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THE PURSUIT OF GOSPEL DEMONSTRATION AND DECLARATION AMONG THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

By

JEFF FRITSCHE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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MILLENNIALS AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: THE MOTIVATIONS, PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES FOR MILLENNIALS IN THE MISSION OF GOD

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discover how millennials in the church pursue the mission dei through gospel declaration and demonstration. Understanding the practices, motivations, and challenges millennials face will help the church emphasize both gospel declaration and demonstration. This understanding is vital, especially as the mantel of leadership is passed to the millennial generation.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews. This research required millennial participants who could communicate in depth about their practices, motivations, and challenges in mission. Therefore, the study sample consisted of millennials in the church who are actively and regularly involved in both gospel declaration and demonstration. The review of literature focused on four key areas: a biblical survey of the missio dei, the tension between gospel declaration and demonstration, the characteristics of millennials, and an overview of missional communities.

The literature review showed that the church needs clarity on the mission of God. A new movement of missional churches has begun that emphasize and define themselves by the missio dei. This movement has come into fruition as the millennial generation is coming of age. The qualitative research aimed to understand millennials' practices, motivations, and challenges in mission. The research found that millennials are the first generation in over a century experiencing less tension between evangelism and the social gospel.

Each participant in the study was passionate about mission and profoundly involved in local mission. Millennials do not differentiate between evangelism and social

justice. Although the literature is replete with the tension between these two, it was a non-issue for millennials. They are willing to talk about the differences, but in general, they have a holistic vision of mission that includes both.

Each of the participants believes that they have a responsibility to do their part to change the world. They all have optimism for the mission of God in their generation, even though statistics show a decline in church attendance. Each of the participants also wants to know their role in God's mission. They want to play their part in the story, regardless of how small that role may be. The participants talked about mission that was local and intentional instead of a big splash. They do not seem to be enamored with the idea that bigger is better. When asked about their ideal mission, all of them described a small picture of sustained mission in one area for a long time.

Pastors can disciple millennials for effective gospel ministry. Ministry leaders have an opportunity to shape this generation through unique discipleship. Millennials need to understand what elements of their generational distinctive should be received, rejected, and redeemed through the gospel. Especially as millennials are known for being more biblically illiterate, pastors have an opportunity to lead them through the process of spiritual formation and arm them with a biblical worldview.

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I would also like to thank the participants who graciously gave me the opportunity to interview them. Most of all, I thank our missionary God for sending Jesus to redeem us and make all things new. May we be compelled by the gospel to participate in the missio dei.

Chapter One

Introduction

The scriptures clearly show that God is a missionary who pursues his people and sends his people to declare and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus. Christopher Wright, the director of the Langham Partnership and Old Testament scholar, says, in the *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative,* that the whole story of the Bible is about the missio dei.[1] Yet, understanding the nature of that mission divides many Christians. Is the mission simply about declaring the message of the gospel through evangelism? Or is it only about demonstrating the gospel through acts of service? Should the church involve itself in the affairs of the world or focus solely on saving spiritual souls? Does God call the church to devote itself to both declaring the gospel and demonstrating the gospel? In recent history, the church has dichotomized itself over this debate. Harvie Conn, in his book *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace,* defines the mission of the church as both declaring and demonstrating the gospel.[2] Yet the church has bifurcated the mission of God in the last century.

Currently, there is a generational divide on this issue of mission. Baby boomers focused solely on evangelism, react against the social gospel. Generation X, stereotypically experiences tension between evangelism and social justice. As the torch of church leadership is passed to the millennial generation, there is an equal reaction against

[1] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 26.

[2] Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 26.

the boomers' focus. Millennials in the church tend to focus more on gospel demonstration with a diminished focus on propositional evangelism. A new movement of "missional" churches emphasizes the church as a "community, a gathered people, brought together by a common calling and vocation to be a sent people."[3] The calling emphasizes justice and a tangible demonstration of the gospel. Carson Nyquist, pastor and author of *The Post Church Christian*, said of millennials, "we want to be challenged to love the unlovely, share our possessions with the poor, or give our lives to something that matters. This is what inspires our generation."[4]

As millennials come into leadership in the North American business, church, and the marketplace, scholars are evaluating their beliefs and behaviors. Millennials believe they can change the world.[5] As this generation gains influence, American culture is experiencing a movement of philanthropy inside and outside of the church. Justice ministries that meet the poor's tangible needs around the world motivate millennials more than the boomer generation.[6] Thus, the church is shifting its focus toward social action in mission. For many millennials, it is a helpful redefinition of the mission of God. Some Theologians are concerned that a diminished emphasis of gospel declaration will damage the church.

Perhaps the church's focus is not shifting. Perhaps, millennials are forming a more complete definition of the mission of God. Kevin Corcoran, professor of religion at

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[3] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 81.

[4] J. Paul Nyquist and Carson Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 27.

[5] Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Pub. Group, 2011), 30.

[6] Ibid.

Calvin College and author of *Church in the Present Tense,* says that a vision where compassion and justice cannot be mutually exclusive compels millennials. He says, "compassion without justice can heal and bind up wounds, but it cannot move or inspire us to fix what is broken in the world. Justice without compassion can repair the ripped fabrics of social institutions, but it cannot bind up the brokenhearted and link human beings to one another. In the theater of God's kingdom, there is both justice and compassion, the structural and the relational."[7]

Problem Statement

With all the recent emphasis on mission in local churches, how will millennials define God's mission as they assume positions of influence in the North American workforce, media, non-profits, and churches? Instead of choosing either gospel declaration or gospel demonstration, this generation needs a definition of mission that includes both. If the missional church exists "as a community created by the Spirit that is missionary by nature,"[8] then it must clarify the nature of the mission. Even after the "missional church" movement, defining God's mission still challenges the church. Most churches specialized in either declaration or demonstration but not both. Gospel demonstration rarely leads to gospel declaration in churches today. Often, the church reduces gospel demonstration to unsustainable projects. The boomer version of only propositional evangelism is not attractive to millennials, but evangelism must not be lost for this generation. Is there a way for the church to contextualized gospel declaration and demonstration for this generation?

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[7] Scot McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What's Emerging*, Emergent Village Resources for Communities of Faith (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 72.

[8] Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 84.

Current sociological literature addresses the philanthropic tendencies of millennials and their diminished focus on evangelism. Current missional literature repeatedly expresses the world's need for holistic mission, but it does not address about how to motivate millennials toward both gospel declaration and gospel demonstration.

How can church leaders motivate a sustained mission that includes both for this generation? Even with the missional movement, many Christians still see mission as an add-on to the Christian life. Millennials need a mission that encompasses both gospel declaration and demonstration and leads to a robust, sacrificial, and relational lifestyle of mission. In order to lead this movement, the church must understand this generation's practices, motivations, and challenges.

If the motivations of millennials toward mission are not understood, the church may miss a fundamental opportunity to disciple this generation toward a mission that includes both gospel declaration and demonstration. Will it be specific training, sermons, stories, or Bible studies that motivate millennials? Or is this generation far more motivated by living in a missional community?[9] What role does the cultural trend of philanthropy play in motivating millennials in the church? As fewer millennials in North America are participating in church,[10] it may be that a robust definition of mission for millennials may be one way to recapture this generation for gospel ministry.

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[9] Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

[10] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2011).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to discover how millennials in the church pursue both gospel declaration and gospel demonstration. To that end, the following research questions will guide the qualitative research:

1. What are the practices where millennials pursue gospel declaration and gospel demonstration?
    a. Which practices do millennials categorize as gospel demonstration?
    b. Which practices do millennials categorize as gospel declaration?
    c. Which practices do millennials categorize as both gospel demonstration and declaration?
2. What motivates millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
    a. In what ways and to what extent do experiences (such as worship, small groups, classes, service projects, et cetera) inside the church motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
    b. In what ways and to what extent do social experiences outside the church (such as work, neighborhood associations, cultural activities, et cetera) motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
    c. In what ways and to what extent has biblical training motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
    d. In what ways and to what extent have relationships motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
3. What challenges do millennials face in pursuing both gospel declaration and demonstration?

a. What cultural challenges do millennials face in pursuing both?

b. What tensions do millennials feel in pursuing both?

4. In what ways and to what extent are millennials' pursuit of gospel declaration and demonstration congruent with the missional community theory?[11]

Significance of the Study

Understanding the practices, motivations, and challenges millennials face will help the church emphasize both gospel declaration and demonstration. This understanding is vital, especially as the mantel of leadership is passed to the millennial generation. After the historical bifurcation, it seems that now is the time for the church to commit once again to both declaration and demonstration. Hopefully this study will be helpful in propelling the church forward in that endeavor.

Definition of Terms

Millennials – people born between 1980 and 2000.[12] Most of what has been written on this generation summarizes studies conducted in the Western world. This will be reflected in the study.

Missional – this term is defined many ways in evangelical, neo-evangelical and emergent Christian communities. For this study, it is used as a way of life that is instrumentally consistent with God's mission to reconcile all things to himself through Christ.

Missio Dei – the mission of God, which "is not primarily a matter of our activity or our initiative. Mission from the point of view of our human endeavor, means the committed

[11] McNeal, *Missional Communities*.

[12] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*.

participation of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation."[13]

Gospel Declaration – for purposes of this study, this term will primarily refer to evangelism and speaking the propositional truths of the gospel of Jesus.

Gospel Demonstration – displays the values of the gospel such as love, peace, truth, justice, and grace in service to others. This includes acts of compassion, service, prophetic protests on behalf of those whose human dignity is disrespected through neglect or the misuse of power.

Missional Community – a "non-institutional" community or small group for Christians to experience life and to be actively involved in gospel declaration and demonstration for others.[14]

[13] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 67.

[14] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, xix.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to discover how millennials in the church pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration. Four areas of literature were reviewed for this project: a biblical survey of the missio dei, the tension between gospel declaration and demonstration, the characteristics of millennials, and an overview of missional communities.

In the midst of a culture that values philanthropic work, Christian millennials need a biblical and theological framework for their missional activity. The scriptures repeated resound the theme of the missionary God pursuing his people. Understandably, the truncated mission of exclusively propositional evangelism has missed the mark with many millennials. A full picture of God who is concerned with justice, compassion, and conversion is especially compelling to this generation.[15] In order to understand Christian millennials and their approach to mission, it is important to begin with the biblical framework for the missio dei.

It is impossible to understand millennials' view of mission without understanding the historical tension. Evangelism and social justice have unfortunately been at odds over the last century. Millennials benefit from the work of past generations that have tried to reconcile these two elements of the mission of God. Also, millennials are reacting to the Baby Boomer Generation's view of mission. Understanding the tension gives insight into

[15] McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense*, 72.

how millennials see evangelism, social justice, political involvement, the poor and the kingdom of God.

Researchers have found that millennials have certain stereotypical characteristics. These characteristics play a big role in how millennials see missional activity. Although millennials are still very young and the research is relatively new, this is helpful information for understanding their perspective on evangelism and social justice. The research covers millennials in general as well as millennials inside the church.

Lastly, recent literature on the missional church and specifically missional communities was surveyed for this study. The missional community movement is growing as millennials come of age. There are many characteristics of missional communities that seem to fit with the characteristics of millennials. One of the research questions driving this study is the congruence of the missional community theory and millennials pursuit of the mission. Therefore, this research will establish the categories for understanding this movement.

Biblical/Theological Framework

The Bible addresses the mission of God's covenant people from Abraham to Revelation and gives clarity on God's mission. Some scholars believe that the Bible is from cover to cover a missionary book.[16] Charles R. Taber, a professor of World Mission, says, "the very existence of such a collection of writings testifies to a God who breaks through to human beings, who disclosed himself to them, who will not leave them unilluminated in their darkness."[17] Many scholars believe that the entire biblical theme is

[16] Arthur F. Glasser and Charles Edward van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

[17] Charles R. Taber, "Missiology and the Bible," *Missiology* 11 (1983): 232.

God's redemptive activity and therefore God's mission. Wright contends that mission is the "purpose for which the Bible exists, the God the Bible renders to us, the people whose identity and mission the Bible invites us to share, the story the Bible tells about this God and this people and indeed about the whole world and its future."[18]

The Old Testament establishes God's right to rule over all of creation. God is established as creator, governor, redeemer and revealer of his ultimate purposes in the Old Testament.[19] The story consistently focuses on the crown of creation—humanity and how sin stains creation. God's creation shows his sovereignty, power, perfection, care, and grace. By nature, God's creation shows his willingness to condescend and intervene powerfully with his world.[20] In the creation account, Wright notes how the missio dei introduces a God who is personal, purposeful, and goal oriented.[21] The creation account sets God up as both sovereign over and intimately connected to his creation. The creation of humanity in God's image evokes the "discursive, technological, social, historical, esthetic, ethical and religious qualities that are unique to humans."[22]

Therefore the cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve shows the primary activities of subduing and ruling the earth.[23] God includes the entire physical world in the cultural mandate.[24] This encourages all humanity to care about all of life including

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[18] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 31.

[19] Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 20.

[20] Ibid., 33.

[21] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 63.

[22] Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 35.

[23] Genesis 1:26-27.

[24] Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 39.

injustice, oppression, and exploitation. The cultural mandate gives humanity a purpose "that flows from the creative purpose of God himself" to care for the creation.[25] This includes "ecological responsibility, our economic activity involving work, productivity, exchange and trade, and the whole cultural mandate."[26] Some believe that the cultural mandate and the redemptive mandate merge into one in the New Testament.[27] Others simply point to the fact that the great commission to disciple all nations includes the great commandment to love God and neighbor. This combination of the mandates forms the framework for never separating evangelism and social responsibility.[28]

Though humanity had this great mandate, mankind chose to disobey God's authority and disregarded his boundaries. The fall caused a break between people and God, people with each other, people and themselves, and people with the earth.[29] Redemption ultimately heals each of these breaks. Sin devolved to the flood event, where God destroyed the earth. Even in the flood event, God is "renewing his promise to creation and human beings are again sent forth" to fulfill the cultural mandate.[30] Sin led to the Tower of Babel incident where people built a tower in order to make a name for themselves and purposefully not scatter throughout the earth. The Tower of Babel exemplifies the pride of sin,[31] but the people also rejected the cultural mandate to

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[25] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 65.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 39.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 195.

[30] Ibid., 196.

[31] John Calvin, *Genesis*, 1st edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 103.

multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.[32] God's gracious and missional response to the Tower of Babel forces them to scatter across the earth as originally intended.[33] This scattering sets the stage for the next step of God's gracious redemption.

God compassionately establish his covenant people. His initiation with Abraham bless him so that he "will be a blessing." God says, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[34] The Abrahamic covenant declares the good news that, despite what has happened in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, God's ultimate purpose is to bless humanity.[35] Therefore, God always intended for his covenant people to bless all the nations of the earth. If the redemptive mandate is ultimate relief from the curse and restoration of Adam's broken relationship with God, then it surely begins with Abraham and the mission of his family. God's invitation to Abraham in Genesis 22, to sacrifice Isaac, shows that God called his covenant people to faith and obedience in order to participate in this mission. Wright says, "those whom God calls to participate in his redemptive mission for the nations are those who exercise saving faith like Abraham and demonstrate costly obedience like Abraham."[36] God is a missionary who cares about all nations and chooses to use his covenant people to reveal himself to them.

At the same time, God executes justice for the oppressed. In the Old Testament, God tasks his people with the mission of seeking justice and reflecting God's heart for

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[32] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 196.

[33] Ibid., 197.

[34] Genesis 12:1-3.

[35] Joshua 4:24; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194.

[36] Ibid., 208.

the oppressed. God desires for the nation of Israel to declare who he is and demonstrate his justice in the world.

The Exodus story of redemption addresses both systemic injustice as well as personal idolatry. The trajectory of God's redemption includes both individual sins of idolatry such as the golden calf and systemic sins of slavery. God calls his covenant people to work for reconciliation in both systemic and individual sin. This is especially seen in the law as it speaks to worship but also injustice. The law speaks to every area of the Israelite's life because holiness is personal as well as communal and public. Israel is called a royal priesthood so their righteous deeds would be a witness to the holy God.[37]

The historical books and the Psalms clearly define Israel's purpose: that the nations come to know Israel's God. Joshua established the purpose for entering into the promised land as missional, saying that they crossed over "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."[38] David grounded the defeat of Goliath in the mission, so that the whole world would know Israel's God.[39] Solomon's dedication of the temple "envisions the blessing of foreigners and the spreading fame of YHWH."[40] Many of the Psalms that are written as an expression of their faith and worship are also concerned with "all the families of the nations" bowing down before the God of Israel.[41] The covenant call of

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[37] Exodus 19:6.

[38] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 228.

[39] 1 Samuel 17:46; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 228.

[40] 1 Kings 8:41-43, 60-61; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 229.

[41] Psalm 22:27; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 230.

Abraham to be a blessing to all nations continues as a major theme throughout the Old Testament.

God invited Israel to know him, the one, true God; therefore, the prophets say that they were "entrusted with bearing witness to that in a world of nations and their gods."[42] When Isaiah 49:6 says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth," his words provide a "missiological hermeneutic of the Old Testament."[43]

The prophets speak to the God who loves justice.[44] Gary Haugen says, that God cares about the proper use of authority and therefore justice "occurs when power and authority is exercised in conformity with his standards."[45] John Perkins cites Zechariah 8's eschatological vision as the vision of justice for which communities strive. Zechariah's vision of a heaven is one "where old folks sit in the streets with their canes in their hands and the children play around them."[46] Ray Bakke says that the prophet Isaiah provides a theology for the city where there are "celebrations, public health, housing for all, food for all, family support systems, and an absence of violence."[47] Bakke believes

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[42] Isaiah 43:10-12; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 66.

[43] Ibid., 67.

[44] Isaiah 61:8.

[45] Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World*, 10th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 71.

[46] Charles Marsh and John Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God's Movement toward Beloved Community*, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 110.

[47] Isaiah 65:17-25; Raymond J. Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 83.

that the church has ignored the 400 texts on the poor in the Bible and the sixty-three calling for urban justice.[48]

The Old Testament's principles of theocracy are a foretaste of the New Testament kingdom of God. God is sovereign as king and governor in the Old Testament, and the heart of the gospel is Jesus' kingdom.[49] In the Old Testament, God's rule extends "to all aspects of their social order," and God requires his subjects to be servants.[50] Similarly, in the New Testament, when Christians respond to the gospel by grace through faith, they commit to Jesus' lordship of all things.[51] God's rule in the Old Testament demands a response to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God,"[52] and, likewise, social justice is an essential theme in the New Testament's idea of God's kingdom.[53] In the Old Testament, the covenant people of God were called to mission to all peoples,[54] and the kingdom of God in the New Testament extends to all the earth.[55] Lastly, in both the Old and New Testament, the kingdom is focused on the eschatological hope of the future.[56] Many of characteristics of the mission of God in the Old Testament are reiterated in the New Testament.

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 24.

[50] Ibid., 25.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Micah 6:8.

[53] Luke 4:18-19.

[54] Genesis 12:3.

[55] Acts 1:8; Glasser and Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 26.

[56] Ibid., 27.

God ultimately displayed his missionary nature through Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. God the Father's love compelled him to send Jesus to reveal himself and redeem the world. Jesus' ministry included a balance of preaching along with acts of righteousness, fellowship, service, and worship. Jesus said his ministry was to "proclaim good news to the poor," but also to give "liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[57] Jesus' ministry was about both declaration of the gospel and demonstrating the heart of God. Ultimately, Jesus' sacrifice and crucifixion displayed the extent of his mission.

The church, as the new covenant people of God, is united with Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and glorification. Union with Christ describes the church's unique identity. The Westminster Confession says, all Christians "are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory."[58] Wayne Grudem, professor of Theology at Phoenix seminary describes how union with Christ summarizes of all salvation's benefits, including the fact that "we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ."[59] In a mysterious way, Christians were "buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."[60] By the Holy Spirit's sealing and by faith, Christians are spiritually connected to Jesus in his death, his resurrection, and his glorification.

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[57] Luke 4:18-19.

[58] WCF 26.1.

[59] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 840.

[60] Colossians 2:12.

Therefore, all believers in Jesus past, present, and future are united with Christ as their fundamental identity.

Not only is the church united to Christ, but Christians are also united to one another. Chapter 26.1 of the Westminster Confession says, Christians are "united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."[61] Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, "people of any nation can now belong to the redeemed people of God."[62] In the same way that Christians have union with Christ, the church is also joined to one another. Each person is in communion with everyone else who is united to Christ, whether living or dead. Therefore, the communion of saints is a spiritual reality as well as a tangible bond. Grudem defines the church as the "community of all true believers for all time."[63] In each body, God designed the church to nourish one another through the word of God, fellowship, communion, and "live together as a community exercising the gifts of the body."[64] Paul says, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."[65] God invites the communion of saints to use their unique gifts for the edification of the body. Mike Goheen, professor of mission and author, says

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[61] WCF 26.1.

[62] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 192.

[63] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853.

[64] Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 198.

[65] 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

that the church has a "bipolar orientation" including both an "inward and outward face."[66] Inwardly and outwardly, God wants the church to embody the kingdom of God as and alternative community.[67] One author and shaper of the theology on mission, Lesslie Newbigin, says that the church should be an outward display of the gospel to outsiders as well.[68] Therefore, the church has a very peculiar identity. It is in union to Christ, is in communion to the saints, and also has a missional identity to the world.

Peter picks up the language of Exodus 19 to describe the church's missional identity. Believers are to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."[69] Peter calls the church to imitate Jesus in his righteous deeds in order to show the nations who Jesus is. Peter encourages the people toward good deeds by saying, "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."[70] Peter uses inclusive language about the nations in the Old Testament to set up the gospel's universality for the Gentiles.[71] In Acts, the mission is explicitly a continuation of Jesus' mission.[72] Jesus

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 227.

[69] 1 Peter 2:9-10.

[70] 1 Peter 2:12.

[71] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 243.

[72] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 122.

pours out the Holy Spirit on the apostles and calls them to be a community of witness.[73] Goheen makes the point that being a witness is not one of many tasks to be done, but it is the defining role of the church.[74] Jesus calls this new community to continue his ministry and declare that salvation is found "in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."[75] In the New Testament, the identity of God's covenant people is unified with Christ, in communion with the saints as they demonstrate and declare the gospel.

Paul brings both demonstration and declaration together in the ministry of reconciliation. Paul says, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us."[76] Christ calls his ambassadors to both declare and demonstrate his ministry of reconciliation. Mission must include being ambassadors of Jesus' reconciliation with people. Yet at the same time, the church is also called to a ministry of reconciliation that includes relationships, structures, and injustices. The ministry of reconciliation is both vertical and horizontal.

God's plan culminates in restoration of all things when God "will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."[77]

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[73] Acts 1:8-10; Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 126.

[74] Ibid., 127.

[75] Acts 4:12.

[76] 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

[77] Revelation 21:3.

When God dwells with his people, he leads them in vertical restoration between people and God. God dwelling with his people also leads to a horizontal restoration, as God makes all things new. God's mission includes both declaration and demonstration.

Gospel Declaration and Demonstration

Prior to the twentieth century, evangelicalism included both gospel declaration and demonstration. Current trends toward social activism among millennials are very similar to the prominent evangelical reform movements of the nineteenth century.[78] In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, evangelicalism was marked by "Biblicism, a focus on Christ's atoning sacrifice, conversion as a requirement for salvation and activism – that is, the understanding that the gospel's truth must be expressed in effort."[79]

In England, the gospel message of personal salvation and responsibility for social action found its pinnacle in the abolition of slavery.[80] George Whitfield, John Wesley, and others not only stressed gospel preaching in open meetings, but they worked tirelessly to establish hospitals, orphanages, and schools. In the United States, evangelicals often encouraged both gospel declaration and demonstration.[81] Evangelicals in the nineteenth century were instrumental in social reform and humanitarian aid primarily through the work of para-church organizations.[82]

In the mid to late 1800s, several factors contributed to the bifurcation of gospel declaration and demonstration. The Civil War brought about tension in the debate about

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[78] Brian Steensland and Philip Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 4.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 5.

how American Christians should engage in social action. Some believed that conversion would lead to social change with slavery, while others believed that Christians should be actively involved in the abolition of slavery.[83] In the nineteenth century, German higher criticism and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* cast doubt on the Bible, causing immense pressure among evangelicals.[84] Liberal Protestantism, influenced by higher criticism and evolution, believed that social reform was required to build the "Kingdom of God."[85]

In response to liberalism, evangelicals increased their emphasis on biblicism and personal conversion. Some scholars credit the growth of dispensational premillennial theology in the twentieth century to the increasing withdrawal of evangelicals in social engagement.[86] Dispensationalism minimized social reform and instead exclusively emphasized evangelism. The American church changed is perspective from a focus on conversion that led to social change, to a focus on conversion in order to usher in the return of Christ. David Moberg, a social scientist, in the *Great Reversal* claims that pessimism after World War II and the conservative evangelical commitment to individual salvation accelerated the shift away from social action among evangelicals.[87]

That reversal was more pronounced as an overreaction to the social gospel. *Christianity and the Social Crisis* by American pastor Walter Rauschenbusch initiated what is known as the social gospel by interpreting the Bible through a social and moral

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[83] Ibid., 6.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 13.

[87] David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (Eugene, OR: Wipf &Stock), 32.

lens.[88] In the process, Rauschenbusch abandoned supernaturalism and simply focused on how Christianity fight social evils in the world. He defined sin as exclusively systemic and salvation as only political. Therefore, Rauschenbusch and the social gospel taught that Jesus simply exemplified social transformation instead of atoning for sins. Rauschenbusch reduced God's missional call to justice for systems and structures, excluding individual sinners.[89]

Fundamentalist overreacted to Rauschenbusch's teaching, causing evangelicals to throw out the Christian's social call all together. Theologians reacted and emphasized individual salvation and spirituality to the detriment of understanding of God's heart for justice. Some historians think this was an overreaction and believe that Rauschenbusch's roots were more in line with evangelical agendas.[90] Nonetheless, fundamentalism pitted itself against liberal protestantism. This caused evangelicals to reject social change as gospel ministry for fear of being associated with liberal protestantism. Though evangelical Christianity originally held together social engagement and evangelism, these historical, social, and theological factors led to the bifurcation of the mission of God.

Throughout the tension of the twentieth century between the social gospel and fundamentalism, several Christians attempted to urge the church back to both declaration and demonstration. Moberg pushed evangelicals to see the inadequacies of a narrow view of the mission.[91] Professor of Missions at Westminster Seminary, Harvie Conn, wrote *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* and defined the mission of God as

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[88] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

[89] Ibid.

[90] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 266.

[91] Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 32.

"gospel show and tell" including both social action and personal evangelism.[92] Many wanted to eradicate the contrast between mainline protestants who focused on social reform and the evangelicals who focused on orthodoxy, evangelism, and piety.[93]

In the last fifty years, evangelicals limited their social engagement to a political agenda. Americans today primarily know evangelicals for their public disdain of abortion, homosexuality, and the denigration of the family.[94] A new movement of "neo-evangelicals" has emerged with little popular press that is focused on issues like the environment, urban renewal, homelessness, economic development, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS.[95] This movement has shaped even the primary leaders of evangelicalism who are seeing the miss opportunity for social action. The 2004 release of *For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility* by The National Association of Evangelicals illustrates a shift toward social engagement.[96] The Evangelical Manifesto, in 2008, also called for a broader agenda, "engaging the global giants of conflict, racism, corruption, poverty, pandemic diseases, illiteracy, ignorance and spiritual emptiness, by promoting reconciliation, encouraging ethical servant leadership, assisting the poor, caring for the sick and educating the next generation."[97] In recent years, this emphasis has led evangelicals to start relief efforts spanning from the war in Sudan, to immigration

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[92] Harvie M. Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 26.

[93] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 21.

[94] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 21.

[95] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 1.

[96] Ibid., 9.

[97] Timothy George, *An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment* (Chicago: The Evangelical Manifesto Steering Commitee, 2008), 13-14, accessed July 6, 2015, http://anevangelicalmanifesto.com/docs/Evangelical_Manifesto.pdf.

reform, to care for AIDS patients.[98] Some of America's current and famous evangelicals like Franklin Graham, Rick Warren, Gary Haugen, and Rich Stearns have led significant efforts in social reform.[99]

Researchers site various reasons for this increased interest in gospel demonstration. Despite the progress toward social reform within evangelicalism, millennial evangelicals are not interested in being associated with their predecessors who are most known for a limited number of social issues and the Republican Party.[100] Evangelical social activists typically do not align politically in the classic divisions, but function privately and locally outside of the realm of politics.[101] As one pastor says, the church is "the answer to welfare," not the government.[102] New evangelicals tend to have less faith in politics as a means to reforming society. Conservative spokesperson and pastor, Joel Hunter, says, "no policy improvement or military force can replace our individual responsibility in solving society's ills."[103] Young evangelicals' dissatisfaction with bipartisan politics has been one reason for the renewed interest in gospel demonstration.

Also, new evangelicals are less white, less southern, more educated, and more affiliated with urban philosophies.[104] These realities are foundational to the shift toward

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[98] Marcia Pally, *The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 116-118.

[99] Ibid., 117-120.

[100] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 15.

[101] Pally, *The New Evangelicals*, 151.

[102] Tony Evans, *The Kingdom Agenda: What a Way to Live!* New edition (Moody Publishers, 2006), 418.

[103] Joel C. Hunter, *A New Kind of Conservative* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 22.

[104] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 15.

social engagement within evangelicalism. Millennial evangelicals have also grown up conscious of environmental issues, sex trafficking, and global issues such as the lack of clean water.[105] This increased level of cultural and global awareness has motivated Christians to participate in mission. Some scholars see this shift so significant that it may change what people mean by the term, evangelical.[106] Other evangelicals say that it is exactly what evangelicalism has always been as a "religion of protest against a Christian society that is not Christian enough."[107]

Even though culture impacts the younger evangelicals' interest in social reform, some evangelicals claim that it is a radical reorientation around the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did not withdraw into an alternative community but lived differently within society, "promoting the dignity, freedom and equality of each person."[108] Some evangelicals look at Jesus' emphasis on the Year of Jubilee in Luke 4 and see a "revolutionary subordination" that John Yoder, Christian pacifist, coined in his book *The Politics of Jesus.*[109] Revolutionary subordination is not passive or weak, but it seeks to be involved in society through the countercultural care for the poor. Marcia Pally, professor at New York University, references Jesus' claims in Luke 4, saying, if "healing the brokenhearted, setting the captives free, and ministering to the poor was his job

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[105] Ibid., 16.

[106] Ibid., 21.

[107] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 81.

[108] Pally, *The New Evangelicals*, 131.

[109] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 185-187.

description, then we believe it is ours as well."[110] Churches have been content with outsourcing justice ministry, but John Perkins contends, "if the gospel of reconciliation is going to interrupt the brokenness in society, our churches are going to have to rethink their vocation."[111] These underlying beliefs lead younger evangelicals toward discontent with only gospel declaration and toward gospel declaration combined with gospel demonstration.

Some evangelical leaders strongly oppose the recent emphasis on mercy ministry and fear that it will neglect the passion for evangelism. Roger Smalling, Latin American author and teacher, calls this emphasis a "version of the social gospel… couched in appealing language and ambiguous slogans" that is wrongly redefining the mission of God.[112] Alistar McGrath, professor at the University of Oxford, notes that in a pluralistic world, proclamation of the gospel must be paramount. He sees this as critical to the future of evangelicalism.[113] Though McGrath believes that the primary task for the church is evangelism, he does not disregard younger evangelicals' interest in society's transformation.[114] James Davison Hunter, American sociologist and professor at the University of Virginia, agrees that evangelism is foundational to Christianity, but

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[110] Pally, *The New Evangelicals*, 138.

[111] Marsh and Perkins, *Welcoming Justice*, 108.

[112] Roger Smalling and Dianne Smalling, *The New Evangelical Social Gospel*, *A Critique* (n.p.: Roger and Diane Smalling, 2011), 2.

[113] Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 163.

[114] Ibid., 161.

evangelism cannot comprehensively change the world.[115] Hunter believes that changing the world must involve righting the social wrongs as well.[116]

It seems that evangelicals see the benefit of both evangelism and social justice, but are confused about the priority. The historical roots of this tension are important as they give understanding to where the church stands today. The tension has brought the church to a critical time where the definition of the missio dei is at stake.

In the debate, some prioritized social action while others prioritized evangelism. Evangelicals tended to see acts of mercy as good things that could lead to evangelism. On the other hand, the proponents of the social gospel saw evangelism as one piece of the overall picture of justice. Wright weighs in on the debate, saying that both are priorities but proclamation is ultimate. Wright does not believe that evangelism must always be the starting point as "it is not always possible or desirable in the immediate situation, and it does not reflect the actual practice of Jesus."[117] His conclusion is that

> *ultimately* we must not rest content until we have included within our own missional response the wholeness of God's missional response to the human predicament – and that of course includes the good news of Christ, the cross and resurrection, the forgiveness of sin, the gift of eternal life that is offered to men and women through our witness to the gospel and hope of God's new creation.[118]

Similarly, Nicholas Wolterstorff, professor at Yale Divinity School, said that mission as righteous deeds does not represent the whole story. Old Testament shalom incorporates more than justice, according to Wolterstorff, because God's shalom includes

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[115] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 318-319.

[118] Wright, 318-19.

his holiness and right relationships.[119] Jesus' salvation brings about true shalom because of the gospel's vertical reconciliation and horizontal reconciliation.

Wolterstorff and Wright encourage the church to include all forms of gospel ministry while keeping proclamation of the gospel ultimate. An understanding of shalom that includes justice on earth and reconciliation between man and God gives a compelling picture of God's mission.

Some evangelicals have consistently urged the church toward a holistic mission that includes both gospel declaration and demonstration. Newbigin expands the conversation to say that mission includes word, deed, and also a new community that lives the gospel.[120] Conn says that gospel ministry is a call to incorporation and humanization.[121] The gospel incorporates Christians into a community of God. According to Newbigin, if the world wants to see the gospel embodied, it should look at the church.[122] God also calls the church to humanization, because the gospel restores the image of God for all people, including the poor and disenfranchised.[123] In the new community, the missio dei is the purpose. Conn believes gospel proclamation is essential, but he believes it should be in the context of shared fellowship, service, acts of righteousness, and worship.[124] Conn uniquely includes all the functions of the church

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[119] Nicholas Wolsterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 71.

[120] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 133.

[121] Conn, *Evangelism,* 29-32.

[122] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

[123] Conn, *Evangelism*, 29-32.

[124] Ibid, 37.

working together for one purpose, which is the mission of God. Conn sees the church's ministries as interconnected and all pulling toward God's mission.[125]

The primary context for mission is within the shared fellowship.[126] Jesus did not write a book, but "formed a community," Newbigin said.[127] It is within an authentic community that people find the gospel.[128] Especially in the current culture of phoniness, Michael Frost, missiologist and author, says that the Christian community must be one of authenticity and honesty.[129] One professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, Eddie Gibbs, says that the "never-churched need to be enveloped by small communities of believers so that they can see the impact of the gospel in their relationships."[130] Part of the mission of the church is to live in community extremely well.

The mission of the church also includes acts of service, according to Conn.[131] Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve.[132] In Acts 6, the apostles see waiting tables as part of the mission.[133] Frost talks about the importance of hospitality and serving as both a spiritual discipline and also a part of the mission.[134] The gospel mission must be

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[125] Conn, *Evangelism*, 37.

[126] Ibid., 36.

[127] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 100.

[130] Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 197.

[131] Conn, *Evangelism*, 37.

[132] Matthew 20:28.

[133] Conn, *Evangelism*, 37.

[134] Frost, *Exiles*, 166.

concerned about the issues in the neighborhood in order to "free the oppressed, heal the sick, and bring hope to the hopeless."[135] The church is God's embassy in a specific place where "good news overflows in good action."[136]

Mission must also include righteous deeds or the doing of justice as Conn calls it.[137] Doing justice goes beyond simply protesting certain moral issues or simply fighting in the realm of politics.[138] Justice begins with compassion for the injustices people experience. Perkins believes that "God gathers us into the family of faith not only for our own sake, but also so that we might welcome justice and build beloved communities for the sake of the world."[139] This means that the mission of God must be seen as a mutual responsibility because "if the Church is to be effective in advocating and achieving a new social order in the nation, it must itself be a new social order."[140] In order for mission to be holistic, it must include working for righteousness and justice.

Lastly, leaders believe that part of God's mission is worship. Worship declares God's glory as a witness to the nations.[141] Newbigin says, the church should be a "community of praise," which is "almost totally absent from modern society."[142] The church is the place where "people find their true freedom, their true dignity, and their true

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[135] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 136.

[136] Ibid., 229.

[137] Conn, *Evangelism*, 42.

[138] Ibid., 44.

[139] Marsh and Perkins, *Welcoming Justice*, 18.

[140] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 231.

[141] Conn, *Evangelism*, 38.

[142] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

equality in reverence to One who is worthy of all the praise that we can offer."[143] A worshipping community is both thankful and hopeful.

Many of these scholars are attempting to define mission more holistically for future generations. To pursue a holistic mission, the church will "recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society."[144]

Millennials

Significant new literature explores the characteristics of millennials, often noting the differences between millennials and boomers. Some scholars simply see these differences as a typical generational conflict.[145] Yet, understanding the tendencies of milllennials helps the church discern what motivates them in mission. This study will examine both characteristics of millennials outside the church and inside the church.

Millennials Outside the Church

Researchers have studied millennials as they are becoming adults, entering the workforce, and entering other areas of society. Thom Rainer, president of Lifeway Christian Resources, discovered, in *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation,* that this generation is diverse, educated, working, mostly single, and not religious.[146] Similarly but less optimistic, Paul Taylor, from the Pew Research center, has found that this generation is "liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful,

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[143] Ibid., 228.

[144] Ibid., 233.

[145] Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown*, First ed. (New York: Pew Research Center, 2014), 17.

[146] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 30.

confident and broke."[147] The literature illuminates the strengths and the weaknesses of this generation.

Millennials live among an "increasing immigrant population, or have jobs that are globally connected or depend on global markets," which provides a greater value of diversity.[148] Some research finds that relational and career instability defines this generation.[149] They are also known for delaying adulthood; one 2012 poll found that forty percent of males ranging from age eighteen to thirty-one still live in their parents' homes.[150]

Despite delaying adulthood, millennials are known for an idealistic optimism. Some believe this is the result of "coddling parents and everyone gets a trophy coaches."[151] Even though some economists believe millennials will be the first generation of Americans who will have a lower standard of living than their boomer parents, they remain idealistic.[152]

Nonetheless, millennials grew up with self-admiring tendencies that can lead to narcissism. One cultural historian, Christopher Lash, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, explained how the focus on impending disaster in the last fifty years has created

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[147] Taylor, *The Next America*, 26.

[148] Jana L. Sundene and Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 35.

[149] Ibid., 31.

[150] Taylor, *The Next America*, 19.

[151] Ibid., 20.

[152] Ibid., 26.

narcissism.[153] He explains how narcissism is fundamentally the idea that people live in the moment and for themselves with no thought toward predecessors. Lash claims, "we are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future."[154] Calvin Miller, evangelical author, says that narcissism is the "breeding ground of self-love and the burial ground of worldwide passion."[155] He fears that since millennials are growing up in an environment where materialism, entitlement, and selfishness are the fundamental worldview, caring for others will become less and less important.[156]

Yet, millennials have a sense of destiny and their involvement in it. Rainer found that nine out of ten millennials believe that it is their responsibility to make a difference in the world and sixty percent believe that they will make "some great contribution in their lifetime."[157] Strauss and Howe postulated that millennials will be the next great civic generation.[158]

The early millennial research showed them as more socially engaged than their boomer parents.[159] Some research found that millennials are distinct from boomers in that

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[153] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 4.

[154] Ibid., 5.

[155] Calvin Miller, *The Vanishing Evangelical: Saving the Church from Its Own Success by Restoring What Really Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 91.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 30.

[158] Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

[159] Ibid.

they are typically environmentally sensitive and not enamored with consumerism.[160] The best products do not compel millennials; instead, the values that a company embodies compel their consumer spending.[161] Trust is not easily given, therefore authenticity is important to them. Millennials were found to match the boomers in volunteerism, but vote less.[162] They do not trust politics as the way to change the world. With globalization and an increasing optimism, this generation sees more possibilities of truly having a world-changing influence.

Religion is not really a factor for most millennials as only thirteen percent rated any kind of religious or spiritual issue as important.[163] The Pew Research Center found that from 2007 to 2012, the religious unaffiliated increased by fifteen percent.[164] Millennials are the least religious of any generation in modern American history, yet they are very spiritual.[165] Roughly sixty-eight percent believe in God and more than thirty-three percent classify themselves as spiritual but not religious.[166] This generation is disappointed in institutional religion. Notre Dame scholar and sociologist, Christian Smith, says that nearly sixty-six percent see the church as "negative, angry and judgmental."[167] Millennials also complain that religious organizations are too concerned

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[160] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 42, 45.

[161] Ibid., 45.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid., 271.

[164] Taylor, *The Next America*, 127.

[165] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 47.

[166] Taylor, *The Next America*, 127.

[167] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134.

with money, power, politics, and rules.[168] Others postulate that the rise of religious disaffiliation parallels the delays in marriage.[169] Some believe the religious disaffiliation is a by product of secularization and a general lack of trust as this trend is not limited to demographics or geography.[170]

Even though religious disaffiliation is growing, millennials still believe that religious institutions can be a force for good.[171] Some millennials would go so far as to expect the church to be leading the way in issues of compassion and social justice.[172] Though millennials are increasingly irreligious, those in the church and outside the church often care about the same issues.

When it comes to motivating millennials, there were several significant categories that Rainer found in his research. Relationships are one of the largest motivators for this generation. Family and friends were far and away the highest contributors to motivation.[173] Education and careers were also motivating, as this is a very educated generation. Surprisingly, according to survey results, money was not overly compelling

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[168] Taylor, *The Next America*, 127.

[169] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 21.

[170] Taylor, *The Next America*, 132.

[171] Ibid., 133.

[172] Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not The Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 228.

[173] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 104.

to this generation.[174] Careers, for many millennials, are a means to contribute to society, which drives them to choose jobs that are fulfilling rather than financially lucrative.[175]

Ninety-six percent of millennials believe that they can do something for the good of the world, and this motivates them.[176] Many millennials believe that they are the most socially engaged generation of all time, yet critics wonder if social action is just veiled narcissism. Twenge and Campbell found that needs or altruism were not the primary motivators for social engagement, but instead, millennials engage social issues focused on themselves.[177] Social media and the connectedness of this generation enhances their self-focus. Millennials are very comfortable using multiple forms of communication and are the most connected generation.[178] This constant connection through technology has enhanced the look-at-me culture and the narcissistic motivations.[179]

Millennials outside the church differ from their parent's generation. They are less religious yet more focused on making a difference in the world. Values, authenticity, relationships, and ethics are important to this generation. Millennials outside the church are, thus, involved in many forms of philanthropy and social action.

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[174] Ibid., 108.

[175] Ibid., 108-109.

[176] Ibid., 108.

[177] Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 2009), 253-254.

[178] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 44-45.

[179] Taylor, *The Next America*, 28.

Millennials in the Church

Rainer and Rainer postulate that millennials are the "most activist generation we have known for a century" as "nearly 8 out of 10 have a strong motivation to serve others in society."[180] How does this activist attitude influence millennials in the church?

Millennials in the church also want to serve others and make a difference. They are attracted to a vision of the kingdom of God. Corcoran says that for millennials

> wherever you witness the tender, pregnant embrace of reconciliation; glimpse the healing touch of forgiveness both given and received; notice small bands of people living cooperatively, sharing possessions, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, loving the severely, profoundly mentally retarded, defending the cause of the poor, defending the proverbial widow, orphan, and alien – whoever they may be – there you are witness to the present reality of God's kingdom.[181]

This generation tends to be more compelled by opportunities to serve the least than to save the lost. For many millennials, demonstrating the gospel through acts of mercy is more important than declaring the gospel through evangelism.

Donald McFadyen, an Anglican priest, speaks for a new evangelical theology that sees the importance of an embodied Christianity in the midst of its surroundings.[182] McFadyen believes that the church should focus on living in community rather than simply focusing on the individual. McFadyen critiques evangelicalism because it tends to see the world and read the Bible as if people are disconnected individuals coming to God.[183] He calls this "individualistic separatism."[184] Conversion in evangelicalism, in his

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[180] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 274.

[181] McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense*, 65.

[182] Tom Greggs, *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 125.

[183] Ibid., 125.

[184] Ibid.

opinion, has been "taking the truth of God out into the world and telling it to people there so that they will come out of the world and into the church."[185] McFadyen claims this approach insufficiently communicates how faith impacts relationships or the rest of the world, and thus many younger evangelicals reject this approach.[186] In recovering the social aspect of the faith, many scholars believe this will help embody God's mission to the world.[187] Only through demonstrating the gospel can the church be as Archbishop William Temple said, "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its nonmembers."[188]

Some millennials in the church see this compelling vision of God's kingdom and discount the gospel of atonement. Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament and author, says, that if millennials had to choose between atonement and kingdom, that the majority would choose the gospel of "the kingdom, justice, peace and love."[189] McKnight contends that millennials are more comfortable preaching the values of God's kingdom and allowing personal salvation to fit into that context.[190] For many evangelical millennials, a definition of mission that doesn't include gospel demonstration is not compelling.

Millennials have encouraged evangelical churches into greater social engagement. Academic scholarship has focused on evangelical boomers who are known chiefly for

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[185] Ibid., 126.

[186] Ibid., 125.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Ibid., 136.

[189] McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense*, 124.

[190] Ibid., 139.

their feelings about abortion and same-sex marriage in an effort to extend "the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy."[191] Yet some millennial evangelicals critique their predecessors' emphasis on the moral majority, the suburban mega-church, and the close allegiance with the Republican Party.[192] Millennial evangelicals generally disagree with the boomer's view of political social transformation. Some millennials believe that the boomer's view of transformation is "if enough people are converted to Christianity, then the society will transform."[193] Younger evangelicals agree that society will benefit from conversions, but conversion as a goal does not adequately incorporate God's mission. The ministry of the gospel must work to transform individuals but also unjust systems.[194]

Even among Christians, critics wonder if millennials' focus upon social engagement feeds the narcissistic culture.[195] Because high schools, resumes, and college applications often require volunteerism, some believe this emphasis on Christian social engagement is simply selfish.[196] For example, while volunteerism has grown, financial giving has greatly declined.[197] Past generations served because of society's needs, but Twenge and Cambell found that millennials tend to serve in order to benefit

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[191] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 2.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 187.

[194] Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 12.

[195] Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 250.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Ibid., 251.

themselves.[198] Some scholars who study millennials conclude that narcissism is a motivator, which may have impact on priorities for Christian millennials.

Missional Communities

The recent literature on the missional church has propelled millenials in their biblical understanding of church and its involvement in mission. As society's view of the church has shifted, so has the church's view of mission. After Constantine, the church slowly became "a place you went to instead of a people you belonged with."[199] Currently, Christianity is losing its place at the center of American life and Christians must learn to build bridges with people who do not believe in Jesus.[200] Missional churches are looking to the pre-Constantine church as a model.[201]

The early church was wrought with strife, disputes, struggles, and persecution yet it attracted outsiders. Australian missiologist and author, Alan Hirsch, says that the future of the church must be a "people movement again," like it was in the early church.[202] Missional leaders contend that Evangelical Christianity is no longer attractive to outsiders. Matt Smay and Hugh Halter are pastors and authors who postulate that the world sees the church "desperately craving a place of power in order to preserve our

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[198] Ibid., 250.

[199] Matt Smay and Hugh Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 55.

[200] Ibid., 12.

[201] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come, The: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, rev. and updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 17.

[202] Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 31.

good, wholesome way of life."[203] Many missional leaders believe that the church must make a radical overhaul in how it functions.

The missional church movement is a response to the dualistic, hierarchical, and attractional church of the modern era.[204] While the church growth movement talked about marketing and meeting needs of populations in hopes that people would come, the missional movement believes that churches "must go to people where they are and communicate in terms that will make sense to them."[205] Instead of dualistically separating from the world, missional leaders emphasize Jesus' incarnation as a call to action through incarnational mission.[206] Some missiologists call Newbigin the father of missional ecclesiology.[207] Newbigin's experience in India and post-Christian England propelled his vision for a diverse church on mission. He believed that a reconciled "congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it" is the only way to communicate a gospel of reconciliation.[208]

Darrell Guder, missiologist and professor at Princeton Thelogical Seminary, in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America,* asks the question, "what would the church look like if it were truly missional in design and

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[203] Smay and Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 50.

[204] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 18.

[205] Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 37-39.

[206] Frost, *Exiles*, 37.

[207] Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 455-457.

[208] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

definition?"[209] Missional churches use the Missio Dei as their foundation. Mission is no longer simply the church's activity or ministry, but an "attribute of God."[210] Therefore, the church has a mission because God is a missionary God.[211] Missional churches spend more time considering their local context as their mission field.[212] Therefore, these churches are "essentially missionary" where its members are "equipped for their calling society; it is structurally pliable and innovative, and it does not defend the privileges of a select group."[213] Missional churches strive to be authentic, serve a cause greater than themselves, be generous, practice hospitality, and live in community.[214]

Both millennials and missional churches value community. Recent literature has encouraged the missional church toward a structure called missional communities as a method to motivate and empower the church toward mission. Missional communities, as defined by Reggie McNeal in *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church,* are a "noninstutional expression" for Christians to experience life and mission.[215] These communities are not dependent upon trained pastors, and they grow in nonreligious environments.

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[209] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 7.

[210] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 223.

[213] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 373.

[214] Frost, *Exiles*.

[215] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, xix.

Halter and Smay compare these missional communites to the faith communities of the book of Acts. They claim that these are the "natural framework God's church was and must still be" based upon.[216] Missional communities succeed by "experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised and…sharing it with others."[217] Often the institutional church, McNeal says, focuses on attendance, giving, and serving inside the church rather than spiritual formation.[218] In contrast, the lifestyles and rhythms of the people in the community establish the rhythms of the missional community.

Missional community is incarnational in nature. Halter and Smay say, "Church should be what ends up happening as a natural response to people wanting to follow us, be with us, and be like us as we are following the way of Christ."[219] A missional community is defined both by its "sent" nature but also by its incarnational posture.[220] Therefore, missional communities must "embody the message" by living in a way that is consistent with the compassion, patience, love, and mercy seen in the gospel.[221] In direct contrast, when they were younger, these missional leaders received encouragement to evangelize boldly with little care for the person.[222]

The missional community movement reacts to the congregational church. Geography drives the congregational church, and its leaders designed it as a place for

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[216] Smay and Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom*.

[217] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, xx.

[218] Ibid., xxi.

[219] Smay and Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 39.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid., 42.

[222] Ibid., 39.

Christians to gather. Missional leaders fear that congregational churches focus on the church rather than the kingdom of God.[223] McNeal contends that for the first three centuries, "Christianity was a street movement" not defined by a geographic place.[224] Sacrificial service for the community defined the early Christians, and they were "radically committed to the well-being of the people in the culture."[225] In the modern church, devotion is demonstrated by "participating in congregational activity… rather than a lifestyle of counter-cultural sacrificial love of neighbor."[226] Rather than focus on the clergy of the institutional church, the missional community asserts that every follower of Jesus is sent on mission.[227]

McNeal is not predicting the end of the congregational church, but rather he advocates that other methods of church are acceptable. He believes that, for many, the congregational church is simply not working.[228] He found that twenty-five percent of millennials prefer to not associate themselves with organized religion.[229] As stated in the research on millennials, this generation is less religious yet more focused on making a difference in the world. Hirsch believes that the church needs to change its perspective. Instead of the church having a mission, he believes the "mission has a church."[230] Churches need more than a missions department within them. The fundamental belief of

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[223] Ibid., 32.

[224] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, 2.

[225] Ibid., 3.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 33.

[228] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, 8.

[229] Ibid., 8.

[230] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 36.

the missional community movement is that mission is the fundamental driver of the church. The community exists as a function of the mission.

McNeal concludes that missional communities outside of the institutional church are the best context for millennials to pursue mission. This kind of community requires an incarnational strategy that is both relational and sacrificial.[231] These elements are attractive to this activist generation who does not trust institutions.

Practices of Missional Communities

Often, people think of missionaries as people the church sends to another nation in order to evangelize. The missional community movement would like to change that perspective so that every Christian would see their immediate world with the "same perspective as a missionary in a foreign land."[232] Hirsch defines the missional church as a "community of God's people that defines itself by… being an agent of God's mission to the world."[233]

The missional community movement is in direct contrast to the attractional, church growth model. Missional means "sent" and is the "antithesis of trying to attract them to us, our programs, our buildings, or our gatherings."[234] Missionaries start by understanding the assumptions, worldviews, and emotions of those in the mission field.[235] These missional communities believe that evangelism should happen in the context of relationship. Hirsch says that the attractional, congregational model results in extracting

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[231] McNeal, *Missional Communities*, 13.

[232] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 63.

[233] Ibid., 66.

[234] Smay and Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 38.

[235] Ibid.

new converts from their previous relationships in exchange for a religious ghetto.[236] This is not the best way to reach non-Christians because "the church quickly exhausts its supply of relationships."[237] Instead of launching propositional truths at sinners, missionaries are called to "help communicate God's love and acceptance and to win people's hearts" through close relationships.[238]

Missional churches follow Jesus' approach by being the friends of sinners. For the missional community, mission is not simply evangelism. Rather mission applies to every area of life including "business, family, art, education, science, politics, etc."[239] Smay and Halter remind readers that Jesus often drew people to himself by his love, but his message often repelled them.[240] They believe that Christians have started "soft-pedaling the message and end up repelling them by how we live our live."[241] The goal, therefore, in a missional community is compassion in the context of relationship.

Involvement in a missional community begins with a streamlined approach to life. Missional communities reject the sacred/secular divide, and instead, "incarnational approaches try to see the kingdom in all elements of life and seek to bring the dimensions closer."[242] Hirsch says that there are three practices of incarnational living: "proximity,

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[236] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 251.

[237] Ibid., 252.

[238] Smay and Halter, *The Tangible Kingdom*, 46.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 48.

frequency and spontaneity."[243] These require missional communities to sacrifice the consumer culture's standards. Tim Keller says that the Christian community must "embody a counter-culture, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money and power."[244] Hirsch says, "in a world obsessed with social status and image, we choose to associate with poor, invisible, and uncool people and invite them into our lives."[245]

Missional communities have unique practices based upon the rhythms of that community, therefore they are difficult to identify. Tim Keller generally identifies a missional community as one that nurtures the neighborhood and culture, rejects a tribal language, cares for the poor and generosity, exhibits humility, and includes non-believers.[246] Any kind of community that embodies these values can be called a missional community.

Challenges of Missional Communities

Sustainability challenges a missional lifestyle. Hirsch recognizes that for most Christians, work and family needs monopolize time for missional involvement.[247] Without clergy, volunteers who have other jobs must do the entire work of ministry. While reliance upon volunteers is one of the movement's strengths, because time is the

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[243] Ibid., 50.

[244] Timothy Keller, "The Missional Church," June 2001, download.redeemer.com, accessed July 6, 2014, http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Missional_Church-Keller.pdf.

[245] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 55.

[246] Keller, "The Missional Church."

[247] Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 252.

limiting factor, it is also a weakness.[248] Size also challenges missional communities. A movement that can change communities must be larger than the normal mid-sized group, but not as big as a small church.[249] Lastly, financial resources can be a challenge for missional communities. The nature of missional communities deconstructs the financial systems of a congregational church and assumes that people in the missional community will meet needs. Therefore money can also be a limiting resource for this type of lifestyle.

Missional communities are compelling to millennials because of the high value of relationships and the low value for institutions. Time will tell if this new way of church will more effectively spread the gospel than the congregational church.

Conclusion

If church leaders want to motivate a sustained mission that includes gospel declaration and demonstration, they must understand the complex nature of millennials and mission. The research shows that millennials desire a mission that encompasses both gospel declaration and demonstration and that leads to a robust, sacrificial, and relational lifestyle of mission.

Millennials are the first generation in over a century that has grown up with less tension between evangelism and the social gospel. The boomer's vision of political renewal and the sole emphasis on propositional evangelism is not attractive to millennials. Therefore, the rise of the missional church that exists "as a community

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[248] Ibid.

[249] Ibid.

created by the Spirit that is missionary by nature" is compelling to millennials.[250] The mixture of anti-institutionalism, the call to change the world and the focus on intimate community seems to fit well with the research on millennials. The combination of the biblical research on mission and historical research on evangelicalism, as well as more recent studies on millennials and missional communities provides a more robust assessment of the challenges and opportunities for pastors and other ministry leaders who are charged with equipping millennials in their congregations or small groups.

[250] Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 84.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover how millennials in the North American church pursue both gospel declaration and gospel demonstration. In order to address this purpose, there were four areas of research. These include the practices of millennials, the motivations of millennials, the challenges facing millennials, and the extent in which the missional community theory aligns with millennials' experience. To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions served as the intended focus of the qualitative research:

1. What are the practices where millennials pursue gospel declaration and gospel demonstration?
    a. Which practices do millennials categorize as gospel demonstration?
    b. Which practices do millennials categorize as gospel declaration?
    c. Which practices do millennials categorize as both gospel demonstration and declaration?
2. What motivates millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
    a. In what ways and to what extent do experiences (such as worship, small groups, classes, service projects, et cetera) inside the church motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration

   b. In what ways and to what extent do social experiences outside the church (such as work, neighborhood associations, cultural activities, et cetera) motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   c. In what ways and to what extent has biblical training motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   d. In what ways and to what extent have relationships motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
3. What challenges do millennials face in pursuing both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   a. What cultural challenges do millennials face in pursuing both?
   b. What tensions do millennials feel in pursuing both?
4. In what ways and to what extent are millennials' pursuit of gospel declaration and demonstration congruent with the missional community theory?[251]

Design of the Study

Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research*, differentiates qualitative research as that which explains how "people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."[252] The issues of motivation are difficult to understand with a simple quantitative research process. Therefore, the researcher chose qualitative research in order to understand

[251] McNeal, *Missional Communities*.

[252] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 5.

millennials' practices, motivations, and challenges in mission. This study adhered to a basic qualitative research method as described in Merriam's book.[253]

Participant Sample Selection

This research required millennial participants who could communicate in depth about their practices, motivations, and challenges in mission. Therefore, the study sample consisted of millennials in the church who are actively and regularly involved in both gospel declaration and demonstration. The participants are all born in different parts of America but are currently living in an urban and suburban context in Dallas, Texas. Some of the participants are college-educated professionals, while others are more artistic. This study includes Caucasian and Hispanic participants. Though the participants are quite similar, they do have a breadth of missional practices. The participants vary in their type of church involvement. Some participants are involved in a home church model, others are involved in a missional community church model, and others are involved in a traditional church model. Though the church models differ, each participant is involved in local mission. The researcher looked for similarities and differences in their pursuit of mission based upon each of their church models. Each participant is involved in a community serving in mission, which pertains to the fourth research question.

Participants were chosen for a purposeful sample because this qualitative research specifically chooses a "sample from which the most can be learned."[254] Seven participants were purposefully chosen to provide variation in experience.

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[253] Ibid., 22-24.

[254] Ibid., 77.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews for data gathering. The flexibility within the interview questions allowed for the interviewer to explore motivations and specific challenges.[255] The researcher used a pilot test of the interview protocol in order to evaluate the questions. The literature drove the interview protocol, but the questions aimed at practices, motivations, and challenges of the interviewees. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using an audio recorder. The interview protocol contained the following prepared questions.

1. How did you come to first understand and value mission?
2. What things motivated you to participate?
3. What types of things continue to motivate your participation?
    a. What role did community play in your willingness to participate?
    b. In what ways and to what extent has the Bible influenced your view of mission?
    c. In what ways is the culture influencing involvement in mission?
4. In your own words, what is the difference between declaring and demonstrating the gospel?
5. What challenges did you face in declaring the gospel?
6. What challenges did you face in demonstrating the gospel?
7. Ideally, how would you best be motivated toward mission that included both?
8. What would be the characteristics of the ideal picture of ongoing mission for millennials?

[255] Ibid., 89.

The researcher was a participant observer who listened, and asked probing questions, and focused upon helpful data regarding the research questions. The researcher did not use any documents or official records. The research was primarily concerned with the personal feelings and word choices that showed motivations, practices, and challenges of millennials in mission; therefore, interviews were the sole method of research.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed each interview by using a phone and a computer in order to type out each transcript. This method allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the data within the categories of the research questions. This study utilized the constant comparison method of analyzing the data throughout the interview process. As Merriam defines, this method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences."[256] This allows for all the data to be grouped and coded in such a way that helps the study. All the data was coded based upon the research questions. This method provided helped the researcher clarify and evaluate the data categories. These categories form the headings for the data analysis chapter. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes and patterns about millennials' motivations, practices, and challenges in mission across the variation of participants. Also, the evaluation sought to understand discrepancies between the participants. Finally, the analysis looked to understand the importance of missional communities in their mission activity.

[256] Ibid., 30.

Researcher Position

The researcher used interviews as a primary instrument for research; therefore, the perspectives and values of the researcher influence this study. In order to frame the research, it is helpful to explain the researcher's biases. The researcher is a seminary trained, evangelical Christian pastor in a non-denominational Bible church. The researcher grew up and pastors in the Bible belt, in Dallas, Texas. The researcher believes that salvation is found only by grace through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This worldview also includes a high value and submission of life to the Bible. The researcher's bias could be a hindrance to the study because it is not the primary worldview of many millennials. Yet, the researcher's experience as a pastor and leader in churches also enhanced the research because all of the participants are actively involved in church and mission. The researcher, though not a millennial, has pastored millennials for fifteen years.

The idea of mission as seen in this study is rooted in the biblical call to declare and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus. The researcher believes that most churches do not both declare and demonstrate the gospel well. Often, churches do one or the other, but they do not pursue both. Secondly, the researcher postulated that millennials are more attracted to gospel demonstration because of the activist culture of millennials. Finally, the researcher believes that both declaration and demonstration are necessary for a complete involvement in the mission of God.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources, time, and the nature of qualitative research, the interview analysis is not universally applicable to all millennials. Since this study utilized

a qualitative research method, the results were not statistically significant, but contain rich descriptions for a depth of understanding of a few particular participants. The research is primarily focused on motivation, practices, and challenges in mission. Therefore, the data is subjective rather than objective, though the analysis is performed to be as objective as possible.

Some of the study's findings may be generalized especially in regard to involvement in mission. Though definitions of mission were clearly articulated, involvement in mission has a broad range of understanding. Secondly, there may be generalizations made about missional communities. Though Reggie McNeal defines them,[257] each missional community has a different focus and particular habits that go with it. This study does not take into account family of origin or church background, which do impact the participants' experience. Researchers who desire to understand particulars in that area should test those specific aspects of millennials in mission. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.

[257] McNeal, *Missional Communities*.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover how millennials in the church pursue both gospel declaration and gospel demonstration. This chapter reflects upon interviews with seven millennials and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions for this study.

Introductions to Participants

Seven millennials who are involved in significant Christian mission were selected to participate in this study. The participants actively participate in a church and are significantly involved in declaring and demonstrating the gospel. Three of the participants were women, and two of the women were single. Three of the four men who participated were married. Only one of the seven participants has children whom they are currently raising. In the following section, each participant will briefly be introduced. The researcher changed all the participants' names and identifiable information to protect their anonymity.

Naomi is single but has a five-year old child whom she is not currently raising. Naomi's parents were servants, and her childhood church emphasized mission globally and locally to the poor. She walked away from her faith during a very dark time in her life. She struggled as she spent time in and out of mental institutions. She came back to her relationship with God through friends who accepted her and prayed for her. She experienced God's radical healing two years ago, and her life has completely changed.

Naomi is a part of a home church that focuses on intimate relationships, serves one another, and evangelizes within a one-mile radius.

Leah is a young married woman who was raised in the church. Her childhood church exclusively taught about missions as sending. She remembers hearing great stories about God acting all around the world, but she never thought that her own backyard needed mission. Through a campus ministry in college, she began to understand her own responsibility to share the gospel with those who do not know about God's grace. This responsibility radically changed her understanding of mission. Leah is very involved in a traditional church with a culture of mission, and she currently mentors a young woman from a low-income apartment complex.

Lauren also grew up in the church and always put global missionaries on a pedestal. That changed when her parents began to raise support to work for a local ministry. She began to see missions as everyday and normal. After going to a Christian college and hearing all the stories of radical missionaries, her normal, day job challenged her view of mission. She wrestled philosophically about how mission could happen in a mundane job. Lauren concluded that all of her life is mission. Lauren, along with her roommate, initiated to serve children in a Burmese refugee apartment complex. Lauren is currently involved in a traditional church that is heavily involved in local mission and service.

James first experienced mission in his dorm when a friend "entered his world" to share the gospel. He did not grow up with any faith, and a group of college students who loved him radically transformed his life by sharing the gospel. James came to faith in a missional environment so he thought that was the norm for Christians. He immediately

began sharing his faith and partnering with others in his campus ministry for evangelism. He now tutors college students in economics and looks for opportunities to share his faith with them. James also mentors a young man from a challenging apartment complex that he met through his church's partnership.

Bill is a recent college graduate who experienced mission and living out his faith for the first time on a college campus. He grew up in a legalistic, religious home, but the gospel never impacted his life. No one from his youth group, he reported, is walking with the Lord. His experience in college shaped his life as he now prepares to go to the Middle East to share the gospel. While he waits, he has moved into a heavily populated refugee neighborhood to live missionally. He also joined a missional community within a church.

Glenn grew up in the church in the pacific northwest. He was told that in order to be truly spiritual, he should attend the church every time it was open. In college he moved into a faith-based dorm where they lived in community and on mission. Through that time, he also had significant international mission experience that shaped his view of local mission. He is married and is currently very involved in a home church in his neighborhood.

Edward was raised in a Missionary Baptist church where they were very involved in sending and praying for missionaries overseas. He began to see that mission was not just overseas as he met non-believers in his neighborhood, yet he did not actively pursue evangelism. Through an experience with a church's missional community, Edward first saw all of life as mission. Currently Edward, his wife, and four kids are involved in a missional community that tries to create rhythms of mission as a part of their everyday life.

Declaring and Demonstrating the Gospel

The first set of questions probed into how millennials define mission. These millennials were not preoccupied with the differences between declaring and demonstrating the gospel. Christians historically have struggled with these two poles of God's mission. However, these millennials rejected the separation. Most have grown up in their faith where they value both evangelism and social justice.

These millennials comfortably define mission as including social justice. They demonstrate the gospel in various ways. Bill felt an incarnational call to move into a refugee neighborhood. Because he grew up in an era where Americans doubted and even hated Arabs, Bill wanted to engage Arabs in a redemptive way. In college, he was the only non-Arab student who joined the Arab Student Union.

As a young child, Naomi came across the poor in her big city. She emphatically said that the injustice she saw "was not ok!" Speaking generally, she explained how she should not "pass that same homeless man she passes every single day." Naomi sees righting the injustices of the world as part of God's mission to love neighbors.

Similarly, Leah struggles with the great divide in her city between extreme wealth and extreme poverty. Leah is thankful that her church ministers the gospel in a specific low-income apartment complex, although she took a while to join the ministry. She understands that the gospel includes demonstrating the gospel, but when she joined the church, Leah had built up enough reasons why she could not serve there. When her church led her out of her comfort zone, she was intimidated and felt inadequate, but Leah also felt convicted that the church should be telling this community that they matter to God.

Lauren and Leah both hesitated to see their ministry at a low-income apartment complex as gospel demonstration at first. Leah was concerned that her protégé would feel like a "project." Yet, she recognized that her desire partly is to help her family end the cycle of poverty. Leah wants to guide her protégé's future, even possibly through college. Lauren teaches English to children in her community and does not consider this enough to be called social justice.

In the interview, James loved the incarnational model of mission. He connected his mentorship ministry in the low-income apartment complex with the incarnational model of Jesus. James said that his mentorship is evangelism, but it is more than telling younger people about Jesus. In the same way that James is a different race and social class than his protégé, Jesus came from heaven for people.

Bill also experienced incarnational ministry as he moved into the refugee resettlement area. He knows that simply living there is a ministry. Because James and Bill do not look like the people they serve, they demonstrate how Jesus pursues sinners. Lauren teaches English and leads a Bible study with girls. She does not see the distinction between demonstration and declaration in her ministry. For Lauren, the primary motive is her relationships with the Burmese girls. Demonstration and declaration go hand in hand when it comes to relationship, she said. Bill, likewise, claimed that ministry should include both because ministry with people will always involve some form of social justice. These millennials are very intentionally involved in demonstrating the gospel among the poor and the disenfranchised, although they all see that demonstration and declaration go hand in hand.

The other millennials do not serve with the poor; yet, in the interviews, they explained how they demonstrate the gospel as a part of their everyday lives. Edward seemed disillusioned with his brief encounters in ministry to the poor because the ministry was not relational. He explained how he felt like he was "checking the mission box" but never connecting with the people. Edward was more interested in gospel declaration that happened everyday with neighbors and co-workers. He intentionally joined a fantasy football league at work to build relationships, even though he does not care about football. Likewise, Naomi talked about how the leader of her home church had kids at the local school, so he intentionally became president of the parent/teacher association. Glenn intentionally joined the neighborhood association so as to build relationships. One photographer in his home church took pictures with Santa for their local neighborhood and school. Bill's missional community invites their friends and neighbors to a pub every other week and throws a party for Halloween. They go to a monthly concert together and try to intentionally invite non-believers. When Bill was a part of the Arab Student Union, he would invite others from his missional community to join them for events.

For these millennials, they hope to demonstrate the gospel in the way they treat each other and love one another. As Bill put it, he wanted to "integrate his secular community with his church community." Glenn said that their community is very attractive to non-believers because they are authentic. Bill equated simply loving neighbors in the midst of their problems as social justice. Four of the millennials interviewed were content to identify these types of things as demonstration or social justice.

Throughout the interviews, these millennials did not see a big distinction between demonstration and declaration. Rather, they value both as important. Although they are mainly doing demonstration, all of the millennials see the importance of declaration. All of their community groups, home churches, and missional communities encouraged them to pray for non-believers in their lives. They intentionally pray for opportunities for evangelistic conversations. Bill invited an international student over to his house once a week to talk about their religion and Christianity. James invites neighbors over and uses evangelistic tools to start a conversation. Leah and James see their mentorship programs as evangelism because they consistently share the gospel with their protégés. Lauren always does a Bible study while she teaches English to the Burmese girls. Glenn's wife just started a Bible study at her office with non-believers. Glenn and Naomi's home church is very actively involved in home beer brewing. They have about thirty people that come to brew beer each week and form relationships that hopefully will lead to evangelism.

Each of these millennials emphatically saw the importance of both declaration and demonstration. James has always emphasized evangelism. Now he believes that without both gospel evangelism and gospel demonstration, mission is a failure. James uses relational quality time and meeting physical needs as a means to clearly communicate the gospel's essential tenets. James shared an example of his church's basketball camp in a low-income apartment complex. After three days of coaching basketball and relating to the kids, the coach spent five minutes citing the gospel as the reason why he came.

Bill similarly said that if he had to choose between demonstration and declaration, he would pick declaration. But he quickly said that he cannot make that choice. He said that spiritual needs are the chief end, but Christians cannot meet spiritual needs without meeting physical and emotional needs. Edward believed that evangelism was ultimate, but also saw the benefit of meeting needs. Glenn, similarly, cited how Jesus performed miracles and then forgave sins. His home church excels at inviting non-believers from the brew club to help meet physical needs in the community. This invitation opens doors for declaring the gospel.

Everyone interviewed was far more interested in relational evangelism than street-type evangelism. Leah simply defined mission by saying, "declaration is truth and demonstration is love." God gives both truth and love. Naomi said truth and love must be in the context of relationship. She believes that Christians must create open space for many conversations and questions about all of life, including the gospel. Leah cited the old adage that "people do not care what you know, until they know that you care." She said that people need to hear the gospel truth in their language, but they also need to see it in your life. Bill and Edward said that there may be some success in the street-type evangelism, but they see more fruit in relational evangelism.

The researcher asked each of the millennials what their ideal view of mission looks like, including both declaring and demonstrating the gospel. Remarkably, the interviewees gave similar answers. James said that he believed the best way to sustain mission was a close-knit community with good leadership on mission. He compared this community to a family that is constantly inviting other people into their family. James used the example of his community group that went to complete a project at a low-

income apartment complex. He described the event as a "crockpot of demonstrating and declaring the gospel." Once they arrived at the job site, the kids flocked to them, hampering the efficiency of the project. The community group quickly realized that their primary objective was to build relationships with the children. Some of the kids helped the group to finish the project, others talked about Jesus, and others made deeper connections with members of the community group. James said it was a great example of a close-knit community incarnating the Father's love to their neighbors. While the group did not accomplish the project as effectively as they hoped, they saw the benefit of the relationships. Lauren agreed that a community that has the same passion and commitment to a mission would be really compelling to her.

Edward and Naomi, similarly, said that the ideal picture of mission involved community. Edward said that an intimate community is the "sleeper advantage" to Christianity. Everyone wants community, and a healthy Christian community should always be inviting others to join them. Naomi described her ideal missional experience by identifying characteristics of community. She referenced Acts 2 and Acts 4 as a community where people share with those in need, live in close quarters, eat together, garden together, mentor one another, pray together, challenge one another, and bring other people into that same love. Glenn described a similar picture, but added discipleship as the main thrust of the community. In their ideal picture of mission, these millennials consistently started by talking about the ideal community.

Also, most of those interviewed described diversity within their ideal picture of mission. Naomi said, "every color, race, nationality, age" are involved together. James and Leah similarly painted the picture of the men and women from the low-income

apartment complex growing up in the Lord and leading their church into new avenues of mission. James said that success would be "if our church started looking like the people we were trying to reach." Bill's experience with refugees and the Arab Student Union also led him to say that he would like to see mission that is diverse but unified. Leah said an ideal picture of mission would "eliminate the other mentality" that people so often have about other races, social classes, et cetera. She wants to see mission that is a great, diverse picture of the body of Christ, like heaven. After experiencing the effects of the homogenous churches that are similar in race and socioeconomic status, these millennials want to see diversity in mission.

Motivations of Millennials

The purpose of this study is to understand millennials' views of and motivations for mission. The questions addressing motivation revealed positive and negative motivations for mission. Each millennial described a process of becoming more missional.

Mission Experience

The participants grounded their motivations for mission in their own understanding of how Jesus pursued them in the gospel, as seen in the Bible. All participants explained that God's pursuing mercy, grace, and forgiveness for them was the underlying motive for being involved in mission. Mission, for each, was not primarily motivated by guilt or legalism. Rather, they served out of an authentic response to the gospel of Jesus as seen in the Bible.

James' first experience with mission was when he was an atheist in college, and friends reached out to him with God's love. One friend intentionally lifted weights with

him every morning, building a relationship and inviting him into his Christian community. When James trusted in Christ, he immediately started doing the same thing, motivated by his own experience.

Bill grew up very religious but never knew the Lord. An inspirational book convicted him that he was not doing what his religion commanded him. In response, he began truly to trust in Jesus. Naomi grew up in the church, but her fight with mental illness caused her to move away from the church. She experienced a radical healing by God's power that brought her back to church and compelled her desire for mission. Edward's experience with intimate community has motivated him to share that community with others. Each of the candidates has experienced transformation and grace from God that compels them to spread the gospel.

The millennials who grew up as believers in Jesus, had different processes leading them to a missional lifestyle. Lauren, Bill, Edward, Naomi, Leah, and Glenn all grew up in churches that sent international missionaries. Glenn remembers that the Catholics helped the poor, and his church evangelized. Naomi was taught at an early age that Jesus' love had no boundaries and sharing the gospel was important to all people. They all reflected that the sending of international missionaries had an early impact on their view of missions. Also, each of the participants had some experience with overseas missions.

This international experience impacted their understanding of what it means to do mission in a local context. Lauren said that she thought missionaries were "super Christians" until her own parents began to raise support to serve with a para-church organization. Leah said that she did not grow up with an awareness of suburbia's need for mission. Glenn and Edward both came to the realization that churches were sending

missionaries around the world, but their friends at school did not know Jesus. They had to reconcile that missions was global, yet there was so much spiritual need around them.

Lauren went to a Christian college where they had inspirational and influential speakers at chapel. Those speakers were missionaries, pastors, leaders of non-profits, and those who worked with the extreme poor. Not once did a person who worked an office job come speak about how to be missional in their everyday life. She believes her generation of Christians is taught that they were supposed to go out and change the world by building a well in Africa or starting an orphanage. Because she was not called to that type of mission, she had to consider what mission included for her in her everyday life. Lauren slowly came to the conclusion that mission is living with other people in mind. She began to see that being a good roommate, co-worker, and friend were part of being missional. She focused upon how to live missionally in everyday life, leading her to start serving the Burmese girls locally. She admits that her work is not spectacular, but she is motivated by her relationship with these girls. The millennials all had to shift their understanding of mission from global missionaries to local, everyday people living in the mission of God.

The Bible also greatly influenced these church-going millennials, yet they did not cite biblical training as their primary form of motivation. Experience with the gospel in their life has motivated their zeal for mission.

Needs

The millennials frequently named the world's great need as a motivator for their service. They all grew up with a constant awareness of global crises and needs. Bill grew up in a culture that hated Arabs, which compelled him to want to show Christ's

love to all people. Naomi grew up going down to the inner city to serve the poor in her city. Lauren responded to her community's needs by teaching English to Burmese girls. James and Leah both saw the need to mentor at a local, low-income apartment complex. Edward looks around him and sees so many lonely people who need community. Leah and Naomi see how people face strongholds and want to tell them about the freedom found in Jesus. The vast amount of needs is a compelling motivator for each of these millennials.

When asked what motivates him to mentor, James gave a compelling answer. He began to cry and said, "he is fifteen years old and doesn't have a dad." James's dad died when he was fifteen. He said that it was "almost like God was leading a fatherless person to an incarnational representative of my heavenly Father to him." James explained the connection to mission, saying he saw his heavenly Father reach down and pursue him, and he wants to do the same thing for this young man.

James feels that the breakdown of families motivates millennials for mission. Lauren agreed. She has seen a vacuum of influence as parents do not teach, model, and love children. Although she personally experienced loving parents, she observes the impact of the denigration of family. She is motivated, therefore, to stop that cycle however she can. James believes that the deep desire for millennials to be communal is deeply rooted in the breakdown of families. He realized what he was missing in intimacy once he first tasted community in the church. James sees part of his mission as modeling God's fathering. Lauren admits that she is drawn to people who do not have significant positive people to influence in their lives. Lauren believes that the demise of the family is one reason that so many millennials help others.

Responsibility

Personal responsibility for involvement also motivates millennials toward mission. Lauren's Christian college told her that she could change the world. Leah's and James' campus ministry trained students in evangelism with the expectation that they would participate in evangelistic outreach. Each of the interviewees were deeply convicted that God leads them to a personal responsibility in mission.

Leah's campus ministry trained her to share the gospel on the beach at spring break, but she transformed her lifestyle when she received training on how to reach artists. Leah danced, and her church encouraged her to leverage these relationships for the gospel. This experience gave Leah perspective and purpose in all of her relationships moving her from a generalized responsibility to a personal burden.

Edward likewise feels a responsibility to care for and love his neighbors. In an empty field next to his house, he hopes to build soccer equipment and enhance his neighborhood. Edward believes that he lives in this neighborhood for the purpose of mission. Bill believed it was his personal responsibility to move into a refugee resettlement neighborhood for mission. There is an innate desire and responsibility to change their world, no matter how small or large.

Narcissism

Everyone recognized that narcissism is a very real factor and motivator for millennials in life. They recognize that among their generation, doing good, philanthropy, and serving is popular. There is cultural pressure to "do good" for a narcissistic result. James recognizes that the Christian subculture has been influenced by the popularity of serving.

They all confessed and were convicted that narcissism is a personal issue in their lives. Bill cited a sinful motivation for mission is to "be the best Christian," but he laments this sin. Lauren confessed that she used to see serving people as something to make her look good. God convicted Glenn that he struggles with comparing himself to what others are doing in mission. They all showed disgust with their own generation in this struggle.

James said that he is taking a break from social media because he is tired of people talking about themselves. He said, "I do not tweet pictures of me and my mentee (sic)" in order to feel better about myself. Lauren's desire to do social work started out as a desire to look like a "good Christian," but she now has a genuine care for people. Lauren was convicted that "it is not about me, but instead about people that need to hear God's love."

Bill believes that his generation cares about philanthropy, but is not active enough. He said, "we know it is a priority, but when it comes to waking up tomorrow, those things are not going to be on the list." That is why Bill and Edward particularly want to make mission more average and everyday so that it is a lifestyle. They all attested to narcissism as a negative motivator as well as source of disgust.

Leah took a different approach and saw the redemptive possibilities of this culture where "doing good" is popular. She saw service as a good tool that the church can use so that millennials can take the church seriously. Millennials are inundated with negative messages about the church. She believes that when the church cares for the widow and the orphans, it gives credibility to the church. Even if millennials do not like the gospel, they can be happy that the church is contributing to the overall good. She believes the

message of mission is especially appealing to millennials. Millennials want to be part of something bigger and beyond themselves, and the church may provide that opportunity.

Community and Relationships

By far, these millennials consider community as their largest motivator in mission. Each interviewee values intimate community; each millennial participates in significant Christian community; each sees community as vital to mission.

James compared his first mission trip to that of a family vacation. He went with his best friends whom he loves deeply. They worked hard together on the same mission. James confessed that millennials are communal people and do not want to be isolated. They like to find truth in groups and consensus. James loves the idea of being a family, going out together, and living a truth together. His church cancels its worship service five times a year, and instead they all go together and pursue a mission. He personally loves those days.

Lauren believes that community is a very helpful motivator for her in mission. If others are serving, then she can feed off of their passion. Lauren specifically took her roommate with her to serve the Burmese girls. She said that she gets to know people in a different way when she serves with them. Bill believes that community is a motivator because it provides understanding, prayer, and accountability. He also notes how he sees different strengths when people serve together. Leah thinks that watching the community use its different gifts to accomplish a shared vision is one of the most compelling parts of mission. She said that the contribution of the community inspires her toward mission.

Community radically transformed Naomi's life, and it is the single most important value in her life. Before coming to the home church, she felt uncomfortable and

condemned in Christian communities. Her authentic community accepts people and allows them to be "in process." Everyone is changing, growing, and therefore, speaking the truth in love. This kind of authentic community motivates Naomi.

Glenn said that his home church is not just a social network, but provides family and encouragement. He knows that when he "throws a party to meet neighbors that his community will be there to help clean up." He leans on his church. Glenn knows that his home church cares about and prays for his co-workers who do not know Jesus. His community cheers each other on in their personal mission.

Glenn and Leah both said that community plays a role in accountability toward mission. Glenn knows that his community will ask him each week about his commitments. Leah said that when people are praying for her and are participating in the same mission, there is accountability.

Church

Each of the millennials had significant experience with church or a faith community that contributed to mission's value. Bill reflected that his church experience growing up was very compartmentalized; yet, after become a believer, God led him to a church that saw mission as part of everyday life. Bill's church radically changed his perspective on faith and life. Naomi's home church had more grace and a better perspective than any community she had experienced previously. Her good experience compelled her in mission. Edward experienced a missional community that struggled to do mission. He decided, instead, to pursue a simple lifestyle of mission. James and Leah's involvement in a college ministry stretched them to share the gospel whenever

they can. Glenn's experience in a faith-based dorm and his experience in Zambia and India motivated him to mission.

When asked how the church could continue to motivate sustained mission, some interviewees saw the church playing a significant role while others just saw the church as an encouragement from the sidelines. Leah lamented that, for her generation, Christians go to church to meet their needs and work with a local non-profit instead of their church to do something significant. She believes that should change as churches cast vision and empower people to mission. She shared the example of her church that challenges her to participate in local mission. Her church is serious about child literacy in a poor apartment complex in the local neighborhood. Leah believes that a church's passion for an initiative can help millennials fit their life into that initiative. Lauren and Leah both believe that millennials want to be challenged to be part of something bigger than themselves. They think that millennials do not want a canned program or an event, but a vision cast with clear steps for how to be involved personally.

Lauren appreciates that her church's approach to mission is consistent and local. There are opportunities to serve in one place as a lifestyle and make significant change over time. Edward communicated something that was true for all of these millennials. He said, he "was less concerned with making a big splash, but more interested in steady, ongoing, unglamorous ministry in one place." Leah confessed that she can get overwhelmed with all the needs in the world and needs direction from her church to focus on one and make an impact.

Challenges

In order to understand millennials' practices, the reasearcher asked about unique challenges millennials have in participating in mission. The challenges that millennials face are not necessarily unique to their generation. Millennials recognize these challenges yet their individual responsibility to participate in gospel ministry seems to outweigh the challenges.

Interviewees identified how in their current culture, it is popular to meet physical needs and to participate in philanthropy. This is a challenge because gospel ministry is more than just meeting needs. James said, "doing good deeds is not labeled foolish, but communicating that salvation is only found in Jesus is seen as foolish." James' desire to be seen as wise can cause him to hesitate in sharing the gospel. Lauren finds that most people are not open to having truth spoken into their lives. Christianity is negatively perceived as judgmental. She finds it challenging to distance herself from the negative perceptions. Bill experiences the tolerance undertones in his generation all the time. His generation looks at gospel presentations outside of relationships as prideful and narrow-minded. His generation cannot be convinced by gospel words. He believes that Christians have to give them some "compelling reason to love what we love for the reason that we love it."

All of the participants emphatically believe that evangelism must be in a relationship. They all expounded upon the challenges to relationships. Glenn said that all non-believers have specific reasons why they do not attend church. Glenn likes to get to know unbelievers first and build trust with them. Trust takes time and patience. He is aware that this model does not give quick results in evangelism and sometimes it is hard

to be patient. Leah's highly values her relationships, and she fears that she will ruin them by bringing up the gospel. The risk of rejection in a tolerance-based society resonated with all of the interviewees. Relationships are the biggest motivator and yet also the biggest challenge for these millennials.

Several of the participants struggle with knowing when to present the gospel. Glenn tries to be mentally and physically ready for those conversations whenever they happen. Naomi echoed Glenn's struggle. She wants to be bold but struggles to move past the surface conversation and talk about the gospel. Naomi also feels accused about her past. When she shares the gospel, she wonders if she is a good messenger, "because she used to get drunk all the time" and have other struggles.

Time is also a very real challenge for these millennials. Edward said that this caused his missional community in one church to stagger. The group's purpose was to be on mission together but they never really engaged in mission because of poor time management. After Edward moved away, he was interested in a missional community that had simple rhythms of mission. His church now builds mission into what they are already doing. Bill spoke of this same value. He does not believe that adding mission to an already busy life will be sustainable. Instead, Edward values integrating mission into his everyday life, eliminating time as the primary challenge. Glenn said that busyness characterized his life until he joined his home church. He now builds margin into his schedule, and he intentionally worked to slow down to make time for mission. All the participants cited time as a challenge; yet, they prioritize mission. They make time for it.

There were also challenges in demonstrating the gospel that each of the participants experience. Glenn struggles to know the needs in his community. He lives in

an affluent neighborhood where the poor are hidden. He says that the needs in that neighborhood are less obvious. Leah finds herself shutting down when she considers all of the world's needs. When she reads about sex trafficking, orphans, and extreme poverty, these problems overwhelm her because she does not know how to participate. When overwhelmed, she tries to "focus on inviting one neighbor over for dinner rather than trying to save the whole neighborhood." Finding the time to meet needs was a common challenge that each participant felt.

One honest participant shared that sometimes she does not focus on the needs in the community. Leah shared that there are times when she does not have a burden for the least or for the lost. She honestly admitted fearing what might happen if God gave her a deep burden for the poor or the oppressed. Leah fears that God might call her to something bold for his kingdom.

One challenge to doing mission as a community is the conflict and unmet expectations within the community. Naomi has seen how gossip and division hinder the overall mission of the community. Glenn said that living in community is his "biggest motivator to mission and at the same time his biggest challenge." Working through conflict sharpens their community and makes their ministry more effective, but Glenn wonders if isolation would be easier.

Another challenge that these millennials face is the culture of selfishness. As mentioned earlier, they see narcissism as a characteristic of their generation. Although it turns them off, they also feel the draw toward it. A few of the participants spoke honestly of this struggle. Lauren said it is challenging for her generation to not "make mission a spectacle and see yourself as better than the people you are serving." When she is

meeting needs, Lauren reminds herself that she has the same fundamental needs that they have. Glenn struggled on his mission trip to Zambia with not thinking that he had all the answers. Instead, his group went with a posture of learning and listening. They attempted to start projects that could be locally maintained. That experience taught Glenn that mission is about what God is doing rather than what he is doing. Glenn also sees how his generation needs to learn from other generations and not just assume that millennials have all the answers. Naomi sees her generation posts pictures of the child they support on social media, displaying their own righteousness. In this selfish generation, it is even more challenging to participate in mission with the right motives.

In the midst of philanthropy's cultural popularity, focusing on the gospel challenges the participants. Lauren and Naomi both talked about how they grew up in the era where community service was a requirement for college applications. It almost seems "like being involved in charity is simply being a competent member of society," Lauren said. The fact that it looks good on a résumé to serve can misconstrue motives for mission. Bill optimistically believes that gospel communities who speak the truth in love would confront narcissism as a motivator. He also thinks that a false motive will not last. Leah and Bill both claimed this motivation as a reason they need the gospel. The gospel reminds Christians that God blesses the poor in the spirit. The gospel also promotes humility rather than pride.

Missional Communities

Missional communities are a growing movement, designed to better motivate and empower Christians toward mission. Part of this study was to understand if the values of these missional communities truly motivated millennials. The primary value in a

missional community is to experience deep, intimate relationships and share that with others.[258] Instead of focusing on attendance and programs, these communities focus on spiritual growth and owning a specific mission. The lifestyles and rhythms of the people in the community establish the rhythms of the missional community.

Each of the participants in this study were involved in some form of Christian community. Two of the millennials attend a church that promotes missional communities directly. Two others participate in a deconstructed home church model that believes it is the best way to do life and mission. The last three were in a traditional church setting but were significantly involved in community.

James, Leah, and Lauren are involved in a more traditional church that participates in local mission projects. Although they are not involved in "misisonal communities," the values and motivations for mission are similar. James cited that the mission is easy when it is in community. He explained that the most motivating picture of mission for him is the "picture of a family on mission" that invites others into the family. Lauren also cited community as motivation for her in mission. She believes that the church can provide easy opportunities for people to serve that are convenient and social. She sees the value of community and convenience as a catalyst for more intentional, missional relationships. Leah is also not in a "missional community," but lives in community with similar values. She said that other people mostly motivate her. She is drawn to people who "know who they are in Christ and unashamedly love people." The value of spiritual formation in a community speaks volumes to Leah. People actively involved in mission around her inspire her to believe she can do it too. Her excuses begin

[258] McNeal*, Missional Communities,* xx.

to seem silly as she watches members of her community serve in unique ways. She said, "millennials want to participate, not just sit on the sidelines and watch, but play."

There are challenges to this kind of mission as well. Community can be insular, James said, and that hinders mission. Over time, every community desires to spend time with each other and loses the value of sharing it. He believes that is the main reason that communities need leadership to remind them of the vision. Lauren readily acknowledged that convenience and social benefits will not sustain long-term mission. She has experienced the emotional high of a mission trip or project that does not "create missional mindsets." Her experience with the Burmese refugees has led her to see that a community serving the same group of people over time is the best way to sustain mission.

Bill and Edward are involved in a missional community. Bill said that he was drawn to his particular church because his "purpose is to be missional." He believes that a "healthy church is going to have a huge focus on work for the kingdom." Relationships within the missional community are the most important part of what they do as a church. Bill said that they are most effective in mission when they are united in Christ. Edward also experienced a deep, intimate community and believes that it is essential. Therefore, he desires to be a part of a church that emphasizes missional communities. Everyone is looking to be known so that they do not have the anxiety of carrying everything alone, Edward said.

Missional communities attempt to be non-institutional and do not emphasize paid clergy. Bill believes that the church could pay anyone to do mission, but very few families are willing to sacrifice their time, money, and energy for God's mission. This commitment that goes far beyond a paycheck inspires him. Bill also believes that the

missional community model is reproducible. He sees this model as a viable model for his long-term goals of planting churches in the Middle East.

Edward said that his church is not trying to be excellent. He said, that he "does not care if Christians find the perfect church." Churches that only care about attracting more Christians value excellence. Imperfect community is more focused on connecting with the lost.

Bill and Edward both explained how missional communities take the mystique out of mission. Edward said that thinking about mission overwhelms most people, but he believes simple actions such as kindness to a neighbor are missional. Bill believes that mission should be more integrated with every part of his life. The rhythms of the community should drive the rhythms of mission. Edward appreciates how simply his missional community lives. They set aside the fourth Sunday each month to do something missional. The men meet twice a month at a local pub, inviting non-Christian friends and forming relationships. The women set up a book club to invite unbelieving friends. Edward defines mission to include simple things like eating with non-Christians, choosing a hobby that includes non-Christians, and talking to co-workers.

Edward and Bill cited unsurprising challenges to their missional communities. Bill said that the families in his missional community are busy. They try and pray for each other in their own specific mission, but it is difficult for families to meet together. Edward's missional community struggled for three years to find a mission emphasis. They tried different things but never landed on a project because they did not know if God called them to social justice or evangelism. Edward said that the social justice efforts felt like they were just checking a "missional box off," instead of creating sustainable

relationships. Once members of the community started having children, mission became even more difficult. Keeping a community on mission is one of the typical challenges of missional communities.

Naomi and Glenn are involved in a home church that tries to live and serve within a one-mile radius. Naomi said that they are still working out their normal practices, but they typically meet on Sunday mornings in a home for music and a message. They do not usually invite people to their Sunday gatherings, because as Naomi said, they don't want to be a church plant. Members of the home church live in community and share life together. They meet and pray together on Friday mornings for the neighborhood. On Tuesday nights, they have brew club for the men. They also throw regular parties around the community's rhythms.

The home church prioritizes the brew club because they have conversations with people who would never step into a church. Primarily, men from the neighborhood attend who have an interest in beer brewing from home, and church members use their hobby to reach non-believers. The home church is also very inclusive with its parties. They desire to practice radical hospitality. Glenn believes that biblically illiterate people are attracted to their community because of their authenticity.

Naomi said that each member of the community also has their own mission. Two members of the community started evangelistic Bible studies at work. Church members act as cheerleaders for each other. Glenn echoed this as he said, he appreciates that his home church is invested in his co-workers. They share stories and encourage each other toward mission.

In this particular home church, community is primary. Naomi has thrived with the open door policy and the communal living. It reminds her of Acts 2 and Acts 4. Living in community and bringing other people into that community compels her toward spiritual growth. She is attracted to the love, acceptance, support, and the challenge that this kind of community provides. Glenn described the church as a family.

Naomi was quick to say that her community is life-giving but not exclusive. She said it functions primarily as a sending community. Glenn appreciates the home church model because of the margin it gives him for mission. He used to think, "inviting people to church was his only responsibility." When Glenn was involved in a traditional church, he did not know any non-believers. Now his community is always setting aside time for relationships with non-believers. Recently, church members have recognized that Sunday mornings may be a better time to reach non-believers and are evaluating their meeting time. Glenn found it too easy in a traditional church to be insular and not focused on the lost. But a primary purpose of the home church is to reach unbelievers.

In his home church of ten people, Glenn appreciates that everyone contributes. There is an expectation and challenge to pray, speak, serve, and lead from time to time. Glenn said that in a larger church setting, he does not feel as much responsibility. He wants his church to challenge him, and he wants to participate.

Glenn likes the home church model because the group can nimbly adapt and lacks political games. The church members evaluate often and can make changes quickly for better missional influence. Glenn challenged the typical growth model that he has seen in churches. Instead, he sees Jesus cutting the group down to make it smaller and more

effective. Naomi believes that this organic model is reproducible. It will look different every time, but the values of authentic, missional relationships are easily reproducible.

Maintaining accountability and structure challenge the home church. Naomi said they recently talked about greater accountability. While the organic nature of their community is reproducible, Naomi also blames its organic nature for the weakness in structure and accountability. For example, church members currently have no vision to reproduce the church. They are in relationship with many non-believers but are not currently multiplying new home churches in the area.

Living life in such close proximity also creates challenges. They can sometimes struggle with comparison and pride. Glenn said when one couple bears fruit, their success can cause comparison and frustration. Naomi recognized her own temptation to gossip about other women in the group. Glenn mentioned that they spend time working through conflict, because expectations are often unmet. Glenn compared it to living with roommates who see your dirty laundry. Although challenging, Glenn and Naomi believe this community sharpens them spiritually. Therefore, community is the greatest motivator and challenge for Naomi and Glenn in mission. In fact, all the millennials named the value of their missional community model, no matter the church structure.

Lessons Learned

Although the participants were diverse in background and church experience, their answers were similar. These millennials come from America's northwest, south, midwest, and northeast, yet their values are similar. Much of the research on millennials is similar to how these participants view life. Although they fit the description of millennials, they also seem aware of their generation's shortcomings.

Each of the participants believed that they have a responsibility to do their part to change the world. They all optimistically participate in God's mission for their generation, even though statistics show a decline in church attendance. Bill shared that he grew up watching all the "self-made people" succeed; therefore, he believes that he can succeed in mission. These millennials want to participate and know their role in the mission of God. They are not content in simply writing a check to international missionaries. They want to know and play their part in the story.

Like their peers, these millennials believe that they can change the world. Although they displayed optimism, each participant was very content with small impact. They talked about mission that was local and intentional but not necessarily a big splash. They do not seem to be enamored with the idea that bigger is better like Boomers. When asked about ideal mission moving forward, all of them described a small picture of sustained mission in one area for a long time.

All the millennials interviewed had some experience with international mission. Many of them recounted stories of missionaries coming to their church as a child. All of them have gone overseas on a mission trip. Globalization has made travel and cultural awareness easier. Those international experiences influence their idea of local mission. Their participation in global missions gave them the desire to be involved locally. These millennials also are more aware of the gospel needs in their own community after meeting needs overseas. Thus, their global experience in missions greatly enhanced their lifestyle of mission locally.

Another common theme among the participants was diversity. The ideal picture of mission for millennials included diversity of ages, races, and socioeconomic classes.

These young evangelicals seem to be disenfranchised with the homogenous unit principle as a church growth strategy. They are not impressed with a uniform ministry. When asked about the ideal picture of mission, they described a vision of heaven like that of Zechariah 8. People, old and young, from every place, gathered together in unity and peace. Globalization and international mission experience also seem to impact this diverse vision.

In the interviews, participants did not differentiate between evangelism and social justice. Although the literature is replete with tension between these two, it was a non-issue for these millennials. They were willing to talk about the differences, but in general, they had a holistic vision of mission. James, like many of them, said that he had never been in a church that did not do both. They did not have to prioritize one over the other. The participants normally saw Christian mission as including both gospel declaration and demonstration. Millennials are possibly the first generation in a century that has grown up without this distinction. The heightened discussion on mission over the last fifty years seems to have been successful in shaping their perspective. For missional church leaders, millennials do not need convincing to pursue gospel declaration and demonstration. Rather, millennials need leadership in mission that includes both.

It seems that the values of missional communities align with millennials' desires in mission. The lessening focus on clergy and the heightened value on lay-powered mission resonate with the participants. They want to participate, play a role and do not want to sit on the sidelines. Millennials are not content to give financially for missionaries and pastors to do the work of ministry. Similarly, several of the interviewees participate in mission that are reproducible and not complex. The missional community

movement is based on a simple, reproducible model no matter the culture. Nonetheless, these participants had not yet reproduced them.

The millennials also valued the small and locally focused nature of mission. This is another characteristic of missional communities that seem to fit the millennial vision of ministry. Similarly, the most important value in mission for all of the participants was community. Each participant was aware of the challenges of doing mission in community, yet none of them want to be isolated.

While pastors and ministry may argue about whether home churches, missional communities, or traditional churches are "right or wrong," these millennials are not caught up in the right or wrong model. Those who participate in home churches appreciate that model, but do not disdain the traditional church. The members of missional communities see the value, but do not think it is the only way. The participants involved in a traditional church value how their church leads them in mission. For these millennials, the most important factor is that their holistic mission includes evangelism and social justice. They want to participate in mission in intimate community that is diverse, reproducible, and locally based. They are less concerned with what the community is called, but desire to engage in mission with a community.

Conclusion

The tension between gospel declaration and gospel demonstration over the last century has eased as millennials define mission. The participants in this study believe that a definition of mission should include both evangelism and social action. They value both and are not concerned with the distinctions. According to Kevin Corcoran, millennials are

very interested in a mission where compassion and justice meet.[259] Millennials are compelled by the gospel of the kingdom where Christians meet needs and preach the gospel. These missional millennials want to participate in churches where mission defines the community. The contextualized vision for mission for millennials seems to be a "congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."[260] Communities that live out the gospel, meet needs, share the good news, and invite everyone to participate attract millennials who are empowered for mission.

[259] McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense*, 72.

[260] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

This study has emphasized that God is a missionary God who pursued his people and now sends his people to declare and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus. Yet, the nature of that mission has been a source of vast misunderstanding throughout recent church history. The misunderstanding revolves around the role of social justice and evangelism for the church. In recent history, the church has found itself siding with either social justice or evangelism to the neglect of the other.

The church has an opportunity to disciple the millennial generation into a mission that includes both gospel declaration and demonstration. This study was an effort to understand the practices, motivations, and challenges for millennials in mission. As fewer millennials participate in church, clearly empowering them for mission may be one way to recapture this generation for gospel ministry.[261]

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover how millennials in the church pursue both gospel declaration and gospel demonstration. To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. What are the practices where millennials pursue gospel declaration and demonstration?
    a. Which practices do millennials categorize as demonstration?
    b. Which practices do millennials categorize as declaration?

[261] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.

   c. Which practices do millennials categorize as both demonstration and declaration?

2. What motivates millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   a. In what ways and to what extent do experiences inside the church motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   b. In what ways and to what extent do experiences outside the church motivate millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   c. In what ways and to what extent has biblical training motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   d. In what ways and to what extent has community motivated millennials to pursue both gospel declaration and demonstration?
3. What challenges do millennials face in pursuing both gospel declaration and demonstration?
   a. What cultural challenges do millennials face in pursuing both?
   b. What tensions do millennials feel in pursuing both?
4. In what ways and to what extent are millennials' pursuit of gospel declaration and demonstration congruent with the missional community theory?[262]

Summary of Findings

The literature review has addressed the biblical and theological emphasis of the missio dei and the historical tension between social justice and evangelism. It has shown that the church needs clarity on the mission of God. A new movement of missional

[262] McNeal, *Missional Communities*.

churches has begun that emphasize and define themselves by the missio dei.[263] This movement has come into fruition as the millennial generation is coming of age. Therefore, this study has also focused on current literature about the stereotypical tendencies of millennials as well as specific forms within the missional church.

The qualitative research aimed to understand millennials' practices, motivations, and challenges in mission. The research found that millennials are the first generation in over a century experiencing less tension between evangelism and the social gospel. The historical conversation and tensions have led to more clarity on the definition of God's mission. At the same time, recent research on characteristics of the millennial generation also helps to understand this shift to a more holistic mission.

Millennials are characterized by a desire for purpose in life, intimate community, optimism, and anti-institutionalism. The combination of those qualities has led some to call them the activist generation.[264] Christian millennials, therefore, are more concerned with the church's mission. The generational activism combined with clarity on biblical mission gives the church a unique opportunity to lead this generation in mission. The research shows that millennials desire a mission that encompasses both gospel declaration and demonstration that leads to a robust, sacrificial, and relational lifestyle. Therefore, the rise of the missional church "that is missionary by nature" is compelling to millennials.[265] The research has confirmed that the mixture of anti-institutionalism, the call to change the world, and the focus on intimate community seems to fit well with the missional church movement. The combination of the biblical and historical research with

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[263] Guder, *Missional Church*.

[264] Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*.

[265] Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 84.

the current research on millennials and missional communities paints an optimistic vision for mission in the future.

Each participant in the study was passionate about mission and profoundly involved in local mission. Despite their diverse background and church experience, the millennials' answered interview questions similarly. Much of the research on millennials matched with the participants' view of life. These millennials also seem aware of their generation's shortcomings. Each of the participants believes that they have a responsibility to do their part to change the world. They all have optimism for the mission of God in their generation, even though statistics show a decline in church attendance.

Each of the participants wants to know their role in God's mission. They want to play their part in the story, regardless of how small that role may be. The participants talked about mission that was local and intentional instead of a big splash. They do not seem to be enamored with the idea that bigger is better like boomers tend to. When asked about their ideal mission, all of them described a small picture of sustained mission in one area for a long time.

All the millennials interviewed had some experience with international mission. Many of them recounted stories of missionaries coming to their church as a child. All have gone overseas on a mission trip. With globalization, millennials can easily travel and be more aware of other cultures. That international experience seems to be influencing their idea of local mission. Millennials' participation in global missions gave them the desire to be involved locally. They also are more aware of the gospel needs in their own community after meeting needs overseas. It seems that experience in global missions has greatly enhanced their lifestyle of mission locally.

Another common theme among the participants was diversity. The ideal picture of mission for millennials included diversity of ages, races, and socioeconomic classes. These young evangelicals seem to be disenfranchised with the homogenous unit principle as a church growth strategy. Ministries that all looks the same do not impress millennials. When asked about the ideal picture of mission, they described a vision of heaven like that of Zechariah 8. People, old and young from every place, gathered together in unity and peace. Globalization and international mission experience also seem to impact this diverse vision.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in these interviews was how millennials do not differentiate between evangelism and social justice. Although the literature is replete with the tension between these two, it was a non-issue for millennials. They are willing to talk about the differences, but in general, they have a holistic vision of mission that includes both. All of their experience in mission included both. They equally valued both evangelism and social justice. The discussion on mission over the last one hundred years seems to have successfully shaped these millennials' perspective. This is good news for church leaders who desire to lead their congregation in mission. Instead of convincing millennials about God's mission, pastors can lead them in ministry that includes both evangelism and social justice.

It seems that the values of missional communities align with millennials' desires for mission. Participants resonate with missional communities' lessened focus on clergy and heightened value on everyone's as a missionary. They want to participate and play a role, not sit on the sidelines. Millennials are not content to simply give financially for missionaries and pastors to do the work of ministry. Similarly, several of the interviewees

wanted to be a part of mission that was reproducible and not complex. The missional community movement is based on a simple, reproducible model no matter the culture. The millennials also value the small and locally focused nature of mission. This is another characteristic of missional communities that seems to fit the millennial vision of ministry. Lastly, the most important value in mission for all of the participants was community. Each participant was aware of the challenges of doing mission in community, yet none of them want to be isolated.

Millennials' Discipleship

Considering the research on the millennial generation, there are some helpful guidelines in how pastors can disciple this generation for effective gospel ministry. I start with discipleship because I believe ministry leaders still have an opportunity to shape this generation through unique discipleship. Millennials need to understand what elements of their generational distinctive should be received, rejected, and redeemed through the gospel. Especially as millennials are known for being more biblically illiterate, pastors have an opportunity to lead them through the process of spiritual formation and arm them with a biblical worldview.

Mission of God

Millennials are less concerned with the tension between evangelism and the social gospel. This is true from the research, but pastors can disciple millennials into a deeper understanding of God's mission. This generation is concerned with a connection to the bigger picture of what God is doing from Genesis to Revelation. Each of the participants noted that building wells and caring for the poor is popular among millennials. I wonder, what will happen to Christian millennials when those things are no longer popular in

secular society? Millennials need a holistic understanding of why God cares about meeting physical needs. As self-effort runs out and popularity wanes, only the gospel will motivate mission. Motivation for mission, for all the participants, came from their own understanding of Jesus' pursuit of them in the gospel. All interviewees explained that God's pursuing mercy, grace, and forgiveness for them motivated their involvement in mission. An authentic response to the gospel of Jesus as seen in the Bible motivates them toward mission, not guilt or legalism.

If the gospel is preached, taught, and understood, mission outflow naturally. No other motivations for mission compelled these participants. As I look at the research, I am reminded that our discipleship must be centered on the gospel. The gospel grounds millennials in their identity in the Lord. The outcome of that discipleship is sustained motivation for gospel mission.

The missional church movement attracts millennials because it is an organic church setting that embraces the whole story of the Bible as the missio dei.[266] The movement within churches to connect lives to the mission of God has been very effective. This is especially successful as millennials look to find their purpose in something bigger than themselves. Although millennials are known for losing their sense of "historical continuity," a growing number of believers want to participate in something that connects to the past.[267] The church needs to disciple millennials into honoring and connecting to past faithfulness. For rootless millennials, this connection to the bigger picture of the mission of God brings continuity and sustainability.

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[266] Wright, *The Mission of God,* 26.

[267] Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 4.

Also, as millennials outside the church focus on issues regarding poverty, Christian millennials need to understand a biblical worldview on these kinds of issues. When Christians understand the poverty of heart and resources, gospel ministry expands.[268] Christians must not only lead people into mission to the poor, but they must also help people understand God's heart for the poor and how the gospel addresses poverty issues.

Everyday Mission

Millennials need discipleship that impacts their everyday life and everyday callings. The interviewees spoke eloquently of their life and work as mission. They do not unnecessarily divide secular and sacred. Some even said that they are disillusioned with ministry to the poor that feels inauthentic and unnatural. Glenn wanted his mission to happen everyday with neighbors and co-workers. Interviewees saw simple things like joining a fantasy football league, joining the neighborhood association, and becoming the PTA president as missional opportunities. They intentionally invite non-believers to join their church friends in the pub and serve together. One participant said her generation of Christians is taught that they were supposed to go out and change the world by building a well in Africa or starting an orphanage. Because Lauren was not called to overseas ministry, she reconsidered what mission included for her in her everyday life. She slowly came to the conclusion that mission is living with other people in mind. She began to see that being a good roommate, co-worker, and friend were part of being missional.

Often, Christians have been trained to believe that real mission happens when they are in vocational ministry or an overseas missionary. This teaching minimizes God's

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[268] Steve Corbett et al., *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014).

call on each believer to be witnesses.[269] These missional millennials were uniquely aware that all of life is mission. Many of them actually spoke against the paradigm that only vocational missionaries are involved in God's mission. For many of them, this realization motivates them to participate in mission. Participation in mission that is seamless and sustainable is a critical piece of discipleship for millennials.

This kind of discipleship also helps millennials reject narcissism. Narcissism, the excessive interest in promotion of oneself, characterizes this generation. The literature warned of narcissism's dangers for this generation and how it destroys relationships, self-esteem, and philanthropic work. If mission is an extension of promoting self, then it must always be bigger, grander, and more impactful. Even among Christians, some wonder if the growing interest in mission is simply a way to feed the narcissistic culture.[270] Because volunteerism is required in high schools and looks good on a résumé and college application, critics believe this emphasis on Christian social engagement is simply selfish.[271] Past generations served because of society's needs, but some researchers found that millennials tend to serve in order to benefit self.[272] Jesus, in the gospel, gave everything to those who deserved nothing. The gospel's calls Christians to deny themselves, take up their cross, and extend the gospel to all people. Narcissism has the capability of truly hindering Christian mission if it is not rooted out early in discipleship. Everyday relationships become less important because they are not enough if narcissism is the motivation. Some leaders fear that as materialism, entitlement, and selfish desires

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[269] Acts 1:8.

[270] Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 250.

[271] Ibid.

[272] Ibid.

are the fundamental worldview, caring for others will become less and less important.[273] Therefore, discipleship into the humility of following Jesus and the importance of everyday faithfulness are vital. The gospel, not narcissism, must drive sustainable mission.

Community

Living in intimate friendship and community is essential to millennials. Discipleship to the biblical value of community is fundamental for this generation. As the literature showed, many millennials believe that the church should be focused on living in community rather than simply on the individual.[274] Each of the millennials in this study talked about the importance of community. Yet, the challenge is that the purpose of Christian community is not just friendship, but intentional spiritual growth and mission. Paul's strategy in Thessalonica was to "share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."[275] Yet he claimed his purpose was that they would "walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."[276] The purpose of intimate community is spiritual growth and mission.

One of the interesting conversations I had with several of the participants revolved around the breakdown of the millennials' family. Several mentioned that either the breakdown of their own family or families around them had a significant impact on their development. They postulated that the longing for deep, intimate friendships comes

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[273] Miller, *The Vanishing Evangelical*, 91.

[274] Greggs, *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology*, 125.

[275] 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

[276] 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

from the breakdown of families. Christian community has become a replacement for family for many of these millennials. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians, speaks to how he was like a nurturing mother and a loving father who encourages, comforts, and urges the Thessalonians on toward who God has called them to be. As church leaders disciple millennials in the biblical purpose of community, it can lead to sustainable and healthy spirituality and mission.

Global Missions

All of the participants had global missions experience, but only one planned to go back to the mission field. They all remember hearing about missionaries as a child and seeing the discrepancy between their own lives and other cultures. Global mission is an effective introduction for millennials to mission locally, but they are not content to define mission as only global. Global mission experience can be an effective discipleship tool in helping millennials understand contextualization and the importance of God's mission on their lives.

Leading Millennials in Mission

The research focused on the practices, motivations, and challenges millennials face in mission. Understanding these will help the church lead millennials in mission.

Practices

Each of the participants had distinct missional practices. Some were involved with mentoring poor children locally. Others worked with a refugee apartment complex in order to have conversations about world religions. All intentionally pursued relationships with their co-workers and neighbors. Though the practices were different, all of the

participants saw all of life as mission. They all shared their time and resources; they all practiced missional relationships.

All of the interviewees said that mission is about relationship. Relational evangelism interests them much more than street-type evangelism. One simply defined mission by saying, "declaration is truth, and demonstration is love, and if you do one, then it is not enough." They believed that Christians must create open, authentic space for conversations and questions about all of life, including the gospel. They were passionate about people hearing the gospel truth in their language, but also the participants acknowledge that they need to see the gospel their own lives as well.

In leading millennials in mission, the church must form on-going relationships. The particpants have all witnessed mission without relationships and rejected that form of mission. They see mission without relationships as non-strategic, non-sustainable, and condescending. Sustainable mission for millennials highlights the image of God in humans and cares for their holistic needs.

As mentioned, millennials are the first generation in a century who does not dichotomize between gospel declaration and demonstration. Thus, the battles, the arguments, and the prophetic voices have moved the pendulum in order for them to focus on both. Millennials already know that mission includes both evangelism and social action. Yet, millennials are increasingly attracted to opportunities to demonstrate the gospel through social action. The participants practice more gospel demonstration than declaration. While they all believe that mission's ultimate goal is conversion through their social action, their practices do not necessarily reflect that vision. Though millennials value both, their actions seems to show that they value social action more.

Motivations

Motivations are difficult to measure and can have many variables. Throughout the research, there were some consistent motivations for sustained mission with millennials.

One survey showed that ninety-six percent of millennials believe that they will make a significant contribution to the good of this world.[277] Their purpose and values motivate everything, including their purchasing habits and career choice.[278] Their idealism provides a great opportunity for mission. Millennials are constantly bombarded with the next big story of someone who adopted multiple orphans, rescued slews of women out of the sex trade, or built 200 wells in the developing world. Yet, local impact and faithfulness motivates each of the participants. I was surprised to see that they were not interested in talking about newsworthy initiatives. They all have a compelling vision of local, sustained, and relational impact over time. Though making a significant contribution is a value, a place to participate motivated each participant more than a grandiose impact. Millennials want to contribute in a meaningful way. While flashy stories of great impact could paralyze missional leaders, this research has found that the mission does not have to be big or flashy because millennials will participate in mission if it is local and relational, and if they can play a significant part in it. This is good news for church leaders as they lead this optimistic and idealistic generation into mission.

Diversity is also extremely important to this generation. Millennials live among an "increasing immigrant population, or have jobs that are globally connected or depend

[277] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 104.

[278] Ibid., 42, 45.

on global markets," which provides a greater value of diversity.[279] The eschatological vision of all peoples worshiping God together compels them to service. They desire diversity in their interactions and in their mission. Because diversity motivates millennials in mission, leaders should cultivate an openness to diversity.

Community is an essential motivator for mission. This generation is known for a lack of trust in people, authority, and corporations. Authentic, deep, and loyal relationships attract them. With the breakdown of families, they are looking for a greater sense of connectedness. Therefore, millennials are very comfortable using multiple forms of communication and are the most connected generation through various forms of social media.[280] Relationships motivate millennials for all things. Each millennial interviewed participates in a Christian community, and they all see community as vital to their involvement in mission. One compared his first mission trip to that of a family vacation. He went with his best friends, whom he loves deeply, and worked hard together on the same mission. The participants all affirmed that millennials are communal people, find truth in consensus, and do not want to be isolated. Serving in community and seeing different gifts come together to accomplish a shared vision compels, inspires and sustains them in mission. Leaders who build communities on mission will find millennials motivated to be involved.

Though some skeptical observers of this generation think that they are only motivated by selfish desires, the participants all stated the needs in the world as a great motivator. They are, perhaps, the most globally connected generation. They all noted that they grew up with a greater sense of the world's needs than their parents. Millennials are

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[279] Sundene and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 35.

[280] Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 44-45.

compelled by global crises and local predicaments. They mentioned everything from the AIDS pandemic, to the hatred of Arabs, to the suffering of local refugees, to the lonely people in their neighborhood. The world's vast needs moved each of these missional millennials to tears. Some felt overwhelmed and even paralyzed, but the needs also motivated them to contribute in some way.

Each participant seamlessly connected those physical needs to the great spiritual needs. One participant said he felt like God was leading him, a fatherless person, to be an incarnational representative of the heavenly Father to another fatherless child. Through his tears, he related how God pursued him and he wants to do the same thing for the young man he mentors. Gospel mission as the only solution to physical and spiritual needs was motivating to these participants. Leaders who create awareness of needs and opportunities to contribute will motivate millennials into mission.

This study makes me very optimistic for mission in this generation. Millennials are motivated by the great needs in the world and see how the gospel answers those needs. Local and sustained opportunities motivate them, and millennials have a sense of responsibility to participate. Lastly, they want to serve in community. In order to lead millennials, the mission must include both gospel declaration and demonstration. There must be tangible opportunities to participate and form communities in the process. This kind of mission will have a greater chance of remaining sustainable and impactful.

Challenges

Although the practices and the motivations for millennials are encouraging, there are also real challenges in leading millennials. There are characteristics of their generation that need to be rejected and redeemed.

The Christian millennials involved in ministry recognized that narcissism is a very real factor and motivator for millennials in life. They recognize that social action is popular today, and its popularity has greatly influenced the Christian subculture. There is cultural pressure to "do good" for a narcissistic result. Each of the participants confessed that narcissism is a personal issue in their lives. They are motivated to be the "best Christian" or to make themselves look good. They admit that comparison in mission is very common yet detrimental. The participants all showed disgust with their own generation's obsession with self. One of the participants noted that he does not "tweet pictures of him and his mentee" in order to feel better about himself. Awareness of this negative motivator will be important for leaders in ministry.

Within the narcissistic culture, there are redemptive possibilities. Since doing good is popular, the church can use mission as a tool for communicating well with non-Christian millennials. Millennials are inundated with negative messages about the church. When the church cares about the issues of poverty, orphans, and global crises, it gains credibility. Even if millennials may not like the church, they can be happy that the church is contributing to the overall good. This might be a redemptive opportunity to invite millennials to be part of something bigger than themselves, to see a bigger picture of the gospel.

Another challenge for leading millennials in mission is an idealistic optimism and a lack of trust. Millennials will challenge leaders to dream bigger and to see significant outcomes. This idealism affords an opportunity to encourage greater participation, and also to disciple into local, sustainable mission. Millennials want to see mission

accomplished, not just talked about. Leaders have to earn this generation's trust, and inauthentic talk about mission will lead to distrust.

Also, the desire to "change the world" can lead to depression and disillusionment for millennials. Stories of significant, global change are heralded, which can lead to comparison and degradation of local mission. This challenge provides an opportunity to ground millennials in their identity in the gospel. As they understand the gospel, they can begin to see God's call to dream big and to influence locally without comparison. Leaders have a unique challenge to encourage millennials' dreams while also helping form them in the gospel.

Though millennials dream big, they also struggle with paralysis. Several of the participants noted that mission compels their generation, but very few are involved in tangible ways. One observer of this generation said that they are by nature "liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident and broke."[281] Some research finds that relational and career instability defines this generation.[282] Since they are known for delaying adulthood, this can lead to laziness and instability in all areas of life. Others see the needs in the world and get overwhelmed and do not know where to get involved. The idealistic, change-the-world message combined with the tendency toward laziness is a mixed message for leaders. Leaders can help millennials overcome this tendency by motivating them through the self-sacrifice seen in the gospel. The gospel asks Christians to respond with everything because Jesus gave everything for them. Some self-motivated millennials will find mission opportunities apart from the help of the church. Encourage and empower them in those areas. Most millennials want to be motivated, but they will

[281] Taylor, *The Next America*, 26.

[282] Sundene and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 31.

need leadership into these opportunities. Churches can help by finding and empowering millennials into tangible opportunities of mission. Leaders will have a tendency to make mission a program, which will not inherently be compelling to millennials. Leaders who offer relational, local, and sustainable opportunities will motivate millennials.

Another challenge that I see with leading millennials is their bent toward social action over evangelism. It is quite easy to motivate millennials into social action, but more challenging to lead them into evangelism. All the participants said that the ultimate goal in mission was conversion, but they were less involved in evangelism than social action. They see the importance, but their practices do not match the priority. Part of that discrepancy may be their negative experiences with evangelism in the past. Some have seen evangelism as simply "taking the truth of God out into the world and telling it to people there so that they will come out of the world and into the church."[283] This model is insufficient to many younger evangelicals. Part of the challenge may be that millennials see evangelism apart from relationship as inauthentic. They are afraid to make people into projects. Therefore, conversion is a slower process that happens through multiple conversations in relationship. The participants were not interested in street evangelism or knocking on doors as a mission strategy.

Leaders creatively need to motivate and set up structures for millennials in evangelism. The value of intimate community can be leveraged for gospel declaration. Millennials need to be trained and encouraged into authentic conversations about the gospel. They have grown up in a tolerant culture, which can cause timidity in conversations about Jesus. As millennials are trained to see true intimacy involving truth and grace, conversations about the gospel are more possible. Millennials will naturally

[283] Greggs, *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology*, 126.

drift toward social action over evangelism. Although they believe both are important for mission, leaders need to work hard to motivate, train, and encourage evangelism.

Lastly, millennials need a clear definition of terms. Words like missional, social justice, and mission are very popular words, but they do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone. Mission has come to mean anything that is encompassed in outreach or service. The mission of God is the restoration of all things, but the church's role is to make disciples.[284] Making disciples includes outreach and service, but it also includes teaching and maturing Christians in every area of life. Harvie Conn's inclusion of gospel proclamation, shared fellowship, diaconal service, worship, and social justice is a helpful tool in defining terms.[285] All of these functions work together for one purpose, which is to make disciples.

Many of the millennials interviewed were not fluent in these distinctions. For example, one of the participants defined loving their neighbor through a difficult trial as social justice. Social justice is addressing social and systemic issues that bring about oppression or injustice. Diaconal service highlights the importance of meeting material needs because the whole person is important to God. Both are important and integral to the mission, but a lack of distinction may cause millennials to misunderstand or misrepresent the mission of God. Leaders must disciple millennials into this holistic mission and see their role in the mission of God.

Models for Mission

This study looked at the practices, motivations, and challenges of millennials in mission. It also looked at how well the missional community movement aligns with

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[284] Matthew 18:19-20.

[285] Conn, *Evangelism*, 37.

millennials in mission. The research found that the organic and local nature of missional communities attracts this generation. Christian millennials are concerned with living missionally, finding their purpose, and participating in God's world. Finally, the focus on discipleship in community compels millennials.

Pastors and ministry leaders often over-emphasize a particular ministry model. Arguments arise about whether home churches, missional communities, or traditional churches are "right or wrong." The study participants spoke from a lay perspective, not a position of ministry leadership. These millennials are not caught up in the right or wrong model. Those who are in home churches appreciate that model, but do not disdain the traditional church. The members of missional communities see the value, but do not think it is the only way. The participants involved in a traditional church value how their church leads them in mission. These millennials named holistic mission that includes evangelism and social justice as their most important motivator. They want to participate in mission in intimate community that is diverse, reproducible, and locally based. They are less concerned with its name or model, but they desire for older Christians to lead them in this kind of mission.

Leaders can learn from the missional community model, regardless of the model they use. Missional communities focus on discipleship that includes mission. Millennials see discipleship that focuses only on the mind as insufficient. The participants in the home church model had a clear vision of their mission. They lived, worked, played, and participated as missionaries. Every conversation contributed to their clear mission. Older generations had clearly disicpled them into mission as a vital part of what it means to follow Jesus. Participants in missional communities struggled to identify their mission,

yet these communities attracted them. Interviewees in a traditional church varied in their mission involvement. Two of them connected to opportunities to mentor through their church. Another went out and found a mission within her community.

I am convinced that as the church disciples toward the gospel of a kingdom, discipleship must include mission. Leaders may be surprised by what comes from this kind of discipleship. If the church does not have tangible ways to get involved in mission, they can explore their passions. Even if a church has mission opportunities, it may lead millennials to invest in areas of ministry outside of the church. If millennials feel discouraged to participate in their passions inside or outside the church, their fear of institutionalism will show. There are opportunities to disciple young evangelicals into what it means to be a part of a church, but I would encourage treading lightly in this area. Leaders will need to be humble and promote a kingdom vision rather than a territorial vision. The goal is discipleship that moves millennials forward in the mission of God.

As discipleship focuses upon God's mission, church leaders can also learn from a missional focus on community. Each of the participants highlighted the importance of intimate relationships. This study showed how millennials value community. Missional communities leverage that value to motivate millennials for mission. I would encourage leaders to include a mission and service element in their discipleship plan. If leaders can encourage organic communities to serve together, the involvement will increase. Leaders will be encouraged that they do not necessarily have to restructure their discipleship model, but they can shift to focus on mission. Leaders who want to move millennials into mission need to start with communities with pre-established relationships. Then

empower, equip, and unleash millennials into a local mission. Even a very small group can start a movement that will be attractive to other millennials.

Missional communities are all about participation as everyone in the group is seen as a missionary. Millennials want to make significant contributions to changing the world. Millennials are not content with watching others do the work of the ministry. They want to be equipped to participate with their gifts. Leaders will attract millennials as they find opportunities for millennials to participate in significant ways. Leaders should capitalize on millennials' desire for purpose by helping shape that purpose toward gospel ministry.

Lastly, one underappreciated element of the missional community movement is the opportunity to invite non-believers into community. Millennials outside the church also have a desire to live in community, make a significant impact, and care about issues of poverty and social justice. Communities of millennials on mission can invite unchurched millennials to participate with them. As the research shows, they may not be interested in visiting church, but they still long for participation. Research also shows that unchurched millennials believe that churches should be involved in helping the community. The combination of these two factors can be a great strategy for helping unchurched millennials understand the gospel. Church leaders can learn from the inclusivity of missional communities. Often churches limit discipleship times and unintentionally miss opportunities to invite others to participate in mission and connect to the gospel.

The research has shown that the values of missional communities are compatible with the millennial generation. Millennials do not care what they call their community,

but want to participate in intimate community making significant local impact for the gospel.

Recommendation for Further Research

This study found other ideas worthy of exploration. It would be interesting to understand the breakdown of family for the millennial generation. What elements of this generation are driven by how families have evolved? Is the need for intimate community directly related this?

Further research could be explored in the area of relational models of evangelism for millennials. Boomers have found success using propositional tracts and large, seeker-sensitive churches. It would be fascinating to research methods and modes of effective evangelism for millennials.

Lastly, this study mentioned the popularity of social justice issues among millennials. It would be compelling to understand the genesis of that passion for this generation. Was that born out of globalization, the over-emphasis of separatist church movements or something else all together?

Conclusion

From this research, the tension between gospel declaration and gospel demonstration over the last century has been a helpful development for the definition of mission for millennials. The participants in this study believe that a definition of mission should include both evangelism and social action. Millennials value both and are not concerned with the distinctions. Millennials are compelled by opportunities where they can compassionately meet needs and preach the gospel.[286] These missional millennials want to be a part of the church where mission is the defining characteristic and where

[286] McKnight, *Church in the Present Tense*, 72.

they can participate. The contextualized vision for mission for millennials seems to be a community "of men and women who believe it and live by it."[287] Where there is a community living out the gospel, meeting needs, sharing the good news, and inviting everyone to participate, there will be millennials empowered for mission.

[287] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

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