sup>1</sup> The divide has deeper roots, though, and can even be traced back to the Reformation and the advent of public schooling. Reformers advocated literacy and schooling. This schooling was done outside of the home in age-groups, a model that was later adopted by the church for spiritual formation.<sup>2</sup> These gulfs have been further widened by the advent of social media, which has transformed the way its users, primarily younger people, communicate.<sup>3</sup> This has led to the consequence of generational churches, congregations that are made up predominantly of people at one end or the other of the adult age spectrum.

Unity is elusive in many contexts in contemporary life; and this is no less true in the church than it is in the rest of the world. Collective identity, of any sort, has devolved into infinitesimally small special interest groups in arenas from politics to religion. Amid

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<sup>1</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> Allan G. Harkness, "Intergenerational Christian Education: An Imperative for Effective Christian Education in Local Churches," *Journal of Christian Education* 42, no. 2 (1998): 37-50.

<sup>3</sup> Kara Powell et al, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 228-9.

this ever-present division one is tempted to ask the question, “Is there any hope for a unified Christian community?” Indeed, there is. Christian groups need not agree on preferred worship style, they need not use the same liturgy, or be of the same generation to live in harmonious Christian community. Nor must all members agree on every jot and tittle of theology, soteriology, eschatology, or ecclesiology to be unified by their collective identity in the statement “Jesus is Lord!”<sup>4</sup>

The modern church, both local and universal, would benefit from rediscovering unity and interconnectedness as a lifestyle, focusing more on what unites than divides us, and showing a unified witness to those outside of the Christian fold. Unity cannot remain relegated to the domain of hopeful ideologues; it must become an integral part of Christian identity so that those outside the church may see a unified Christian witness as evidence of the presence of God.

Furthermore, aside from corporate worship, there is very little interaction between generations in the modern American church. Ministry often exists in segregated silos in many areas of the local church, but this is especially true concerning different age groups.<sup>5</sup> Sunday school, Bible studies, and mission trips are almost always segregated by age, leaving little room for intergenerational interaction. Therefore, the church needs intentionally formed intergenerational activities.

First Baptist Valdese is no exception to this. Until recently in the history of the church, there had been little thought of carving out times that allowed people of various

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<sup>4</sup> The statement “Jesus is Lord” is the briefest Christian creedal confession found in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:3, Romans 1: 3-4; 10:9-13, Philippians 2:11).

<sup>5</sup> Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 30-1.

generations to learn, serve, and grow together. Therefore, a ministry that demolishes silo mentality and encourages cooperation under the banner “Jesus is Lord” is a necessity for the future of the local church, both in Valdese and in churches anywhere built upon the generationally segregated program model.

### **Personal Rationale for this Project**

Howard was seen as a curmudgeon of a man to most. To me, he was a hero and a mentor. He lived next to my grandparents when I was growing up. He had been a carpenter, a mechanic, and a farmer in his long life. By the time I came along, he spent most of his days in a woodshop in front of his house. When I was able, I would go watch him work. He never minded that I played with scrap blocks destined to be fuel for the woodstove that heated the shop in the winter. He never minded that I asked lots of questions. He took time to teach me. He took time to answer my questions. When I started college, he would perpetually ask me what I was learning, encourage me to stick with it, and answer my questions when I needed to fix my truck. Without realizing it, I had formed an intergenerational friendship. To this day, I count it as one of the best friendships I have ever had in my life.

I have spent a lot of time with older people in the fifteen years of my ministry career. They are the backbone of many congregations. I have learned important and indispensable life lessons from them. Their experience can often give insight and wisdom to situations that seem dire at the time. However, many feel pushed out of church decision making as they age. On the other hand, I have served in student ministry for much of my career. I have learned that students often feel as though their voices are

underappreciated and their contributions are looked at with skepticism, even when there is wisdom and truth in their words. Middle-aged adults feel trapped in the middle, not old enough to see themselves as a source of wisdom, but knowing they are not children anymore.

There are many benefits to encouraging these groups to learn and serve together in the local church. Too often staff are the only hub through which these spokes connect, which I've seen lead to perpetual generational isolation throughout my career. Therefore, my personal interest in this project stems from a deep desire to see an interconnected web of beneficial relationships that make the church stronger.

### **Project Setting**

Valdese is a town of about 4,500 people in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina in Burke County. The town looks like any number of small towns in this region, but its history is unique. Valdese was founded in 1893 by a group of Waldenses, a French-dialect speaking, pre-Reformation, persecuted Christian sect from the Cottian Alps in northwestern Italy.<sup>6</sup> Waldensian history and heritage run deep in the town. Many residents are direct descendants of the founding families. The label "Waldensian" is a label that is carried with pride in the town. Until 1941, worship

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<sup>6</sup> The Waldenses were founded by Peter Valdo in the 1170s in Lyon, France. They endured various persecutions as heretics for almost 700 years until 1848 when they were granted full civil rights by Charles Albert of Sardinia. Groups of Waldensians came to North America and founded communities in New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Utah, and North Carolina. An artistic interpretation of the history of the Waldensians and their settlement in western North Carolina runs as an outdoor theater production in Valdese each summer called *From This Day Forward*. Other tourism related sites in Valdese are also tied to the history of the movement including an outdoor museum called The Waldensian Trail of Faith and an indoor museum called the Waldensian Heritage Museum. The Current pastor of Waldensian Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Kevin Frederick, has taken a special interest in the history of the sect and has recently published a book on the subject. Kevin E. Frederick, *With Their Backs Against the Mountains: 850 Years of Waldensian Witness* (North Charleston, SC: Create Space Publishing, 2018).



services were still offered in the French dialect common to the founding group at Waldensian Presbyterian Church, the original church in town. For many years, the Waldensian church was the only church in town. There was also a much talked about, but unwritten, rule that once people attained a certain managerial level in their industry, particularly if that industry was Waldensian owned, that their church membership must move to Waldensian Presbyterian. This rule, though now outdated, did influence the socioeconomic makeup of First Baptist Church. Unlike many “First Baptist” churches in small towns, First Baptist Valdese was historically made up of blue-collar and grey-collar workers, rather than a high percentage of upper-management white-collar workers from locally owned industries.

Valdese was once a thriving textile town. However, the largest textile mills drastically scaled back operations in the mid-1990s, and many closed their doors in the late 90s and early 2000s. This led to high unemployment in the area for over a decade. New industry has come to town in the last five years, but the manufacturing sector is but a shell of its former self. In the last two decades, Valdese has also shifted to a bedroom community for the larger towns of Hickory and Morganton, both easily accessible via Interstate 40, and both having seen new economic investment that has spurred larger growth.

The most recent US Census Bureau information reports that those who self-identify as “white” comprise 93.4% of all residents in the town. The largest non-white demographic is the group that self-identified as “Hispanic” in 2010. This identification

comprises just over 4% of the total population.<sup>7</sup> The town limits are relatively small, however, and there are many non-annexed rural areas close by. Burke County has a poverty rate of 16.6% and a median household income of \$40,854.<sup>8</sup> The percentage of people with at least a bachelor's degree is 16%<sup>9</sup>

First Baptist Valdese was founded in 1920, when the town was only twenty-seven years old. It was birthed out of an ecumenical Sunday school program that taught both Methodists and Baptists. The church maintains strong ecumenical ties to this day, including an annual Easter sunrise service with First United Methodist, as an homage to their common roots. First Baptist also maintains ties with the local ecumenical ministerial association. Through this organization, First Baptist joins other churches in the community for combined worship services and service projects.

The current physical plant of First Baptist is the second building in the history of the congregation, built in 1965. It is a building that can accommodate 350 people comfortably, in both worship spaces and classrooms. Currently, average attendance in Sunday morning worship at First Baptist is around 120, with approximately 200 active members. There are currently three full-time staff and three part-time staff employed by the church. The church employs a full-time minister, a full-time secretary, a full-time building superintendent, a part-time musician, a part-time worship leader, and a part-time youth worker. Until 2018, there had always been at least two full-time ministers on staff

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<sup>7</sup> "Valdese, NC," American Fact Finder, accessed April 4, 2019, [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk).

<sup>8</sup> "Burke County, NC," United States Census Bureau, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/burkecountynorthcarolina>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

for the past thirty years. The church is currently in a time of financial and personnel restructuring and has no immediate plans to hire a second full-time minister.

There is a history of intergenerational ministry at First Baptist. In 2016, the church began experimenting with a ministry called “Passage,” an intergenerational mentoring ministry. Passage partners each participating high school student with an adult mentor. Passage has made progress in bridging the generational divide that plagues many churches like First Baptist and has borne fruit in individual intergenerational relationships. Passage, however, is a point-to-point connection model, rather than an interconnected web. This project sought to test the effectiveness of an intentionally intergenerational *group* where the lines were blurred from the beginning.

### **Resource and Literature Review**

A myriad of resources were used to complete this project. The idea of forming intergenerational small groups comes from a deep-held conviction that there is a continued and vibrant call throughout scripture for unity in the community of God. Therefore, much was drawn from the canon of the Old and New Testaments and related commentaries, both ancient and modern. Biblical texts that address learning in community were mined and contextually applied to this project, both in its rationale and its concrete teaching lessons.

Willing participants from First Baptist Church in Valdese were the greatest need. This project also needed approval by the Youth and Children’s Ministry Team at First Baptist, as all ministries that involve youth and/or children are under the umbrella of this team. However, all teaching and coordination for the project was done by me. The

church did not incur any financial needs for this project, as it fit within the existing parameters for our “youth ministry,” “discipleship training,” and “local missions” line items in the church budget.

Much debt is owed to Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross for their book *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*, as their work was one of the first book-length academic works about intergenerational ministry. The Fuller Youth Institute has also built a very useful framework in their Sticky Faith tools for ministry. The most widely used relevant resource published by the institute is *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* by Kara Powell and Chap Clark. However, since the publication of that book in 2011, the Fuller Youth Institute has built an entire framework of both digital and print content centered around the concept of spiritual formation in Christian youth. One of their more recent publications that also provided invaluable data for this project was *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love your Church*. Though not explicitly a resource focused on intergenerational ministry, *Growing Young* provided helpful data concerning trends in church activity among fifteen to twenty-nine-year-olds. Insight was also gleaned from past Doctor of Ministry projects at Gardner-Webb. Of particular interest was Bruce Caldwell’s 2014 project titled “A Training Program for the Mentoring Ministry at Spencer Baptist Church in Spindale, NC.”

Some of the more pragmatic and theologically sturdy resources that focus on intergenerational ministry came from Christian denominational work on the subject. The Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in America, and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod have all published, or made digitally available, resources that provide insight for local congregations to strengthen intergenerational ministry (See Bibliography). Most of these resources were written for laity. Therefore, their insights are approachable and readable to those who are not trained in theology or social science.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project took place over five weeks in November and December 2019. The dates for the project sessions were November 10<sup>th</sup>, November 17<sup>th</sup>, November 24<sup>th</sup>, December 1<sup>st</sup>, and December 7<sup>th</sup>. The experimental group met each Sunday evening from 4:00pm to 5:00pm for four consecutive Sundays in a classroom at First Baptist Valdese (see pages 21-2 for class schedule). Those sessions functioned as the teaching sessions for the project, with each session focusing on a different aspect of intergenerational unity (see pages 23-32 for lesson plan). The final meeting was a group mission project that lasted over three hours on the Saturday following the final classroom session.

The experimental group was made up of ten participants. There were five students, ranging in age from thirteen to eighteen years old, and five adults, ranging from twenty-eight to seventy-five years old. The experimental group was present for all four of the Sunday afternoon sessions, and the fifth mission project session.

The control group was made up of those who returned the pre and post-tests that were made available to the worshipping congregation of First Baptist Valdese on the Sunday morning of the experimental group's first meeting (November 10<sup>th</sup>) and the Sunday morning after the experimental group's mission project (December 8<sup>th</sup>).

In conjunction with the material that was taught to the experimental group, the Sunday morning sermons (See Appendix A) preached at First Baptist Valdese throughout the project focused on the broader theme of Christian unity, rather than the more focused theme of intergenerational unity with the experimental group. The sermon texts, though,

were different than the texts that were taught to the experimental group on Sunday afternoons. Along with sermon texts that focused on unity, the entire worship service for these four Sundays had an overarching theme of unity. The orders of worship included unity themed music, scriptures, and people from all generations in church life participating in leadership (See Appendix D).

### **Project Goals**

The overarching goal of this project was to strengthen intergenerational bonds between teenagers and adults in the congregation of First Baptist Valdese beyond their current level through both an understanding of Christian unity and engagement in a kinesthetic mission activity. Assessment of perceptions was measured by comparing the current perceived and real intergenerational connections before and after the project, using both Likert scale instruments and journals kept by participants throughout the project.

Each session's learning outcomes were as follows. The first session focused on Jesus' redefinition of family. Participants articulated a definition of family that went beyond nuclear family. They also collectively produced a Family Covenant that identified a redefinition of family. In session two, participants, individually and collectively, defined "mutual submission" in light of John 17 and the Pauline corpus, particularly Galatians 3:26-29 and the household codes in Ephesians 5 and 6. The third session led the participants to examine their perceived level of authority, then delved into biblical texts (Joel 2 and Peter's interpretation of Joel 2 in Acts 2) to discern the value of the intergenerational prophetic witness. Sessions four and five engaged participants in a

demonstration of communal witness as a call to Christ through a group mission and service project in the community. The hope was that the group, and outsiders, would see the unified work of an intergenerational team with a common purpose.

### **Project Calendar**

The following calendar provides the overarching schedule for the ministry project that took place between November 10<sup>th</sup> and December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

- I. During the month of October, I asked five students 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and five adults, over the age of 25, to participate in this small group experience. I selected these participants from regular attendees at First Baptist Valdese. I also began planning the fifth session of the project, a community mission project, that took place on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019
- II. This project took place during November and December of 2019 over the course of five weeks. Each of the first four sessions was one hour in length, beginning at 4:00pm and ending at 5:00pm on four consecutive Sunday evenings. The final meeting of the group was a group mission project done in the community on the Saturday following the last teaching session.  
  
Accompanying the experimental group meetings that focused pointedly on intergenerational unity, a four-week sermon series was preached on Sunday mornings that focused on the larger theme of Christian unity (See Appendix A for accompanying sermons and Appendix D for orders of worship for each Sunday).
  - i. Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup>: Morning Sermon #1: Psalm 133



1. The Control Group took the Pre-Test before morning worship.
2. Evening Session #1: Redefinition of Family
  - a. The Experimental Group took the Pre-Test during Evening Session 1.
- ii. Sunday, November 17<sup>th</sup>: Morning Sermon #2: Colossians 3:12-17
  1. Evening Session #2: Mutual Submission
- iii. Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup>: Morning Sermon #3: 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 (with communion)
  1. Evening Session #3: The Value of a Multigenerational Prophetic Witness.
    - a. The Experimental Group took a pre-and-post-test focused only on the material covered in this session.
- iv. Sunday, December 1<sup>st</sup>: Morning Sermon #4: Ephesians 4:1-16
  1. The Control Group will take the post-test after morning worship.
  2. Evening Session #4: Communal Witness as a Call to Christ
- v. Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup>: Group Mission Project in the community (8:00am – 12:00 noon)
  1. The Experimental Group took the Post-Test at the conclusion of this session.

### **Experimental Group Session One: Redefinition of Family**

The first experimental group session took place on Sunday, November 10, 2019 at 4:00pm. Nine of the ten experimental group members were present, with one teenager having a prior commitment. After the group arrived, I greeted the participants and handed out the pre-tests for them to complete. I also gave them each a composition book that I told them would function as their journal for the duration of the project. Each participant wrote their age and gender on the inside of the journal so that they could be used later for qualitative analysis.

Once all the participants completed the pre-test, I officially welcomed them to the session and led the group in prayer. In the welcome, I thanked for their participation in a project that was part of my Doctor of Ministry program. I pledged to them my confidentiality with respect to any data collected and encouraged them to participate with honesty and respect for everyone in the group.

The first activity of the session was to examine the biblical text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 so that the group would see an example of the basic model of Jewish education, top-down education within one's family. Before the text was read, the participants were asked how they defined the word "family." The responses were recorded on the board for all to see. The participants were then asked to listen carefully to the text as it was read by the facilitator, paying special attention to what this text told the group about how education was done at the time of its writing. Participants were then asked about their understandings of the strengths and weaknesses in such an educational model. Members of the group then spoke up and those strengths and weaknesses were recorded on the white board.

Before transitioning to the gospel texts, I recapped the teaching point that education in ancient Jewish life was grounded in top-down teaching within the family unit, so that the group might see the upcoming contrast between the definition of family offered in the Deuteronomy text and the gospel texts that they would examine next.

From there, the session moved on to the gospel texts of Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 12:46-50, and Luke 8:19-21. These texts tell a similar story of Jesus redefining familial relationships. The group of ten was divided into three smaller groups, and each group was assigned a different gospel text. Each group included both adult and teenager representation. The groups were asked to examine their respective texts and come back to the larger group with a definition of “family” that arose from their study of the text.

After ten minutes for reading and group discussion, each group reported back to the larger group with a new definition of “family” based on their interaction with their assigned texts. The definitions were written on the board beside the scripture references. The larger group then collectively used these individual definitions to settle on a large-group-made definition of “family” that went beyond the nuclear family.

The group was then asked if the definition they had come up with was accurately reflected in the life of First Baptist Valdese. The purpose of this question was to spur thought and discussion among the group as to why or why not they believe what they believe concerning the familial identity of First Baptist.

The final learning activity of session one was for the group to articulate a Family Covenant among themselves that would provide guiding principles for their participation in the sessions going forward. I did not wish to influence this process, as I wanted their family covenant to arise organically from within the group. However, I did instruct the

group that the covenant must include the following: a statement concerning how disagreement within the group should be handled, a statement concerning the intergenerational nature of the group, and a statement that identifies each member as part of the family. The group was welcome to add anything else they deemed appropriate to the Family Covenant. As facilitator, I simply wrote down the things I was asked to write down by the group so that they might see them in writing before editing into a final covenant. Once the covenant was articulated and agreed upon by the group, I typed the covenant, immediately printed it, and asked all participants to sign their names affirming that they agreed to the terms of the covenant. Each participant also received a copy of the covenant with the signatures of all participants.

### **Experimental Group Session Two: Understanding Mutual Submission**

Session two took place on Sunday, November 17, 2019 at 4:00pm. All ten of the group participants were present. After an opening prayer, the participants were asked to write down a definition of the phrase “mutual submission,” as best as they currently understood the phrase, in their journal. Several participants shared these definitions with the group before the group moved on to examining biblical texts concerning submission.

The biblical texts for this session were the foot-washing story from John 13:1-17 and the Household Code from Ephesians 5:21-6:9, also informed by Galatians 3:26-29.

The learning activity for session two was for the participants to re-craft a definition of “mutual submission” after examining the story of submission by Jesus in John 13 and one of the New Testament household codes in Ephesians 5. As facilitator, I provided a brief contextual introduction for each of the biblical texts. For the John text, I

shared with the group that this story took place after Jesus turned water into wine, healed people, and raised someone from the dead. If one followed the trend of continual uphill progress, he or she might expect the final act of Jesus before his arrest and crucifixion to be even more miraculous. However, Jesus chose to serve his disciples in an act of submission before he went to the cross. For the Pauline texts, the group was taught about the structure of the book of Ephesians. The first half of the book is a theological treatise about how the Jews and Gentiles are brought together into one community under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The second half, where the household code comes from, was written as part of the practical instructions concerning how to live out unity in Christ. The group was also told that the Galatians text was written, if not by the same author, by someone who was part of the same school of thought as the author of Ephesians. I also mentioned that the scholarly consensus is that Galatians was written prior to Ephesians.

The large group was then broken into two smaller groups of five, each containing both teenagers and adults. One group examined the gospel passage, while the other examined the texts from the Pauline corpus. The small groups were instructed to study the material so that they could teach the content of their passage to the other group. The purpose of this was twofold. This forced participants to internalize the content. It also encouraged the groups to collaboratively, and creatively, present the material.

After the groups had twenty minutes to study their respective texts and formulate their teaching strategy, the two groups taught each other their respective texts and answered questions from one another.

The final task of session two was for the group to collectively re-define “mutual submission” as a term for how Christians relate to one another in the church considering

the biblical witness. Like the first session, the group was asked to work collaboratively to accomplish this task, and I served as the scribe for their endeavor.

### **Experimental Group Session Three: The Multi-Generational Prophetic Witness**

Session three took place on Sunday, November 24, 2019 at 4:00pm. All ten experimental group participants were present. This session was the only session that used a pre-and-post-test instrument to evaluate change from the beginning of the session to the end of the session (See Appendix C).

When members of the group arrived, they were handed the pre-test instrument. After completing the pre-test, I offered a brief introduction to the story of Pentecost in Acts 2. Before the introduction, I asked the group to share what they knew about the holiday of Pentecost, so that I could gauge their prior-knowledge and to allow them to take an active role in the instructional process. After their responses, I offered a brief overview. To place the story on a timeline that would provide some context, I told the group that this would have taken place roughly seven weeks after the crucifixion and resurrection. I shared with the group that Pentecost was not yet a Christian celebration at the time of this story in Acts 2, but rather a Jewish pilgrimage festival known as The Festival of Weeks that brought Jews from all over the diaspora to Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> I also reminded the group that the total size of the “church,” meaning the followers of the resurrected Christ, was only about 120 people according to Acts 1:15. I also provided the group a reminder of the character of Peter from the gospels, and included a brief synopsis of the threefold denial of Peter (Matthew 26:33-35, Mark. 14:29-31, Luke. 22:33-34,

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<sup>10</sup> James C. Vanderkam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 206.

John 13:36-38) and what is commonly referred to as the “reinstatement of Peter” in John 21:1-24.

I then read Acts 2:1-13. Afterward, the group of ten was broken into three smaller groups, each with intergenerational representation. The small groups were then asked to read and study Acts 2:14-21, the first part of Peter’s speech to the crowd. The groups were also asked to think about what the text might have to say about intergenerational cooperation and to discuss that in their respective groups for a few minutes after reading it aloud together. Once the groups spent time with the text, I shared that a portion of Peter’s address came from the Old Testament prophet Joel, and that Peter recalled a familiar scripture and applied it to the scene at hand. I then asked to hear what answer the groups came up with to the question, “What might this text have to do with intergenerational ministry?”

After allowing time for answers and recording responses on the white board, I re-read Acts 2:17-18. I focused on the word at the end of verse eighteen, *prophēteusousin*, and provided a lexicon definition of the word. In the New Testament, this word means “to expound scripture, to speak and preach under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> I then asked the group, “If this reading is accurate, how does it influence your thoughts on the teaching authority of your generation in the church?” I asked the group members to record their responses to that question in their journals, then I asked them to share openly as I wrote some of their responses on the white board.

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<sup>11</sup> H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 704.

With ten minutes left in our time, I distributed the post-tests, the same as the ones used at the beginning, and asked the group to complete them in light of the biblical witness and any other insights they had gained during session three.

#### **Experimental Group Session Four: Communal Witness as a Call to Christ**

Session four was held on Sunday, December 1, 2019 at 4:00pm. Eight of the ten group members were present, as one teenager and one adult were ill. This session was the only session that was used as intentional preparation for another activity, the group mission project that took place in session five. This session was meant to prepare the group to take what they had learned thus far in the project and apply it to a ministry project outside the walls of the church. The main biblical text for this session was John 17:20-23, the prayer of Jesus for all believers who would come after him.

The session began with a discussion of the term “witness” as it is used in our congregation. I asked the group the following questions: What does it mean? How do people use it in our congregation? Is it a term people use to talk about individuals or groups? I recorded the answers given by participants on the white board. I then shared definitions of the term from *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*. It can be defined as “one that gives evidence” or “one who has personal knowledge of something.”<sup>12</sup> I then asked the group to ponder the question, “If those definitions are true, to what evidence are we pointing with our individual and communal lives?”

I then gave background and contextual information on John 17, including its place within the gospel in the final scene before the arrest of Jesus and the fact that the text was

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<sup>12</sup> “Witness,” accessed August 5, 2019 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/witness>.



a prayer, not simply a piece of prose. After setting the text in context, I asked the group to read the text individually and silently. The purpose of this was to allow the text to speak to participants as individuals, so that they might grasp the call of the text toward unity. After they had reflected on the text individually, I called them back together so that they could share their insights with the group. The responses that were shared openly were recorded on the white board in the room.

The pointed question of this session was “What was the purpose of Jesus praying for unity for all those who will believe?” I asked this question of the group and then shared that one answer is clearly stated at the end of verse twenty-one - “...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” The group of eight then spent time in discussion with one another about what contemporary application this text had for First Baptist Valdese. I also asked the group to discuss the following question: “If generational divides are normal in society and in the church, can unity be a countercultural communal witness that calls others to Christ?”

In the final exercise in this session, I asked the participants to journal about their understanding of communal witness and its importance to showing those outside the church who we are when we are unified. I also asked the group to write one statement in their journals answering this question: “Reflecting on the material of the last four sessions, how does a church achieve unity so that they might have a better picture of the body of Christ?” I asked some participants to share their journaled words publicly in the group.

Prior to dismissal, I reminded the group of the date and time of session five. I revealed what the mission project would be, assisting an elderly non-church-member

couple with health issues clean leaves and other debris from their property. One of the teenagers prayed prior to dismissal.

### **Experimental Group Session Five: Community Mission Project**

Session five took place on Saturday, December 7, 2019 from 8:00am until 12:00 noon. Nine of the ten experimental group members were present, as one adult was sick and unable to participate. This functioned as the final meeting of the project. The mission project was planned and incorporated into this project after a deacon from our church made me aware, in mid-October, of an elderly couple in his neighborhood that would undoubtedly need assistance cleaning their property after the leaves fell in the fall. This opportunity fit very well into the goal of the project which was to have a unified communal witness to someone outside of our congregation. This couple had no previous relationship with the congregation of First Baptist in Valdese other than an acquaintance in their neighborhood.

The group gathered at 8:00am in the church fellowship hall for breakfast that had been purchased by me so that we might sit around a common table and discuss the goals of the mission project. I had met with the owners the week before and made a list of what they hoped might be accomplished. There were two learning outcomes for this session. The first was to allow the group to work collectively to achieve a common goal. The second was to finish the project to its specifications. I communicated to the team that both goals were important, but visible unity was necessary to accomplish the task in the spirit of the project. I shared with the group that our objectives as a team were to rake the leaves out of the yard, clean the gutters on the house, and clean out the flowerbeds in

the front yard. After we finished our meal together and prayed as a group, we traveled as a team to the jobsite in the church van pulling a tool trailer that is also owned by the church. Both the trailer and the van were marked clearly with the name of First Baptist Valdese.

We arrived at the jobsite and met the property owner on his carport. I asked him to share a little bit about himself with our group. After he did, the group members present introduced themselves. I communicated clearly to the owner that we are an intentionally intergenerational mission team from First Baptist in Valdese. After praying with the homeowners, we began work. The team of nine split into two smaller intergenerational teams of five and four. One worked in the front yard and the other worked in the back yard. The back-yard team finished before the other team, so the groups came together to finish up the project together.

Following completion of the project, we met again with the homeowner, and prayed with him before leaving to go back to the church. The van ride back to the church gave participants time to share about their experiences and insights gained throughout the project. When we arrived back at the church, the group was given the post-test and asked to complete it. All group members were given an additional week to keep their journals to write any insights they gained throughout the entire project. I asked them to record anything they thought relevant to the project and provide any feedback they deemed appropriate. The journals were collected over the next week, and their insights became part of the qualitative data for the project.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Unity is defined as “that quality which makes something an individual entity or whole.”<sup>13</sup> The biblical witness is clear regarding the call to unity. Across generations, genres, geographic locations, and cultural histories, there is a timeless call for unity among the people of God. This call for unity also extends to those who are brought into the community through their response to the message of God, regardless of their past, idiosyncrasies, continuing struggles, age, or place on their respective journey. All are united under the Lordship of Christ.

This unifying statement, “Jesus is Lord” caused tension in the Roman world of its origination, because if Jesus is Lord, the implication is that neither Caesar nor any of the myriad of other worshipped deities hold ultimate power over the church. The statement served as a binding agent for the ancient church, a collective confession that unified people from different social, racial, economic, and cultural backgrounds into one body. The statement dissolved socially accepted dividing lines and brought Christians together in ways that challenged the former identities of its members. Unity was not easy. The early church struggled with the tendency of humanity to cling to identities other than Christ, a struggle that continues in contemporary Christendom.

The biblical and theological rationale for building intergenerational small groups is a logical progression that develops throughout the entire canon of scripture. The intergenerational nuclear family was the foundational setting for spiritual growth in the

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<sup>13</sup> "unity, n." OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/view/Entry/214779?redirectedFrom=unity>.

Old Testament. There was a definite hierarchy in the Jewish family as well as the Jewish social and religious structure. However, even in the Old Testament, there is broad evidence that God chose influencers based on something other than natural status. In the New Testament, Jesus redefined family to mean all those who choose to follow the will of God. He also elevated those in low positions to higher positions. Paul built on this idea in his letters when he claimed that the old hierarchies and divisions were no longer the rule in the new kingdom. For this reason, there is much we can learn from each other when mixed together in intentional discipleship and mission groups where generations learn and serve intermingled with each other.

The rationale for this project followed the order of progression of biblical themes throughout the canon of scripture. This began with the redefinition of family, continued with mutual submission, moved on to the value of the prophetic witness, and ended with communal witness as a call to Christ.

### **The Family as a Tool for Unity and Spiritual Growth in Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

In preparation for Israel's journey into the Promised Land, the book of Deuteronomy records Moses gathering *all* the people of Israel to share with them the covenant terms between God and Israel (Deut. 5:1). It was significant that men, women, and children are gathered together for a time of religious instruction. In ancient Israelite life, the role of women was almost exclusively domestic. Genesis 24:38 and 46:31 use the Jewish phrase *bet av*, meaning "house of a father" to describe a family, a reference to patriarchal lineage being the bedrock of the family.<sup>14</sup> Israelite religious life was also

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<sup>14</sup> Anson Rainey, "Family (In the Bible)," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Vol 6, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 693.

patriarchal; all leadership was done by male priests who were responsible for all formal instruction concerning worship and piety.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, children were not held in high esteem when it came to religious and social practices in ancient Israel. Their role was to be submissive to the authority of their elders both inside, and outside, the home.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the gathering that is the context for Deuteronomy 6:4-9 was a pivotal moment of instruction in the history of Israel. Their forty-year journey from Egypt had almost ended, and the instructions given in this moment were foundational Judaism as it would be practiced in the Promised Land. Therefore, all Israelites, regardless of their age or social status, got to hear the message from God, conveyed through Moses, that day. The religious and social statuses of women and children did not immediately change that day, but it was a taste of the dissolution of hierarchy that would come later elsewhere in the biblical narrative.

The belief that there was only one God was an integral part of ancient Jewish identity. Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the *Shema*, explicitly states the Jewish position on monotheism that is integral to both Jewish and Christian faith. It has been memorized by Jews at a young age throughout history and is still a foundational religious text for observant Jews of all branches today.<sup>17</sup> The NRSV translates this text as “Hear, O Israel:

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<sup>15</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, “Women (OT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 951-6.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph A. Grassi, “Child, Children,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 904-5.

<sup>17</sup> George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 155.

The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.”<sup>18</sup> However, there are linguistic ambiguities noted in the NRSV that may allow for either “The LORD our God is one LORD,” “The LORD our God, the LORD is one,” or “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one.” How one reads this text has some bearing on its meaning. However, the umbrella of God over the community of Israel as a unifying presence remains in all these readings, as does the thought that YHWH is a singular being.

Biddle claims that “the Shema’s ambiguity may have been intentional so as to imply both understandings simultaneously.”<sup>19</sup> If there is one God, under which the entire community is subject, then there is no room for division between those who claim identity in God, regardless of their age, gender, or status. This belief stood in contrast to the polytheistic religions of the ancient world, which, by claiming allegiance to various gods over others within the same belief system, were inherently divided. A polytheistic lens would also allow for “multiple local manifestations [of YHWH] worshipped at different shrines,” a concept that the author of Deuteronomy vehemently denied.<sup>20</sup> There was inherent unity in the author’s view of communal identity and worship.

The invocation in 6:4 sets the stage for the material in 6:5-9. The language shifts from a statement about the unity of God to a call to action that arises out of the invocation. The first call was a call to love God. This was a new concept in the history of Jewish thought at the time, but it would become a focal point of both Jewish and

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<sup>18</sup> All scripture quotations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>19</sup> Mark E. Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 125.

<sup>20</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 88-9.

Christian spirituality.<sup>21</sup> The command to love the LORD with all your heart, soul, and might should be understood as a holistic love, akin to loving with one's entire self.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted here that a communal call to love a singular divine being with one's entire self allows for no substantive division between adherents to the covenant. Gregory of Nyssa, a 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian, commented on the connection between lack of holistic love for God leading to division within the community of faith. He claimed that "the person in this condition, who has not given his whole soul to God and has not participated in his love, the craftsman of evil finds disarmed and easily overpowers."<sup>23</sup>

After a call to keep the words proclaimed, "in your heart," the crux of the relevance for this text concerning the family is found in verse 7. "Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise."<sup>24</sup> The words of God, the Shema and the Decalogue, recited by Moses earlier in the text, were to be topics of conversation in daily life. They were to be normalized in family life, so that all Israelites, young and old, would be intimately familiar with these foundational teachings.

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald E. Clements, "The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 2, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 343.

<sup>22</sup> Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, 126-7.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 284.

<sup>24</sup> There is a similar call in Deuteronomy 11:18-21. There, the context surrounding the call to teach and set an example of faithfulness to children is followed by a promise to vanquish the enemies of Israel living in the Promised Land.



### Education in Ancient Israel

During this time in this history of Israel, primary education was done within the family.<sup>25</sup> Moral, spiritual, and vocational training was the responsibility of parents, particularly for children under the age of fourteen, the age at which boys were considered men.<sup>26</sup> There were also opportunities for children to receive religious instruction outside of the home, as children would accompany their parents on religious pilgrimages where they would see the communal witness of their community in worship. The family unit, though, remained the center of this experiential educational experience.

Later in Jewish history, formal schools for religious education were established under teachers who would gather young men for religious instruction.<sup>27</sup> However, the bedrock and development of religious education remained in the home. It was expected that children would revere their elders and learn from their wisdom, their commitment to the Torah, and their example; and it was expected that the old mentor and teach their offspring. Since Jewish education was historically integrated into daily life, and since the Torah was central to this education, Jews normally had higher rates of literacy than the general population. This trend continued through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup>

Since the entire family was invested in the teaching and learning process, younger generations were attuned to spiritual thoughts and teachings that might have eluded them

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<sup>25</sup> Aaron Demsky, "Education, Jewish," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Vol 6, ed. Fred Sklonik (New York: Macmillan, 2006), 163-4.

<sup>26</sup> Andre Lemaire, "Education (Israel)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 2, ed. David Noel Freeman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 306-7.

<sup>27</sup> Lemaire, "Education," *ABD*, 307-8.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 154-5.

in other cultures of the time. This meant that they were able to grasp important theological teachings from other leaders when they were offered. Such opportunities occurred throughout the history of Israel.

### **Intergenerational Assemblies and Continued Importance of Family Teaching**

The entire assembly of Israel, young and old, was gathered together again as Moses spoke of a renewed covenant at Moab (Deuteronomy 29:2). In Joshua 8, Moses' successor did the same thing. Joshua gathered the entire community, including women, children, and resident aliens, to hear the word of the Lord in a time of covenant renewal. Intergenerational groups were present at crucial points in the foundation of Israel in the Promised Land. When there was something important to be communicated to the people, it was done broadly rather than focused on those whom might be deemed as leaders in the culture.<sup>29</sup>

The author of Deuteronomy came back to family instruction later, in chapter 32, when these words were placed on the lips of Moses: "Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you" (Deut. 32:7). Leviticus 19 places the responsibility of reverence toward one's mother and father on the shoulders of children (Lev. 19:1-4). The call to heed the wisdom and instruction of one's family is also present outside of the Torah, particularly in the book of Proverbs, where there is a repetitive call, using familial language, to point its readers toward following the example of those closest to them (Proverbs 1:8-19, 22:6, 23:22). All of this points to the explicit integration of instruction and family

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<sup>29</sup> Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 78-9.

relationships. Parents were responsible for instruction with their words and actions; and children were responsible for submission and being prone to guidance from their parents and elders.

In a context where parental and child roles seem so rigid, one must be careful not to miss the logical outcome of such a teaching relationship. Elders set the example and then offered correction or praise of behavior that conforms to teachings. Therefore, as children matured in thought and practice, they would eventually become examples of faith themselves.

### **Hierarchy Inversion**

Without question, the primary mode of learning in ancient Israel was knowledge being passed from old to young, with the old primarily being models for the young. Even in a patriarchal hierarchical society, though, there were glimmers of the inversion of natural hierarchy, a concept that Jesus would later make central to his teaching.

In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel was sent to anoint a new king after Saul had fallen out of favor with God. Samuel arrived at the house of Jesse and asked to inspect all his sons, for he was told by God that one of the sons of Jesse would be the new king of Israel. In an upside-down moment, Samuel did not anoint the oldest, the strongest, or the most handsome. Rather, Yahweh instructed Samuel to anoint the youngest boy, a shepherd whose own father did not bother to invite into the presence of the prophet Samuel. Though David was chosen, he had no social status, no military experience, not even respected status in his own family. God chose someone from the margin of society. Walter Brueggemann summed up the theological significance of this moment when he

claimed that, “among the little ones there is potential for greatness.”<sup>30</sup> David went on to become a unifying king who succeeded in both battle and in religious matters before committing a sin that would haunt him for the rest of his life. Despite his fall, David remains a positive example of faith for both Jews and Christians today, cementing the legacy of a young man held in high regard by both God and people of all generations.

While the example of youth in the Old Testament challenged the prevailing social structure at times, true upending would not come until the time of Jesus Christ. When God intervened in the world through the incarnation, challenges were made to religious and social structures that would leave the community of faith changed forever.

### **Jesus Clarifies Family**

Sole allegiance to God was a theme throughout the Old Testament, one Israel struggled with mightily at times. Jesus took the concept of God as ultimate king and makes it a central part of his message. The “Kingdom of God,” or its variant “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew, is a prevailing theme in the New Testament, particularly in the gospels. Monarchs allowed for no competing allegiances. Therefore, allegiance to God was paramount, and any other allegiances must be secondary or tertiary. The kingdom is both spatially and temporally ambiguous. It is said to be “near” (Matthew 3:2, 4:17, Mark 1:15), but also “among you” (Luke 17:21). It appears to be present (Matthew 12:28, Luke 11:20) but also something in the future (Luke 19:11-12). Broadly, though, the kingdom in the New Testament was understood as a cosmic entity ruled by God that has broken into temporal reality. It was inaugurated through the person of Jesus Christ

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 124.

who taught repentance and allegiance to God above all else. It had religious, ethical, social, and even political, implications for those who claimed allegiance to Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> In the context of this project, it reinforces the idea that Jesus was ultimately concerned with one's relationship with God above traditional hierarchies, including the nuclear family unit.

From the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, in the call stories of the first disciples in Mark and Matthew, Jesus began to lay the groundwork for redefinition of the family. James and John were called to follow Jesus while working with their father on a fishing boat (Matthew 4:21-2, Mark 1:19-20). They abandoned their father and the family business to follow Jesus. This seemed unfathomable in a society with familial relationships at its core. The things they left were symbols of a stable livelihood and of their strong connection to their family and its traditions.<sup>32</sup> To make these scenes more troublesome, Jesus seemed to *break into* their family unit, rather than be invited into the family. On the surface, this might not seem significant. However, it was uncommon for a Jewish rabbi to summon followers; normally, prospective followers would seek out a teacher.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, not only was Jesus shaking up the family order, he was taking sole initiative to do it. Jesus was reorganizing the systems of society in a way that calls into question one's ultimate allegiance and family identity. Jesus truly redefined the word "family," loosening status quo ties and strengthening new bonds in the family of God.

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<sup>31</sup> Dennis C. Duling, "Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 4, ed. David Noel Freeman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 56-67.

<sup>32</sup> Francis J. Maloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Baker Academic, 2002), 53.

<sup>33</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 48-9.

*The New Family of Jesus*

Nowhere is Jesus' call to radical redefinition of family more apparent than in a story told in all three of the synoptic gospels as well as the Gospel of Thomas (Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21, and Thomas 99). The scene is similar in all four accounts. The biological mother and brothers of Jesus arrive to see him. Jesus, however, is aloof and uninterested in his earthly family. He uses the encounter as a teaching moment to redefine family for those around him. He claims that his family is now composed of those who do the will of God. Each account of this story differs slightly in its description, but the commonality of *doing* the will of God [Father] is present in each.

Below, these specific texts will be evaluated, their discrepancies will be noted, and their unique messages for their respective audiences will be communicated. One will notice, though, that their message is strikingly similar, and the focus of family reorganization is central in each account.

Mark 3:31-35

The Gospel of Mark is the most discouraging canonical gospel concerning the earthly family of Jesus, as well as the implied earthly families of his followers.<sup>34</sup> Mark's account (3:31-35) has the underlying presupposition that the family of Jesus believed that he was deranged in some way (3:21). The family arrived "outside" the house, a significant fact which leads the reader to believe that Jesus' family are outsiders to the

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<sup>34</sup> S.C. Barton, "Family," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green et al (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 226-7.

community of faith as well.<sup>35</sup> Jesus' response to the question was, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (3:33). Looking at the crowd around him, Jesus proclaims "Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." The fact that Jesus alluded to both mother and sister reminds readers that, unlike the normal model of religious teacher and student in the ancient world, Jesus' community included women.<sup>36</sup> Perkins argues that this story is about "challenging the social and cultural norms of power and subordination."<sup>37</sup> In short, there was but one place for allegiance to lie in the new family of Jesus Christ, with God himself; and, there was only one purpose for members of that family, to do the will of God. All other social and cultural hierarchies became much less relevant in this new order.

It should be noted that Jesus was not, neither in Mark nor any of the other canonical gospels, inherently anti-family. The fact that he used the model of family to teach others about his movement is evidence of that fact. Jesus was redefining and refining family, not abolishing it. He upheld the command to honor one's father and mother in Mark 7:9-13. Jesus did, however, call his followers to a higher allegiance, one where the former hierarchical system of power and subordination were no longer relevant. Concerning this project, this means that all are equal in the family of God if they self-identify as a follower of Jesus committed to doing the will of God as best as they understand it. The community of faith is a new "kin group" which provides for

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, "Introduction and Notes to Mark" in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 1812.

<sup>36</sup> Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel of Mark," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 8, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 567.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, "Mark," *NIB*, 566-7.

mutual growth as the community seeks to discern the will of God under their individual and collective subordination to the Lord.<sup>38</sup>

#### Matthew 12:46-50

M. Eugene Boring, in his outline of Matthew, titles the second of two major sections of the book (12:22-28:20) “The Conflict of Kingdoms Developed and Resolved.”<sup>39</sup> The author of Matthew placed his account of this story within that larger section of conflict stories. Here, the conflict is between old biological family ties and new spiritual family bonds. Matthew omitted the thoughts that might have caused Jesus’ family to come, suggesting that the focus here is less on the negative motives of Jesus’ old family and more on the positivity of his new family.<sup>40</sup> The question of response Jesus offered was almost identical to his response in Mark, “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” His response to his own question, was different in Matthew. Here, he pointed not to the crowds, but to his chosen disciples, “Here are my mother and brothers!” The allusion to God as “Father” in Jesus’ response is present only in Matthew and Thomas. Matthew used this descriptor of God, as well as the portrayal of the father-son relationship between God and Jesus, more than any other gospel writer (Matt. 4:3; 4:6; 8:29; 10:32-3; 11:25-27; 12:50; 14:33; 15:13; 18:10-35; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39; 53, 63; 27:40). However, one should understand the same interpretation as its predecessor text in

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<sup>38</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 129.

<sup>39</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 8, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 283.

<sup>40</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, trans. by Robert R. Barr, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 120.



Mark. Those who do the will of God are part of a spiritual family that is on a higher plane than one's biological family.

In the larger narrative of Matthew, there is concern for keeping this new family united. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus prescribed a process of reconciliation when members of the community were in conflict. This is evidence that unity was elusive, even in the new spiritual family of early Christianity. Matthew also contains the story of the Magi, a story of Gentiles, "outsiders," recognizing the Jewish messiah in ways that expanded the unifying ministry of Jesus (2:1-12). The inclusion of the story of the Magi broadly expanded the possible new family ties in first-century Christianity, as Jesus and his first followers were all Jewish. The author of Matthew ended his gospel with a call to "make disciples of *all nations*..." (28:19) further illustrating that Jesus may bring division to biological family relationships but also unity with, and within, his new family. Therefore, exercises designed to promote unity and cooperation across any dividing lines within the community are not only biblically and theologically justified; they are crucial to preserving unity in the family of God.

#### Luke 8:19-21

In Luke 8:19-21, the story is shorter than either Mark or Matthew's account. Jesus' question is omitted entirely. There is no suggestion of the motives of Jesus' family nor their antagonism to his message. This makes the entire narrative read less like a conflict story and more like a teaching moment about following God.<sup>41</sup> Mary is shown to

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<sup>41</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 9, ed. Leander E. Keck, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995), 182-3.

be favored by God in Luke (1:28-38). A close reading of Acts, written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, reveals that both Mary and the brothers of Jesus were part of the early Christian community (Acts 1:14). Therefore, biological family conflict was not the primary interest of Luke, even if it was part of the story. Luke was preoccupied with the message that those who “hear the word of God and do it” are part of his family and share spiritual kinship.<sup>42</sup>

Luke’s witness with respect to this story is significant. It reminds people of faith that Jesus was not preoccupied with breaking familial bonds; he was simply interested in being united with those who heard and did the word of God. Therefore, one need not disown his or her biological family for the sake of following Christ. Rather, one must hold to the teachings of Christ to be united with him in kinship.

### **Mutual Submission**

Submission is a common theme in the New Testament, but submission is often inverted to the point that it is either countercultural or scandalous. Jesus himself is the model of submission for the church, as he humbled himself to do tasks considered beneath his status. Submission began with the incarnation. Later, Jesus submitted to baptism by John, though, at least by one account, John had reservations about baptizing someone of obviously higher status (Matt. 3:14). He knelt to wash the feet of his disciples and asked them to do the same (John 13:1-7). He submitted to the ruling authorities as he underwent an unjust trial and execution.

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<sup>42</sup> Culpepper, “Luke,” *NIB*, 183.

The foot-washing scene in John 13 is especially scandalous. Even though Jewish culture espoused humility as a virtue, Jewish slaves were exempt from washing the feet of guests; it was a task reserved only for Gentile slaves.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Jesus, a Jewish teacher surrounded by a group of Jewish followers, provided a scandalous example for his disciples to imitate when he called them to “wash one another’s feet.” This emptying of status was something that would not have been missed by his disciples. Had Jesus asked them to wash his feet following this action, they might have obliged; but, that was not the request. Jesus challenged them to wash the feet of their fellow disciples, those of equal status. Hence, Jesus taught more than just humility through this action; he taught mutual submission.<sup>44</sup>

Pauline letters are more scattered concerning submission that challenged the status quo of first-century society. At times, Paul seemed to hold up the status quo of hierarchy in the ancient world, particularly in intergenerational relationships. In both First Timothy and Titus, there are positive mentions of traditional societal divides (1 Timothy 5:1-2, Titus 2:2-10). This was particularly true for older and younger believers, as their status reflected their historical roles of teacher and student, respectively.<sup>45</sup> However, Paul also wrote of a leveling that takes place in the kingdom as he reflected on the humility of Christ, and the implicit model of submission by Jesus, in Philippians 2

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<sup>43</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 36, ed. Bruce Metzger et al (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 233.

<sup>44</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 462-3.

<sup>45</sup> Mona Tokarek LaFosse, “Age Hierarchy and Social Networks Among Urban Women in the Roman East,” in *Mediterranean Families in Antiquity: Households, Extended Families, and Domestic Space*, ed. Sabine R. Huebner and Geoffrey Nathan (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 206-7.

where he called for unity in the body of believers (Phil. 2:1-8). He dealt with leveling more explicitly in Galatians 3, a text that will be discussed later.

Perhaps nowhere in Pauline literature is there more uncertainty concerning Paul's view of Christian hierarchy than in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians has one theme: *unity*. The letter is about relationships between people of different views and varying backgrounds coming together under the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>46</sup> The primary concern of the text is the Jewish/Gentile Christian divide. The first half of the letter (chapters 1-3) provides theological underpinning for the practical teachings concerning unity in chapters 4-6. It was in those practical instructions that Paul included a Christian household code (Ephesians 5:21-6:9).<sup>47</sup>

Household codes were common in the ancient Mediterranean world. Their origin dates to at least the time of Aristotle.<sup>48</sup> These codes dealt with a myriad of matters of estate order for both people and property.<sup>49</sup> There is much debate over how these codes made their way into Christian writing. Some scholars hold that the Christian community inserted these codes into the formation of their faith to assimilate into the Greco-Roman world as a means of survival. In short, if Christianity had some of the same tenants as the surrounding culture, they might not be persecuted. However, other scholars hold to the

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<sup>46</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Household codes exist in other New Testament writings as well. See Colossians 3:18-4:1, 1 Peter 2:18-3:7, Titus 2:1-10. For a detailed comparison of these household codes, see PHEME PERKINS' chart in volume 11 of the *New Interpreter's Bible*, 447-9.

<sup>48</sup> Russ Dudrey, "Submit Yourself to One Another: A Socio-Historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15-6:9," *Restoration Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1999), 27-8.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Talbert, "Are There Norms for Biblical Marriage?," *Journal of Family Ministry* 15, no. 1 (2001), 22.

opposite position and believe that these codes provide uniqueness to Christian identity in contrast with the rest of the ancient world.<sup>50</sup> One thing is certain. The Christian household codes are *different* than their Mediterranean counterparts. They were so different, in fact, that they were perceived as a threat to cultures around them.<sup>51</sup>

The main question concerning how to interpret the household code in Ephesians is, “Where does the household code actually begin?” Whether or not one begins this pericope at 5:21 or 5:22 has tremendous impact on one’s interpretation of the text. Interpreters are divided on the issue, with the slight majority historically favoring including 5:21 with the preceding material for grammatical reasons, particularly the fact that verse 21 includes a participle (*hypotassomenoi*) that is the end of a chain of participles that began in verse 19 and are “all dependent on the imperative of v. 18b.”<sup>52</sup> Verses 18-21 are a single sentence in Greek, with everything within their bounds pointing to evidence of being filled with the Spirit.<sup>53</sup> However, there are compelling reasons to include 5:21 with the household code that follows. The most prominent being that verse 22 does not include the verb *hypotassomenoi*, translated as “be subject” in the NRSV. The verb must be borrowed from verse 21, as it is not in the text of verse 22. This means that verse 21 may function as an umbrella statement for the following material. At the very least, verse 21 is a transitional verse between 20 and 22, and must be considered when one reads the household

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<sup>50</sup> This debate is illustrated in the competing conclusions of David Bach and John Elliot, particularly in their research on the household code in 1 Peter. A synopsis of this debate can be found in Sean M. Christensen, “The Balch/Elliot Debate and the Hermeneutics of the Household Code,” *Trinity Journal* 37, no. 2 (2016) 173-193.

<sup>51</sup> Bonnie Thurston, “Ephesians,” *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2096.

<sup>52</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. J.A. Emerton et al (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 515.

<sup>53</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIVAC, 286.

code that follows. The latter understanding reinforces the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God, and the fact that the community's collective relationship with Jesus Christ brings the high low and the low high (Luke 14:10-11).

What makes the household code in Ephesians even more confusing is that it seems to reinforce the status quo concerning submission. "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord" (5:22). "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (6:1). "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ..." (6:5). However, each command is part of a couplet, with an equal command to the person of higher status. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (5:25). "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (6:6). "And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality" (6:9). These commands provide, at least, restraint to the person of higher status. I argue that they provide liberation for the traditionally submissive person that continues the concept of leveling in the kingdom of God. The passage is undoubtedly *not* completely egalitarian in nature. Paul did not challenge the overarching social structure of society. However, he recast the social order through the lens of the humility of Christ (5:25), so that the example of Christ would be the bedrock for all social relationships, even those with subordinates. Christ's submission transformed the way believers interact with each other, as their default position should be influenced by the incarnation of Christ, an unquestionably humble position.

It should be noted that Paul addressed children first in Ephesians 6:1, as normally the person of highest position would have been addressed first in ancient household

codes.<sup>54</sup> Children were full members of the community, though their social status was bound by cultural structures.<sup>55</sup> The call to “obey your parents in the Lord” relates one’s obedience to his or her parents with his or her relationship with God, as a means of living out a relationship with the divine.<sup>56</sup>

The Greek word *pateres* in Ephesians 6:4 can mean “parents” as well as “fathers,” so the call can be understood as parental instruction. The verse assumes the authority of the parent, but also it sets bounds on his or her authority. It assumes that children have basic dignity and worth in the community, not something to be taken for granted in the ancient world.<sup>57</sup> The text also assumes that the instruction of children in their relationship with God is paramount to their formation as members of the community.

The calls to children and parents in this text do not inherently destroy the divisions between generations; each maintains their own identity. However, their respective identities are shaped by their commitment to Christ. A child would not have been a leader in an early church any more than First Baptist Valdese would call a 12-year-old to serve as her pastor today. However, the influence of Christ in the relationship, and the presence of the Spirit living in every believer, should cause the leader to value the words and thoughts of younger Christians, because they are valuable voices in the Christian community.

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<sup>54</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard et al, Vol 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 402.

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC, 403.

<sup>56</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIVAC, 321.

<sup>57</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, NIVAC, 407.

### The Value of Prophetic Youthful Voice

While there are positive examples of youth in the Old Testament, their teaching voice is silent, as conveying wisdom and knowledge was relegated to older generations. James Crenshaw called the voice of youth “the missing voice” in education in ancient Israel.<sup>58</sup> Proverbs, with its paternal sage voice, is an example of the call for children to listen and elders to speak (Proverbs 1:8). However, there is a prophetic corrective to this ideology in the form of the pouring out of the Spirit of God. This prophetic corrective is seen in Joel, and again when the text of Joel 2:28-32 was used by Peter in Acts 2:17-21 at Pentecost.<sup>59</sup>

The story of Pentecost, the day many have described as “the birthday of the church” is also an early symbol of unity. Devout Jews from all over the world were present in Jerusalem. Each group brought with them their cultural identity, an identity that was secondary to their unity in faith. Each left further unified by their shared experience of the Spirit, and they were equipped through unity to return to their places of origin with a story to tell! Thousands of women and men from various cultures heard simple Galileans speak their language so that they heard the same message of God

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<sup>58</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 187-203.

<sup>59</sup> Luke’s quote of Joel is predominantly from the LXX, though there are minor redactional differences between Acts 2:17-21 and Joel 2:28-32. The author of Acts includes “in the last days” instead of “afterward” at the beginning of the statement in v. 17. Acts also includes “God declares” following “after the last days” in the opening statement in v. 17. Furthermore, Acts includes “and they shall prophecy” at the end of v.18, which is absent from Joel. For a more thorough discussion of these textual differences and their sources, see Richard Pervo’s excursus on “The Text of Acts 2:17-21” in his *Hermeneia* commentary on Acts. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 76-9. There is also a detailed textual analysis in Darrel L. Bock, *Proclamation From Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series* 12, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 156-69.



through the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, the dividing lines drawn by humans are shown to be null and void when the Spirit of God is present. Without the unifying movement of the Spirit at Pentecost, the gospel would not have left Jerusalem in the minds and hearts of the people as they went back to their homes. There are explicit ties to Moses within the Pentecost story which allude to the history of Israel, the giving of the Law, and now, the giving of the Spirit, as a unifying gift that echoed the gift of the Law.<sup>60</sup>

In the opening scene of the book of Acts, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:5), but the apostles were not privy to the time of the arrival of the Spirit. The Spirit arrived in full force in Acts 2:2 and caused a miracle of speaking and hearing that led many in the crowd to understand “God’s deeds and power” (2:11). Presumably, the “deeds and power” of God was testimony concerning the power of God displayed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that all languages could understand. The story is dependent upon the Babel narrative (Genesis 11:1-9) for context, and that moment of disunity is undone in this moment of reunification.<sup>61</sup> This act of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles to communicate the gospel brought awe to some and doubt to others. Peter, after explaining to the crowd that they were not inebriated, interpreted the sign as evidence of the presence of the Spirit among them.

The idea of “already, but not yet” means that Christians live in an interim period between the first and second comings of Jesus. This concept, and its eschatological underpinning, was espoused by Peter in Acts 2 as he interpreted the coming of the Holy

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<sup>60</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina, Vol 5, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Vol 5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 45-6.

<sup>61</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts (Revised)*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 59.

Spirit as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel.<sup>62</sup> Peter provided no commentary on Joel but pointed to the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit as contemporary proof of the ancient prophecy.

In its original context, Joel 2:28-32<sup>63</sup> is a hopeful text that follows a lament over the destruction of Judah's homeland and a call to repentance. It deals with the coming "Day of the Lord," and frames this day in a more positive light than most prophetic literature. Here, the day of the Lord is portrayed as a day of salvation and rescue for those in Judah who repent.<sup>64</sup> Joel spoke of a day when the Spirit of God would be universally available to all believers, regardless of their position or status.<sup>65</sup> No longer would the Spirit be selective of a specific person, task, or time; it would be democratized for all who repent of sin and claim allegiance to Yahweh.<sup>66</sup> This universality of the Holy Spirit makes anyone, of any generation, a potential prophet able to speak inspired words to others.<sup>67</sup>

It is evident that the coming of the Holy Spirit dissolved any divisions between groups who could claim the prophetic voice of God.<sup>68</sup> Sons, *daughters*, old men, and

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<sup>62</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* vol. 1 of 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 879-80.

<sup>63</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, Joel 2:28-32 is referenced as 3:1-5.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Simundson, *Hosea-Micah*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 124.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Achtemer, "The Book of Joel," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, Vol 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 326.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hoseah-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 31, ed. Bruce Metzger et al (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 260-1.

<sup>67</sup> Simundson, *Hoseah-Micah*, AOTC, 140-1.

<sup>68</sup> Carl R. Holladay, *Acts*, The New Testament Library, ed. C. Clifton Black et al (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 102.

*young men*, both male and female *slaves* will prophesy (*propheteusosin*), a word meaning “to expound scripture, to speak and preach under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup> This text reminds the reader that the Spirit of God undoes human hierarchy and blurs dividing lines between student and teacher, as all are connected to the same source. When God is present in every believer, every believer becomes a possible vessel for the voice and actions of God. This includes both the young and the old.

In Acts, Peter continued the positive imagery associated with the implied “Day of the Lord.” Peter recasts this text to speak of a new and realized movement in the history of Israel after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Repentance and forgiveness remain central in the context of Acts. The difference is the mode of forgiveness. In Joel, repentance from sin and turning toward God was the aim. However, in Acts, there is the theological underpinning of Jesus as the Jewish messiah, the agent through which God offers forgiveness and salvation.<sup>70</sup> The pouring out of the Spirit is for everyone to speak the truth that Jesus is Lord; it is the new vocation of all on whom the Spirit of God has fallen.<sup>71</sup>

Though only Jews were spoken of in the Pentecost story in Acts, the theology of Acts developed quickly to include both Jewish and Gentile believers. Gentiles became beneficiaries the gift of the Holy Spirit (10:44-46), even though Peter was hesitant at first. Not everything spoken by Peter at Pentecost was always lived out in Acts, even within

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<sup>69</sup> Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 704.

<sup>70</sup> Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 65.

<sup>71</sup> Wall, “Acts,” *NIB*, 69.

Peter himself. It was Peter who struggled with Jewish and Gentile unity in Acts 10.<sup>72</sup>

However, there is evidence in Acts for realization of Peter's proclamation concerning the Holy Spirit, as it began acting in believers who had no high status of their own. Acts records evidence of this in chapter 21 when the "virgin" (presumably young) daughters of Philip prophesied (21:9).<sup>73</sup>

### **Paul Builds on Peter's Proclamation**

The central figure of the latter part of the book of Acts is Paul, as Peter fades into the distance in Luke's narrative. During the lifetime of Paul, Christianity transformed from a subsect of Judaism, predominantly in Judea, into a faith that was built predominantly on Gentile converts throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>74</sup> The missionary fervor of Paul, by his own admission a Pharisaic Jew (Philippians 3:5), coupled with his work among the Gentiles of the Roman Empire made him *the* central figure in the development of first-century Christianity outside of the Jewish homeland.<sup>75</sup>

Paul's desire for unity is built directly on the foundation of his Christology. Paul claimed to have met a manifestation of Jesus who revealed the gospel to him (Gal. 1:11-17). The details of this gospel can only be surmised through Pauline letters in the New Testament, as Paul did not compose an explicit account of the gospel he received from Christ. However, it undoubtedly involved the crucifixion of Jesus (Gal. 6:12; Phil. 2:8),

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<sup>72</sup> Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 884-5.

<sup>73</sup> Holladay, *Acts*, NTL, 407.

<sup>74</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 17.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 18-9.

his bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 2:1-2; 15:12-28), and the idea that his resurrection had implications for how believers ought to live their lives under the covenant of grace (Col. 3:1-17). James Dunn stated that Paul believed that “the resurrection inaugurated a new humanity” (Rom. 5:12-21).<sup>76</sup> With this foundation, Paul moved toward the new reality of unity that is possible in the church.

One of the major implications that Paul gleaned from his understanding of Christ was the concept of unity under the Lordship of Christ. Paul rejected all other pathways to unity, including adherence to the Jewish law, in favor of the unity offered in Christ.<sup>77</sup> Ben Witherington claims that “[Paul] radically reconceptualized the people of God” by steering the identity of the Jewish people away from “Torah, Temple, and Territory” and toward Jesus.<sup>78</sup> Paul was also a fervent supporter of Jewish and Gentile reconciliation into one church, which moved the Jewish identity marker away from bloodline and ancestry. This meant that Paul’s criteria for unity were drastically altered by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it became the only series of events that could offer true unity.<sup>79</sup> For Paul, the believer followed the path of death, burial, and resurrection to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-14); and that newness of life included unity with God and unity with one another in the church.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Christology (NT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 985.

<sup>77</sup> Walter F. Taylor Jr., “Unity/Unity of Humanity,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 750.

<sup>78</sup> Ben Witherington III, “Christology,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne et al, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 113.

<sup>79</sup> Taylor Jr., “Unity,” *ABD*, 749.

<sup>80</sup> Witherington, “Christology,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 114.

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an impassioned call for living under the covenant of grace, rather than the Jewish law. It calls for abolition of separation within the kingdom of God, and an understanding of the freedom one has through Christ.<sup>81</sup> In Galatians 3, Paul wrote of the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit that abolished divisions among the family of God (3:13-14). His thought continued through a connection to Abraham, the collective ancestor of the church, and culminated in the most realized statement in the entire New Testament about abolished hierarchy and division in Galatians 3:28. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

While this statement does not explicitly address generational divides in the community of faith, the church should take note of the abolition of social status, race, and gender identity in the new kingdom and notice the revolutionary nature of one's new identity in Christ. This is not an apples and oranges comparison, because the main question raised by this text is the question of one's source of identity. Does one's main identity come from his or her relationship with God through Christ, or does it come from something else? If it comes from Christ, then the social divisions that existed in our old lives must cease to exist as identity markers in our new life with the Spirit.<sup>82</sup>

The early church was revolutionary, in its time, for bringing people together from different cultures, nations, and socioeconomic levels under the unity of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul uses the image of the church as a body, consisting of interdependent parts making up an ideal whole with Christ as the head, throughout his writings (Romans

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<sup>81</sup> Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 11, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 187.

<sup>82</sup> Hays, "Galatians," *NIB*, 278-9.

12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, and Colossians 1:18, 24). Paul, or someone heavily influenced by Paul, built on the concept of unity and the image of the body in Ephesians. The culmination of his thoughts on unity is found in Ephesians 4 where he equates unity with maturity in faith in Ephesians 4:1-6. Unity is the result of the maturation process of the church and its individual members. Oneness in the Father, oneness in the Spirit, and oneness in the body are all examples of, and calls to, unity in the church.

### **The Communal Witness of a United Family of God**

In the Old Testament, the image of God is a creator, creating humankind in God's own image. There are two major implications one can garner from this truth. The first requires some insight into the anthropology and linguistics of ancient Israel. The Hebrew word *adam*, meaning "man/humanity" has a collective meaning.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, God created more than unconnected individuals; creation of humanity was a unifying act. The second is that all humanity is imprinted with the mark of God. Therefore, an attack against a created being of God is an attack against the very image of God.

Though much of the Old Testament Law is comprised of holiness and purity codes that seem to be more divisive than unifying, there is much to be said for unification under faith in Yahweh in the Old Testament. The contrast between Israel and its polytheistic neighbors was discussed earlier. Even the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-26, strange and archaic as it may seem at times to a modern audience, is about unity of holiness among God's people before a holy God.<sup>84</sup> The psalmist later wrote "How very

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<sup>83</sup> Taylor Jr., "Unity," *ABD*, 747.

<sup>84</sup> Walter C Kaiser Jr, "The Book of Leviticus," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 992-3.

good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1) as an introduction to the rareness and beauty of a unified community, united in faith under the same God. It is an illustration of proper communal life for those who claim allegiance to God.<sup>85</sup>

The New Testament is overflowing with calls for, and examples of, unity. In John’s gospel, the call for unity is blatant on the lips of Jesus. In John 17, there is a threefold prayer of Jesus. He first prays for glorification, and then prays for his disciples. Lastly, he prays for people who are not present in the physical place where he is praying. He prays for those who will come to believe after the disciples, due to their witness. Jesus prays “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). The reason for this prayer is spelled out at the end of the verse “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Those who would believe after the disciples included the generation that first heard John’s gospel, as well as the generation of professing Christians alive today. Jesus’ prayer was that all believers would be united to him through subsequent generations of believers.<sup>86</sup>

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is often used to encourage ecumenical dialogue. It is a bedrock text of the work of the National Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations.<sup>87</sup> However, the text should not be limited to interchurch cooperation. The Gospel of John, like all canonical gospels, was originally tied to a local community of believers, birthed out of the need to preserve particular traditions about Jesus that the

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<sup>85</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, trans. by Hilton C. Oswald, *Psalms 60-150* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 485-6.

<sup>86</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 2 of 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1061.

<sup>87</sup> “About Faith and Order,” *National Council of Churches*, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/about-us/common-witness/about-faith-and-order/>.



community deemed appropriate to speak to their current situation.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the application of this text in this project is appropriate, because the text was originally addressed to a local congregation and spoke directly to disunity within that community.

The placement of this prayer in the narrative of John is also significant. After this story, the narrative takes a sharp turn. This is the final story in John before the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Soon, Jesus would be whisked away from his disciples and placed on a trajectory straight to the cross. The final prayer John's audience hears on the tongue of Jesus is a prayer for unity for all future believers. Often, one reads scripture with the nagging question, "Does this text have anything to say to me as a 21st century Christian, or should its contents be left in millennia past." This text, however, transcends time in a glaring way and reaches the church of the 21st century with a powerful mandate. Unity is the desire of God himself, as revealed through Jesus Christ.

### **Unity as Modeled in the Trinity**

The term "trinity" is found nowhere in canonical Christian scripture. However, the doctrine of the trinity, a belief system that retained the monotheistic tenets of Judaism yet espoused the uniqueness of the Father, Son, and Spirit, is alluded to throughout the Bible. Early Christians had to reconcile the oneness of God that was foundational to both Judaism and Christianity (Deut. 6:4, Mark 12:29) with the truths that Jesus was Lord (Matt. 7:22, Phil. 2:11) and that the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26) also retains the power of

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<sup>88</sup> Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching, ed. James L. Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 1-2.

God<sup>89</sup> Tertullian, a second-century theologian coined the term *una substantia-tres personae*, translated as “one substance, three persons,” a guiding hermeneutical principle that informs trinitarian theology to this day.<sup>90</sup>

The trinity is a model for unity. If God is unified, so should the church be unified (John 10:30, 17:21). Margaret Hewitt Suchocki defined the trinitarian model for community as more than like-minded individuals, but community that exists through its “embrace of irreducible differences.”<sup>91</sup> Christian community follows the model of the trinitarian God when we exist, despite our uniqueness, in harmony as one body.

Brian Edgar, an Australian theologian ordained in the Uniting Church in Australia,<sup>92</sup> claims that the church is not a body in the same way that other organizations might claim to be a body. What is meant by most other groups is that they are unified by only an idea or concept. However, “the church *is* a body in a different way and there is an underlying reality to its unity which is created by the real, actual presence of God.”<sup>93</sup> He goes on to say that “members of the church *are* connected through the unity of the Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ... not just *as though* they were connected.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Mark Edwards, “Exegesis and the Early Christian Doctrine of the Trinity,” *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80-1.

<sup>90</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, trans. by Margaret Kohl, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 16, 177-8.

<sup>91</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “Introduction,” in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, ed. Joseph A Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki (New York: Continuum, 1997), x-xi.

<sup>92</sup> The Uniting Church in Australia’s history is intensely ecumenical and steeped in unity. They formed in 1977 when congregations of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist heritages united to form a single union with shared identity and polity. More information concerning this assembly can be found at [www.assembly.uca.org.au](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au).

<sup>93</sup> Brian Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 295-6.

<sup>94</sup> Edgar, *Trinity*, 296.

Paul Tillich defined a similar concept of community. He differentiated between groups bound together by common interest and those bound together by something not temporal: God. The former will cease being when the interest dies. The latter will continue because its binding agent is of different substance.<sup>95</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann came to a similar conclusion but took the concept even further. He claimed that the kingdom was indeed more than a social gathering and more than giving up lordship to God. His claim was that the church is also united in *project*. Moltmann wrote that one of the true gifts of freedom in the kingdom of God was the gift of creativity that is “directed *towards the future*, in light of the Christian hope for the future of the coming of God.”<sup>96</sup> Moltmann calls this aspect of living as members of the kingdom the act of “becoming.”<sup>97</sup> The church, as it lives as a reflection of the trinity, becomes a community that pursues the unity of God as it pursues the reality of living into the future kingdom of God.

The common thread in these reflections is the observation that humanity alone cannot unify in lasting bonds of community. There must be something more than a common interest as a binding agent. One’s individual relationship with God, and indwelling by the Spirit, binds them together in a unique way; and it is this unique bond that produces what we call “church.”

The World Council of Churches defined this concept well in their 2006 paper entitled the Nature and Mission of the Church.

The Church is not merely the sum of individual believers in communion with God, nor primarily the mutual communion of individual believers among

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<sup>95</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 118-9.

<sup>96</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity*, 216-7.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

themselves. It is their common partaking in the life of God (2 Pet 1:4), who as Trinity is the source and focus of all communion. Thus, the Church is both a divine and a human reality.<sup>98</sup>

As stated above, believers are called and enabled by their commonality to enter into interdependent relationships with each other and with God. When this happens, trinitarian community is realized and church functions as a model of the triune God. The truth of this statement is not only realized in the ecumenical unity of the church, but also in local congregations all over the world as they pursue unity under the statement that “Jesus is Lord!”

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<sup>98</sup> World Council of Churches, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: 2006), 5.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

The stated goal of this ministry project was to strengthen intergenerational bonds between teenagers and adults in the congregation of First Baptist Valdese beyond their current level through both an increased understanding of Christian unity and engagement in an intergenerational kinesthetic mission activity. The curriculum for the project was developed from a theological rationale of the church functioning as an intergenerational family, learning from each other as Jesus had redefined family roles in the kingdom from nuclear family to the larger community of Jesus followers.

I hypothesized that the experimental group would show a greater growth in appreciation for intergenerational cooperation than the control group at the conclusion of the project, because the experimental group would receive instruction specifically related to intergenerational cooperation. The experimental group was also provided with structured opportunities for participants to learn with and from those of a different generation. Evaluation of the project was completed via pre-and-post tests (Appendix B) that gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. Both the experimental and the control groups took the same pre-and-post test. The pre-and-post-tests also gathered demographic data about participants that proved useful in evaluation and analysis since generational identity was relevant to the project. The demographic data also gave insight to participants' movement on the Likert scale based upon age. More qualitative data was gained from the experimental group than from the control group, because the

experimental group created qualitative data through their journals and their collaborative exercises within the group sessions. What follows are findings from the collected data.

### **Instrument of Evaluation**

The instrument used for evaluation (Appendix B) was created by me. It was reviewed and refined by Dr. David Carscaddon of the School of Psychology and Counseling at Gardner-Webb University. Questions nine through nineteen provided ten-point Likert scales for subjects to rate their responses. The standard deviation for the responses of the experimental group was .99 for the pre-test and .90 for the post-test. The standard deviation for the responses of the control group was 1.2 for the pre-test and 1.1 for the post test. This means that the experimental group was more homogenous than the control group. It also means that participants' standard deviation from the mean on both the pre-and-post-tests did not exceed twelve percentage points. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to be .660 reliability on the pre-test and .653 reliability on the post-test. This reflects that responses were slightly less consistent on the post-test than the pre-test. However, both numbers are near .7, considered the threshold for modest reliability in social science research.<sup>99</sup> The p-value for the pre-and-post-test was .002, a good indicator of reliability, because it is less than the threshold of less than or equal to .05.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Charles E. Lance, et al, "The Sources of Four Commonly Reported Cutoff Criteria: What Did They Really Say?" *Organizational Research Methods* 9, no. 2 (2006), 205-7.

<sup>100</sup> Saul McLeod, "What a P-value Tells You About Statistical Significance," Simply Psychology, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/p-value.html>.

### **Preliminary Findings**

The data for both the experimental group and the control group showed change in average scores across the quantitative questions from the pre-test to the post-test. The mean score of the experimental group rose from an average response of 7.1 to an average response of 7.8. The mean score of the control group rose from an average of 7.1 to an average of 7.6. On the surface, this illustrates increase in the score. However, there were questions on the test that were designed in such a way that make this conclusion incomplete. For example, question ten (see Appendix B) on the pre-and-post-test was intentionally written with the adverb “not.” Therefore, the hypothesized outcome would be a decrease in value, rather than an increase. Question eleven also does not follow a linear increase to prove the hypothesis as its answer is particularly age-dependent. Question nineteen is the other outlier in the data set. It stated, “I would rather serve alongside people close to my age in church service and mission” with a Likert value of zero meaning “strongly disagree” and a Likert value of ten meaning “strongly agree.” If one were growing in intergenerational unity, one would expect to see a move toward neutrality on the scale. Therefore, the data should be mined more deeply in order to draw solid conclusions.

### **Analysis of the Quantitative Data**

Questions nine through nineteen (see Appendix B) on the pre-test and post-test gathered quantitative data. The table below records the averages of the responses for the respective groups in the project and their change from pre-test to post-test.

Table 1: Averages and Movement for Control and Experimental Groups

Question	Pre-Test Average (Control)	Post-Test Average (Control)	Change	Pre-Test Average (Exp)	Post-Test Average (Exp)	Change
I tend to learn things from people who are of a different generation than me (0 = NT, 10 = AT). <sup>101</sup>	6.7	8.1	+ 1.4	7	8.1	+ 1.1
There is not a strong biblical case for intergenerational unity in the church (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	1.1	1.9	+ 0.8	2.4	3.3	+ 0.9
Spending time with which age group brings me the most joy? (0 = AY, 10 = AO)	5.2	4.6	- 0.6	6.6	6.9	+ 0.3
Those of a different generation than me find it easy to understand my life (0 = SD, 10 = SA)	5.8	5.8	No Change	5.1	5.3	+ 0.2
I strongly value input from those of a different generation than me when I must make decisions (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	8.2	7.7	- 0.5	6.6	7.8	+ 1.2
I feel that my voice, my thoughts, and my opinions are valued in our congregation (0 = SD, 10 = SA)	7.9	8.1	+ 0.2	7.1	8.3	+ 1.2
I think that the <i>communal</i> witness of our congregation is important (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	9.2	9.3	+ 0.1	8.1	9.1	+ 1.0

<sup>101</sup> NT = Never True, AT = Always True, SD = Strongly Disagree, SA = Strongly Agree, AY = Always Younger, AO = Always Older.



I find it easy to accept teaching or correction from those who are not my age (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	6.8	8.5	+ 1.7	7	8	+ 1.0
I use the word “family” to describe those who are of no blood relation to me (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	8.7	9.3	+ 0.6	8.9	9.2	+ 0.3
I find it easier to make connections with people if we are given a common task to complete (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	8.8	8.2	- 0.6	8.1	7.6	- 0.5
I would rather serve alongside people close to my age in church service and mission projects (0 = SD, 10 = SA)	3.9	5.5	+1.6	5.0	5.2	+ 0.2

The data above show that there was movement toward strengthening intergenerational unity in several areas by both the control group and the experimental group. This was to be expected, as the control group was not left to exist in a vacuum during the project. The weekly sermons heard by the control group were built upon biblical texts that offered insights into the broad biblical call to unity, not specifically intergenerational unity (see Appendix A). The control group also worshipped in Sunday morning worship services that were designed to point toward the theme of Christian unity (see Appendix D). One would expect that both groups would see some increase in their understanding of, appreciation for, and participation in, broad Christian unity. However, the project hypothesis was that the experimental group would show more of a change in their perceptions from pre-test to post-test. Admittedly, the data supporting the original hypothesis was not as strong as I had hoped. In some cases, the control group

outperformed the experimental group as measured by the quantitative data. With that said, there are still useful conclusions to be drawn from the data.

There were several pieces of quantitative data that were encouraging to me as the pastor of this congregation. The pre-test scores were more toward the “always true” than the “never true” side of the scale when the respondents read the statement, “I tend to learn things from people who are of a different generation than me.” This was true for both the control and experimental groups. Therefore, the intergenerational awareness of the congregation was better than I had anticipated before the project began. The same was true in responses to the statements, “I strongly value input from those of a different generation from me when I must make decisions” and “I feel that my voice, my thoughts, and my opinions are valued in our congregation.” Again, this indicated a higher starting point. However, it also meant that there was less room for improvement on the scale.

Session three had its own pre-test and post-test (Appendix C), because its focus was unique. It focused on intergenerational leadership in the church. Quantitative data showed almost no change from the pre-test to the post-test on any of its questions. However, the responses to the statement, “The Holy Spirit empowers and equips all Christians, regardless of age, to teach and proclaim truths from the Bible” averaged 9.6 on a ten-point Likert scale. Again, this was evidence that the experimental group had a much higher starting point in this area than I had anticipated.

Two statements that dealt explicitly with the project goals received some of the most favorable responses from both groups. Both groups had a very high baseline understanding that the communal witness of the church was important. Granted, each respondent undoubtedly had a slightly different understanding of the term “communal

witness,” but their responses were strong. Use of the word “family” to describe people that were not of blood relation to them also showed a high baseline score for both groups. Again, these two responses to the pre-test that dealt explicitly with experimental group sessions, allowed for little improvement on a ten-point Likert scale.

### **Data Supporting Original Hypothesis**

The data show a difference in the movement of mean of at least one full point on a ten-point Likert scale in three instances. Two of these instances support the original hypothesis that those in the control group would increase in their support for intergenerational unity. The most significant difference in change occurred in the responses to the statement, “I strongly value input from those of a different generation than me when I must make decisions.” The control group decreased half a point from the pre-test to the post-test, indicating a lower value in the opinions of those from different generations when making decisions. The experimental group, however, saw a 1.2-point increase in their average response from pre-test to post-test, indicating that they had become more appreciative of the opinions of those in a different generation after the project.

Another marked difference related to the feeling open to value opinions of another generation when making decisions. The increase in the control group was only two-tenths of a point, while the experimental group saw an increase of a full point higher than the increase of the control group. In the experimental group sessions, group members were placed in situations where they, regardless of their age, were given opportunity to share their opinions openly in the group. They were also encouraged to respectfully

listen to the thoughts and opinions of others. This conversational dynamic allowed for opinions to be expressed in ways that were simply impossible in the worship service setting of the control group.

Appreciation for communal witness was a third area of improvement of the experimental group over the control group. The control group saw a statistically insignificant tenth of a point increase, while the experimental group saw a full point increase. Communal witness was the sole focus of session four for the experimental group, which served as the foundation for the intergenerational mission project in session five. The combination of these two sessions seems to have had a small effect on the experimental group toward the goal.

### **Data Opposing the Original Hypothesis**

The quantitative data also show evidence against concluding the original hypothesis that the experimental group would see a markedly higher change toward intergenerational cooperation. The control group showed a higher increase in their ease to accept correction from those that were not their age. There was also no significant increase in the responses of the experimental group to the statement, “Those of a different generation than me find it easy to understand my life.” If the project had accomplished the goal of significantly increasing participants’ intergenerational cooperation, one would expect the experimental group to have answered more affirmatively than the control group after the conclusion of the project. There was also little increase in the views of either group concerning the statement, “There is not a strong biblical case for

intergenerational unity in the church.” However, this question contained the adverb “not,” so it is possible that quick readers may have missed this qualifier.

The quantitative data on the kinesthetic piece of the project brought great surprise to me. While both groups indicated that common tasks increased the ease of making connections in both the pre-test and the post-test, the response of the experimental group decreased slightly after the completion of the project. Granted, the decrease was only half a point on a ten-point Likert scale, but any decrease at all indicates that it is possible that people like the *idea* of working with others more than the actual practice of working with others.

### **Differences Based on Age-Group**

The most interesting data from this project, though, came from analyzing the experimental group when broken down by generation. For the purpose of this analysis, the data from the experimental group was split into two sets, one group of youth and one group of adults. Each sub-group had five participants. The change from pre-test to post-test on three questions immediately caught my eye. Those results are reflected in the table below. The full data set can be found in Appendix E.

Table 2: Significant Change Based on Age-Group in Experimental Group

Question	Change from Pre-Test to Post-Test: Youth (18 and younger)	Change from Pre-Test to Post-Test: Adult (Over 18)
I feel that my voice, my thoughts, and my opinions are valued in our congregation (0 = SD, 10 = SA). <sup>102</sup>	+2.4	No Change
I think that the <i>communal</i> witness of our congregation is important (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	+2.0	No Change
I find it easy to accept teaching or correction from those who are not my age (0 = SD, 10 = SA).	+2.0	No Change

Table 2 clearly shows two significant findings. The first is that the adults in the experimental group showed absolutely *no change* in their average score on these three statements from pre-test to post-test.<sup>103</sup> The second is that the youth showed more change toward the hypothesized outcome on these three questions than anywhere else in the project data. This is significant. Their response to the first statement (question 14 in Appendix B) indicates that the youth felt more encouraged that their words carried weight in our congregation than before. It indicates that they felt heard and more equal in our congregation than before the project began. The third statement (question 16 in Appendix B) indicates their increased intergenerational respect, which is implied by the goal of this project. The middle statement in Table 2 (question 15 in Appendix B), illustrates that the youth grew in their appreciation of the unified communal witness of the congregation, while the adults in the experimental group did not. This could be from

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<sup>102</sup> SD = Strongly Disagree, SA = Strongly Agree

<sup>103</sup> It should be noted that the individual scores for the participants in the adult group were not exactly the same from pre-test to post-test. However, the *average* of the adult scores on these questions was the same from pre-test to post-test. The data can be examined in greater detail in Appendix E.

increased familiarity with an unfamiliar term, but the data did show an increase in their rating of its importance. The responses of these students in the post-test show that they moved more toward the hypothesized outcome of the project than the adults.

### **Analysis of Qualitative Data from Survey**

Qualitative data was collected on the pre-tests and post-tests for both the experimental and control group through the last four questions on the evaluation instrument (see Appendix B). These were open-ended questions with space for the participant to write his or her response. Three of the four questions simply asked for definitions of the terms “family,” “mutual submission,” and “communal witness” respectively. The fourth open-ended question asked the participant to “Please explain why it is important to learn from people that are not close to your age.”

Surprisingly, no one in either the experimental group or the control group defined family solely as those who were related by blood on the pre-test. Therefore, as a point of contrast from pre-test to post-test, that question was unable to provide movement from an undesired belief to a desired one. However, there was noticeable growth in this area from the responses of some, particularly in the experimental group. One adult moved from a simple response of “a group of people who care for each other in community” to “a unit of friends, brothers, and sisters seeking purpose in their lives, sharing responsibilities, holding everyone accountable, and living in unity.” The second response shows far more depth of understanding and reflection. This was true of all members of the experimental group in the post-test. In every case, their responses to the open-ended questions on the post-test were longer than their responses on the pre-test. The control group, however,

was less consistent as they did not have the benefit of focused teaching on the topics of the open-ended questions.

For participants under the age of eighteen in the experimental group, the terms “mutual submission” and “communal witness” saw very little response on the pre-test. Only two out of the five teenagers attempted to answer those two questions at all, and their responses were very short, indicating little understanding of the terms. The post-tests received more responses from the teenagers, and their responses to those two questions were more complete. One teenager showed tremendous improvement from pre-test to post-test. This person did not provide an answer on the pre-test concerning “communal witness,” but responded on the post-test with the following: “Communal witness means that through individuality, service projects and family-like surroundings, we are able to show the love of Christ and share the gospel through those shared moments with others.” This indicates a change in understanding of the term from pre to post-test.

The open-ended responses that were most intriguing to me, though, were the responses to the statement “Please explain why it is important to learn from people that are not close to your age.” This answer could not be given by regurgitating information; it forced the participants to reflect on the entire project and synthesize a lot of the teaching and experiences they had throughout the project. The control group had much shorter responses to this statement than the experimental group on the post-test. Both the adults and teenagers in the experimental group responded well to this question. A youth wrote “learning from those both older and younger is of uber importance because each individual person is so unique and can look at things and view them differently than you



do. It is important to be open to those views.” An adult said it this way, “God created all people for HIS purpose. Observing and learning from all ages allows us to grow. God puts certain people in certain places for a season. You’re never too old to learn!” Both responses reflect a general willingness to prioritize openness to learning from those who are of a different generation than them.

### **Analysis of Qualitative Data from Experimental Group Sessions**

Qualitative data was also gathered from the sessions themselves. Much of this was gained through recording the outcomes of learning activities that asked the experimental group to create something. The following examples are moments of growth that were shown as the group progressed through the project.

In session one, the activity was to create a Family Covenant for the group that all members could agree to and sign. Copies of this covenant were made for all participants to have at the end of the session. In the time allotted, this was a difficult task, and the covenant ended up being quite wordy. With more time to process and refine their statement, I feel like the outcome would have been more succinct. The group agreed on the following statement.

We will work together as a family. Each member has freedom and safety to disagree. We will respect all views of each age within the family; everyone is equal. We will hear, and listen to, views different than our own, and we will take time to understand them (Appendix F).

This statement reflects an adequate grasp of the learning goals for the session, which included understanding and articulating a definition of “family” as something other than nuclear family. The work also was the first challenge that the entire

experimental group had to accomplish together. This prepared them for communal work in later sessions, and ultimately, the community mission project.

In session two, I asked the group at the beginning of the session how they would define mutual submission. A student piped up and said, “It means that our relationship with others should be Christlike.” I asked the group, “What does it mean to be Christlike?” The room got very quiet, then the responses of “good,” “kind,” and “loving” chimed in. I could have never known that “Christlike” would be one of the adjectives used in this case; however, it was a wonderful springboard into looking at a story in John 13 where Jesus submitted himself to something others might have deemed menial or beneath him. One of the two intergenerational sub-groups studied this text, while the other examined the household code in Ephesians 5-6 along with Paul’s statement on equality in Galatians 3. Their task at the end was to formulate a statement that defined “mutual submission” in light of these texts. Their collaborative work produced the following statement. “Putting others before self, because we’re all equal and create a whole family serving Christ.” This statement draws upon both texts. The familial language is found in the household code from Ephesians, the equality piece is informed by Galatians, and the self-sacrificing piece comes from the example of Jesus. This statement is evidence that the group grasped this concept well at the end of the session.

In the third session, the pre-test and post-test proved to be less helpful in grasping movement from beginning to end than I had intended. However, the group did produce some wonderful insights from the text that showed understanding. This session also saw the largest number of people who spoke up during the session. Eight of the ten provided unprompted verbal feedback throughout the session. The session also produced one of

the most illustrative metaphors that showed growth in insight. It came after examining Peter's use of the prophet Joel in Acts 2. A retirement-aged person spoke up in the group, after remaining silent for most of the discussion, and said, "It's like a puzzle. If you're missing one piece, then it just isn't complete. It's the same way with the church. If you're missing one voice, then it just isn't complete."

The final task of session four provided some useful qualitative data. Unfortunately, only about half of the participants chose to complete the final reflection for the session. I asked the group to journal their thoughts about the value of communal witness. One teenager said, "How we get along with people matters. Our life is a witness to who Jesus is. If we can't get along, then why would people want to know Jesus?" This showed profound insight and understanding of not only the concept of communal witness, but its application in the local church. An adult from the group asked, "How could anyone expect us to love them if we do not love each other well?" I later quoted that person anonymously in a sermon several weeks later, because that is a simple, yet profound, question for the church that shows true understanding.

The final session yielded no written qualitative data; it only provided me a time to observe the group. The group worked well together to accomplish a task that was too large for any one person. One practical downside to the project was that since we removed leaves, this necessitated the use of leaf blowers to make the task manageable. The leaf blowers drowned out any meaningful conversation that might have been possible as the group worked together. What was noticed, though, was that the group developed their own system for working together. Some volunteered to rake, some volunteered to carry sheets of leaves, some volunteered to operate the leaf blower. They changed

positions regularly so that everyone would have a chance to do each job. This all developed organically with no guidance from me. There were no verbal altercations or people who chose to slack off. It was a true team effort. That alone was a good picture of at least measured success of the project from a qualitative analysis perspective.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project**

The most noticeable strength of this project was the fact that it allowed individuals within our congregation, who would not normally be in the same room for spiritual formation, to learn and grow together. Most participants in the experimental group had never been a part of an intentionally intergenerational experience of any kind, much less in the church. Many only had the lens of family members to peer into other generations. That lens can be clouded by family dynamics that assign power to each member based upon his or her perceived status within the family. This project allowed unrelated people to spend time together in a safe and level environment.

The survey instrument provided useful data. The pre-test and post-test showed change in areas of interest to the project. By breaking down the age-groups within the experimental group, I was able to gain insight in areas that would have otherwise remained hidden. The instrument allowed for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, which proved to be useful in discerning change from pre to post.

The survey instrument also had deficiencies that I would correct if I did the project again. The most noticeable deficiency was its length. While twenty-three questions created a lot of data, it also took a lot of time to complete. This led to a very low number of people in the control group completing both the pre and post-tests. With a larger sample in the control group, my results would have been more reliable and less

prone to chance. Likewise, the time that the post-test was given was problematic. The control group pre-test was distributed to Sunday school classes prior to worship on the first day of the project. This allowed people more time to fill them out before turning them in prior to worship. The post-test had to be given to the control group after the final worship service in the project. My reasoning behind this was that I did not want the mission activity of the experimental group, and their talk about their activity, to influence the results of the control group. Since the post-test was distributed after worship, the number of people who chose to stay and complete the test was very low. If I ran this project again, I would wait until the next Sunday morning before worship to distribute the post-test to the control group.

One area of the project proved to be a double-edged sword. The control group did not exist in a vacuum while the experimental group sessions were meeting. The control group heard sermons, and worshipped in services, focused on the theme of Christian unity. This had a net positive effect on the congregation, as the control group showed growth in the area of intergenerational unity. However, understanding the nuanced differences between the two might have been a barrier to seeing a clearer separation of the post-test responses in the data. If I did the project again, I would continue with a more generic sermon schedule to provide more accurate data.

I had hoped journals would provide more helpful qualitative data for analysis. However, participants journaled very little. In fact, most provided no insight in their journals other than brief notes that were jotted down during the sessions. If I ran this project again, I would provide more structure for the journaling piece. I would provide

the participants with written journal topics and a schedule so that more insight could be gained from their reflection.

The final issue that the project had working against it was timing. This issue was two-fold. First, the project ran through the holiday season in the months of November and December. This meant that attendance for the control group was sporadic. Surprisingly, the experimental group attended the sessions remarkably well. However, this is not an ideal time to run a program in the church as the minds of people are elsewhere.

The second issue with timing was less controllable. The church had voted me in as senior pastor less than one month before this project began, though I had served as Associate Pastor and Interim Pastor beforehand. This meant that the congregation was, at the time of this project, experiencing a season of heightened unity. They had just overwhelmingly voted in a new minister, which was the end of a very long road for this congregation. I believe that this may have skewed the results more than one would normally see in a congregation of similar size and history. This may explain some of the higher baseline scores that I reported in my earlier analysis.

### **Evaluation of the Facilitator**

After the project was completed, participants in the experimental group were given an evaluation to complete concerning my role as facilitator throughout the project (Appendix G). This evaluation gathered quantitative data using a Likert scale to assess my performance in the areas of preparation, organization, clarity, knowledge of material, my interaction with the group, and my overall effectiveness. The group was quite

gracious in their responses. However, there was minor room for improvement concerning my ability to adequately address questions raised by the group. My inclination is that I was attempting to assure adequate time for the material, rather than letting the inquisitiveness of the group drive the discussion, which might have facilitated a better learning experience for some participants. While the room for improvement was minor in this area, the insight did remind me of the importance of allowing more time in teaching sessions to address honest inquiry, as having a safe place to ask questions was crucial to my own intergenerational friendship that sparked my appreciation for intergenerational community.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Interpersonal unity is an elusive goal. It is elusive because humans change. When it is reached for a moment, often the moment is fleeting. People may unify around a certain cause or issue, while remaining divided on others. Therefore, it is more than simply a goal to be achieved, reached, and noted on a plaque on the wall. It is a goal to be constantly reevaluated as the goalposts move as one attempts to live in harmony with those around them. This is especially true of intergenerational unity. The young will become the middle aged, the middle aged will become the old, and the old will become the saints known only in our memory.

This project was but a snapshot of a moment in time in the life of First Baptist Church Valdese. Were the project to be run again with different people in a different setting, the outcomes would undoubtedly be different. However, there was growth in the group. They grew together. They grew as individuals in their understanding of one another, scripture, and of God's call toward unity in the church. The project continues to see fruit in the life of First Baptist, as I see students and adults who were involved in this project talking to one another around the church building when they had not known each other before. The project undoubtedly had merit in its ministry context. Did it meet all of its stated goals? Not in the ways I had hoped. Movement was not as drastic on the Likert scales as I had hoped. However, its unique context and its unique time in the history of this congregation placed baseline scores of unity higher than most contexts might see, and higher than this congregation may see in the future.



### **Next Steps**

Because this project was completed at an extremely unique point in time in the history of this church, I hope to run it again in the future at a less transitional time. In the meantime, I hope to incorporate its lessons into the future ministries of First Baptist Valdese. My hope is that the experimental group will continue to share, and live, their newfound unity as they permeate all areas of the congregation. It is only then that culture can be transformed. If it moves from theoretical classroom crafted statements to lived theology, then I will know the project ultimately succeeded.

The ultimate application of the concepts studied and refined through this project would be to simply allow intergenerational ministry to be the default type of ministry in local church life. Program ministry, ministry that exists in segregated silos in the local church, is dying as budgets are cut and staff positions are being eliminated. Therefore, rather than running this as another program in the church, my hope is that it will be mined for its best practices that bring people together in unity and mission, and those practices will be implemented in the church of the future.

### **Connection with Life-Long Goals**

When I began the journey toward a Doctor of Ministry degree, my goals were: to broaden and deepen my understanding of God, to grow in holiness, and to grow in my skillset for biblical interpretation. The last goal on the list was worked into the project explicitly. Without an exegetically based and reflective understanding of scripture, no useful hermeneutic can be developed. This project pushed me to think about a logical progression through scripture and seeing the unveiling of newness through the person of

Jesus Christ. Coupled with serious exegetical work, this was both academically and spiritually fulfilling. The first two goals require a more nuanced explanation. Deepening my understanding of God was partially fulfilled as I spent time understanding the texts from which this project developed. However, God is more than the sum of texts that reveal truths. I also spent time with the generational breadth of humanity throughout this project; and it is humanity, made in the image of God, that reveals a facet of God that we might have missed before. As God is united in the trinity, so can the church be united in mission. This project has convinced me of that; and it is through that truth that I have seen God more clearly. One elderly participant put it this way, “Because of this project, I was reminded of the wonderfulness of each individual in our church, and that was beyond price.” As the image of God is revealed, so is the holiness of God.

It is only through seeing the holiness of God that we know holiness. Through this project, I have come to understand even more clearly the words of a professor from my undergraduate years. He said, “We owe almost all of our growth to people who are different from us.” That is the truth that undergirded this project from the beginning. It is a truth that was revealed throughout; and it remains a truth that will impact the rest of my ministry career.

## APPENDIX A

### SUNDAY MORNING SERMON MANUSCRIPTS<sup>104</sup>

#### **Psalm 133**

#### **“Messy Unity”**

Preached on November 10, 2019

In our society, there are a lot of things that divide us. However, I think we're often too quick to discount the fact that there are things in life that unite us. In the last 48 hours of my life, I've seen two places of unity that were truly at opposite ends of the spectrum. Friday night, I was at the Draughn Football game, and it was one of the largest crowds I've ever seen there. We all watched as Draughn coasted to a win that propelled them into the playoffs, and the crowd, at least on the home side was united in their jubilation. Yesterday, I participated in the annual Hospice Memorial Service for Caldwell Hospice, where hundreds of people came together to remember and honor their shared grief, as they had lost someone they loved in the past year. They were united in their solemnity and their shared experience.

Division seems to rule the day on most days; but on those days, in those contexts, unity won out. However, it was an election week, and the news is still on our TV and our phones every day. So, division was plenty apparent this week. But, what if it hadn't been? I need everyone to close your eyes for me this morning and just listen to what I'm going to read. Let your mind dive deeply into the following completely hypothetical news story.

Tuesday's election saw landslide victories for sensibility in America. Governorships in all the states who had them up for grabs, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi all saw long-shot independent candidates have strong showings, with Kentucky actually electing its first non-partisan governor in the state's history! “I think this election taught us that people are tired,” governor-elect Indy said to the Louisville Courier-Journal. “They're tired of the yelling. They're tired of the backbiting. They're tired of us politicians doing the very things that they teach their children not to do.” Louisiana and Mississippi saw something even more unthinkable! Republicans won in Louisiana and Democrats in Mississippi. However, both governors elect made history when they immediately pledged to appoint their former challengers as top advisors in their new administrations.

A wave of purple swept across the nation as balance was restored to every state legislature up for grabs. Neither New Jersey or Virginia have one party controlling their state government anymore. Even local elections were not immune to this phenomenon. Partisan identities seemed to melt away in the days leading up to the election. In fact, all candidates for city council in the city of Indianapolis, Indiana,

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<sup>104</sup> These manuscripts were written each week for use during the Sunday morning worship hour at First Baptist Valdese, NC during the length of the ministry project. I am not a strict manuscript preacher. Therefore, the actual sermon preached may have varied at times from the printed manuscript. However, these manuscripts are very close to the words spoken from the pulpit on their respective Sundays.

renounced their party affiliation in the month prior to election day. A joint statement crafted by all candidates running was released the Friday before election day. It read, in part, that “If we can’t be judged on the merit of our ideas, rather than the letter beside our name, then we don’t deserve to be elected!”

The mood of cooperation in local and state elections did not go unnoticed in Washington, and that led to a potential bridge being built over the largest chasm in American politics. President Trump will host a bipartisan summit next weekend at Mar-a-Lago. In attendance will be Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Senate leaders Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell, along with House Minority Leader, Kevin McCarthy. A press release from the White House concerning the upcoming summit simply said, “We owe it to the people of the United States to set an example of civility and cooperation. Both sides are prepared to move forward for the betterment of America, and the world. We realize this means that we must make concessions, bury hatchets, and commit to move forward as a true *United States of America*.”

Ok, you can open your eyes now. Sadly, that was just an imaginary tale spun together from a mixture of lies and pie-in-the-sky optimism. Sadly, political discourse in our country is neither positive nor kind. It’s easy to blame “them” for setting a bad example, but *we* are the ones who elected them, so they are simply reflecting the worst parts of who we are. The cycle doesn’t end there, though. We see the intense dialogue portrayed on television, and we become even more intense in our own conversations. It makes us harken back for a simpler time when people could just get along! In that mindset, here these words from Psalm 133.

How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!  
It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe.  
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

The author of this psalm, of course, had no thought of American politics when it was written. It’s a “psalm of ascents,” one of the 15 psalms you’ll find from Psalm 120 to 134. These are relatively short songs that could be easily memorized and sung as Jewish worshippers were ascending to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem for one of the three pilgrim festivals each year. They may have also been sung as priests were ascending the 15 steps that led into the temple itself, stopping at each step to recite one of these psalms. Either way, they were psalms that were used to center oneself, and the community, as people were going to worship. Imagine entire families singing it, the old teaching it to the young, and the adults singing through their smiles as they heard their children reciting these lines back to them, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

When you read this text in most translations, they make an interpretive decision that is merited. There is definitely an allusion to the worshipping community, “God’s people.” The text, though, says “brothers,” alluding to the familial nature of what’s being celebrated here. What begins as a chant in the nuclear family is quickly extended to the larger family of God. That’s true with most things, don’t you think? Family is where we learn how to function as part of a group. It’s where we learn how to love. It’s where we

learn how to give and take. It's where we learn how to get along. But, it's also where we can learn resentment and other destructive behavior. We bring all of these things with us when we come into the family of God, because they've made us who we are. It's here, when we're at our best, reflecting the character of our God, that those wounds can be healed and we learn the give and take of a larger community.

The family is also where we learn this sense of collective responsibility, the idea that there is language beyond "I" and "me." It's reflected here in this psalm, which some scholars say has its roots in how estates were settled in the ancient world. Nowadays, when it's time for an estate to be settled after the death of the owner, families divide things equitably, ensuring that all heirs get their fair and equal share. Then, though, it wasn't uncommon for the estate to remain intact, left to be managed by the children of the patriarch. As you might imagine, this could have led to its fair share of family conflict, unless it was part of the culture, unless they understood that the words to use were "ours" and "us," instead of "I" and "me."

Unity isn't an easy thing to achieve. It requires looking at the world from a perspective where we don't see ourselves as the center of it. It's the call that Jesus made in the gospels when he claimed that if anyone wanted to follow Him, he or she must "deny themselves and follow me," because we aren't the center of it all. The give and take can be messy, and probably will be, as we sort it out as the kingdom of God, but I can promise you that it's worth it. It's good, it's holy, and it's lifegiving!

Unity is *good*! Now, I know that might not seem revolutionary, but in a culture of lone-wolf independence and tribalism, I think it's something that we could stand to be reminded of. Unity is good for who? It's good for the community, which is, in turn, good for you! I don't know how many of you like paying taxes. I can assure you that I do not! However, I did like driving to church this morning on a passable road. I do enjoy being able to send my daughter to school. Those are things that are built out of big-pool unity, things larger than any of us could do for ourselves.

In 1944, War raged on both sides of the globe, and a terrible disease was reaching epidemic status right here in our own area: polio. The need for a hospital capable of providing care was urgent, but the largest town in the area, Hickory, didn't have one. Children affected with polio had to be sent to Charlotte or Gastonia for better treatment. However, in May 1944, those beds were all full, and the need for another hospital was critical. There was a camp out near the Lake, where Jaycee Park is now that had been built during the Depression by the WPA, and was then being used as an outdoors camp for underprivileged kids. It was selected as the site for the hospital. There were no materials, no huge labor force, as most of the able-bodied men were overseas fighting. There were, however, people willing to put all of their time and energy into the effort.

Three doctors were put in charge of the project. Within a couple weeks, they had commitments from healthcare professionals from all over the country, and some of the finest medical schools. Harvard, Yale, and Johns Hopkins were all represented. They gathered a corps of student nurses and therapists to do other needed work. They had everything in place, except a building, and they needed one ASAP.

The final decision to build the hospital was made on a Wednesday afternoon. An architect arrived on site, sketched out a crude building plan, and construction began before nightfall. Lumber was trucked in from local sawmills as fast as it could be.

Plumbers, electricians, and carpenters worked around the clock. For the unskilled labor, basically anyone with a pulse was recruited to help. Even local bankers and attorneys swung into action, hammering, carrying, and painting.

Fifty-four hours after construction started that Wednesday evening, the hospital admitted its first patients on Saturday. Without the unity that was built around common purpose, there's no way that could have ever been done. Sadly, I wonder if it could be done today. We seem to have lost the centrality of the common good, a malady that affects us everywhere from our families to our workplaces to our churches. Over the next six months, the hospital would treat over 700 patients. The decision was made in the first week of the hospital's existence that they would be a colorblind facility. They would treat ALL patients who needed help on a first come first served basis, regardless of race or creed, another unifying symbol that was truly revolutionary at the time! Because of that unity, because of people laying aside their special interests and focusing on a common goal, unity was good for both the individuals and the community. March of Dimes, which was then focused on eradicating polio in the United States, used the story in their fundraising campaigns. They called it, "The Miracle of Hickory." And, if that's not the best word to describe people laying aside their preferences and to-do lists to focus on something larger than themselves, then I don't know what is.

Unity, though, among the people of God, is more than just unity for unity's sake. It's more than simply uniting around a social problem and pledging to support it. No, unity among the people of God comes when we realize that we aren't the center of it all; and that's where unity becomes *holy*! This psalm wasn't the equivalent of the dwarfs singing "hi-ho, hi-ho; it's off to work we go." No, this was sung in preparation for worship. As they're ascending to worship at Jerusalem, the people of God are implicitly set apart from the nations who do not worship in Jerusalem.

This isn't unlike the ceremony that's described here in the first metaphor. The priests in Jewish life were set apart for special duties in worship. In Israel's history, these were descendants of first Aaron, and then Levi. You can read about their consecration ritual in Exodus 29. It included pouring oil over their head, specially mixed oil that was blessed for the purpose of anointing. And, this wasn't just any anointing. Some of you may have been anointed with oil before in a Christian context. In some traditions, it's done along with prayer over the sick, or a prayer of consecration, setting something apart. But, in these traditions, it's almost always a small amount of oil that's used. You can buy these small vials of oil for that purpose now. But, this text isn't talking about a small amount here. No, this is an exorbitant amount, so much so that it runs off the head, down the beard, and then soaks into the robe. This setting apart brings literalness to the metaphorical messy unity. It is indeed exorbitantly blessed by God, though, and his community in their "set-apart-ness" becomes a beacon for others to see God.

Lastly, unity is *life-giving*! Mount Hermon is the highest mountain in that part of the world, so high that, even in a part of the world we think of being arid, it's snow covered most of the year. It's so high that it catches the moisture and precipitation from the atmosphere. It was also known for heavy dew that fell there. When you live in a place that doesn't get much rain for 6 months out of the year, you begin to rely on the dew to renew the earth. When it warms up, all of that water runs down the mountain and becomes the source of the Jordan River, the literal lifeblood of the entire region. Without it, there would be no way to sustain crops or people. The water is refreshing to the land,

and life springs forth in ways that couldn't happen if all that water that collected on the top of Mount Hermon didn't all run toward the valley, each stream and tributary combining to form a great river that sustains every living thing in the land! If each of these tributaries simply went off on their own direction, they would eventually dry up in the hot and dry climate. But, their unity is their strength, and that water is a sign of blessing on the land and on the people!

The unity described here, though, is much more than a symbol of God's blessing. It also invites the blessing! "There," the text says in verse 3, the Lord bestows His blessing. There, where the unity is, where people put aside their differences and work toward a common goal, ascending the mountain to worship God, taking their focus off of themselves and assigning it to God. There, where the hard work of unity is done; that's where God's blessing will be! His blessing of what? "Life!"

The communal life that God gives us in the church is indeed a gift, and it's meant to be understood as a blessing from God, one that makes us better, more whole, more holy, and more life-giving than we could ever be on our own!

As I close this morning, our invitation is to respond to the invitation of unity God has given us through this text, to put aside the things that cause us to retreat into isolationism or tribalism and live into the community that God gives us as a blessing. And, if you're here, and you want to be a part of the community of God, I invite you to trust in the promises of our savior Jesus Christ who came to give life abundantly and who fixes our eyes on the Father and the promise that He desires us to be a part of His community, unified with Him in abundant life that begins here and now and continues into eternity.

### **Colossians 3:12-17**

"A Beautiful Day"

Preached on November 17, 2019

There's a movie opening this Friday about one of the people in the world who probably did more to spread the truths of kingdom living throughout the world than anyone who ever lived. It's not a biopic about Billy Graham, Martin Luther, or even the Apostle Paul. All those movies have been made before. This one stars one of my favorite actors, Tom Hanks. He plays Rev. Fred McFeely Rogers, a Presbyterian pastor from just outside of Pittsburgh. Most of us know him as Mr. Rogers. If you haven't seen the trailer yet, grab a box of tissues and watch it after church today. If you're planning on going to see it in the theater, either take a box with you or wear something with long sleeves. You'll probably need it. So far, it's gotten overwhelmingly positive reviews from critics, and it's almost guaranteed to be a box office success, despite the fact that it drops on the same opening weekend as "Frozen 2," which I can assure you our daughter Caroline is much more interested in seeing.

If the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, Mr. Rogers implicitly taught more about the spiritual life than most of us can ever hope to. In an age when televangelism left black eyes on the face of Christianity, Rogers saw television as "a tool for broadcasting grace

through the land,” his approach was different. As a young boy, he taught manhood to millions of little boys just like me, that was extremely different than the one we saw all around us. By most societal standards, he was considered weak. But, let’s look at some of the things “weak” Mr. Rogers taught us.

He taught us to take a stand against racial injustice, when in 1968 just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Officer Clemmons, a black police officer, was invited to soak his feet in a pool on a hot day with Mr. Rogers. This was at a time when pools all over the country remained racially segregated. When wealthy men in suits tried to cut federal funding for public television, he went before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications and gave a peaceful, kind, but passionate and airtight argument in defense of children’s educational programming, and in defense of the families in the lower socioeconomic classes who couldn’t afford private early childhood education. He spoke an unpopular wisdom against the nuclear arms race, even working into one of his children’s programs in 1983 in which King Friday is made to appear just plain silly for entering into a contest with a neighboring kingdom about who can purchase the most “parts” from a factory, “parts” being a stand-in term for bombs.

Standing up for convictions and beliefs is one of the most “manly” or “womanly” things I can imagine, but Mr. Rogers taught children to do it, not by shouting opinions into a vacuum or into the faces of those with whom we disagree. He taught children, through example much more than words, to do the difficult work of peaceful reconciliation, standing up when necessary, but always in the most humble, patient, and kind way. As a pastor, he had undoubtedly studied this text from Colossians many times, and it undoubtedly informed his own thoughts about conflict.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Like Ephesians that we studied last spring on Wednesday nights, Colossians begins with a theological treatise that talks about the power of Jesus Christ to redeem and restore those who were estranged from God and about how full and free that life in Christ can really be. Paul then moves on to expand upon this new life and how it is in contrast with the old life and old ways of their lives before they began to follow Jesus. It’s here, at the beginning of chapter 3, when he calls his readers to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your [new] life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Paul understood Christian life as community life. Believers weren’t simply committed to following Jesus as disconnected individuals. It is, in fact, our experience



with God that makes us draw closer to both God and one another. It is our own thankfulness for the mercy and life that God gives us that encourages us to be more thankful and gracious to each other. Life in community is better, but it brings with it its own set of challenges due to differences in priorities, personalities, and desires.

In this redefined family that Jesus had introduced us to, that was read about earlier in the service, we learn that this new community wasn't just *like* family, it *was* family! In a society in which your family might have shunned you for your involvement in this new way of following the God of Judaism, Christianity, you might need a literal new family, a new support system, and that's just what the church was, and can be, for people. But, with people, there are differences; and, with differences, there is conflict. It's part of the human condition. This isn't a prescription wondering *if* conflict will ever come; it's a prescription for *when* it comes.

It's into that family system that Paul uses the metaphor of changing clothes so that we may live better together in harmony. He knew that believers were no longer their old selves, but they still needed to throw off certain vices and put on the virtues of the faith. This process of sanctification is taking place in all of us. We are justified by our faith in Christ, but if we stop there, then we aren't living into the life that Christ has called us to, and we won't be a good family member either.

Each week in the opening scene of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, Fred Rogers came through the front door of his home singing. The door represented the division between who he had been and who he was going to be as he was speaking with children and teaching them virtue. He changed clothes as he sang. Off with the stiff jacket and on with the sweater. Off with the dress shoes and on with the sneakers. His image was softened; it was different. He was clothed in comfort. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love are all things that make an environment safe, and a safe environment is what's needed for healthy growth. This is true both in our homes and in our churches. This doesn't mean that Jesus calls us to a safe life. He was very clear that our call is a call to give up ease and embrace suffering. Paul, as he was writing this letter from prison, undoubtedly understood that. He also understood that God could work through the community of faith to teach us how to live, conforming us more to the image of Jesus.

That transformation happens best in safe community, community where the knee-jerk reaction to wrongs isn't "how can I get even," but "how can I stretch myself in grace right now?" It's a community rooted in forgiveness, not because we've chosen to avoid or ignore the things that hurt us, but because we choose to face them, understand them, and release them, because we understand that others are human beings made in the image of God who are prone to making just as many mistakes as we are. In fact, it's both our mistakes, what we call "sins," the places we miss the mark, and God's salvation, that are the only things that really unite us in the church.

I know, "sin" isn't a fashionable word. I understand that it can bring up visions of angry preachers for some or tremendous guilt in others, but I challenge you to view the word in a different way. For a second, let's not view the word in the particulars, though they are listed earlier in Colossians 3. Let's view it in what sins do at their most basic level. They break relationships. Sin breaks relationships. Yes, it is our sinfulness that separates us from a holy God, but it's also sins that separate us from other people, even those within our own family. One Christian teacher said it this way, and it's about the

simplest way anyone could say it. “Sin is a failure to love” (Fiona Basile). Therefore, as we battle against our old nature and the temptations that drag us back into the brokenness of our former selves, the text calls us to put effort into those things that form relationships instead of break them. These are the things that bring us back into right relationship with God and with one another.

It’s become fashionable today to say that you’re “not a people person,” or that you “don’t trust anyone,” or that you “don’t need anyone.” I’ve used the trust one more than I’d like to admit. Those, though, are simply defense mechanisms that indicate our continued struggle with healthy community.

Jonathan Edwards, the early American preacher who delivered the terrifying classic sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” that scared most of us in high school English class, also delivered a sermon called “Heaven, a World of Love.” As you can imagine, the tone and theme were a bit different. Rather than the image of humanity as a spider dangling over the flames, he spoke of an image of heaven, a crowded heaven.<sup>105</sup> We’ve seen some of this in our study on Revelation on Wednesday nights. Edwards pictures heaven as a place of community, where all relationships are as they should be, because there is no sin against one another to break relationships. Heaven is made complete by its community! I think the temptation for us is to often think of the kingdom of God as just us, God, and all the things we want, and none of the bothers of the things or the people that frustrate us. But, that’s not the call of this text. It calls us to a more difficult path, one that includes bearing with one another as we practice the resurrection life here on earth!

“Bear with one another.” What does that look like in community? It doesn’t look like pointing out faults quickly. “Bearing with” means that there’s some sort of load being carried, and loads are a lot easier to endure when you aren’t by yourself. The old life pushes to isolate and exclude; the new pushes to include and help. It’s counter to our nature, though, if we hold to survival of the fittest in its purest form. Why should I care about my sister or brother? They’ve made their bed, I guess they’ll have to lie in it. No, that’s not who we are anymore. We tolerate the difficult things in the lives of others while we help them heal, because we know that our own difficulties have been tolerated as we’re being healed. It means that we sacrifice our own interests for the benefit of others. That individual sacrifice is what makes communal peace possible.

Without love, the overarching binder and source of all of the virtues, none of them would be possible. If we didn’t love our children, would we be willing to put up with potty training or temper tantrums? If my wife didn’t love me, would she have continued to support me when I was in seminary and pouring so much income toward a goal that seemed to be so far away?

This text ends in verse 17 with a call to do whatever you do, either with your words or your actions, in the name of the Lord Jesus with an attitude of thankfulness toward God. On the surface, that seems simply like a call to do the good things that are called for in the verses before. Its implications go further than that, though. I challenge me, and the rest of us here, to look at these things a little differently. The church at

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<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Heaven, A World of Love,” Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, accessed October 18, 2019, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy43OjQ6MTUud2plbw==>.

Colossae was a minority church in a town ruled by the Roman Empire, at a time when the name of Jesus was not welcome in many circles outside of the church. We, on the other hand, despite divisive rhetoric to the contrary, have extreme freedom in our use of the name of Christ or our association with the church. It seems, though, that we should ponder the responsibility associated with that freedom. Since we are so free to identify as Christian, and since most of our friends, coworkers, and family members know that we identify as Christian, that means that we carry the name of Jesus Christ with us in all that we do. This is even true, or maybe even especially true, when we continue to pick up those old clothes of anger, resentment, gossip, and divisiveness, we wear all those things in the name of Jesus too. That's why Paul is so concerned with unity in the church. It's good for those inside, yes; but the evangelistic benefit of a communal witness that lives unity rooted in Christ is invaluable to the world!

Each week, Fred Rogers invited the world into his neighborhood to see what healthy love and healthy social growth looked like. It looked a lot like these kingdom virtues we see listed here, bound together by a strong commitment to the worth of every child who was watching. Each week, we go forth from this place carrying the name of Jesus with us as we go. To those who see us, what Jesus are they seeing? Are they seeing the character of God being revealed through the Jesus of the gospels? The one who is merciful, patient, and kind? Or, will they see a reflection of community that is somehow off the mark?

When you're seen as an individual in your home, workplace, or school, what will people see? Will they see someone who, despite the conflict that comes from living and working with other people, strives to bring unity, peace, and compassion into every situation? Or, will they see someone so transformed by their relationship with Jesus Christ that they can't figure out why you're so willing to go the extra mile to bring peace and unity?

Jesus calls us to repentance, both individually and collectively, for the times that we've allowed our old nature to cloud the image of God that we show to the world. As a church, that's our invitation today. Or, if you've been listening this morning, and your heart and mind are unsure where you draw your strength from, and your unsure where your collective identity comes from, and you'd like to lay claim to the promises of salvation through Jesus Christ this morning so that you may live into community life as God intended, I invite you to come this morning and be a part of who we are as we strive to figure out community life together.

### **1 Corinthians 10:14-17**

**"The Thanksgiving Table"**

Preached on November 23, 2019

Retailers drive Christmas, there's no question there. The day before Halloween, Walmart, Lowe's, and Target all had gigantic Christmas displays. On Thursday morning, we'll gather around the TV to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, but there's no anxiously awaiting the arrival of Santa anymore. He's been around for weeks. Leave it up to a society driven by consumerism to go from a holiday centered on wearing masks

and getting lots of candy to a holiday, that, at least culturally, is centered on wish lists and gifts.

I know there's at least one place, though, where Thanksgiving gets to be experienced to the fullest, without being crowded out by reindeer and evergreen trees. This Thursday, in a garage, about the size of our fellowship hall, in the backyard of a rural home down a dirt road just one county over, my wife's family will host their annual Thanksgiving feast! They moved it out of the house several years ago, because the crowd got too big. The tables are all decorated by Crystal's grandmother who makes handmade centerpieces from sticks and natural things she finds around the farm. The festivities begin with a family skit, also directed by Crystal's eccentric grandmother, a skit that I've successfully avoided for most of the 15 Thanksgivings I've spent with her family. I agree to pray if not forced to act. It's a good trade for me.

What makes the Feast unique, though, is the eclectic group of people that make up the crowd. It might be about the most unique family Thanksgiving that happens in that part of rural North Carolina. It starts with the astounding number of northerners present. See, my wife's entire family is from New Jersey. They've all moved down here, though, something that worked out well for me. I'm the one who "talks funny" in that crowd, though. It is a beautiful picture of community. This all hit me a couple years ago when I looked around the room. There's Crystal's aunt Lenora from Trinidad. Her cousin, a Marine, fell in love with a local woman while stationed at the US Embassy in Tokyo. They're now married and live not far from here. Her uncle's companion came to this country from the former Soviet Union as a religious refugee in the late 1980s. Then, at the next table over, were another cousin's British in-laws who had joined us that year. People were laughing and learning about each other, telling stories, and truly living into the quintessential picture of "family." They'll do it all again this year in just a few days. People from all over the world, all over the United States, all over the political spectrum, and all over the map on the issues that we find ourselves divided on in society, come together each year in the spirit of thankfulness.

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

This text is part of a relatively long section of 1 Corinthians that began back at the beginning of chapter 8 that addresses a very real problem in the early church. See, the church that Paul is writing to here is in Corinth. Corinth was a prosperous city in modern-day Greece on an isthmus, a narrow strip of land between two larger land masses. It wasn't narrow enough to build a canal across, at least not back then, but it was narrow enough to carry goods across from ships on one side to ships on the other side. This would save transporters a long time at sea and allow them to get their goods to market faster. So, in Corinth, there was both ample work for the working class and ample wealth for those prospering on the backs of others. This wealth meant that there were many architectural and artistic temples and shrines, at least two dozen, throughout the city. In these temples, there were animals that were sacrificed to the false Roman

gods, similar to how animals were sacrificed in the temple at Jerusalem. Some of the meat from these sacrifices ended up being used for large meals in these temples that were open to anyone in the community. Some of this meat might also end up in the marketplaces in town, for sale to anyone who could buy.

The Jews wouldn't eat this meat, because they saw it as having been polluted. They had their own butchers who could assure that meat for their consumption was held to a higher standard. The problem? Supply and demand. The unclean meat was more abundant, and probably cheaper. Also, many of the converts here in Corinth were Gentiles who didn't have any concept of clean vs unclean meat. Besides, for the poorer classes who may never eat meat aside from these community meals in the temples, it was a welcome treat. They were just claiming the freedom that Paul, and others, had told them they had in Christ. Or, so they thought.

So, the Corinthians had apparently asked, "what do we do about this?" Paul gives them an answer that's a little convoluted, but culminates in our text for this morning. First, he says that there's only one God. He works that in there, because he wants to remind the church at Corinth, the church that sees dozens of gods and idols being worshipped around them every day, that all of those gods aren't real. He talks about all of this in chapter 8. There's only one God, and his presence was made fully known in the world through Jesus, lest anyone be confused.

He then goes on into what to do when Christians have to make a choice concerning this meat sacrificed to idols. Where he comes down on it is this: It can't make you less of a Christian. God gives us freedom. BUT, there may be some people that aren't as mature as you in the faith that see you eating it, and they might think it's OK to go into the temple of the idol, and then their faith might digress. He even implies that he'd be willing to become a vegetarian at the end of chapter 8 if it meant that he wouldn't lead others down a path they might not be able to handle. Paul never understood decisions to be made simply about what was right and wrong before God. That was legalism from his old pharisaic life. He's moved beyond that; he's moved toward holiness, toward living a life that is a reflection of who he is on the inside so that others may be drawn to faith in Jesus Christ.

There was a communal aspect to all of this. What draws the community closer to God, and what might lead a brother or sister further away from God? This line of thought has historically been used by the church on everything from alcohol to the lottery. Those are arguments that may have some merit at times; but, when you pick out some individual sin and make it "the enemy," you miss the larger point of what Paul is getting at here. The life that we model to those around us matters! It's either drawing people toward Jesus or driving them away.

He goes on to use himself as an example. He talks about the great lengths he's willing to go to, "becoming all things to all so that I might save some," he says, while not compromising his core conviction that Jesus is Lord.

In the midst of that argument, he seems to have wandered away from table fellowship, but really, he's been pointing toward it all along, and he picks it back up explicitly in 10:14 where our reading started today. He relates it to the number one sin talked about in the entire bible, idolatry. Idolatry happens any time we place anything in front of God in our lives. We like to think of it as some sort of silly figurine people would worship, because that's what we see in stories in the Bible. No. Idolatry is much

more complex and much more rampant. I don't think any of us here this morning will go home and pray to a teddy bear shrine or any other inanimate object. However, I can assure you that our allegiance to something competes with our allegiance to God.

Paul's main concern is not the meat at all, but the community of allegiance that the meat represents. All of these sermons in the past three weeks have focused on the communal aspects of Christianity, this idea that we can't simply do our relationship with God alone and call it Christianity. It is inherently communal and inherently interconnected. He knows that we're responsible for each other. That means something to those who claim Jesus as Lord. It means that there must be attention paid to who's watching and how we're living as reflections of our savior in the community. It's called our communal witness as a church.

Last week, as I wrapped up the text from Colossians 3, I talked about the communal witness that we carry with us as we carry the name of Jesus Christ out of the church walls each week into the places we spend the other 6 ¾ days of the week. Those around us often know the God we claim to serve, and see our lives as a reflection of that God, for better and for worse. There may be a hint of that in the text, but the focus here is on those inside the community, those who may be struggling with their new identity in Christ, and how, for their sake, we give up freedoms we may have in order to be the example they need.

What allegiances are we living? What allegiances are we living to our children? Are we telling them that it's OK to forsake gathering around this communion table, or the metaphorical table of worship, if something better comes up in life somewhere else, or if it's just easier to do something else? Are we living a unified witness with a sole purpose to those around us? Earlier in the service, Libby read from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The opening lines of that passage are called the "Shema," meaning "hear," or "listen." It was an attention getter to let God's people know that what followed was important. God is one, love Him with all of your heart, soul, and strength. Talk about these things when? Teach them to your children, when? When you sit down and when you walk, when you lie down and when you get up? So, when? All the time! Faith in God alone isn't something that's just supposed to be instilled in children at church or in special times of religious instruction at home. No, faith is modeled as you go through the mundane day-to-day tasks of life. Paul understood that, and that's why he's leading followers of Jesus away from coming and partaking in this meal along with the other meals that could be confused with some other act of ultimate allegiance.

If you read a little further on beyond our text for this morning, Paul compares these tables where sacrificed meat is eaten to "tables of demons." Now, Paul knew good and well that the gods those temples and meals represented had no power in and of themselves; they were nothing. He said so earlier in chapter 8. What he did know, though, was that they were being used to draw the attention of the people of God away from focusing solely on Jesus Christ.

Political discourse is undoubtedly one "table of demons" in contemporary society. We go and feast at its table and leave ultimately unfulfilled, but emotionally enraged by our interaction with it. We also confuse followers of Christ, and non-believers alike, when we live passionately for our political persuasion, but less passionately for the kingdom of God. It all leaves people asking, "So, who is their God, anyway?" As I've listened to Christians who love Jesus on both sides of the political

aisle speak about the impeachment hearings this week, I've noticed something. Often, even I can't figure out where their ultimate allegiance lies. Remember, as we commune around these tables, that god becomes a part of us, and that is to the detriment of our witness for Jesus Christ.

The largest temptation of any, though, is to worship at the altar of self-fulfillment, clamoring for whatever we want, whatever makes us happy, and whatever brings us joy all the time. Make no mistake, God does not desire for his children to be unfulfilled. However, He does desire for their fulfillment to be found in Him, because it is only there that lasting fulfillment can ever be known.

So, what we're really doing when we come to this table is we're taking a stand, a stand of unity for our children and our grandchildren in the faith, so that they will see that we don't worship at the altars of falsehood and unfulfillment. We don't place anything above our allegiance to our Lord, Jesus Christ. We put aside our differences, our preferences, and our different perspectives to claim that we are united to God, and to one another, by the act that this meal commemorates. We don't set the example to them that this isn't important. We know it's important, because as we commune with each other, we commune with God!

If we truly desire to come into authentic community with God and with one another, then laying aside the pledges we have to other gods for the sake of the true God can be celebrated right here at this table. The body of Christ is both broken and formed at the communion table. That's the paradox of our faith. We remember Christ's brokenness and celebrate the fact that His brokenness brings us back together as one body of Christ, united to do the work of our savior in the world.

Our more liturgical brothers and sisters in the faith call the communion meal the "eucharist;" it comes from a Greek word meaning something like "Thank you!" This meal is a celebration of thankfulness where we all come together, forsaking other allegiances to focus on the thankfulness we have for the sacrifice that's symbolized here. God's table is open to all who repent of their sin and seek to come to the table and give thanks. If you would like to claim God's grace today as we partake of this meal together as a community of faith, I invite you to do so. If you would like to break the bonds you have with other idols and commit to following Christ alone, I invite you to accept God's grace, repent, and turn to following Jesus Christ as savior and Lord, so you too can join us at this Thanksgiving table.

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

"Times are Changing"

Preached on December 1, 2019

No one in my family had ever gone to college before, so I didn't really know what I was getting into. I thought I was going to learn the same kinds of facts and knowledge I had learned in high school, just different things and more of it. Sure, that was part of it; but any good education teaches you more than dates, figures, and a collection of facts. Education, when it's at its best teaches you how to learn and how to synthesize all of the facts and experiences you have into a lens through which you see the world. It's what

church should be for those who grow up here, a place for them to learn and grow and develop into followers of Jesus who see the world through His eyes.

It was in college at Mars Hill that I met two people who would teach me more than any textbook or class ever could, and shaped how I view other people more than anything else. Their names were Dr. Walter Ziffer and Mrs. Edith. Dr. Ziffer was born in Czechoslovakia, and as a 12 year old boy woke up in the middle of the night to artillery shells in the distance. Hitler's Nazi troops were soon a common sight in their town, a few months later some of his friends who he had grown up with wouldn't play with him any more. Instead, they hurled the insult of "filthy Jew" at him when he walked past. Then, they were evicted from their apartment. Then came the arm bands signifying that he and his family were Jewish. Then, came the deportation to a ghetto. Then, his childhood crush and her family attempted to escape the ghetto only to be captured and murdered by German soldiers. Finally, he and his family were carted off to concentration camps. He would survive five camps over the next four years and survive as a shell of his former self. His experience shaped his teaching, because he taught as someone who had a mandate to make sure humans were always treated with dignity and respect, because he had seen what could happen if humans were ever treated as "less than."

Mrs. Edith was an elderly Jewish lady who always came to my Bible studies at a local retirement home where I was doing a chaplaincy internship. She wasn't a Christian, but enjoyed having something to do at the retirement home. Edith never spoke up in the studies themselves, but I loved the conversations we had afterward. She would ask all kinds of questions about God that I was woefully unprepared to answer, but she was always graceful. Then, she would open up about her own experiences. She had survived over a year at Auschwitz. Her job as a seamstress included sorting through clothes that belonged to people who had been gassed to death just hours earlier. She talked about the emotional wall she had to build to survive the Holocaust, saying that "to cry at Auschwitz could have you shot." She told me how it didn't take long to view it as "just another job." In her old age, she said those words with tears in her eyes. She went on to say that that feeling made her seem as bad as the Nazis, because, as she said it, "when you dehumanize someone, and turn them into an object, all bets are off on how you treat them."

The early church wasn't involved in a holocaust, but there were rampant dehumanizing words flying as Jews and Gentiles were trying to sort out how to live in community together. Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to address this. We'll read part of it here in Ephesians 4:1-16.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people."



What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians is a book about growing up in Christ. The first 3 chapters of Ephesians are all about God unifying two formerly divided groups of people, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Paul tells his readers early in the book that those who separate themselves, thinking they are more holy than the rest, need to be reminded that God’s love is always bigger than their box. The Jewish Christians thought the Gentiles needed to follow their rules in order to follow Jesus; but Paul was clear that it just didn’t work like that. God’s desire is for us to grow up, so that we aren’t dragged back into the same old arguments that don’t matter, because when we’re on one mission together, it’s really hard to be distracted by temptations that drag us down.

Most of you know my passion for local church cooperation. It’s what led me to first know this church over 10 years ago. It comes out of my own crazy and varied denominational history. I stand before you today as someone who was sprinkled in a Missouri Synod Lutheran church, dragged kicking and screaming to two years of Confirmation classes in the Evangelical Lutheran tradition, dunked and ordained Baptist, graduated from a Methodist seminary, and, just for good measure married the granddaughter of an Episcopalian priest. The technical term for what I am is a “mutt.” Looking back on it though, I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I often tell people that in seminary I learned grace from the Lutherans, holiness from the Methodists, order from the Anglicans, spirituality from the Pentecostals, and peacefulness from the Mennonites. It wasn’t too many generations ago, that some of these groups wouldn’t even sit at the same table, but now, we seem to be doing a pretty good job at talking out some things.

Due to my varied denominational history, I stand as a staunch proponent of ecumenism, cooperation, and dialogue between different traditions within Christendom, and recognize the need to learn from each other and the various expressions of our shared identity in Christ, and the benefit that that unity affords the kingdom of God. That’s the easy part. We don’t have too many groups spouting that their way of understanding Jesus is the only way to heaven anymore. But I’ve found it much more difficult to bring peace between people within the same group. Our fractured Baptist circle is testament to that. And harder still, it’s even more difficult to bring unity and peace within the same church! When it comes to someone you disagree with whom you know. Nope, not going there. Because it’s easier to find commonality with another institution or group of

people, that allows me to leave things vague, so I can just go find another church and not do the messy work of growing in community.

Our text for today unquestionably points to the necessary unity in the body. We find this text in the book of Ephesians functioning as a pivot between a theological treatise and practical instructions for Christian behavior. The whole book shows a sort of theological maturity, moving on from the imminent eschatology, talking about the return of Christ, of earlier letters to a more practical ecclesiology; how this movement called church, and the people that make it up, should be once they have realized their redemption. And, right up front, in this practical transition, he hits us with all of these interpersonal softeners that lead to us getting along with one another and being unified. Humility, gentleness, patience, love; those things we just don't want to think about when we know the other person is wrong! Paul was well aware that the passions of our old nature, that nature that objectifies, die hard, and that the pride in our personal identity can so easily fog our minds, taking our eyes off our communal identity and witness.

In Baptist life, we are known for our language and convictions regarding one's personal walk with Christ, an integral piece of one's faith life. However, we're also some of the best at neglecting the communal aspect of Christianity. We pride ourselves on things like autonomy and self-governance, and can, at times, form impenetrable bubbles that shield us from the rest of the world, because our polity allows us to exist without strong connections to our sisters and brothers across town or across the world. This solely individualistic view of our faith life is a sin that merits a prophetic corrective. This, combined with our strong Western individualism, is a recipe for disharmony, especially when coupled with spiritual immaturity. And, if we're honest with ourselves, we are absolutely all immature in some aspects of our walk with Christ. But, we also all have this nagging habit of all thinking we're more mature than we are. It happens with Caroline, our four-year-old who thinks she's ready to run from the car in the parking lot into the store without any guidance or anyone holding her hand. But, come on, the objective truth is that she just isn't! Well, we never really outgrow that without some intentionality, and the call of the text is to a mature faith, and a mature faith is one that seeks unity in the body, recognizing that each fellow believer is made in the image of God. But more than that, they have something to contribute to the kingdom of God that I can't.

I have served churches of various denominations and traditions, and the mature believers I've known in each, the ones I consider my mentors, the ones I want to emulate, all have but one hill on which to die; their confession that "Jesus is Lord!" It was Paul himself who made that declaration earlier in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Philippians. The statement was more than just a slogan. It was a theological, political, and social statement that rocked the status quo of the world in such a way that our modern world would benefit from as well. Because if Jesus is Lord, Caesar isn't. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar's money isn't. If Jesus is Lord, then our social world is turned upside down; and if Jesus is Lord, it affects how we treat and advocate for those who have been oppressed by a broken worldly system. If Jesus is Lord, then our own desires aren't, because we're not our own Lord; Jesus is.

In Galatians 3 that Karoline read earlier, we see an even clearer picture of what Paul thought about divisions in the body of Christ. The ancient world was all about class division; there wasn't much of an "American dream" mentality, the thought that you

could elevate yourself to a higher class. So, when Paul says that all of these classes are one in Christ Jesus, that was a radical social statement, one that required people of all classes to see the humanity and value in those whom they had recently thought of as “the other.”

Ephesians is written into a world in which Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and men and women are all adjusting to the new reality of equality in their status. Through the body of Jesus, God has brought together disparate groups into community. Do not miss how bold the claims of the gospel are! People from different cultures, with different heritage, moral codes, and behaviors have now collided ( I use the word collided, because it's more than a gentle melting pot; it's a culture clash) into a new community where the old boundaries of race, class, and gender are no more. They ate together, worshipped together, and prayed together, committed to the Lordship of Christ.

Anytime I officiate a wedding, I'll write a different message, but there's always one illustration that makes the cut. While the couple is still standing and facing me, before they turn to face each other for the vows, I'll say to them that this is the perfect image of what marriage should look like. Two people, standing side by side focused ahead, toward Christ. Many people think, the perfect picture of marriage is two people turned facing each other, always focused on each other and being attentive to one another; but no. If you're facing each other, you're actually looking in opposite directions. The same is true in church life. If we spend all our time focused on what we do, or don't, like in those around us, we're destined for failure. A unified church, a fit church, looks past the staff and the charisma of the leader, toward Jesus Christ, the only one worthy of our focus and attention. It's then that we can receive the truths of God for what they are, and share those truths in love with those who don't know the truth that is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Truth is one of those things that can be shared outside of love too, and Paul realizes that. It's one of the most quoted phrases from this passage. “Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up into him who is the head, into Christ.” We live in a world right now where “telling it like it is” can be praised as a virtue. However, it's often not a mature one. “Tell it like it is” people toss verbal grenades into a situation and then feel like they are deserving of pity when their prophetic message is rejected. Oh, there's plenty of truth, but no love. On the other hand, avoidance people sacrifice the truth for love; but the two are inseparable. Love is the plumbing that allows the truth to be spoken and heard.

The culture change that can come when we understand that there is one vein of commonality that unites us as a congregation under the lordship of Jesus Christ. We can come to a place where our preferences don't matter nearly as much as they once thought they did; in fact, there are none that we value more than unity. It won't come easy all the time, but it can lead us to a healthier place of unity in diversity. And not the kind of slogan diversity that you slap on a bumper sticker. True unity in diversity requires the hard work of recognition, acceptance, practice, and celebration of gifts given to the community - gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.

What is a unified church? A unified church is one that refuses to allow others to be objectified, but sees them as human beings loved and created by God. A unified church is one where the voices and convictions of all those who claim Jesus as Lord are valued and welcome in the conversation of community life. A unified church is one

where the passions of the young are guided by the wisdom of the old. A unified church is one that is standing side by side as they look out to identify and minister to the needs of its community. A unified church is one that does not allow itself to be dragged into the latest political or social conflict in the news, because a unified church has already spent time in earnest prayer, study, and honest contemplation, discerning the will of God for the oppressed and the marginalized in their neighborhoods and in the world. A unified church is one who takes seriously their only common identity, the confession that Jesus is Lord!

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the time of the church year where everything is new! It's the time when the church looks around, just like Bob Dylan did in the 60s when things were changing fast enough to make your head spin, and says, "These times, they are changing!" Something big and new is about to happen! Something unlike anything we've ever experienced before. The prophets talked about it! They said it was going to happen! They knew God was going to make all things new! What better time for the church to make all things new, starting with a genuinely unified witness to those around us, a statement that we aren't going to let the divisiveness of the world creep into us as a body. What if this Christmas is the one where that "peace on earth, goodwill toward people" saying, that the angels declared at the birth of Jesus, makes it off of the Christmas card and into practice? What if this Christmas is the season where you let go of the burden of division that's held you captive for too long and embrace the unity with God and one another that this scripture, and so many more, call us to!

APPENDIX B  
PRE-AND-POST-TEST

*Please choose the answer that describes you most accurately.*

1. What is your gender?

Male	Female
------	--------

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your marital status?

Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed
--------	---------	----------	---------

4. Do you have children?

Yes	No
-----	----

If you answered yes to question #4, please answer these follow-up questions.

- How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the ages of your children? Please circle all that apply.

0-3	19-25
4-8	25-35
9-13	35-50
14-18	Over 50

- Do any of your children live in your home?

Yes	No
-----	----

- If “No,” how many times per month do you communicate with your children who live outside the home?

More than 30 times	15-29 times	2-14 times	Less than 2 times
-----------------------	-------------	------------	-------------------

- What is your primary means of communication with them?

In-person	Phone-calls	Written or Electronic
-----------	-------------	-----------------------

5. Do you have any living grandparents?

Yes	No
-----	----

- If “Yes,” how many times per month do you communicate with them?

More than 30 times	15-29 times	2-14 times	Less than 2 times
-----------------------	-------------	------------	-------------------

- What is your primary means of communication with them?

In-person	Phone-calls	Written or Electronic
-----------	-------------	-----------------------

6. What is the average amount of time per week you spend engaged with other people from First Baptist Church, Valdese? (e.g. time spent in worship, Sunday

school, choir practice, praise band practice, youth group, volunteering with various ministries within our church, or any activity connected with First Baptist Valdese, both on-campus and off-campus?)

1-4 hours	9-12 hours	15-20 hours
5-8 hours	12-15 hours	More than 20 hours

7. On average, how much time per week do you spend reading and reflecting on scripture outside of church activities?

Never	1-2 hours	3-4 hours
Less than one hour	2-3 hours	More than 4 hours

8. On average, how many people from our congregation who are a different generation than you, do you have conversations with on a *weekly* basis?

Less than 2	2-5	5-9	10 or more
-------------	-----	-----	------------

*For the following questions, please indicate where you self-identify on the scale provided.*

9. I tend to learn things from people who are of a different generation than me.

Never True      Rarely True      Neutral      Often True      Always True

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

10. There is not a strong biblical case for intergenerational unity in the church.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
Agree nor  
Disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

11. Spending time with which age group brings me the most joy?

Always those  
younger  
than me

Those about  
my age

Always those  
older  
than me

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

12. Those of a different generation than me find it easy to understand my life.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

13. I strongly value input from those of a different generation when I must make decisions.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----



14. I feel that my voice, my thoughts, and my opinions are valued in our congregation.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

15. I think that the *communal* witness of our congregation is important.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

16. I find it easy to accept teaching or correction from those who are not my age.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

17. I use the word “family” to describe those who are of no blood relation to me.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

18. I find it easier to make connections with people if we are given a common task to complete.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
Disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

19. I would rather serve alongside people close to my age in church service and mission projects.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

20. Please define the word “Family” as you understand it.

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21. Please define the term “Mutual Submission,” and state how this term relates to church life.

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22. Please explain why it is important to learn from people that are not close to your age.

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23. Please define the term “Communal Witness,” and state how it is pertinent to local church life.

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## APPENDIX C

### SESSION THREE PRE-AND-POST-TEST

#### *Session 3 Survey*

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How often do you feel your opinions and insights are valued as a member of this congregation?

Never                      Rarely                      Neutral                      Often                      Always

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

4. Please explain why you circled the number above.

---



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5. I feel as though my insights and opinions are valued at First Baptist about as much as they should be.

Strongly Disagree                      Neither agree nor disagree                      Strongly Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

6. Please explain why you circled the number above.

---

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7. Are there any biblical stories that you feel should inform our understanding of the value with which our church should hold your insights and opinions?

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8. The Holy Spirit empowers and equips all Christians, regardless of age, to teach and proclaim truths from the Bible.

Strongly  
Disagree

Neither  
agree nor  
disagree

Strongly  
Agree

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

APPENDIX D  
SUNDAY MORNING ORDERS OF WORSHIP

**Sunday, November 10, 2019**

*Gathering Song	<i>Lord, I Need You</i>	Praise Band
Welcome and Announcements		Rev. Josh Lail
*Song of Praise	<i>Made New</i>	Praise Band
Children's Sermon		Karen Pittman
*Hymn of Praise #385	<i>In Christ There is No East or West</i>	Congregation
*Prayer of Thanksgiving		Daniel Wall
Offertory	<i>Thanks Be To God</i>	Debbie Thompson
First Reading	1 Corinthians 1:10-17	Katie Vines
Anthem	<i>Give Thanks</i>	Choir
Message	"Messy Unity" Psalm 133	Rev. Josh Lail
*Hymn of Response #387	<i>Blest Be the Tie</i>	Congregation
Benediction		Rev. Josh Lail
Postlude	<i>For The Beauty Of The Earth</i>	Debbie Thompson

# **Sunday, November 17, 2019**

*Gathering Song	<i>My Feet Are On The Rock</i>	Praise Band
Welcome and Announcements		Rev. Josh Lail
*Song of Praise	<i>Build My Life</i>	Praise Band
Children's Sermon		Daniel Reeves
*Hymn of Praise #2	<i>Holy, Holy, Holy</i>	Congregation
*Prayer of Thanksgiving		Ben Hudson
Offertory	<i>Let All Things Now Living</i>	Debbie Thompson
First Reading	Mark 3:31-35	Mary Anderson
Anthem	<i>Living For Jesus</i>	Choir
Message	"A Beautiful Day" Colossians 3:12-17	Rev. Josh Lail
*Hymn of Response #305	<i>I Have Decided To Follow Jesus</i>	Congregation
Benediction		Rev. Josh Lail
Postlude	<i>Simple Gifts</i>	Debbie Thompson

**Sunday, November 24, 2019**

Call to Worship	<i>We Gather Together</i>	Handbell Choir
Welcome and Announcements		Rev. Josh Lail
*Song of Praise	<i>No Longer Slaves</i>	Praise Band
Children's Sermon		Christy Baker
*Hymn of Praise #227	<i>Praise Him! Praise Him!</i>	Congregation
*Prayer of Thanksgiving		Jerry Mace
Offertory	<i>Come, Ye Thankful People, Come</i>	Handbell Choir
First Reading	Deuteronomy 6:4-9	Libby Vines
Anthem	<i>Jesus, at Your Holy Table</i>	Choir
Message	"The Thanksgiving Table" 1 Corinthians 10:14-17	Rev. Josh Lail
The Lord's Supper		
*Hymn of Response #637	<i>Come, Ye Thankful People, Come</i>	Congregation
Benediction		Rev. Josh Lail
Postlude		Lynda Massengill



# **Sunday, December 1, 2019**

Gathering Song		Praise Band
Welcome and Announcements		Rev. Josh Lail
Song of Praise		Praise Band
Lighting of Advent (Hope)		The Wall Family
Children's Sermon		Rev. Josh Lail
Hymn of Praise #77	<i>Come Thou Long Expected Jesus</i>	Congregation
Prayer of Thanksgiving		James Phipps
Offertory		Debbie Thompson
First Reading	Galatians 3:26-29	Karoline Pittman
Anthem	<i>The Advent Wreath Carol</i>	Choir
Message	"Times are Changing" Ephesians 4:1-16	Rev. Josh Lail
Hymn of Response #297	<i>Search Me, O God</i>	Congregation
Benediction		Rev. Josh Lail
Postlude	<i>Sing We Now of Christmas</i>	Debbie Thompson

## APPENDIX E

### RAW DATA BROKEN DOWN BY AGE-GROUP

The following tables were produced from the raw data collected during the project from the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group. Each participant was assigned a number to protect anonymity. Participants 1-5 were all 18 years and younger. Participants 6-10 were all over the age of 18.

#### Pre-Test

Participant#	Pre-9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1	7	7	7	8	5	7	8	5	8	10	8
2	5	2	8	4	5	10	8	5	10	8	5
3	8	5	8	5	5	2	6	6	8	8	3
4	8	1	8	4	6	6	5	4	9	6	7
5	4	2	5	5	7	5	8	8	8	7	5
<b>Youth Average</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>5.6</b>
6	9	5	9	7	5	9	8	9	10	7	5
7	7	1	4	5	5	5	8	8	8	8	5
8	7	1	4	5	5	9	10	6	10	10	4
9	7	0	9	4	6	10	10	10	10	10	7
10	8	0	4	4	7	8	10	9	8	7	1
<b>Adult Average</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>5.0</b>

Post-Test data on the following page.

## Post-Test

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Post-9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>
1	8	8	7	4	8	9	10	10	9	9	7
2	8	3	7	4	7	9	8	8	10	6	5
3	9	10	7	5	8	6	7	8	8	7	4
4	8	1	7	5	6	8	10	7	10	8	6
5	5	0	9	5	5	10	10	5	10	5	9
<b>Youth Average</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>6.2</b>
<b>Youth Change from Pre to Post</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>+0.2</b>	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	<b>+2.4</b>	<b>+2.0</b>	<b>+2.0</b>	<b>+0.8</b>	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>+0.6</b>
6	10	0	9	8	9	8	10	9	10	9	5
7	8	0	5	5	8	8	7	7	8	7	5
8	7	10	4	4	8	8	10	7	10	10	5
9	10	0	10	8	10	10	10	10	10	8	5
10	8	1	4	5	9	7	9	9	7	7	1
<b>Adult Average</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Adult Change Pre to Post</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>+0.8</b>	<b>+0.4</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>+0.1</b>	<b>-0.8</b>
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Total Change from Pre to Post</b>	<b>+1.1</b>	<b>+0.9</b>	<b>+0.3</b>	<b>+0.2</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>+1.0</b>	<b>+0.3</b>	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>+0.2</b>

# Family Covenant

**We will work together as a family. Each member has freedom and safety to disagree. We will respect all views of each age within the family; everyone is equal. We will hear, and listen to, views different than our own, and we will take time to understand them.**

## APPENDIX G

### EVALUATION OF FACILITATOR

- 1) The facilitator came to each session prepared.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 2) The material was well organized for each session.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 3) The presentation of the material was clear and concise.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 4) The facilitator adequately answered any questions raised by the group members.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 4.9**
- 5) The amount of material for the sessions was appropriate for the time allotted.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 6) The facilitator showed flexibility when things did not go as planned.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 7) The facilitator allowed all participants to express their views.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 8) The facilitator showed an in-depth knowledge of the material.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 9) The facilitator made an effort to stimulate participant's interest throughout the project.  
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree **Average score: 5.0**
- 10) I would rate the overall effectiveness of the facilitator's teaching as:  
Very Weak 1 2 3 4 5 Very Strong **Average score: 5.0**

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