

Lancaster Theological Seminary

Who is my Neighbor: A Four Week Study on how the Church can Engage Millennials

A Major Project Submitted to the Faculty
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Lancaster, Pennsylvania
May 2016

Who is my Neighbor: A Four Week Study on how the Church can Engage Millennials
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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to help churches begin to engage Millennials, those born between 1981-1997, who have largely not engaged or abandoned church. This project is intended to help today's churches unravel and decode the complex reality in which these young adults live. If successful, this project will have done this in three different ways: first, the study will offer a theological way of bridging the gap between the world of millennials and the knowledge of such in the church. The study will do that through the use of a tool of a four-week Biblical study of the book of Luke. Second, the study will offer a practical way of decoding the world of millennials by offering four pointed essays examining the world in which millennials live. Last, the study will offer a constructive way forward by outlining ways in which today's church might begin to engage millennials.

This work is dedicated to two amazing parents, and one awesome wife

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Chapter 1: Introducing the Study

Theological Rationale and Reflection

The study contains both a four-week Bible study and a four-part series of essays. The purpose of both the Bible study and the essays are to help congregations understand concepts such as emerging adulthood, postmodernism and the current cultural complexities that Millennials live in today. By unmasking these hurdles present in the world of Millennials, the goal is that, through the lens of scripture, the church would see a duty and an opportunity to respond and embrace Millennials. Two years ago, I wrote my first book, *Bigger than Hip Hop: 7 Questions for Effectively Reaching Young Adults in Ministry*. The book afforded me the opportunity to tour the country and conduct a number of teaching sessions with ministries interested in engaging Millennials. Many churches were missing a foundational understanding of ‘who’ and ‘what’ Millennials are and ‘why’ they as a church are theologically called to reach them. This work is significant because it enables the church to gain a better understanding of who the Millennials are and how the church might engage and respond to their needs. The way this study does that is with the book of Luke. Luke, as a writer, was very community focused. His writings appealed to the masses while also helping Christians own their role of engaging, participating in and serving as Christ’ representatives. The study will use Luke’s words and concepts to help congregations embrace that same call to inclusion. By using Luke’s words and paralleling his text with highlighted portions of the realities that Millennials live in today. The study will enable the reader to make the connection that Millennials need to be included, engaged and served by today’s church.

Major Goals of the Research Project

The intended outcome for congregations is to provide a fuller perspective on Millennials as a group and to propose an expanded and healthy view of what the church can do to connect with them. I expect that through the work on the role of postmodernity and Millennials, I will find a number of differing opinions as the term itself is difficult to define and capture. The author expects that more research on the realities of emerging adulthood will uncover keys for dialogue that could assist ministries in connecting with Millennials. Luke's text as an opening devotional will help to cement the relationship between the call of the church and the needs of Millennials.

The End View

Imagine: it is Sunday morning, Mr. James, a retired military Captain and current head Trustee, arrives early to church as usual. He has parked his brand new Harley Davidson motorcycle as far away from the front entrance as possible. As he is walking up to the church doors, he sees the Banks family, a young couple with three small boys, getting out of their old model Volkswagen Beetle. The couple is struggling, they are clearly upset about something. It could be the struggles of wrangling three small kids early in the morning, it could be the financial worries of managing debt, stress and family, or it could be the uncertainty of their ability to maintain focus during today's worship due to tiredness. Mr. James, as he is walking up to the church door, is "processing" all of those options in his head as he comes near the car door of the Banks. He decides to stop; he takes the crying two-year-old and puts him on his shoulder, spinning him around until his cries turn to laughter. He then looks at the Banks and says, "How about today we each take a kid; divide and conquer, that's how we did it in the war," and then, "Let's meet up after church, ice-cream on me." The Banks chuckle, the kids laugh, and just like that, Christ happens.

Why does this story matter? Every day, Millennials are faced with an onslaught of converging responsibilities, many for which they are fundamentally unprepared. Part of their social maturation process has convinced them that articulating their concerns and needs to adults or authority figures such as the church is both a sign of weakness and a flawed plan, given all the projected failures they have seen in past institutions and other adults. The result of this line of thinking is that Millennials typically retreat into their own bubbles of cyclical mediocrity, or worse, present themselves in spaces of opportunity like churches but sit silently and posture as if everything is fine. If this four-week Bible study and essay component are successful, our churches will be full of many Mr. James. Mr. James represents church members who are attuned to the realities and needs of Millennials ready to break that bubble and move past posture into actual relationship. The purpose of this study is to equip churches with tools and information that will empower them to gain a better understanding of the hidden source of trauma which Millennials wrestle with and remind them of their call as followers of Christ to engage all of God's people.

The end view of this research is to give churches the tools to see and process the world in which Millennials live. The end view is to give churches the boldness to step authoritatively into that world and to see engagement with Millennials as a Biblical mandate and their Christian responsibility.

Research Methods Employed

The project is a four-week Bible study. It will involve gathering as many published books and articles around the subject matter as possible and detailing, exploring and qualifying the findings. In addition to the four-week Bible Study, the project will also include four essay

accompaniments that focus on key issues facing Millennials. This information will include the same process of gathering data from published books, articles and existing research.

Central Terms

Emerging Adulthood

The term was first introduced in an article written by Jeffery Jensen Arnett, in an article written for the *American Psychologist* journal. Arnett qualified Emerging Adulthood as “a distinct developmental period between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine that captures the experiences of youth who are no longer adolescents but not yet fully adults.¹”

Millennials

The United States Census states that in 2015 Millennials become the largest generation group in United States history, numbering seventy-five point four million. The generation was born between 1981-1997, with the age range of adults in 2015 being eighteen to thirty-four.²

Modernity

Modernity came into being with the Renaissance Era and implies a progressive economic and administrative rationalization and differentiation of the social world. Reason, rational thought, objectivity, neutrality and systematic enquiry allow humanity to make sense of nature and society and the world.

Postmodernity

A movement that later developed into a general philosophy. It is the ability to see deconstruction and difference as liberating forces and foresee discontinuity, indeterminacy, fragmentation, distrust of totalizing discourse and instability.³

¹ Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000):doi:10.1037//0003-066x.55.5.469.

² "Millennials Surpass Gen Xers As the Largest Generation in U.S. Labor Force," Pew Research Center, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/11/millennials-surpass-gen-xers-as-the-largest-generation-in-u-s-labor-force/>.

Literature Review

With one out of four Millennials calling themselves unaffiliated with any faith tradition and the absence of Millennials in many churches becoming more and more prevalent, there has been increased research to gain perspective on the causes. Much of the current research looks squarely at either defining Millennials as a subgroup or highlighting a list of proposed solutions for replenishing empty pews with Millennials. Both of those methods have a level of validity; however, they also are lacking in an effective connective tissue. The fundamental question the literature must answer is “Why should churches care about Millennials?” Neither of the current research methods fully address this fundamental question head on. Research intended only at defining Millennials misses the mark by not engaging the church and research intended on creating list of possible solutions misses the mark by not engaging Millennials in identifying those solutions. In my research, there is a ministry resource, which is a four-week Bible study that presents participants with a framework for understanding the unique dynamics of Millennials. The goal in exposing these nuances through the lens of Biblical text is to give congregations and churches tools that will assist in relating to a generation who is in crisis and absent from the church. By exposing them to nuances, engaging them in theological content and bridging their passion to be effective followers of Christ with a new revelation of need for Millennials, the hope of this research is to answer that fundamental “why” question.

The first section of this document is a review of Millennials as a group. This section will look at the major themes, experiences and cultural realities that help to shape Millennials. The second section is a reflection on the role of postmodernity as a theological framework of thinking and the impact of that on Millennials. This section will examine the differences between

³ Raimol Nurmi, "An Attempt to Understand the Twentieth Century," *Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2011): xx, doi:10.3176/tr.2011.3.06.

postmodernity and modernity and how the former has helped to shape the mindsets and function of Millennials today. The third section will look at emerging adulthood and places where Millennials are in need of support. The fourth and last section will be a reflection on the church, its current system and the resources at its disposal.

- Defining Millennials

According to a study by the Pew Research Center concerning Millennials, one out of four members of the Millennial generation are unaffiliated with any tradition.⁴ According to Pew, this is the largest gap, historically, that there has ever been. Pew highlights a gap in the American tradition of passing on religious values as an inheritance by pointing to a startling reality that young adults today are less likely to be affiliated with religion than their parents were a generation before. The Barna Millennial Project, which interviewed 27,140 Millennials over a ten-year period, places the number of religiously unaffiliated slightly higher at thirty percent, who not only are unaffiliated, but according to the Barna Millennial Project, see no importance at all in attending church.⁵ Not only are young adults turning away from religion as a practice, according to this Barna study, but they are also turning away from the institution of church. For them church is not an important part of their lived experience. This is a far cry from their grandparents' generation, who according to Pew, saw only thirteen percent of their young adults during the 1970's expressing similar views. In fact, the Public Religion Research Institute's American Values Atlas Study indicated that thirty four percent of young adults in comparison to eleven percent of today's seniors see themselves as religiously unaffiliated. On a whole, the decline in religious affiliation is staggering.

⁴ Michael Lipka. "Millennials Increasingly are Driving Growth of Nones," PewResearch.org, 2015, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.

⁵ "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church," Barna Group (2013): accessed September 12th, 2016, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church#.V0cE-4-cHIU>.

A number of authors speak to this dim perspective on Millennials and the church. Christian Smith, author of *Emerging Adulthood*, is one of those authors. Smith points to a need for the gospel to be more relational. His argument is that the dictatorial nature of many of our institutions of worship doesn't work for Millennials. Millennials don't just want to be told right from wrong, according to Smith; they want to hear of real stories from current people about how doing wrong or doing right affected their lives.⁶ This is a major shift away from traditional notions of church, as Heath White notes in *Postmodernism 101*. Heath explains that there has been a shift away from the sermon as the focal point, to now small groups and different forms of community being formed, even online ones as the principle focus for churches.⁷ All of this is an attempt at moving to a relational experience versus the traditional religious interaction. This shift can be seen specifically in use of technology and worship experiences. Ed Stetzer, in his book *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them*, talks about this techno-culture that creates community online. Worship, for them, becomes an extension of this online space, a redecorated "upper room."⁸

This need for a relational approach and community may have something to do with the sociological pathologies of Millennials, according to Jen McIntosh-Elkins. Elkins, in her article, "From the Silent Generation to Generation X, Y and Z," makes the connection between Millennials being the product of a latchkey generation and their current perspective of the world. Elkins talks about Millennials being the first generation to grow up fully submersed in group sports and activities such as dance and band groups, after school programs, clubs and sporting

⁶ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

⁷ Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 17.

⁸ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 39.

organizations, all with the constant oversight of a coach, instructor or adult.⁹ For Elkins, this need for validation and community translates for Millennials into their adult experience. Alan Ehrenhalt in his book, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*, speaks to this cultural shift for Millennials. Ehrenhalt argues that Millennials who spent their college years living in dorm settings, instead of returning to the places they grew up, are now returning to urban centers to recreate that same sense of community, once they graduate: small, intimate, niche communities right in the middle of urban centers, surrounded by their friends and new community.¹⁰ Ehrenhalt believes that church must also relocate into these new urban centers in order to be relevant to Millennials.

The difference between postmodernism and postmodernity is the difference between a cultural current and a social condition, according to Virgil Nemoianu and his book *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities Conflicts and Coexistence*.¹¹ Nemoianu notes that understanding this distinction is important in that postmodernism points toward a time period characterized by shifts in architecture and art, while postmodernity points toward an intellectual pursuit that is suspicious of reason and looks to form knowledge and truth out of the gathering of multiple and often contrary sources of thought. Millennials today experience postmodernity; however, as Thomas Kuhn points out in his book *Structure of Scientific Revolution*, “Since new paradigms are born from old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and manipulative, that the traditional paradigm had previously

⁹ Jeni McIntosh-Elkins, “From the Silent Generation X, Y and Z: Strategies for Managing the Generation Mix,” Lecture, Proceedings of the 35th Annual ACM SIGUCCS fall Conference, (New York: AM Press, 2007): 12.

¹⁰ Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 73.

¹¹ Virgil Nemoianu, *Postmodernism and Cultural Identities Conflicts and Coexistence* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 136.

employed.”¹² For that reason, it is important to engage both Pre-Modernism as well as Modernity in order to see firsthand some of the pieces being incorporated into today’s Postmodernity.

Pre-modernism, as Heath White points to in his book *Postmodernism: 101*, was a time where feudalism was the universal form of government. For White, this meant that the political structure as well as the social order were all centered on the ruling power.¹³ This idea of a ruling power deciding independently for a nation was challenged by Modernism in the 15th and 16th century, according to White. Kuhn points to a shift during that time period of justifying actions based on reason and not on the prescribed authority. What was important for Modernists was the narrative or the reason, as opposed to just ‘authority’ as it was for the Pre-Modernist.¹⁴

- Postmodernity and Millennials

In Jean Baudrillard’s book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, the author lays out for us a stark and sobering pronouncement on today’s generation when he proclaims that reality itself has begun to imitate the model, which now precedes and determines the real world.¹⁵ What Baudrillard is pointing to is the idea that in a postmodern world, there is no longer a preference for authenticity. For Baudrillard, this means that an individual isn’t locked into binary constructs. Instead, there is a preference for the illusion or constructed normality as a fitting substitute for real life. In short, what Baudrillard helps us to see is that this generation has no quarrels about distinguishing between fantasy and reality; instead, this postmodern generation, for Baudrillard, has simply done away with reality and replaced it with differing forms of fantasy. While Fredric Jameson, in his book, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* does not go as far as Baudrillard in seeing postmodernism as a replacement or simulacrum of reality, Jameson

¹² Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 43.

¹³ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 28.

¹⁴ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 59.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 71.

does see it as a pastiche.¹⁶ Jameson sees postmodernism as an emptied stylized representation of our historical past. Jameson would argue that the thought process of postmodernity is to commodify and consume history instead of embracing and learning from it. This brand of hollowed reflection leaves this generation self-absorbed, inwardly focused and without depth.

Jeanne M. Peloso's article, "The Theological Anthropology of Young Adults," neither refutes, nor is at odds with Baudrillard or Jameson; however, Peloso attempts to qualify the world postmodern Millennials live in today. What Peloso suggests is that postmodernism is not a construction of Millennials, but instead, Millennials are its tenants.¹⁷ Peloso points out that Millennials are the first generation to develop completely in a postmodern world. Millennials, by virtue of the postmodern experience, are born into and then forced to find meaning among shattered networks of institutions, and are both abandoned and tasked to piece together their own sense of self from its remains.

This view of postmodernism departs from Baudrillard and Jameson in that it suggests that postmodernity for Millennials was never a system of choices (what to replace, what to imitate); instead, postmodernity is an inviolable way of life. The result of this view is that the individual is seen as a constructed relation in conjunction with a stream of possible, already created options and experiences. Lincoln Williams, in his article "Modernism, Postmodernism and Global Standard Setting," adds to Peloso's sentiments by pointing out that "in the postmodernist paradigm, modernist notions of justification, objectivity, proof and unity of science no longer hold."¹⁸ For Williams, the postmodernist has no concern for rationalizing experiences or seeing

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992). 44.

¹⁷ Jeanne Peloso. "The Theological Anthropology of Young Adult Catholics in Postmodern America," *Pastoral Psychology*, 2011, 1-11.

¹⁹ Williams and Sewpaul, "Modernism, Postmodernism and Global Standards Setting," 562.

reason as a necessity. Williams notes that the main feature of postmodernism is to critique totality, reason, essentialism and universality, not to submit to it (560). It is the postmodernist who rejects grand narratives, denies epistemological essentialism and contends that knowledge and truth are embedded in relations of power and not found exclusively through reason (560). Yet, despite the postmodernist Millennial's view of the world, their rejection of reason, objectivity and systematic enquiry can still not be squarely placed upon their shoulders. As David F. White explains in "Toward an Adequate Sociology of Youth Ministry," you cannot separate post modernity from the economic system that fosters its fragmentation.¹⁹ It is an economic system that postmodern Millennials had no hand in creating but yet to which they are chiefly responsible.

- Emerging Adulthood and Millennials

In an article entitled "Emerging Adulthood, a Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," published in the *American Psychologist* in 2000, Dr. Jeffery Jenson Arnett produced the term 'Emerging Adulthood.' He defined this term as a distinct development period between the ages of 18-29 that captures the experiences of youth who are no longer adolescence but not yet fully adults.²⁰ For Arnett, this period is culturally constructed, and depending on what part of the world one is in, may even be obsolete.

This idea of a cultural construction of emerging adulthood is shared by David Sentran and Chris Riesling in their book *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, where they see this cultural construction as a formation driven by individualism instead of a formation driven by relational community. To this end, Sentran and Riesling point to 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.' This is, for them, the belief in humanity's vague moral goodness and appeal to personal

¹⁹ Ibid.,565.

²⁰ Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," 469-480.

fulfillment, and a God who is distant and called on only in times of trouble.²¹ The authors suggest that this time of life is one in which beliefs are solidified, life patterns shaped, and key decisions are made regarding spiritually, identity, church participation, vocation, morality, sexuality, and mentoring.

Jeromy Staff, who writes in “Uncertainty in Early Occupational Aspirations: Role exploration or aimlessness,” disagrees with the authors of “Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood,” and largely takes aim at Arnett’s theory as well. What Staff highlights is that this time of “emerging adulthood” is not one of construction and formation but instead is largely one of exploration.²² Staff suggest that this role of exploration could ultimately benefit social-economic attainment and create enduring partnerships in the long run. He also points to the fact that this role exploration is an appropriate response to today’s job market where market instability increasingly requires young adults to be flexible and creative in finding employment.

The vagueness and fluidity found in emerging adulthood for Staff is representative of a response to the social conditions in which young adults find themselves. Christian Smith, in his seminal work, *Lost in Transition: The Darkside of Emerging Adulthood*, would seem to agree with Jeromy Staff. Smith postulates that young adults today live in a complex world, filled with difficulty and serious problems. As a response to the social condition they live in, Christian Smith determines that emerging adults are naturally ‘adrift.’²³ Smith suggests that these emerging adults are directly adrift morally as they wrestle with limited reasoning capabilities to explore and explain basic moral issues.

²¹ David P Sentran, Chris A Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 87.

²² Staff et al., “Uncertainty in Early Occupational Aspirations: Role Exploration or Aimlessness,” *Social Forces* 89, no. 2 (2010): 659-683 doi:10.1353/sof.2010.0088.

²³ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 64.

A 2007 study by the Australian Temperament Project entitled, “Predictors of Positive Development: Emerging Adulthood,” found that this idea of having a determinate moral center was at the heart of what it meant to positively move from emerging adulthood to being a fully functioning adult.²⁴ The study followed 1158 Australians from infancy to adulthood and found a direct correlation between self-regulatory characteristics as youth and positive development as adults. What the study showed was that when young adults learned to self-regulate. Social competence leads to strong peer relationships. Strong peer and parental relationships, lead to clear identity formation and clear identity formation at a young age, shortened the length between emerging adulthood and becoming fully adult.

The “National Education Longitudinal Study” adds to the dialogue by pointing out that uncertainty in occupation aspirations at age sixteen affected wage attainment in young adults at age twenty-six. Young adults who did not have a specific idea of what they wanted to be at sixteen ended up earning significantly less wages in young adulthood than their peers who did know. What both studies highlight is that perhaps the central challenges of emerging adults begin long before they reach the age of eighteen to twenty-nine. Perhaps key indicators on moral convictions, identity formation, and occupational pursuit are better indicators in determining the length with which their emerging adulthood will last.

- The Church and its Role

Christian Smith, professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, offers his book *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* as a possible way in which the church has played a role in the lives of Millennials. In his work, Smith argues that part of the problem for millennials is that the gospel is no longer relational. Smith suggests that in order to connect to

²⁴ Meredith O'Connor et al., "Predictors of Positive Development in Emerging Adulthood," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2011, 860-874.

this generation of me-centric characters, the gospel must touch both an emotional and intellectual core.²⁵ For writers like Smith, Millennials are leaving the church because they don't "feel" a connection to the gospel message being preached. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons argue in their book *Unchristian*, that Millennials are emotionally and intellectually connected, but not in a good way. *Unchristian* suggests that what Millennials feel is that the church is judgmental, biased, and insensitive toward social issues. Because of this view, millennials are staying away from organized religion.

Robert D. Putnam, professor of Public Policy at Harvard University and writer of *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, suggests that part of the "prejudices" Millennials claim to be recipients of may be authentic.²⁶ Putnam shows that while church attendance over the last decade has become flat and largely declined among select population groups, for those in the top third of the socioeconomic hierarchy that decline has slowed in comparison to those in the bottom third of the socioeconomic hierarchy where the decline has doubled. What Putnam outlines is that church, in fact, has become more exclusive and is largely about socio-economic status. This isn't hard to digest when looking at the work of Scott Berridge in his book *Millennials After the Great Recession*. Berridge concludes that in addition to the institution of religion, millennials have also exited the institutions of marriage, with only twenty-five percent reporting as married, as well as the financial institution, with millennials to date owing over 1 trillion dollars in student loans. With issues of a missing relational gospel and an exclusive church, it is easy to see how millennials are challenged with religious affiliation.

²⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity-- and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 43.

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam and Arthur Morey, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012). 26.

Despite this forecast of the role of the church in the lives of today's Millennials, there are a number of opportunities still available to reverse this shift. Authors like George Boran, in *Youth Ministry that Works*, writes about the importance of imprinting. Boran says that in an age of pluralism, where contrary ideologies are often held as equals, the Christian message is assimilated by young people through identification.²⁷ This idea of identification happens as a result of nearness, according to Robert C Dykstra²⁸, which is the result of engaging Millennials in their environment with a sense of intentionality. Concepts like these, as well as mentoring, creating support systems, and starting new churches in urban centers focused on targeting Millennials are helping to recast the value of the church with Millennials.

Why Luke?

Only in Luke's gospel will one find these words: "Who is my neighbor?"²⁹ Other gospel writers such as Mark and Matthew make mention of "loving like a neighbor" (Mathew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; 12:33), but it's Luke who challenges the reader to investigate the nature and validity of a neighbor. Bart Bruehler's book *A Public and Political Christ* expands this point by suggesting that Luke, unlike other gospel writers, consistently places Jesus in the unofficial public sphere with some connection to the local politics. Bruehler goes on to explain that most of the miracles in Luke occur in humanly constructed spaces (roads, synagogues, cities) and so take on the character of culturally constructed places with public valences.³⁰ In fact, as Greg Carey points out in his book *Sinners: Jesus and His Earliest Followers*, in Luke's

²⁷ George Boran, *Youth Ministry that Works: Practical Ideas for Working with Young People* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 49.

²⁸ Robert C Dykstra et al., *The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church and Culture, Institute for Youth Ministry* (Princeton: Princeton Publishing House, 2003), 59.

²⁹ Luke 10:29, KJV.

³⁰ Bart B Bruehler, *A Public and Political Christ: The Social-Spatial Characteristics of Luke 18:35-19:48 and the Gospel as a Whole in Its Ancient Context* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 300.

gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal.³¹ What Carey is pointing to is a specific theme in the book of Luke to highlight a ‘public’ Christ. This is a Christ for the people, a Christ seen as being amongst neighbors. This is an important shift because it challenges the notion of Christ being only for the select few. Philip Esler, in *Community and the Gospel in Luke-Acts* agrees with Bruehler by stating that “Luke’s gospel expands the text to include all humanity.” Esler suggests that Luke has a Universalist theme³²-one unconcerned with national or personal loyalties but instead focused on including everyone despite all identifiers; this is the lens through which Luke must be read, Esler suggests. It is this reading of Luke as a Universalist, as community centered, and as one focused on presenting Christ to all that makes his gospel accessible for engaging Millennials.

In Luke’s account of Jesus’ instructions to his seventy disciples before sending them out to minister, Luke adds something to the instructions that the other gospel writers leave out. Luke records Jesus saying, “Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. When you enter a town, and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you.”³³ Luke’s intention here points to what Arthur Just states in *The Ongoing Feast Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus*; he calls this strategy ‘table fellowship.’ For Just, table fellowship has three elements. First of all, it is fellowship with sinners, which was normally an inclusive event. This was very different from first century Jewish culture where only those deemed righteous and with privilege were invited to the table with the priest. Another attribute of Just’s table fellowship was that it was an opportunity for Jesus to teach about the kingdom. This point must be held in conjunction with Just’s third point that this

³¹ Garry Carey, *Sinners: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 17.

³² Philip F Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49.

³³ Luke 10: 7-8 NIV.

was also a time of joyous feasting. The second and third points are connected. Neither the teaching itself nor the eating itself was of greater importance; they were both considered together as one and the same activity.³⁴ According to John Navone, in his article “The Lucan Banquet Community,” this table fellowship and inclusion of sinners was exactly the problem for Jesus. Navone states,

“In Luke’s theology, the poor were all those whom the religious leaders of Israel at the time of Christ considered, for one reason or another, as hopelessly excluded from the kingdom of God. They were the marginal people living on the fringes of Jewish society precisely because they deviated from the religious ideals of the Pharisees, Luke shows that society and economics actually fostered the receptivity requisite for the acceptance of the Messiah.”³⁵

The controversy in Luke’s gospel is that Luke uses the table as a way to include everyone. The table becomes a gathering, centering force that attracts all who will hear the good news of Jesus freely. The notion is that everyone is invited, and regardless of social, economic, political or even cultural background, there is still a place for “you” at the table, and this notion is purely characteristic of Luke’s gospel.

Perhaps the inclusion and centering laid out in Luke by the use of the table can be traced to elements in the Old Testament. Geoffrey Wainwright, in *Eucharist and Eschatology* lays out Biblical Old Testament categories as possible precedents to the Lukan table fellowship, namely:³⁶

- The meal at the making of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24)
- Sacred meals in places of sacrifice (Genesis 31:54; Exodus 18:12; 1 Samuel 9:11-14; Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 17-18; 14:23, 26; 15:20: 27:7)
- The wisdom literature (Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalms 23:5)

³⁴ Arthur Just, *The Ongoing Feast Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 52.

³⁵ John Navone, *Themes of Saint Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1970), 155-161.

³⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Memphis: Order of Saint Luke Publishing, 2002), 110.

- The feeding and feasting in the future salvation (Isaiah 25:6-9; 48:21; 49:9f, 55:1-2, 5: 65:13; Ezekiel 34r:13f., 23, 25-31; Zechariah 9:16-17)

What Wainwright helps us see is that ‘community’ and ‘communion’ have always been connected, especially in the Old Testament. This is important for framing Luke’s gospel because it helps the reader validate the theme of community found in the table fellowship throughout the book of Luke. Luke wasn’t just showing Jesus at the table for purposes of excavating a theological point, he was showing Jesus at the table to remind the reader of the broader narrative of value and necessity of community found throughout the Old Testament and highlighted through Luke’s gospel.

In addition to Luke’s presentation of a public Christ at the table, another nuanced prerogative of Luke that connects to postmodern Millennials is the use of the ‘great reversal’ narrative. Justo Gonzalez, in the book *The Story Luke Tells* talks extensively about this theme running through the gospel of Luke. ‘The last shall be first, the first shall be last’ concept and others like it can be seen in great detail, especially in Luke 4, during Jesus’ inaugural address. Gonzalez points towards Luke’s focus during Jesus’ address to remedy the sick, poor, and lost and to reverse their fate.³⁷ Gonzalez points to other places in Luke’s gospel that continue that theme such as Luke 14. In Luke 14, Jesus gives an unparalleled parable about a dinner party. This parable appears no other place in the gospels, except for Luke and tells of the crippled, blind, lame, sinners and others being invited to feast at the king’s table. What makes this parable unique is in who is excluded from the feast. There are no religious leaders, political officials, rich, military or other high-ranking people at this feast. Again, we find Luke helping us to reframe an inclusive public Christ who is focused on those considered in the margins. For Luke,

³⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story Luke Tells: Luke’s Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 29.

again, social-political class or ethnicity is less important than intent to follow Christ. It is one's intent that makes him or her welcome. S.J Fitzmyer, in *Luke the Theologian*, says it this way: "For Luke the nucleus of the Christian community is that we are called to be neither disciples nor followers, but rather brethren" and that is open to all who would come.³⁸

The gospel of Luke becomes a useful tool in helping congregations engage Millennials because it reminds us that we are all welcome at the table of Christ. The gospel of Luke reminds us that our call as ministers of the gospel is to create space for our neighbors. The gospel of Luke reminds us that the end goal for our faith is not self-promotion but instead is communal victory. When the sick are healed, the widowed and orphaned redeemed, those imprisoned set free and those living in poverty empowered then we will have done the work of Christ, according to Luke's gospel.

These Universalist themes found in the book of Luke are key for engaging Millennials. In the book *Big Questions Worthy Dreams*, Parks talks at length about a "New Commons." She explains that where past generations gathered around physical spaces to develop and create culture, today's Millennials have transferred that dedicated space of connection to the internet. As a result, Parks writes that the shared commons are now "global in scope and personal impact."³⁹ Millennials are wired to be more inclusive, to see beyond preconceived physical or cultural barriers and to instead choose an expanded community. Luke's gospel speaks to this desire by framing Christ in constant interaction with community. Millennials are drawn to the book of Luke because of this inclusive theme found throughout. Luke reflects the global yet personal aspect of Christ.

³⁸ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke The Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 128.

³⁹ Sharon D Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 15.

Testing the Study

In order to judge the validity of this research and potential effectiveness of a completed Biblical-week study I conducted a pilot session with a local church. The goal was to determine whether or not there were any apparent flaws in either the research or methodology. Below are findings from the assessment. Ten people, including the pastor, participated in the study. All of them were African Americans. The youngest participant was twenty two, and the oldest was seventy-two. Their ages were twenty-two, thirty-six, fifty-three, fifty-seven, fifty-eight, sixty-two, sixty-four, sixty-six, sixty-eight, and seventy-two. In the room sat: The Head Trustee, SPRC Board Chair, Worship Leader, Sunday School Leader as well as several Ushers and members. With the exception of the twenty-two year-old and the fifty-seven year-old, all other participants held positions within the church.

- Subject Matter Preconception

This project provided many extraordinary lessons. I began with a basic assumption that everyone who agreed to participate in the Bible study did so because they were invested. I assumed that both the pastor and the members present during the study wanted more young adults active in their present ministry. I hypothesized that those who showed on that rainy night, down a long, dark, dirt road in the middle of the country, to a small two room church building, did so because they had an affinity toward Millennials. I assumed that this church was aware of its mortality and need for engagement and inclusion of young adults. Prior to presenting the Bible study, I was convinced that this ministry was open to change even if it meant breaking with traditional norms of worship and outreach. I thought this church was ready for a shift and that by inviting me to conduct this introductory Bible study they did so with an expectation of leaving the study poised to make strategic and deliberate changes in their ministry.

- Content Preconception

The church exists 5 miles outside of a major university. While the area is agricultural in nature, I assumed many of the members of the church and those who were participating in the study would have some connection to the university. I share this assumption, because it was the basis for presenting the essay ahead of time. I assumed the members of the study would be familiar with reading dense work and would be at ease with concepts like “emerging adulthood” and “post-modernity.” I also presumed that the passages chosen in Luke would be familiar to the participants. I thought the parable referenced in the initial Bible study was a passage that each of the participants would have heard and read before. What lead me to that assumption was knowing that many of the participants had been members of that church for several years. In the room on the night of the Bible study there were no first time visitors or new members; those who participated had established roles within the church and had served in such for years.

- Structural Preconception

The Bible study was laid out in 4 distinct sections: pre-work of an essay that gave a broad understanding of the subject matter and a video that reinforced the principal themes using different and unique voices, a foundational section that crystalized the subject matter, a framing section that placed the subject matter into perspective and a faith section that introduced the Luke text as a comparative tool for critiquing the church. The preconception was that this layout and way of organizing the Bible study would be effective for the participants. I assumed this layout was manageable and coherent. I also assumed that the use of multiple mediums such as video, music, PowerPoint, essays and group conversations would be welcomed by the participants. I thought everyone in the Bible study would be able to consume the material as presented without any problems.

The Bible Study

- Methodology

The original idea was to have the Bible study participants receive both the essay and initial video the day before the Bible study so that on the actual day of the study we could plow ahead with the information being fresh. The pastor informed me that many of those who would be participating did not have internet access in their homes. This meant they would be unable to watch any YouTube video or download and print the essay prior the Bible study. The solution was to print and deliver hard copies of the essays during the Sunday morning worship experience prior to the Bible study for those who agreed to participate. We also concluded that the video would need to be shown at the beginning of the Bible study at the church to ensure that everyone without internet access would be able to view it. On the night of the Bible study the participants arrived, having read the essay many days in advance; however, many of them had noted and highlighted sections as evidence by their paper copies in front of them.

- Section 1: Foundations

The section began with a video clip of a Grammy award winning Hip Hop artist reciting a poetic prayer during a radio interview with a hardcore rap radio station. The tone and mannerism of the rapper during the prayer were deliberate and reflective of the hardcore gangster rap community. I warned the Bible study participants that we were going to open with a prayer, and as they assumed the natural position of bowed head and closed eyes, I watched as each of them sharply looked up as they heard the prayer being recited. The reaction was instantaneous. The sixty-six-year-old in the room remarked that “he couldn’t understand what the rapper was saying because he was too distracted by how he was saying it.” Another participant remarked that she was uncomfortable with the prayer and wouldn’t be open to someone praying in that fashion in

her church. Another participant stated that the rapper needed to just “pray the right way.” While most of the participants were dismissive and critical of the rapper’s prayer, there were three participants who celebrated its uniqueness. The sixty-four-year-old remarked “as long as he’s talking about Jesus, he’s okay with me.” Others also felt that the focus on scripture, inclusion of the name of Jesus and intent to pray openly with boldness were enough positive factors to warrant accepting and appreciating the video.

The purpose of the opening video was to help the participants begin to frame what their own prejudices were when it came to ministry. By being forced to listen to a prayer spoken in a tone and manner that was both uncomfortable and foreign, they had to immediately reconcile with whether or not “different” was welcomed in their space. This video was followed up by two short cellphone commercial clips. The first cellphone commercial was from 1981, and the phone was a Radio Shack bag phone. The second commercial was from 2016, and cell phone was an Apple watch. The task for the participants was to name the similarities between both of the commercials and to name the similarities between the cellphones. The twenty-two year-old remarked that both commercials presented objects designed to help people connect with others. This was a critical observation in that it allowed me to link the fact that though the machine may change form and size, the objective doesn’t.

These initial three clips were utilized to lay a foundation of the awareness and acceptance of an “other.” As the discussion of emerging adulthood would broaden throughout the next 2 sections, it was my goal to establish, at the beginning, a value for young adults. The hope was that these videos and subsequent discussions would allow the participants to be aware of a different perspective and to also see that perspective as an equal.

With the three video clips and subsequent discussion behind us, we launched into the meat of section 1, which was the essay and content video. After spending 15 minutes watching the TED Talk from Dr. Jeffery Arnett, psychologist and inventor of the category “emerging adulthood,” the participants were asked Biblical questions:

- 1) What challenged you in both the reading and video?
- 2) What new terms or knowledge that you didn't know prior, did you learn?
- 3) Did anything in particular seem wrong to you?
- 4) How do your own experiences with emerging adults fit with what you read and heard?

Immediately the 72-year-old started the discussion by giving a history of how he became a man.

He explained that after high school you went to the military and after you came back from the war you got a job and that was the end of it. His challenge, as he addressed it, was in understanding the difference between an “emerging adult” and a “slacker.” The essay, as one explained, gave a great historical framework but left out an accountability section that would have been beneficial. Many in the room were troubled by the notion of having to accept that life and opportunities are significantly different for emerging adults versus when they themselves were in that same age category. In almost a defense of emerging adults, the 66-year-old shared a story about when she graduated from high school there were two distinct options waiting for her: get hired at one of the twenty crab picking port jobs in town or go to the local college where tuition was less than a \$1000 a year. She explained that today all but 1 crab picking port job has closed up shop and the local college's tuition has skyrocketed, making it virtually impossible to enroll without taking on debt.

- Section 2: Framing

This section began with a quote on empathy. We spent several minutes unpacking the quote. Some of the challenges named were to determine whether or not their responses were empathetic or whether they were dismissive. This proved especially difficult to the sixty-two-year-old, whose work with millennials as an educator gives her a unique perspective. She named that challenge as she talked about witnessing emerging adults both thrive and struggle in structured environments. This section included both a video showing a challenging interaction between a father and son as well as a lengthy discussion on how the changing litmus test of adulthood mirrored specific changes in society. The highlight of this section was detailing and engaging the work of Bernice Neugarten's 1965 Social Clock Theory. Bernice Neugarten first introduced in 1965 the five markers of adulthood: completion of school, marriage, financial independence, homeownership, and children.

By pointing to Neugarten's theory as a foundational tool the participants were able to measure in a very real way the difference between the offerings and opportunities of past generations versus the offerings and opportunities of today's millennials. They were also able to engage in a way they didn't in the foundational section by moving away from just naming differences to now embracing the differences of millennials. The questions used in this section included:

- 1) How old are you when you become an adult today?
- 2) How old were you when you finally felt like an adult (assuming you currently feel like an adult)?
- 3) What stuck out to you in the slides?
- 4) What pressures do you think result from living in a space of "becoming" versus being?
- 5) How do our churches shift in programming and teaching to respond to "emerging adults?"

To the question of "becoming versus being" the 36-year-old in the room talked at length about the angst she felt/feels from being rushed through all of Neugarten's Social Clock metrics,

unknowingly. She discussed the pressure of feeling like a failure if she was unable to find the “right” employment quickly and the fear she currently holds of not being able to support her family financially. This section allowed others in the room who had lived through that experience in their own generational settings to now empathize and share those experiences with her and the community. It also gave the participants the opportunity to engage first hand with the realities of an emerging adult. The thirty-six-year-old was an active member of the church, and so her voice and opinion humanized the subject matter in such a way that empathy was freely available. Her inclusion in the discussion was paramount in that it allowed the group to own the need to make strategic and intentional connections between themselves and emerging adults.

- Section 3: Faith

This section began with a video clip dramatizing Luke 14’s dinner feast. In the video the actor begins by describing the officials and royalty who are expected at the dinner feast. The actor himself is dressed as if to fit in with that group of people. As the video continues the actor morphs from clothing of royalty to clothing we would traditionally associate with homelessness. The metamorphosis happens while the actor explains that those who actually showed up at the feast didn’t fit the traditional model of who should be at the table. The ones who ended up eating at the table during the feast were the homeless, the downtrodden and the unsuccessful. The purpose of the video was to spark debate about who we invite to our table and who actually shows up. The questions used during these sections were:

- 1) The people at the feast didn’t fit in with who traditionally would be allowed there, and yet they were there by invitation. What do you think that this says to us a church?
- 2) What, if anything, can you see between this text and your understanding of emerging adults?
- 3) Can Luke teach us anything about how to engage emerging adults, or how to welcome them to our table?
- 4) Were there any alterations made to the feast or meal in order to attract the party; if not, why did they come?

5) Why would an emerging adult come to your table?

The twenty-two year-old in the room started the discussion by noting that most people don't come to the table because they don't feel welcomed. She went on to explain that moving the table from the palace to the community would help others feel comfortable enough to sit and be a part of this new configuration. This discussion lead to a long back in forth between her and the sixty-six-year-old about the menu at the table. It was a great discussion that asked the question "Does the menu have to change if different people are now being invited to the table?" Also involved in the discussion was whether or not this text connected with the Bible and fit into the discussion of emerging adulthood. The fifty-three-year-old quickly spoke up, responding that the church was the table and emerging adults were those who had been left out of the initial invitation but were now present. Many of the participants in the room wrestled with what steps could be done in order to invite and engage emerging adults today to their church. One of the answers that seemed to resonate throughout the discussion was "intentional mentoring and engagement." They made the connection between the Luke text of the personal invitations that went out, and their own responsibilities to personally go after and engage and invite emerging adults to their space. The sixty-six-year-old exclaimed "if we can just get them here we can feed them the word of God; we got good word!"

- Analysis

On the night, we conducted the Bible study, it had been raining for 3 days straight. There was so much water that many of roads in and out of the town were flooded. The pastor asked if we could meet at an earlier time to make sure that the road leading to the church wouldn't be flooded and that the participants who were coming would be able to get out if the rain and flooding continued. What struck me was that he insisted that we continue with the Bible study instead of rescheduling. He explained that his congregants were excited about the study and had

been contacting him throughout the evening to ensure that the study would continue in spite of the weather. This led me to believe that everyone who planned on attending was doing so because they were excited about learning new ways of engaging emerging adults. This was my first misconception. One of things that became clear within the first few minutes of showing the first video was that some who were present were there to defend their traditions and current church culture. While they may have been open to hearing about emerging adults, their mission was clear. You could hear this defense in some of the responses like “why can’t they just…” “that’s not how I grew up,” “we don’t need that here,” and “they are just immature.” While this line of defense did not represent the majority of the participants in the room, it did comprise most of the comments of the males’ present. The room was also comprised of several educators. As a subject matter, they seemed to engage the conversation with a higher degree of empathy and presence than others gathered. Many of the educators highlighted sections of the essay and were actively taking notes during each video. The remainder of the participants participated in the Bible study more during the third section on faith. When the discussion turned to Luke they countered the discussion with supportive scripture and personal examples of how they could engage emerging adults. It was clear that they felt more comfortable talking about scripture than sociological and historical trends.

Having two emerging adults present made a significant impact on the dynamics in the room. There were several moments when their verbal and physical body language during the responses of others in the room caused many to pause. One of the noticeable shifts in the room was the posture of the young adults. As the conversation broadened you could see them easing and relaxing into less of a defensive posture. In the beginning of the Bible study the emerging adults sat together, arms folded, cell phones out, head down. They were present but not engaged.

As the discussion wore on, specifically during section two on framing and empathy, they began to speak up, offering their own stories as examples and actively engaging the others in the room.

- Subject Matter Alterations

The format of the Bible study didn't allow for the participants to self-identify their perspective and stances on emerging adulthood. They were able to notate it in their survey, but I didn't provide a space for them to discuss it openly during the beginning of the Bible study. In the next Bible study, one of the changes I will implement will be to allow everyone in the room to go around state their positions on the state of Millennials and how they came to that opinion. It will also be helpful in the next Bible study to have subject matter definitions of terms visible during the Bible study. Often during the study, I found people referring back to notes or asking for definitions to be repeated in order to make their points.

The emerging adulthood content proved difficult for several members of the group. Part of the struggle appeared to be not an intellectual one but instead a relational barrier. The participants brought into the study a preconception based on their own experiences that hindered them from initially appreciating the value of the content. The data as well as the linkage between the Luke text, and a sense of the church's role proved helpful in overcoming that initial hurdle. It was also helpful having multiple voices and images re-affirming the themes and realities of emerging adulthood via video for the next study.

In the final Bible study, I will produce several testimonials of young adults speaking directly into a camera about their experiences as an emerging adult. This kind of intense intimacy I think will help the participants humanize the content in such a way that the relational hurdle will be quickly overcome. By seeing these images of people as well as hearing the data and connecting with the Luke text, the content should be easier to digest.

- Structural Analysis

The Bible study was originally set up into three sections: pre-work that included the essay and video, a foundational framing section, and lastly a faith section. In pitching the study to the pastor of the church, it was at his request that the structure be changed. He had two major concerns: 1: that multiple people who would attend the study did not have internet access at home, so they would not be able to watch the video ahead of time nor would they be able to download and print out the essay; and 2: the best time to dispense the essay as a hardcopy would be on the Sunday prior to the Bible study to make sure everyone got a copy. This would mean they would come into the study having read many days prior the essay and would need to watch the video during the Bible study.

- Structural Alteration

One of the adjustments made in order to accommodate these requests was to find a shorter video to present. The original video on emerging adulthood was a twenty-minute TED Talk by Jeffery Arnett. Another adjustment made was to alter the flow of the actual Bible study. Knowing that the participants would be spending roughly forty-five minutes' total watching videos during the study, I needed to make sure that each section provided a quality amount of time for interaction and peer learning. The entire Bible study lasted two hours and forty minutes. It was important to take several short breaks and continue to mix video and music presentations with peer interactions.

- Luke Analysis

One of the fears I had going into the Bible study was that the presentation of the Luke text would feel to the participants like an interloper. Since the bulk of the study focused on the content area Emerging Adulthood and not on the text, my preconception was that once we got to

the part of the study on Luke, it would not feel authentic. I thought that the participants would be swift to step over that section in order to hurry toward the end of the Bible study. I assumed that even though the section on Luke functioned in the same structure as the other two sections that it would not be appropriated correctly. I admit those tensions going into the study. I was surprised, however, at the results.

What I discovered was that long before we arrived at section 3 on faith, many of the participants were already making the connection between consuming the material at face value and looking for ways in which to interpret it through the lens of the church and scripture. During the discussion around the prayer in the first section on Foundations, the twenty-two-year-old remarked that if Jesus were really going out in the community “like the Bible says,” the language and tone used in the rapper’s prayer would have been normal for Jesus to hear. She was unintentionally challenging the participants to think about what kind of Jesus their Bible allowed for. Another example of premature inflecting of a Biblical lens came in the second section on formation. After giving data related to the kinds of realities millennials face today, the sixty-eight-year-old, in exasperation, shouted out “The church has got to do something.” She said it’s time for us to get out into the “highways and byways and reach these young folk.” Those consistent expressions from the participants helped to ease my anxiety leading up to the third section on faith.

Apart from the twenty-two-year-old, all of the other participants had heard the Biblical narrative before. They were familiar with the text. Hearing it, however, during the Bible study, now with a fresh and informed perspective, allowed them to look at the story differently. The participants were the ones who made the connection between the poor who were welcomed to the table and emerging adults who are in need of such intentional inclusion in the church. The

fifty-six-year-old remarked that just like the story, all the young adults aren't "here;" instead we have to "go where they are, and maybe they will come." The Luke text provided the participants with a strategy. They could acknowledge their own possessions of value: they had the table, they had the menu, they had the food, they had something specific to offer; it also allowed the participants to note the distance between their possession and those whom could benefit from it. The poor were outside, the hungry were outside, but their possessions of value were inside. I heard many struggle with this revelation. The seventy-two-year-old remarked that he'd been "in" the church for so many years, "in" ministry, "in" the men's groups, "in" the choir. He remarked that to implement what the Luke text outlined would be tough for him, because it would require him to accept someone else coming "in." The discussion on the Luke text also allowed the participants to wrestle with this changing table dynamic. As Emerging Adults were invited "in" there could be a natural shifting at the table. Whether figuratively it would be the menu or seating arrangements, it was undeniable that with the inclusion of others, something would have to change. For the participants, this meant perhaps their worship order, liturgy, song choices and even seating arrangements, and décor. The question they pondered was "What would the table look like if Emerging Adults were invited to be fully present?"

The Luke passage was effective in helping to fully shape a theological imperative around engaging and reaching out to Emerging Adults. According to the fifty-three-year-old, the text helped her see that it wasn't right to keep an "empty table," especially when so many are in need and hungry. This revelation was vital in leading the others at the table to again think critically about what steps they could take in the moment to engage and connect with Emerging Adults. The takeaway from this section was twofold. On one hand they left convinced they had

something of value to share, and second, they left stating that it was their responsibility to take the first steps of reaching out to share and invite others in.

- Conclusion

This pilot Bible study was informative. I learned a lot about the relationship between longevity and motives. One of the lessons was that the older members who had been active at that church for many years held a sense of protective perspective in engaging the material. It wasn't negative or dismissive; it was honest. They had worked for years to get the church to its current state and were invested in all aspects of its future. Recognizing this helps in crafting future Bible studies. I will be able to name this phenomenon as well as honor it as I convey new and different perspectives. I also learned the importance of managing dense material and time. We went through a heavy almost 3 hours' worth of content. For the actual study it will be imperative to either discard the introductory video or find a way to have it available for viewing via DVD or USB prior to the study. This will help to cut down on time during the actual study. I also think there was great value in the peer to peer interaction. One of the things I will consider in the upcoming Bible studies will be the use of more discussion group- based learning. The structure as well as content were helpful as a test for constructing the future Bible studies. Overall I was pleased at the outcome and specifically the natural connecting of the Luke passage with the material.

Chapter 2: Emerging Adulthood Bible Study

Course Description

This is a four-week multi-media interactive Bible study with a four-part essay component. The goal of this study is to utilize the book of Luke as a launching pad to begin conversation and transformation for the purpose of helping congregations decode the world of Millennials and the church's role and responsibility to them.

Learning Objective

The topic of this lesson is emerging adulthood. The goal is for the participants to gain a deeper understanding of the life many young adults are living today. By the end of the study the expectation is for participants to be able to articulate an empathic critique of the lives of young adults and to also see a connection between the role of the church and the need for young adult participation as evidenced through Luke 14. In particular, what participants should take away from this study is a renewed understanding about their responsibility as members of a local church to reach out and connect with young adults.

Audience

The audience for this Bible study can include but is not limited to; church members, church leadership, pastors and denominational governing boards. The intended audience is anyone connected with a local church, who has an interest or passion in better understanding the possibilities, problems and realities of engaging Millennials.

Preparation for The Study

All participants should read a copy of the essay prior to attending the class.

Course Materials

The Presenter will need the following:

- a. Electrical Equipment: The ability to project and hear streaming video (Speakers, TV/projector, laptop, WIFI)
- b. Instructional Arrangement: Tables and chairs arraigned ‘conference style’
- c. Instructional Materials: Extra copies of the essay, name badges, pens and paper, (refreshments are also helpful)

Instructional Method

The Bible study will be divided into four sections. Each section will begin with a short video that captures the essence of the presentation for that section. Following the video there will be a short discussion lead by the presenter. The purpose of the discussion is to begin to expose inherent biases, challenge ideas and help the participants hear from their peer’s unique and personal perspectives. Following the discussion, the presenter will lead the participants in a group learning opportunity by reflecting on the essay presented to them prior to arrival. In addition to the essay the presenter will also utilize the relevant instructional materials provided to spark dialogue. After reflecting on the essay and having introduced the new instructional materials the presenter will lead the participants through another round of questions. The last set of questions will be geared to direct the participants toward forming perspectives aligned with Luke’s gospel that affirm, acknowledge and seek to include Millennials. The presenter will then close the section with an opportunity for the participants to verbally assess their own growth or learnings during the Bible study. The section will end with a prayer.

Duration

The Bible study should take no more than 90 minutes and should include 3 minute brakes between each section.

Section 1

*The presenter will begin the Bible study by asking the participants to direct their attention to the screen for opening prayer, via slide 1:

- **Slide 1**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/v/CDBShaAZQDM>

Synopsis: The video displays a popular Grammy award winning controversial gangster rapper. In the video the rapper is participating in a live radio interview and is asked to pray. The rapper obliges and tone, meter and content of his prayer resembles the nature of his music. The prayer is harsh, unpolished, honest and challenging.

** The purpose of the video is to confront the participants with what they perceive as acceptable church language and behavior. The goal of the video is to help the participants expand their views and focus them on identifying similarities instead of differences.*

Questions

- How did the prayer make you feel?
- Would something like that be welcomed in your current church?
- Would you want to be in a church where prayers like that happen?
- Do you think the rapper loves and believes in the same things you do?

Duration: Slide one should take no more than 10 min

Section 2

- **Slide 2**

Video1: <https://www.youtube.com/v/vBxYoAZLWwA>

Video2: https://www.youtube.com/v/p2_06M1m6xg

Synopsis: Both videos are of cell phone commercials. The first video is of one of the first bag phones ever invented. The video shows the large cell phone and different people carrying it, making calls and enjoying their day while utilizing this phone. The second video is a commercial for an iPhone watch. In this video participants are shown using the watch to make calls, text others and receive alerts.

** The purpose of these videos are to highlight differences and similarities. If successful, both videos will show that although size and style may change, core function remains the same.*

Questions

- Name some similarities of both adds?
- Do both adds seek the same outcome?
- What do the cell phones themselves have in common?
- What could each cell phone benefit from, from the other?

*The presenter will now instruct the group to pull out their assigned essay and be prepared for discussion on it and the next video.

Section 3

- **Slide 3**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/v/fv8KpQY0m6o>

Synopsis: The video is a TEDx Talk featuring Jeffery Jensen Arnett. The title of the talk is “Why does it take so long to grow up today?” Jeffery Jensen Arnett, who is the

inventor of the phrase “emerging adulthood” talks at length about characteristics of emerging adulthood and what responses are effective.

**The purpose of this video is to facilitate a deeper conversation about the concept of emerging adulthood.*

After the video, the presenter will ask the participants to reflect on both the essay and the video:

Questions

- What challenged you in both the reading and the video?
- What new terms of knowledge that you didn't know prior, did you learn?
- Did anything in particular seem wrong to you?
- How do your own experiences with emerging adults fit with what you read and heard?

Section 4

- **Slide 4**

*The presenter will display the quote on Empathy in front of the participants and invite them to sit silently in reflection for two minutes as they process it.

Quote:

Empathy is a unique trait that requires one to move beyond the porch of political correctness or social boundaries and to instead walk courageously into the middle of the other person's reality and sit there in reverent observation until you can fully see the other person's frame of reference.

Questions

- What does that quote trigger for you?
- What challenges you with hearing that?

- Do you think it is accurate?

- **Slide 5**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/v/SXxITJcUs6A>

Synopsis: The video is a clip from the very first episode of The Cosby Show. In the clip, a conversation is happening between a father and son. The son is attempting to explain why he can't live up to the standards and achievements of his father. The father then retorts with his own harsh but critical feelings about the son's capacity and life choices.

** The purpose of the video is to help the participants wrestle with the role of empathy and how it can either help or hinder points of connection with others.*

(The presenter will suggest that the participants take a 3-minute break. The presenter will request that the participants stand, stretch and move around the room before returning to dialogue.)

*the presenter will now focus the conversation back to the previous video shown.

Questions

- How far off or accurate is this video today?
- What do you hear and sense?
- Are both sides, right?

*the presenter will now display the following facts and ask the participants to pull their essay out and follow along during the presentation.

The content slide will consist of the following bullet points

- 18th-21st century shifts in understanding adulthood based on physical characteristics and menstruation cycles.

- Cultural shifts in understanding of adulthood
- Bernice Neugartens 1965 Social Clock Theory

**for content on the three bullet points, the presenter must be familiar with the essay and should ask the participants to add their own understanding based off their reading of the essay.*

Supplemental Questions to be asked

- At what age today do we consider someone an adult?
- How old were you when finally felt like an adult (assuming you currently feel like an adult)?
- What pressures do you think result from living in a space of “becoming” verses “being”?
- “How do our churches shift in programing and teaching to respond to Emerging Adults?”

- **Slide 7**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/v/fQT9rFr96W4>

Synopsis: In the video the actor is dramatizing Luke 14. You see the actor talk about the kind of people typically invited to a king’s table. As the actor describes the people, the actor who has been wearing very formal attire transforms into clothing typically associated with impoverished communities. As the transformation is happening the actor continues in their discussion to reveal that those who actually attended the meal with the king were impoverished.

** The purpose of the video is to highlight the role invitation and access play when it comes to engaging new communities. What the video intends to do is help the participants parallel what is happening in Luke’s text and the role of the church and Millennials.*

Questions

- The people at the feast didn't fit in with who traditionally would be allowed there, and yet they were there by invitation. What do you think that says to us as a church?
- What if anything can you see between this text and your understanding of emerging adults?
- Can Luke teach us anything about how to engage emerging adults, or how to welcome them to our table?
- Where there any alterations made to the feast or meal in order to attract the party, if not why did they come?
- Why would an emerging adult come to your table?

*Presenter will ask the participants to reflect on their collective learnings from the evening.

Emerging Adulthood Essay

Remember the cartoon *The Flintstones*? How many young adults do you remember seeing displayed? How many eighteen to thirty five-year old's do you recall, still living at home with Fred and Wilma, or can you recall Barney and Betty deciding between a life of working at Bedrock Quarry and Gravel, or a life wandering about the great unknown? The answer is none. While the cartoon was certainly fictional, it frames a larger perspective on what it meant to be an adult in the past. Until the 17th century, a person was either classified as a child or an adult. The distinction between the two was based solely on whether or not one had reached the point of puberty. Settersten, in his article entitled, "Becoming Adult: Meanings of Markers to Adulthood" says it more plainly when he remarks that historically, the onset of puberty or reproductive

capacity was the basic marker of adulthood.⁴⁰ This worked so well, culturally, that primitive societies would use the onset of puberty as a ‘rites of passage’ moment. Children who now were capable of reproducing were no longer viewed as dependents, and in many cultures, they were married off, placed in their own dwellings and expected to immediately begin contributing to the tribe as a rightful adult. They had, by nature, earned their new status.

Puberty is an important marker. Author J. De Jong writes in *Making it to Adulthood: The Emerging Self*, that the physical changes that erupt in puberty propel the person into adolescence. What happens in the form of physical growth and body chemistry and how the adolescent feels about these changes has a profound effect upon the adolescent.⁴¹ Those effects end up framing the adult experience. What happens during puberty will in many ways direct, if not dictate, how a person will function into their adulthood. The problem, however, is that puberty, while a powerful indicator or marker, has been shown to be a fluid construct. According to Settersten, prior to the 17th century, the age of puberty and menstruation for most females was between fifteen and sixteen, and for boys, puberty was twelve.⁴² Post 17th century, that age of puberty for females dropped to between ten to twelve. The National Institute of Health has cited cases of the onset of puberty occurring as early as seven years old in some females.⁴³ With this change in the average age of the onset of puberty, suddenly the culturally accepted parameters sanctioning puberty as the marker of adulthood become questionable. How could a ten-year-old be considered an adult?

⁴⁰ Richard A Settersten, Timothy M. Ottusch, and Barbara Schneider, "Becoming Adult: Meanings of Markers to Adulthood." *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource* (2015): 45.

⁴¹ Arthur DeJong, *Making it to Adulthood: The Emerging Self* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 93.

⁴² Settersten et al, *Becoming Adult*, 74.

⁴³ M.A Bellis, "Adults at 12? Trends in Puberty and their Public Health Consequences," PubMed Central (PMC), last modified 2006, 910-911, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2465479/>.

Sociological Shifts

Post 17th century puberty was no longer culturally accepted as the door to adulthood, and thus a new category was introduced, adolescence. According to Keniston, in his book *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Approach*, there was great discussion happening among sociologists and psychologists in naming and classifying these individuals who had successfully reached puberty but still could not be considered adults.⁴⁴ In 1904 G. Stanley Hall published his seminal work: *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*.⁴⁵ This work would shape how we understand, today, the biological changes and social changes that contributed to the development of this new category. J. J Arnett, in his article, “G. Stanley Hall’s Adolescence: Brilliance and Nonsense,” talked about some of these new understandings that had been presented by J. Stanley Hall. Arnett suggested that Hall saw adolescence as a time of a higher level of attention seeking, engagement of risky behavior and a strong dependence on friendships- all clear markers of entrance into this new developmental stage of life.⁴⁶

Political Shifts

Coupled with the angst of naming and defining adolescence during the turn of the century were also massive labor issues regarding children. The fallacy of viewing puberty as the marker for adulthood, for so many centuries, had allowed labor markets and industries such as mines, textiles, agriculture and others to target children as capable workers. By the time of the 1900 U.S Census, approximately 2 million children were working in mills, mines, fields, factories, stores

⁴⁴ K Keniston, *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Approach* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 55.

⁴⁵ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: [Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education]* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), 39.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey J. Arnett, “G Stanley Hall’s Adolescence: Brilliance and Nonsense.” *History of Psychology* 9, no3, (2006): 186-197.

and on city streets across the United States.⁴⁷ Some states like Massachusetts adopted child labor laws as early as 1836, preventing children under fifteen from working and requiring them to spend at least three months in schools. However, it wouldn't be until 1938 that the federal government would pass the Fair Labor Standard Act, setting national standards and making education a priority for children.

So, in the late 19th and early 20th century, there was a confluence of several worlds. On one hand, society had finally embraced the reality that puberty was no longer the marker for adulthood. On the other hand, society was also wrestling with both what to call this new demographic of young people as well as how to treat them. As the industrial age rose in the early 20th century, where machines were now aggressively taking the place of workers, the value placed on young people by society shifted. The industrial age brought with it a need for educated young adults who could run machines and factories versus handy children who could work in them. Thus, adolescence continued to morph as the need for primary and secondary education was increasingly seen as a necessary step toward being a fully functioning adult.

Cultural Shifts

While the completion of a primary and secondary education was now seen as a primary indicator for adulthood more so than puberty in the 20th century, there were other indicators for adulthood as well. In 1976, social psychologist Bernice L. Neugarten introduced an article entitled "Adaptation and the Life Cycle." In the article, Neugarten lists five characteristics or markers for adulthood as a part of life stage development. Neugarten suggested that in order to be considered an adult one must: 1: complete school, 2: find a job, 3: move out on their own, 4:

⁴⁷ "Our Documents - Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916 (1916)," Our Documents - Home, accessed October 11, 2016, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=59>.

get married and 5: have children.⁴⁸ Neugarten's stages were meant to be consecutive. Up until the late seventy's, these core principles of adulthood were largely attainable. Finding employment meant being willing to move where the jobs were and settling down there to create and start a family. Adulthood was attainable.

The 1980's brought with it the Reagan Recession. As Richard C. Auxier writes in "Reagan's Recession" for the Pew Research Center, the deepest post-World War II economic downturn outside of today's financial climate occurred in the 1980's.⁴⁹ During that recession unemployment jumped, at one point, to ten-point eight percent. Suddenly the jobs and industries that were easily accessible just a decade before were now gone. With the loss of jobs came the loss of the ability to fulfill one of Neugarten's core markers for adulthood. Being unable to find work also affected several of the other markers such as moving out, getting married and raising children. So, spawned by the economic collapse and subsequent fallout of the 80's, there was now the budding of a generation, who while having finished primary and secondary school, were still living at home with their parents, unemployed and largely single without kids. The question many had was how to define them. While past generations defined adults as those having achieved puberty and more recent generations defined adulthood as one who met the 5 markers laid out by Neugarten, this generation seemed not to fit with either sufficiently.

Emerging Adulthood

In an article entitled "Emerging Adulthood, a Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," published in the *American Psychologist* in 2000, Dr. Jeffery Jensen Arnett produced the term 'Emerging Adulthood.' He defined this term as a distinct

⁴⁸ B. L Neugarten, "Adaptation and Life Cycle," *The Counseling Psychologist* 6, no. 1 (1976): 16-20. doi:10.1177/001100007600600104.

⁴⁹ Richard C Auxier, "Reagan's Recession," Pew Research Center, accessed October 13th, 2016, www.Pewresearch.org/s010/12/14/reagans-recession/.

development period between the ages of 18-29 that captures the experiences of youth who are no longer adolescents, but not yet fully adults.⁵⁰ For Arnett, this period was culturally constructed. David Sentran and Chris Riesling, in their book *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, add to this thought by suggesting that this is a time in which beliefs are solidified, life patterns shaped, and key decisions are made regarding spirituality, identity, church participation, vocation, morality, sexuality, and mentoring.⁵¹

Jeromy Staff, who writes in “Uncertainty in Early Occupational Aspirations: Role Exploration or Aimlessness,” would expand Arnett’s theory. What Staff highlights is that this time of “emerging adulthood” is not just one of construction and formation, but is also largely one of exploration.⁵² Staff suggests that this role of exploration could ultimately benefit social-economic attainment and create enduring partnerships in the long run. He also points to the fact that this role exploration is an appropriate response to today’s job market where market instability increasingly requires young adults to be flexible and creative in finding employment.

The vagueness and fluidity found in emerging adulthood for Staff is representative of a response to the social conditions in which young adults find themselves. The social conditions were created by the previous generation, and this should be considered when framing the mindsets of this generation. Christian Smith, in his seminal work, *Lost in Transition: The Darkside of Emerging Adulthood*, would seem to agree with Jeromy Staff. Smith postulates that young adults today live in a complex world, filled with difficulty and serious problems. As a response to the social conditions in which they live, Christian Smith determines that emerging

⁵⁰ Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," 469-480.

⁵¹ Sentran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 58.

⁵² Staff et al., “Uncertainty in Early Occupational Aspirations: Role Exploration or Aimlessness.” *Social Forces* 89, no. 2 (2010):doi:10.1353/sof.2010.0088.

adults are naturally ‘adrift.’⁵³ Smith suggests that these emerging adults are directly adrift morally as they wrestle with limited reasoning capabilities to explore and explain basic moral issues.

A 2007 study by the Australian Temperament Project entitled, “Predictors of Positive Development: Emerging Adulthood,” found that this idea of having a determinate moral center was at the heart of what it meant to positively move from emerging adulthood to being a fully functioning adult.⁵⁴ The study followed 1,158 Australians from infancy to adulthood and found a direct correlation between self-regulatory characteristics as youth and positive development as adults. What the study showed was that young adults who learned to self-regulate had greater social competence, and where there was social competence, there existed strong peer relationships; where there were strong peer and parental relationships, there was clear identity formation, and where there was clear identity formation at a young age, the length of time between emerging adulthood and becoming fully adult was shortened.

Conclusion

Until the 17th century, with the achievement of puberty, one was considered an adult. This thinking meant that ten to twelve year olds were expected to work strenuous hours of labor, raise and care for families, take on adult responsibilities, and make their own way in society. While this certainly created an independent and strong generation, there were also major deficits and drawbacks for putting that much pressure on such young bodies. As we moved into the 19th-20th century, being an adult meant fulfilling five key markers: School, work, home, marriage and family. Fulfilling these markers had the effect of creating and insuring a stable and prosperous society. However, all of those markers, while noteworthy, rely on a vibrant social economic

⁵³ Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 94.

⁵⁴ O’Connor et al., “Predictors of Positive Development in Emerging Adulthood,” 860-874.

platform in order to be sustainable. Without such a platform, or in the wake of such a platform morphing and crumbling, suddenly the cost of completing school, the scarcity of quality employment, the outrageous prices of home ownership, and cultural shifts in defining sexuality and marriage make fulfilling those markers substantially more difficult. What develops as a result, is a generation who is of age, but still in the process of discovering and fulfilling markers that would identify them fully as adults. What develops are Emerging Adults.

Chapter 3: Millennials Bible Study

Course Description

This is a four-week multi-media interactive Bible study with a four-part essay component. The goal of this study is to utilize the book of Luke as a launching pad to begin conversation and transformation for the purpose of helping congregations decode the world of Millennials and the church's role and responsibility to them.

Learning Objective

The topic of this lesson is understanding Millennials. The purpose of this lesson is to first expose some of the cultural, political and financial hardships that are a reality to Millennials today and secondly to help the participants make a connection between their own personal experiences as Millennials so that they can see places of overlap with what they hear in the material presented. If successful, the participants will be able to draw a connection between the experiences of Millennials today and their own. With this learning, and by applying the Luke context as a sub-narrative the participants will be able to see themselves as uniquely qualified to minister and engage Millennials.

Audience

The audience for this Bible study can include but is not limited to; church members, church leadership, pastors and denominational governing boards. The intended audience is anyone connected with a local church, who has an interest or passion in better understanding the possibilities, problems and realities of engaging Millennials.

Preparation for The Study

All participants should read a copy of the essay prior to attending the class.

Course Materials

The Presenter will need the following:

- a. Electrical Equipment: The ability to project and hear streaming video (Speakers, TV/projector, laptop, WIFI)
- b. Instructional Arrangement: Tables and chairs arraigned ‘conference style’
- c. Instructional Materials: Extra copies of the essay, name badges, pens and paper, (refreshments are also helpful)

Instructional Method

The Bible study will be divided into four sections. Each section will begin with a short video that captures the essence of the presentation for that section. Following the video there will be a short discussion lead by the presenter. The purpose of the discussion is to begin to expose inherent biases, challenge ideas and help the participants hear from their peers unique and personal perspectives. Following the discussion, the presenter will lead the participants in a group learning opportunity by reflecting on the essay presented to them prior to arrival. In addition to the essay the presenter will also utilize the relevant instructional materials provided to spark dialogue. After reflecting on the essay and having introduced the new instructional materials the presenter will lead the participants through another round of questions. The last set of questions will be geared to direct the participants toward forming perspectives aligned with Luke’s gospel that affirm, acknowledge and seek to include Millennials. The presenter will then close the section with an opportunity for the participants to verbally assess their own growth or learnings during the Bible study. The section will end with a prayer.

Duration

The Bible study should take no more than 90 minutes and should include 3 minute brakes between each section.

Direct Interaction

*The presenter will begin the Bible study by inviting the participants to prayer:

Prayer

God help us to see with your eyes and love with your heart those who you have placed in our midst. Amen.

Section 1

▪ **Slide 1**

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGvrmltfMra>

Synopsis: The video is a parody. It presents a fictitious organization whose efforts are to save Millennials. The organization does this by aligning donors interested in the plight of Millennials alongside needy Millennials.

* The purpose of the video is to highlight issues Millennials deal with. The video is also intended to connect the participants to the topic for the presentation.

Questions

- The video was funny. However, there was a lot of truth about the world Millennials are facing today, can you name some truths you heard?
- Name some exciting opportunities Millennials have today that perhaps older generations did not have?
- What is your prayer for Millennials today?

Section 2

▪ **Slide 2**

*the presenter will now ask the participants to pair off into groups of 4, the presenter will then instruct the participants to answer the following questions and actually pray collectively as a group.

Questions

- How old are you?
- When did you first feel like an adult?
- What is your prayer for this current generation of Millennials?

*the participants will engage in a discussion of the essay and their responses to them.

Section 3

▪ **Slide 3**

Video: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=QiYBtUG9jic>

Synopsis: The video is a TEDx talk featuring Ian Aston. Aston talks a length about the misconceptions many have about Millennials as well as real challenges that Millennials face today. In addition to outlining misconceptions and challenges Aston also points to improvements and skill sets that are uniquely Millennial.

* The purpose of the video is to challenge the participants preconceptions of who Millennials are. The video is also intended to inform the participants on some of the realities of being a Millennial.

Questions

- What word or themes did you hear repeated, in both the video and the essay?
- What challenged you during the presentation?

- What new learnings or sparks did you get?
- How does the church fit into what you've heard and read so far?
- **Slide 4**

*the presenter will now focus the groups attention back toward the center presentation

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMUeyRT3ZYI>

Synopsis: The video is PBS special edition show on Millennials. As panelist, an economist and writer have gathered to give their perspective primarily on why more young adults today live at home and not own their own. As a consequence of their analysis they also share their larger overall perspective on the state of Millennials.

Questions

- Can you identify with some of the problems raised in the video?
- Can you point to people within your own circle who are experiencing these frustrations?
- How could the church be more responsive for Millennials?

**the presenter will ask the participants to take a 3minute break. The presenter will suggest that everyone stand, stretch and move around the room before returning for the final two sections.*

Section 4

- **Slide 5**

Video(s): Video1<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRFscdlucXQ>

Video2https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgxCpdFVa_E

Synopsis: Video 1 shows an Asian American young adult talking to an audience about his struggles finding a job. He goes into detail about all the mental and psychological challenges he has had. He also talks about his perspective of the generation.

Video 2 shows an African American young adult talking directly into a camera about her challenges finding a job after college. The young adult talks at length about not being able to utilize her degree, being saddled with school debt and the general challenges of life as a Millennial.

*The videos are intended to give the participants perspective on issues relating to Millennials.

Content Slide

- 36 Percent of Millennials live with their Parents
- 75 Percent of Millennials are unmarried
- 15.5 Percent are Unemployed
- 1 Trillion in Student Loan Debt

*the presenter will now take 3 minutes for any responses to either the videos or the information.

- **Slide 6**

*the presenter will invite one of the participants to read Luke 7:20-23 allowed.

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUnSJTWYuE8>

Synopsis: In video Carl Lentz, an urban Millennial pastor from New York is talking to Oprah Winfrey. Pastor Lentz is sharing perspective on how and why he has a relationship with Christ.

Questions

- What does Luke teach us about the role of the church, that is necessary for us to hear today?
- For Millennials, what aspects of their lives do they need the church to connect with?
- Is Luke's text helpful for us in reframing our focus on what church is called to do?
- Who are the blind, lame, leprosy, deaf, dead and poor amongst us today?

Millennials Essay

According to a 2015, study conducted by the Pew Research Center concerning Millennials, one out of four members of the Millennial generation, those born between 1981-1997, are unaffiliated with any religious tradition.⁵⁵ According to Pew, this is the largest gap, historically, that there has ever been. Pew highlights a gap in the American tradition of passing on religious values as an inheritance, by pointing to a startling reality that young adults today are less likely to be affiliated with religion than their parents were a generation before. The Barna Millennial Project, which interviewed 27,140 millennials over a ten-year period, places the number of religiously unaffiliated slightly higher at 30 percent, and according to the Barna Millennial Project, they see no importance at all in attending church.⁵⁶ Not only are young adults turning away from religion as a practice, according to this Barna study, they are also turning away from the institution of church. For them, church isn't an important part of their lived experience. This is a far cry from their grandparents' generation, who according to Pew, saw only thirteen percent of their young adults during the 1970's expressing similar views. In fact, the Public Religion Research Institute's American Values Atlas Study indicated that thirty four percent of young adults in comparison to eleven percent of today's seniors see themselves as religiously unaffiliated. Overall, the decline in religious affiliation is staggering.

Christian Smith, author of *The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, makes the argument that part of the problem is that the gospel needs to be relational in order to be attractive.⁵⁷ In *Postmodernism 101*, Heath White gives a deeper understanding of 'relational gospel' by stating that "premodern church focused on the Eucharist as the high point of service. Modern church focused on the sermon as the high point; the move from premodern to modern is from authority

⁵⁵ Lipka, "Millennials Increasingly are Driving Growth of Nones."

⁵⁶ "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church."

⁵⁷ Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 33.

to reason.”⁵⁸ Postmodern churches are very different in that they focus on small groups and communal activities as their high points. It’s a move from authority and reason to now relationship formation. This is what Christian Smith is referencing in his notion of a “relational gospel.” Reaching a Millennial generation requires an ability to move beyond our traditional notions of ‘church.’ For Millennials, scripture, preaching and even worship all have to be relevant to their current experiences in order to be embraced. This ‘relational’ model requires participation from more than just the church leadership. In order to be effective, the entire church has to accept as its corporate responsibility, this shift in models. The church must see itself as a place for gathering and connecting and not just a place for transmission of information.

As a part of being relational, the church must also take into account the sociological position in which many Millennials are found. In the article, “From the Silent Generation to Generation X, Y and Z,” Jen McIntosh-Elkins makes the argument that we have to be mindful of the sociological pathologies of a latchkey generation. What Elkins suggests, as well as other researchers, is that this Millennial generation is a generation who has basically grown up needing approval, direction and affirmation from others.⁵⁹ As a result, this longing does not suddenly disappear once they reach adulthood; instead, it gets reassembled as doubt, angst and feelings of being unqualified. The result of such assembly is a generation hypersensitive to being judged, critiqued, or made fully responsible for seemingly simple tasks. At the core of this revelation is, as Elkins points out, a need for support for Millennials. This generation craves positive feedback, direct support, and personal attention. They excel where those models are present. The church, in reaching out to this generation, must begin to re-order how we engage and embrace Millennials in order to connect with them.

⁵⁸ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 96.

⁵⁹ McIntosh-Elkins, “From the Silent Generation to Generation X, Y and Z,” 21.

How different is life for Millennials? Scott Berridge, in his article, “Millennials after the Great Recession,” presents these sobering facts: thirty six percent of Millennials live with their parents, only twenty five percent of Millennials are married, fifteen point five percent are unemployed (please note that the national unemployment rate is at just five percent)⁶⁰ and that Millennials are the most indebted generation to date with a staggering 1 trillion dollars owed in student’s loans.⁶¹ In many ways, Millennials are a generation under siege. The shifting financial landscape of the country has thrown them socially off balance. While past generations at their age would have been finding solid employment, purchasing homes and marrying, this generation is left to make alternative and often multi-dimensional choices in order to thrive. An example of this ‘multi-dimensional’ alternative thinking would be the mass pilgrimage of young adults returning to their parents’ home. By living with their parents, and not paying substantial rent payments, they are able to accept minimum wage paying jobs or work several part-time positions. The need to go after a high paying position in order to pay a mortgage and other bills is no longer valid for them. Millennials, as a result of the world in which they are becoming an adult, have a unique perspective on money and the pursuit of their destiny.

When it comes to interacting with the church, Christian Smith, noted Sociologist and professor at Notre Dame, calls this generation the “church shopping network,” and he defines them as a pronounced consumerist element.⁶² Smith suggests that Millennials may visit a church but are not interested in joining. They feel comfortable leaving and trying a different experience, and their allegiances are not to buildings, but instead to the ministry that meets their needs.

David Kinnaman states in his book *UnChristian*, that this is the least religious generation on

⁶⁰ "Bureau of Labor Statistics Data," bls.gov, accessed October 11, 2016, <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>.

⁶¹ Scott Berridge, “Millennials After the Great Recession,” *Monthly Labor Review*, 1 (2014): 12.

⁶² Smith, *Lost in Translation*, 20.

record. Millennials' view of Christians are that they are judgmental, biased, and insensitive.⁶³ With these biases engrained, Millennials approach the church unburdened and uncommitted. In spite of these realities however, Millennials still see a relationship with God, having a spiritual identity and being 'spiritual' as valuable parts of who they are. For church to be of value to them, the church must alter its traditional framework, specifically around the role of membership and leadership opportunities. There may be skilled, competent, and creative Millennials present who would gladly serve in roles but, however, have no interest in joining. By altering the framework of the church to move away from seeing membership as a necessary step for participation in leadership, the church opens itself up to a new level of access to Millennials.

In 2007, the Barna Group, commissioned by the American Bible Society, studied 1296 Millennials between the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine for five years. The study found that fifty-nine percent of Millennials who grew up in Christian churches ended up walking away from their faith or from the institutional church at some point in their first decade of adult life. The study found that one out of four attend church at least once a month, however a majority claim to pray each week. One of the major findings of the study was that of the seventy percent who dropped out of church, they did so not having established close friendships with adults while in the church. That figure of seventy percent jumped to ninety percent of all dropouts when asked if they had any mentoring while in church. According to the study, ninety percent of those who dropped out completely stated they had no mentor or support system within the church. While these figures are troubling, there is still hope. Seventy-one percent believe that the Bible is their

⁶³ Kinnaman, and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 47.

greatest source of moral truth, and sixty percent say they pray daily; in addition, fifty five percent rank Bible reading as more important than church attendance.⁶⁴

There is hope for Millennials. While their realities are shaped by far fewer opportunities than past generations and many more challenges than those who have come before them, there is still hope. Millennials are creative, hopeful and eager to launch out into the world. Their focus is on creating community and accepting all who would seek to engage, regardless of prescribed boundaries of gender, race, religion or nationality. They rebel against tradition and structure, while at the same time holding those same traditions and structure in high regard in times of trouble or great need. They are a generation searching for identity and meaning. They are also a generation discovering new identities and creating their own unique meanings.

⁶⁴ “Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials,” Barna Group, accessed October 16th, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials/>.

Chapter 4: Post Modernity and Young Adults Bible Study

Course Description

This is a four-week multi-media interactive Bible study with a four-part essay component. The goal of this study is to utilize the book of Luke as a launching pad to begin conversation and transformation for the purpose of helping congregations decode the world of Millennials and the church's role and responsibility to them.

Learning Objective

The topic of this lesson is Post Modernity and Young Adults. The purpose of this lesson is to help participants get a clearer indication of how young adults think and why. By giving them insight into the postmodern perspective of young adults, the goal is to align the participants new understanding with their own concepts of how they process information and how they relate to the world. Creating appreciation through overlap or at a minimum creating acceptance through acknowledgment are both end goals of this project. The impotence of this study is to help the participant gather that, as with the Luke text about the Good Samaritan, the responsibility for connecting is on them.

Audience

The audience for this Bible study can include but is not limited to; church members, church leadership, pastors and denominational governing boards. The intended audience is anyone connected with a local church, who has an interest or passion in better understanding the possibilities, problems and realities of engaging Millennials.

Preparation for The Study

All participants should read a copy of the essay prior to attending the class.

Course Materials

The Presenter will need the following:

- a. Electrical Equipment: The ability to project and hear streaming video (Speakers, TV/projector, laptop, WIFI)
- b. Instructional Arrangement: Tables and chairs arraigned ‘conference style’
- c. Instructional Materials: Extra copies of the essay, name badges, pens and paper, (refreshments are also helpful)

Instructional Method

The Bible study will be divided into four sections. Each section will begin with a short video that captures the essence of the presentation for that section. Following the video there will be a short discussion lead by the presenter. The purpose of the discussion is to begin to expose inherent biases, challenge ideas and help the participants hear from their peers unique and personal perspectives. Following the discussion, the presenter will lead the participants in a group learning opportunity by reflecting on the essay presented to them prior to arrival. In addition to the essay the presenter will also utilize the relevant instructional materials provided to spark dialogue. After reflecting on the essay and having introduced the new instructional materials the presenter will lead the participants through another round of questions. The last set of questions will be geared to direct the participants toward forming perspectives aligned with Luke’s gospel that affirm, acknowledge and seek to include Millennials. The presenter will then close the section with an opportunity for the participants to verbally assess their own growth or learnings during the Bible study. The section will end with a prayer.

Duration

The Bible study should take no more than 90 minutes and should include 3 minute brakes between each section.

Direct Interaction

*The presenter will begin the bible study by inviting the participants to prayer:

Prayer

God help us to reach beyond our limits. Give us courage Lord to walk boldly the path you have laid out in front of us, be with us in this journey. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Section 1

▪ **Slide 1**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVBbPM-SXX4>

Synopsis: The video shows a Christian comedian named Scott McGrath explaining about his first experience of praying publicly in a church. McGrath talks humorously about not knowing what words to use, how to hold someone's hand or even knowing if it was appropriate to look each other in the eye while constructing the prayer.

* The purpose of the video is help the participants see how experiences and culture can be inadvertently isolating.

Questions

- How many of you can relate to this clip?
- How important is having the right vocabulary and use of language in church?
- Where do you learn language and customs from?

- How has this generation of Millennials, absent of those traditional and cultural cues shifted things?

Section 2

- **Slide 2**

*the presenter will inform the participants to retrieve their essays and focus their attention on the center of the room.

Questions

- All of us have preconceptions. What did you think about Post Modernity and young adults before reading the essay and participating in this study?
- What challenges do you find with the essay?
- How many of can see that you do not fit comfortable into just one label, but are also in many ways postmodern?

- **Slide 3**

*the presenter will now ask the group to watch the video prepare to shift into group work of no more than 4 people per group.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gV6uxCch7oc>

Synopsis: The video shows a conversation between several theologians talking about Postmodernity. While neither theologian appears completely supportive of postmodernity, they each give insight into its history and application in today's church.

*the purpose of the video was to give the participants a fuller understanding of postmodernity.

Questions

- How did the video and essay challenge you?
- What new information did you learn about Postmodernity that you didn't know before?

- Were there places you disagreed? If so talk about it among your peers.
- Do you identify with one of the categories more than the others?
- Which category does you're your church most represent?

Section 3

- **Slide 4**

*the presenter will suggest that all participants take a 3-minute break. The presenter will request that the group rise, stretch and circle the room before returning to their seat. Once the break is over, the presenter will call the participants back to attention and ask them to focus on video.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7sxtP8ywo8>

Synopsis: The video shows a presentation by Phil Lempert. Lempert is a supermarket guru. He talks at length about how supermarkets and alter their stores to attract Millennials. The ideas he gives are helpful in a number of different areas of life and speak to what it means to be postmodern.

* The purpose of the video was to assist the participants in thinking of creative ways of engaging postmodern Millennials.

Questions

- What differences in the shopping experience do you hear highlighted for postmodernist vs. others?
- Given what you read and heard thus far, do you see any correlation between the material and what the video presents in terms of facts?
- Can you relate to the experiences of postmodern young adults?
- Can you find value in their experiences, approach or needs?

- **Slide 5**

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha7pSVhSti8>

Synopsis: The video shows an actor talking about the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the video the actor stresses the importance of being neighborly as an outward commitment. The actor helps us to see that we are called to move beyond the security of our comfort zone and go out to be neighbors to the world.

Questions

- What are your initial thoughts?
- Does the text help us in any way relate to or engage postmodern young adults?
- Are we neighbors to postmodern young adults, if not how can we become so?
- What if anything does the text say to us about what our next steps should be?

Essay 3 Postmodernity

Ask someone from the ‘Silent Generation’ in their seventy’s where they want to eat dinner. The response is likely to be Golden Corral or Boston Marker, one of a number of buffet style restaurants that cater to that generation. You get to choose from an array of solid traditional staple choices at an affordable price. You can have baked chicken or fried, mashed potatoes or potato salad, or any other combination of foods. You serve yourself and are largely left alone to consume at your leisure. This self-determinate and unexcited atmosphere fits for a generation who was born during the Great depression and grew up in war. Ask a ‘Baby Boomer,’ someone in their late fifty’s, where they want to eat dinner at and you will get a different response. They are more apt to pick Red Lobster or Olive Garden, places that not only serve a higher quality of food but promote an image and status alongside their meal offerings. These places are big on creating an image and catering to the customer. This fit perfectly in line with Boomers who grew

up as a generation finding prosperity through a growing economy and a highly acute sense of individuality. Ask a ‘Generation X’er’ where they would like to eat and you will likely hear a reference to a fast-food establishment. This generation grew up as latchkey kids, shuffled between afterschool sporting clubs and with the highest rate of divorced parents on record. They grew up rushing into the workforce only to struggle with staying ahead. Ask a Postmodern young adult in their twenty’s or thirty’s out to eat, and after you have assured them they are not expected to pay for the meal, they may choose Chipotle or Honey Grow, one of a number of niche restaurants that specialize in the consumer creating their own meals from scratch. Similar to the ‘Silent Generation’, this generation looks for a buffet style offering, except their choice offerings are hyper particularized. They don’t want a choice of fried or baked, they want a choice of farm raised vs. organic, blacked vs. garlic buttered, grilled vs. rotisserie. This generation wants to participate intentionally in the creation of the meal formation from start to finish. This fits in with their view of the world where they are free. Moreover, as Jeanne M. Peloso writes in the article “The Theological Anthropology of Young Adults,” the goal is to piece together their own sense of self from the remains of the shattered networks of institutions they find around them.⁶⁵

Macro Postmodernity

It is important, at the outset, to make a distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. Virgil Nemoianu writes in *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities Conflicts and Coexistence*, that the distinction lies between a cultural current “postmodernism” and an existential/social condition “postmodernity.”⁶⁶ The distinction is that postmodernism can be categorized as a time period associated with the architectural and art revolution of the 19th and

⁶⁵ Jeanee Peloso, "The Theological Anthropology of Young Adult Catholics in Postmodern America," *Pastoral Psychology* 24 (2011): 1-11.

⁶⁶ Nemoianu, *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities Conflicts and Coexistence*, 59.

20th century. The earliest signs of this can be found in the palaces, churches, railways stations and private dwellings of that time period. There was a shift away from the “high-modernist” gothic renaissance imitation of structures and art toward a new “cubist, functional, symmetrical style in the twentieth century period.”⁶⁷ This shift began in architecture, but quickly spread to art, music, politics and an evolved worldview. However, as Paul Ricoeur reminds us in *Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, postmodernism exists always alongside the modern, using contemporary categories and language to point out the inherent ruptures in the discourse and practices of modernity.⁶⁸ Therefore, it is impossible to give a solid critique of postmodernism and postmodernity without in some way looking back at both modernism and pre-modernism as a starting place.

Macro Pre-Modernism

Heath White helps paint a picture of pre-modernism in his book *Postmodernism 101: A first Course for the Curious Christian*. White says the pre-modern era was a time period where the political structure placed power with kings and nobles, and feudalism was the universal form of government and people were subjects to their lords.⁶⁹ It was the royal decree that established and articulated both religious life and law, and the people were expected to accept without reason or intellect all declarations from the throne. This kind of thinking helped fund massive building projects that produced amazing and ornate castles, while also injecting the elite with a steady stream of wealth and privilege. All of this was done while marginalizing, over-taxing and crippling the individual pursuits of the common man. Pre-modernism was great at advancing political agendas, building amazing infrastructures that still stand today and dictating social narratives, but the control and direction was always set and owned by a single leader.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics of Suspicion Freud and Philosophy*, 62.

⁶⁹ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 24.

Macro Modernism

In the 15th and 16th century, this world came under increasing pressure. Cultural actors like Galileo, John Locke, Isaac Newton, and Martin Luther all had a hand in helping society transition from pre-modernism to modernism. Movements like the Protestant Reformation quickly helped usher the masses to, as Heath points out, “a revelation that the authority of the state ultimately rested with the people it governed” and not with the state autonomously.⁷⁰ Suddenly, reason, and not dictation, was the principle mover of society. Creating a grand narrative, one that satisfied reason was all that was needed in terms of permission for society to create, build and form new identities. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* states, “since new paradigms are born from old ones, they ordinarily incorporate much of the vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and manipulative, that the traditional paradigm had previously employed. But they seldom employ these borrowed elements in quite traditional way.⁷¹” To this degree the grand buildings, high art, and heavy handed political worldview were still present during Modernism; the exception was that this period presented them with prescriptive narratives. The building’s architectural design, the painting’s focal point, the political narrative, and the literature’s plot were all designed to convey a point and illicit reason as a way of denoting value. Unlike Pre-modernism that used physical strength and fear to move ideology, Modernism sought to justify its conquest through the power of the narrative. Slavery is an excellent example. Enslaving masses of people has an economic value to society. If the consciousness of those in power can be manipulated around the conception that those who are enslaved are not ‘fully human,’ then any moral or ethical dissention can be avoided and the focus retained for the grand narrative of “economic benefit.” The same test of reason can be applied to

⁷⁰ White, *Postmodernism* 101, 32.

⁷¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 55.

women, children, the poor, religion, national interests, the arts or even the rights and freedoms of other countries. The grand narrative becomes king.

Macro Postmodernism

Alan Padgett and Steve Wilkens argue in *Christianity & Western Thought Journey to Postmodernity in the 20th Century*, that postmodern thought is highly suspicious of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Modernist period.⁷² They surmise that questioning the “grand narrative” opens up new access points for the intellect to be free to design its own construction. In fact, Michael Horton says in her *Better Homes & Gardens* essay, that for an architect, sculptor, or painter, postmodernism is reactionary.⁷³ This reactionary expression leads the creative away from high modern art and literature, political theorists, utopian ideologies and an industrialized economic outlook on society. For Horton, what postmodernism produces as a result is an information economy in a capitalist global phase.⁷⁴ The idea is that once the grand narrative is questioned, it becomes shattered. Once the narrative is shattered, the postmodern individual is able to pick from the pieces that remain to create a new narrative, largely using the same language and tools but in different and creative ways.

Pre-Modernity and The Silent Generation

There is an overlap between how we interpret Pre-modernism and how we address the ‘Silent Generation.’ Ron Zemke, in his book *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in your Workplace*, talks about some of the characteristics that define the ‘Silent Generation.’ Zemke talks about a group who believe in conformity,

⁷² Raymond J. VanArragon, "Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements, Vol. 3 - By Alan G. Padgett and Steve Wilkens," *Religious Studies Review* 37, no. 3 (2011): 187-188, accessed October 16, 2016, doi:10.1111/j.1748-0922.2011.01531_2.x.

⁷³ Andy Crouch et al., *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 106.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

authority and rules, discipline and who are detail oriented, preferring a command-and-control hierarchical organizational leadership structure.⁷⁵ It's not hard to see why those characteristics are important, given this is the same group that lived through the Great Depression, WWII, and some even Pearl Harbor. Patriotism and ideals of teamwork were critical for survival to this generation. Those same notions of distinctly structured hierarchy and need for a centralized leadership are reminiscent of Pre-Modernism. Both institutions rely heavily on an authoritarian based structure. Both institutions see value in conformity. For Pre-Modernism this bent toward conformity and uniformity was strategic. A kingdom and its subjects were protected by military force. To go against the rules or leadership of a kingdom would mean treason and potentially exile if not death. In a 1951 article published by Time Magazine entitled "The Younger Generation," the unknown author coined the term 'Silent Generation.' One of the justifications around the naming of this generation with the moniker 'Silent Generation,' for the author, was the fear many had during that time period in speaking out about the war and being labeled a Communist or spy. Again, we see in both Pre-Modernism and the Silent Generation an overlap between fear being used as a tool to ensure conformity and an overall dependence on a clear hierarchical system that demanded allegiance.

Modernity and Boomers

Another point of intersection is between Boomers and Modernism. Through the assertion of reason, Modernism sought in many ways to be a rejection of the formula of Pre-Modernism. Modernism did this by redefining the centralization of authority away from an individual and instead landed it on an ideal. Reasoning and creating a grand narrative became for Modernism the only litmus of truth. Those same core values can be seen in Boomers. Boomers, fought for

⁷⁵ Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak, "Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in your Workplace," (New York: AMACOM, 2013), 34.

and against integration, voting rights acts, the sexual revolution, Vietnam, rights of women and a number of other causes about which they felt strongly. The intersection between the two is the overarching sense of fighting against a prescribed structure in order to justify a new ideology.

Postmodernity and Millennials

In Jean Baudrillard's book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, the author lays out a stark and sobering pronouncement on today's generation when he proclaims that reality itself has begun to imitate the 'model,' which now precedes and determines the real world.⁷⁶ What Baudrillard is pointing to is the idea that in a postmodern world, there is no longer a preference for authenticity, but instead, a preference for the illusion or constructed normality, as a fitting substitute for real life. In short, what Baudrillard helps us to see is that this generation has no quarrels about distinguishing between fantasy and reality. Instead, this postmodern generation, for Baudrillard, has simply done away with reality and replaced it with differing forms of fantasy. Fredric Jameson, in his book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* adds to Baudrillard's claims by suggesting postmodernism is a replacement or simulacrum of reality. Jameson sees it as a pastiche.⁷⁷ He sees postmodernism as an emptied stylized representation of our historical past. Jameson would argue that the thought process of postmodernity is to commodify and consume history instead of embracing and learning from it. This brand of hollowed reflection leaves this generation self-absorbed, inwardly focused and without depth.

Jeanne M. Peloso's article, "The Theological Anthropology of Young Adults", continues the dialogue on postmodernity and millennials by qualifying the world postmodern Millennials live in today. What Peloso suggests is that postmodernism is not a construction of Millennials,

⁷⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 77.

⁷⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 39.

but instead, Millennials are its tenants.⁷⁸ Peloso points out that Millennials are the first generation to develop completely in a postmodern world. Millennials, by virtue of the postmodern experience, are born into and then forced to find meaning among shattered networks of institutions, and are both abandoned and tasked to piece together their own sense of self from its remains.

This view of postmodernism expands Baudrillard and Jameson in that it suggests that postmodernity for Millennials was never just a system of choices (what to replace, what to imitate) but instead postmodernity is also an inviolable way of life. The result of this view is that the “self” is seen as a constructed relation in conjunction to a stream of possible, already created, options and experiences. Lincoln Williams, in his article “Modernism, Postmodernism and Global Standard Setting,” adds to Peloso’s sentiments by pointing out that “in the postmodernist paradigm, modernist notions of justification, objectivity, proof and unity of science no longer hold.”⁷⁹ For Williams, the postmodernist has no concern for rationalizing experiences or seeing reason as a necessity. Williams notes that the main feature of postmodernism is to critique totality, reason, essentialism and universality, not to submit to it. It is the postmodernist who rejects grand narratives, denies epistemological essentialism and contends that knowledge and truth are embedded in relations of power and not found exclusively through reason. Yet, despite the postmodernist Millennial’s view of the world, their rejection of reason, objectivity and systematic enquiry can still not be squarely placed on their shoulders. As David F. White explains in “Toward an Adequate Sociology of Youth Ministry,” one cannot separate post modernity from the economic system that fosters its fragmentation,⁸⁰ an economic system

⁷⁸ Peloso, “The Theological Anthropology of Young Adult Catholics in Postmodern America,” 1-11.

⁸⁰ Williams and Sewpaul, “Modernism,” 555-565.

postmodern Millennials had no hand in creating but yet one of which they chiefly carry the weight. The success of this analysis is to see postmodernity as a part of the entire process.

Chapter 5: The Church Bible Study

Course Description

This is a four-week multi-media interactive Bible study with a four-part essay component. The goal of this study is to utilize the book of Luke as a launching pad to begin conversation and transformation for the purpose of helping congregations decode the world of Millennials and the church's role and responsibility to them.

Learning Objective

The topic of this lesson is the role of the Church. The purpose of this lesson is to resource the church with options. The goal is by showing different techniques and resources available the church will feel more compelled to begin to live fully into their roles and begin engaging Millennials in ministry.

Audience

The audience for this Bible study can include but is not limited to; church members, church leadership, pastors and denominational governing boards. The intended audience is anyone connected with a local church, who has an interest or passion in better understanding the possibilities, problems and realities of engaging Millennials.

Preparation for The Study

All participants should read a copy of the essay prior to attending the class.

Course Materials

The Presenter will need the following:

- a. Electrical Equipment: The ability to project and hear streaming video (Speakers, TV/projector, laptop, WIFI)
- b. Instructional Arrangement: Tables and chairs arraigned 'conference style'

- c. Instructional Materials: Extra copies of the essay, name badges, pens and paper, (refreshments are also helpful)

Instructional Method

The Bible study will be divided into four sections. Each section will begin with a short video that captures the essence of the presentation for that section. Following the video there will be a short discussion lead by the presenter. The purpose of the discussion is to begin to expose inherent biases, challenge ideas and help the participants hear from their peers unique and personal perspectives. Following the discussion, the presenter will lead the participants in a group learning opportunity by reflecting on the essay presented to them prior to arrival. In addition to the essay the presenter will also utilize the relevant instructional materials provided to spark dialogue. After reflecting on the essay and having introduced the new instructional materials the presenter will lead the participants through another round of questions. The last set of questions will be geared to direct the participants toward forming perspectives aligned with Luke's gospel that affirm, acknowledge and seek to include Millennials. The presenter will then close the section with an opportunity for the participants to verbally assess their own growth or learnings during the Bible study. The section with ended with a prayer.

Duration

The Bible study should take no more than 90 minutes and should include 3 minute brakes between each section.

Direct Interaction

*The presenter will begin the bible study by inviting the participants to prayer:

Prayer:

Thank you God for this day. We are grateful for every mercy we see. We pray oh Lord that you would help us this day to continue to be your hands and feet in the world. In Jesus Name. Amen.

*the presenter will invite the participants to gather to begin dialogue.

Section 1

Video:

<https://www.facebook.com/RevRocktheBell/videos/644105053306/?l=157215964476729>

[2356](#)

Synopsis: The video shows a pastor performing a rap song. The song itself is filled with scripture references and has a clear focus on engaging Millennials.

Questions

- What are your thoughts about the video?
- Would it be acceptable for your pastor to rap?
- How does the video clip inform you about Jesus, the Bible or the role of the church?
- Did the video challenge you?

Section 2

- **Slide 2**

*the presenter will ask the participants to break up into groups of no more than 4, and require them to say an actual prayer allowed when prompted by the following question.

Questions

- How old are you?
- When did you first feel like an adult?
- What is your prayer for the church and this current generation of Millennials?

Section 3

- **Slide 3**

Video: Video1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jw31aAfVdU>

Video2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUKPzD6pBZs>

Synopsis: Both videos present apologetic views of Millennials. In the first video David Whiting, pastor of Northridge Church talks about the misconceptions many of us have about Millennials. In the second video, sponsored by Concordia Technology Solutions, the conversation continues by defending and explaining many of the realities that Millennials live in today.

Questions

- What similar themes and words did you hear in both videos?
- What challenged you in the videos?
- What opportunities for your church did you hear in the videos?

*the presenter will suggest that the participants take a 3-minute break. The presenter will require everyone to rise, stretch and move around the room before returning to their seat.

Section 4

- **Slide 4**

Questions:

- After reading the essay and watching all the video can you name 3 places the church can start working with Millennials?
- What challenges did you see or hurdles do you sense in engaging Millennials?
- Is your church ready and willing to engage Millennials, if not what will it take?

- **Slide 5**

*the presenter will ask the participants to gather for closing comments and questions.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTVgQfndocs>

Synopsis: The video is of a young adult podcaster named Joseph Solomon. Solomon explains why church is important.

the presenter will ask a participant to read Luke 2:41-50

Questions

- What did Jesus mean when he said he must be in his father's house?
- Does Luke help us see something about the necessity of everyone being in church?
- Is this text in Luke helpful for us in creating an environment that makes Millennials a necessity?
- If we see the presence of young adults in church as a necessity, what can we do differently today?

Essay 4 Church Essay

In the book of Acts, beginning in the second chapter, we are given a picture of a dynamic worship experience.⁸¹ We see people of all different nationalities gathered together, worshipping collectively and enthusiastically, and spending time going from house to house while sharing both their wealth and food as acts of kindness. We see these groups going out into the community and corporately working in teams to both spread the gospel and heal the sick. As evidence of the validity of this approach, we are told at the end of Acts 2 that the numbers of members increased daily. Acts 2 demonstrates what church at its best can be.

Institutional Church and Culture

It's not until 324 A.D., and the rule of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, that ministry would change to "church." Under Constantine's reign, the first basilicas, or church buildings, were constructed.⁸² Leaders were given official governmental authority and ordered to dress, sit, and behave in a manner that separated them from the common people. Even the church building itself was designed originally to give wealthier members prime access and attention, while poorer members were required to sit toward the back or stand.⁸³ Suddenly, what was a team sport turned into a weekly pay-per-view monologue. This shift was a major setback, as effective ministry can never happen in isolation.

What is important to note is that when the church was growing the fastest, engaging in weekly conversations, healing the sick, ministering internationally, and making tremendous strides forward, it was all happening without a specified building to meet in or many of the other norms of church life we are accustomed to, an approved order of worship with bulletins or

⁸¹ Acts 2:5 KJV.

⁸² Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, ed. Andrew Louth. trans. G.A. Williamson (London: Folio Society, 2011), 36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 38.

elected committee member approval. What we see is that effective” church” is first *spirit* driven and not *system* driven.

The United Methodist Church and Race

According to a 2012 Pew Research study, only eighteen percent of the seven million United States United Methodist members are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five.⁸⁴ Divide from that eighteen percent GCFA’s (General Commission on Finance and Administration) 2013 Ethnicity and Gender statistical data that reports that only six point one percent of all United States United Methodist members are African American, and one can see why to be a United Methodist African American Millennials in today’s culture is akin to being an endangered species. We are collectively the remnants of a vibrant, yet buoyant legacy that traces the echoes of its crescendo back to the passage of the 1968 dismantling of the Central Jurisdiction and back to those first gatherings in the book of Acts. With that legacy flowing through our Methodist veins, African American young adults, in spite of our small numbers, are posed now more than ever to reemerge from the ashes of quantitative extinction into a new morphed form of Methodism. That form, largely peppered with the essence of intentionality found in Wesley’s Holy Club and the profound Holy Ghost filled gatherings of 19th century camp meetings has now been coupled with the swagger of urban culture and an anti-establishmentarianism ethic of a Millennial generation. The product of this marriage is a new form of blackness. The produce of such legacy laced with generational angst and theological question is relational reverence.

By relational reverence, I’m alluding to a reality that many within the millennial generation (especially African Americans) are well aware of. The Hagar’s cry of this generation

⁸⁴ "America’s Changing Religious Landscape | Pew Research Center," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>.

is relationship. It is the unexpected simplicity of discipleship metrics. It is a direct connection, and a mentoring between those with age and wisdom and those with youth and energy. When we think about the Central Jurisdiction in all of its glory and when we look back at the early church and its intentionality, we see that centrality at work.

5 Possibilities Forward for the Church

- **Contact and Identification**

In *Youth Ministry that Works*, George Boran suggests that a good place for the church to start is with “holistic formation.” Boran lists five areas the church needs to engage young adults in today: self-knowledge (relationship with self), integration (relationship with others), social formation (relationship with society) spiritual and theological formation (relationship with God) and leadership skills (tools for change).⁸⁵ Of these five areas, the one that Boran suggests the church begin with is ‘self-knowledge.’ Boran writes “in an age of great pluralism of models and ideas, the Christian message is assimilated by young people especially through a process known as identification. The determining factor in youth formation is the contact and identification with other young people, with youth groups, youth ministry, small communities and with the parish.” So, how does the church imprint its ethos on young adults? It does so through establishing presence with young people. The identification process that Boran acknowledges happens because of contact. A practical application of this is to do a demographic study of the community. Locate the areas with high young adult access and traffic and strategically begin to set up connection points. These connection points could be as simple as a core group that meets weekly at the local Starbucks for coffee during the afternoon rush, or a core group that meets weekly at the local community park at 5:00 p.m. with kids. The purpose of these interactions is to engage Boran’s theory of contact and identification. The more often young adults have

⁸⁵ Boran, *Youth Ministry that Works*, 82.

organic contact with the Christian community, the more their identities can be formed from them.

- Nearness and Constancy

Rodger Nishioka tells this story in *The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church and Culture*, Institute for Youth Ministry:

“Ten Years ago a group of twelve young adults were brought to Princeton to produce recourse for the Presbyterian Church’s ‘church school curriculum for young people.’ The designers and editors decided to film a group of young people over the course of a weekend and create an MTV Real World type of video. The theme for the weekend was ‘Exploring the life of Jesus Christ.’ These were bright, handpicked, high school students from the northeast, and their task was to focus on Christology. By the end of the weekend, not only were they not able to come up with a statement about Jesus Christ that could be used in the video but out of the twelve-young people who came together, the Biblical who possessed a strong Christology were now thoroughly confused and questioning everything about the church.⁸⁶

What happened? Formation happens through nearness. By creating an environment devoid of adult and mature believers, the young adults were left to piece together their own theology without a solid reference. This value is what the church community offers that is sorely needed for young adults. The hurdle for the church community is to embrace the “practice of constancy.⁸⁷” This practice requires shedding our cultural angst that every interaction must produce immediate quantifiable results. Instead, what Nishioka offers is that often the greatest formation is happening in silent active engagement. Where Boran points to contact and identification, a process of external observation that leads to relationships, Nishioka is

⁸⁶ Robert C. Dykstra et al., *The Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church and Culture*, Institute for Youth Ministry (Princeton: Princeton Publishing House, 2003), 29.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

recommending that there be immediate engagement- however, without pre-packaged Christian instruction. In short, Boran suggests that the church needs to be visible in the places young adults are, while Nishioka narrows that thought and suggests that the church needs to not only be visible but also be participatory in the spaces in which young people are present.

- Location Location Location

Alan Ehrenhalt further narrows the role of the church in his book, *The Great Inversion and the future of American City*, by suggesting that church should completely abandon its current structure and recreate itself within the urban centers young adults find themselves, around a new model that is community centered.⁸⁸ Ehrenhalt points to the fact that the great outward migration of the affluent that characterized the second half of the twentieth century has all but come to an end. There is, for Ehrenhalt a “return to urban life.”⁸⁹ Part of the allure of this migration is the opportunity to create close-knit communities. Young professional adults experienced these communities in college and now are looking for them again in new city formats. For the church that’s willing, this creates an excellent opportunity to brand itself as a part of that new close-knit community experience. Timothy Keller further elaborates Ehrenhalt’s point in his book *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, by pointing to Paul. Keller says that “Paul and other Christian missionaries went to great cities because when Christianity was planted there, it spread regionally, it spread globally and finally it more readily affected the culture.”⁹⁰ For both Ehrenhalt and Keller, they see a reformation happening. They see the need for the church to reclaim the city, by reemerging as a new and fresh addition to a burgeoning close-knit urban community. Ehrenhalt takes a giant

⁸⁸ Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Got Religion: How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back* ([Place of publication not identified]: Templeton Press, 2015), 75.

⁸⁹ Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 56.

⁹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 33.

step forward from visibility and participation to now reconstruction. For him, strategic urban church planting is one of the viable next phases the church needs to be dedicated toward.

- Techno-Culture

In *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach them*, Ed Stetzer takes a bold step by offering a new phrase: “techno-churches.”⁹¹ Stetzer hypothesizes that the church of the future will be web based. He argues that since we live in a ‘techno culture’ where a generation is shaped by technology, church web sites, emails, blogs, social networking and even interactive live web experiences will be an imperative part of the church experience in the future. He sees technology as an entry point. The focus and energy, Stetzer argues, should still be on honoring God and reaching the lost; however the tools to get there will likely be technologically based. A practical application of this for the church is to begin by doing a tech-skills-function inventory. A church could accomplish this by asking three questions. The first question is: what resources do we currently have that we use? Who is skilled (agreeable) to both update and expand our current abilities? What currently needs to be eliminated? By asking these questions, the church can assess how close they are to accomplishing Stetzer’s techno-church idea. Stetzer has taken Ehrenhalt’s idea of reconstruction and appropriated it to the internet. It’s still the same basic notion of imprinting on a closely-knit community, except the community for which Stetzer is arguing we as a church begin to imprint on is the community online.

- Attraction

In my first book, *Bigger than Hip Hop: 7 Questions for Effectively Reaching Young Adults in Ministry*, I talked about the importance of attraction when it comes to the church. My wife and I went to a play at the local theater. Our tickets, seats, meals, and quality of

⁹¹ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley and Jason Hayes *Lost and Found The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 77.

performance were all above par.⁹² The theater specialized in producing excellent performances. We knew that going in, and, in fact, we chose that particular theater because we knew the quality we could expect. The connection is that the church has some qualities, that if polished, would be attractive to millennials. Finding one's purpose, releasing past fears, resentment and unforgiveness, discovering healthy relationships, loving oneself and learning to love others, and living in abundance are just a few of the qualities that the church is good at evoking but poor at polishing for attractional purposes. As a result, many millennials who are in dire need of those life skills look for them outside the church. One way to begin to curb this exodus is to again engage in an inventory. Two questions to ask are: what are we good at, and who's willing and good at communicating it? There may be an older married couple who has endured life-long lessons and is sitting in the pew, ready to share. There may be people who have managed debt, investments and ownership with precision for their entire business careers, just waiting for a way to be of service. By doing the inventory and then beginning to do the actual work of engaging Millennials, the role of the church changes. What understanding attraction does is move us even further from Stetzer's web based techno-church model into an understanding of our value as a church in any space. We are carriers of the Gospel and mirrors of grace.

⁹² Ron Bell, *Bigger Than Hip Hop 7 Questions for Effectively Reaching Young Adults in Ministry*, (Dover: Ronald Bell Jr. Ministries, 2014), 32.

Concluding Remarks

What difference will this research make? As a national consultant, I get the opportunity to visit with churches, denominations and universities monthly. All of them are asking the same question “how do we get more Millennials?” The question is fundamentally flawed. The question sees Millennials as an object to be acquired. The question views the sudden influx or presence of Millennials as a success. However, there is a glaring problem with this line of thinking. Here is an example of the problem. I am severely lactose intolerant, I also have not eaten red meat or pork products for over 20 years. To the best of my ability I stay away from carbonated drinks such as sodas and I do not like cake or most baked desserts. I have a list. We all have a list. If someone were to invite me to their house for dinner, my instinct would be to decline the offer for fear I wouldn’t be able to consume anything on the menu. That challenge shifts when the host knows my list, actively prepares a menu I can consume and then informs me that I’m not only welcomed but that preparation based on my needs have been met. It is almost impossible to say no to that. That is the exact shift, the search hopes to help the church make. What this research seeks to do is help those same institutions reframe their question. The goal of this research is to help congregations observe that the question should be “who are Millennials, and how can the church live out our Christian experience in partnership with them.”

The use of Luke as a launching pad for this discussion was designed to give congregations a foothold. The passages in Luke remind the reader of our call to move beyond our individual comfort zones and to reach out into broad communities engaging, neighboring, feeding and equipping new people. Luke helps us digest the reality that new can be different, strange, other and still be ok. Luke is also helpful in how he colors Christ. By presenting an

image of Christ this is constantly found in community, it reminds the audience that ministry must be mobile. Ministry must be tangible, it must be relatable and most importantly ministry must be assessable to all. With that frame, Luke becomes our best option of helping churches grasp their responsibility and call to Millennials. My hope with this research is that the Luke texts give congregations the theological push they need to make that initial jump into recognizing their call and responsibilities as Christians. If this research is successful both congregations and instructors will utilize it to better their churches and communities.

The completed study will be retooled into a four-week online course. The online version will allow churches and other institutions to view the selected media and answer all group questions corporately. The online site will also include a pre-assessment to give participants an accurate picture of their institutions current thinking and engagement to Millennials. Along with the online resource, there will be a leader's guide accessible for download or purchase. The leader's guide will include the curriculum, essays and additional notes and opportunities for participants. There will be a student's guide that will include the essays and pertinent questions for each section. The goal of the leader's guide would be to equip those interested in facilitating the four-week course with all necessary instructional material. The online course will only be available to those who have purchased or downloaded the leader's guide, via an access code. Another aspect of the online site will be a monthly webinar that: 1, highlights creative ways of engaging Millennials 2, interviews leaders currently working with Millennials and 3, uses the book of Luke to present devotionals geared toward reaching across generational lines.

The core vision for this study is helping churches create a bridge that reaches away from their own comfort zones and lands squarely where Millennials are present. This study is a first step. It is designed to get congregations and those passionate about Millennials equipped, with a

theological foundation and both a practical and sociological vantage point to begin engaging Millennials. If this study is successful, the number of “nones” will decrease in areas where churches have put this study into practice. If this study is successful, there will be organic church growth that include authentic generationally diverse relationships. If this study is successful, there will be an online community created. If this study is successful, it will help the reader answer the foundational question of “who is my Neighbor.”

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