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## ENGAGING AND MOBILIZING BABY BOOMERS FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

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ENGAGING AND MOBILIZING BABY BOOMERS

FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

A PROJECT DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY  
AT SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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

BY

PAUL D. RUSSELL, SR.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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*under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology of Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.*

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## ABSTRACT

In the 21st-century church in America, can Baby Boomers, who presently range from 57 to 76 years of age, be envisioned and commissioned to make a difference through effective and meaningful ministry? The intent of the research was to discover relevant information and present considerations to help those entering the last third of life make an informed contribution to the church and community. Evidence will be presented to show that Boomers need the church and that the church needs the presence and resourceful productivity of the Boomer cohort. This reality does not circumvent the essential mission of reaching other generations but enhances the prospect of successful multigenerational ministry. The research involves biblical analysis and exegesis concerning aging and flourishing, pertinent observations from current literature, quantitative data gathered from a church group representing a broad age spectrum, and qualitative research from senior pastors and Baby Boomers.

*Dedication*

To Delia Beth Peacock Russell,  
the joy and love of my life.

By His grace, God has always surrounded me with His angels,  
but when you came into my life, He gave me a beautiful earthly angel.

Since the day we met, I have known you as one who lives life for others.

Always putting others first. And fortunately, I have been the main recipient of that devotion.

Thank you for being there, for all your patience, your many quiet labors of love,  
for picking up the pieces, filling the gaps, and for prayers of faith during this whole process.

Because of you, I and our children and spouses and our grandchildren and extended family

and church family always know not a day goes by that we

are not covered with your prayer and love.

## *Acknowledgments*

Thank you to my committee, in whom I have found friends for life. To Dr. Jim Vigil, whose simple admonition to treat my research as an act of worship transformed the way I approached the project and gave me faith to finish. To my chair, Dr. Jamie Stewart, whose excellent spirit and reassuring voice steadied me through the research. To Dr. Rich Wilkerson, whose own doctoral project on generational parity served as an incredible inspiration. And to my editor, Dr. William Raccah, for his dedication to excellence.

Thank you to my many friends who have supported me during this process. Great appreciation goes to Christ Family Church for accepting the fact that your pastor in his later years was embarking on this venture and to the CFC Lead Team for your faithful support. Blessings to all those in my Empty Nesters Connect Group for your prayer and encouragement.

Thank you to my dad and mom, Major Douglas Condy and Minnie Lea Russell, now in heaven, who gave me my first study Bible when I graduated from high school and allowed me to leave home at 17 to pursue God's call. Posthumous thanks also to my pastor, L.H. Hardwick, Jr., founder and pastor of Christ Church Nashville for sixty years, whom we bade goodbye during the writing of this project, for his example of humility and integrity. A special thanks to my wife's sisters, Shelia Peacock and Eltonette Proctor for undergirding us with the support that has made it possible for me and Delia to pursue our kingdom-focused dreams. From one whose life is rich in relationships, I give special honor to Delia and our children and their spouses, Juliet and Lewis, David and Julianne, Kennis and Samantha, and my grandchildren Chloe, Sophia, Preston, Bella, Eva, and Pierce.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

#### *Introduction of the Project*

There is a growing interest in the evident presence and potential of the Baby Boomer generation, within both the secular world and the church world in America. Tony Brooks, in a recent article titled “5 Considerations to Help Your Church Reach Baby Boomers,”<sup>1</sup> addresses how important it is for the church to make fresh connections with seniors in their communities. This piece is reminiscent of articles written in the 1980s and 1990s by leaders of church growth who sought to find ways to engage the unchurched Baby Boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, and draw them back to church. The very title of this article evokes a nostalgic sentiment among church strategists and perhaps a little chuckle from those who have been engaged in church growth dynamics for the past three decades. In the latter years of the last century, the church experienced a generational awakening of sorts. There was a significant movement in the Christian community for leaders to discover the potential of the then-thirty-something crowd. This article, which seems more suited for publication in the 1980s, was actually written in 2017 and represents a renewed focus that many sociological and ecclesiastical publications are giving to the Boomer generation.<sup>2</sup>

Such attention being given to Boomers may seem enigmatic, as the current emphasis of the church appears largely to be on engaging the Millennials, those who are between the ages of

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Brooks, “5 Considerations to Help Your Church Reach Baby Boomers,” Good Faith Media, June 15, 2017. <https://goodfaithmedia.org/5-considerations-to-help-your-church-reach-baby-boomers-cms-24162/>.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, “5 Considerations to Help,” 2017.

25 and 40. The gifted and educated Millennial cohort has in recent years captured a significant amount of attention on the subject of church development. This focus is understandable and appropriate, given the youthfulness of the Millennials, their vitality, and their potential for the future of the church. For its part, the Gen X Generation, those between 41 and 56 years of age, has certainly come to the forefront and assumed broad leadership in key positions in the church. However, the question concerning the Boomers is being asked: where do they fit into the mix of church life?<sup>3</sup> Recent studies have provided an impetus for the church to examine this older generational group and seek to better understand the potential they have in making a significant contribution to the life of the church.

Boomers hold the distinguished position of being the second-largest generational cohort of the population in the United States, outnumbered only by the Millennials. There is only a half-million difference in their numbers. The Millennials number 72.1 million, whereas the Boomers account for 71.6 million.<sup>4</sup> Born between 1946 and 1964, their ages ranged from 57 to 76 in 2021.<sup>5</sup> An interesting fact about the Boomers is the tremendous material resources they have at their disposal. Although some Boomers suffered economic loss during downturns, as in the 2008 recession, the cohort possesses an enormous amount of wealth. A staggering 68 trillion dollars will be passed on to succeeding generations by these seniors in the next two decades.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Erich Bridges, "Boomers and Millennials at Church: Who's in Charge?" *Christian Examiner*, April 27, 2016, <https://www.christianexaminer.com/news/boomers-and-millennials-at-church-whos-in-charge.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Fry, "Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation." Pew Research Center, April 28, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Dimock, "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins," Pew Research Center, January 19, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

<sup>6</sup> Jack Kelly, "Millennials Will Become Richest Generation in American History as Baby Boomers Transfer over Their Wealth," *Forbes Magazine*, October 26, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2019/10/26/millennials-will-become-richest-generation-in-american-history->

There is an adage from yesteryear made famous by General Douglas MacArthur, the famous military officer who oversaw the WWII military theatre in the South Pacific. As he gave his retirement speech before the US Congress, he concluded with this line: “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.”<sup>7</sup> As a point in fact, this now proverbial phrase is the opening line of a British song written after the First World War. It implied that although soldiers may continue to live for many years, the memory of their lives and achievements gradually diminishes into final extinction.<sup>8</sup> The significance of that saying is that it describes the sentiment of many seniors as they seek to discover meaning in life and hope for worthwhileness. They feel as though their significance is simply fading away. Surveys show that those in this cohort, gifted by God with creativity, resourcefulness, experiential wisdom and a myriad of other qualities, do not appear to be ready to fold their hands in sedentary lethargy. For the sake of Christ’s kingdom, the potential of Boomer ministry needs to be discovered, empowered, and released for effective service.

This study is aimed at discovering the thoughts and attitudes of Boomers and determining ways to genuinely celebrate their effective contribution to the church. In our churches and our communities, Boomers have unique felt needs that heighten the possibilities for evangelism. The Christian Examiner reports that although Boomers may not want to be tied down to predetermined routines, they do want to belong.<sup>9</sup> Although they may not appear to be socially

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as-baby-boomers-transfer-over-their-wealth/?sh=51a7d62f6c4b.

<sup>7</sup> Presentation Magazine Staff, “General Macarthur Speech Old Soldiers Never Die, Just Fade Away.” Presentation Magazine, April 20, 2009, <https://www.presentationmagazine.com/general-macarthur-speech-7523.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Pascal Treguer, “Origin of Old Soldiers Never Die, They Simply Fade Away,” Word Histories, February 2, 2020, <https://wordhistories.net/2020/02/02/old-soldiers-never-die/>.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Rogers, “Why ‘Baby Boomers’ May Never See Themselves as Senior Adults.” *Christian Examiner*, March 11, 2016, <https://www.christianexaminer.com/news/why-baby-boomers-may-never-see-themselves-as-senior-adults.html>.

relational to outsiders, they do want to gather with peers. Many retirees have devoted themselves to years of career and work during which time they never developed long-lasting friendships. In their retirement years, they are, perhaps surprisingly, ready to connect with others. Although they do understand their limitations, studies show that they do not like to be stereotyped as seniors.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Rationale for the Project*

As Mark D. Roberts asserts, “Our culture desperately needs a new narrative, one in which the vision of flourishing in the third third of life animates and empowers all of us to see the vast potential for those who are in this season of life.”<sup>11</sup> The fact that such a large number of older adults remain alive and are flourishing during this particular season is evidence of the resolute design of God’s sovereignty. Many professionals in the fields of sociology, medicine, and ecclesiology are acknowledging this unique phenomenon and the church is being awakened to the reality that in God’s grace and wisdom, an army of mature adults can be raised up for divine purpose in the next two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is paramount that we tap into God’s plan for the members of this generation, to see them come or return to Christ, grow in Him, and be engaged in meaningful service.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rodgers, “Why Baby Boomers May Never ”

<sup>11</sup> Mark Roberts, “We Need a Biblical Vision for Flourishing in the Third Third of Life,” De Pree Center. February 6, 2020, <https://depreecenter.org/we-need-a-biblical-vision-for-flourishing-in-the-third-third-of-life/>.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Hanson, “Baby Boomers and Beyond” (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 8, Kindle

### *Relationship of the Project to the Researcher's Ministry*

As a Baby Boomer, I hold an intrinsic interest in the subject of people of my generation. Having reached the “third third” of life,<sup>13</sup> there is an inner passion to end well by making a significant impact upon that sphere of influence that has been granted by God. It is my conviction that Boomers are capable of having a positive impact on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although we have witnessed a widespread indifference to the untapped reservoir of talent and resources found in my aging cohort, studies show that 20 percent of the Boomer population is returning to religion and this number would include millions who are returning to church or at least desiring to do so.<sup>14</sup> This potential influx of seniors into the life of the church could have far-reaching ramifications for future generations. It could amount to an influx into the church of millions of seniors in America desiring to be included and equipped for meaningful ministry. Should not significant attention be aimed at re-engaging and empowering the Boomers?

The greater part of my church ministry has been the pastorate. Perhaps the biggest challenge for my wife and me was starting a new church in our latter midlife. In our mid-fifties, we embarked on planting a new life-giving nondenominational church in Cypress, Texas, a young and growing area of Northwest Houston. This vision was something we had nurtured over the years, moving back to the city where we met in Bible College to “do it all over again.” We had some experience in church planting, having started a new church in Salt Lake City, Utah, in our early years of ministry. In our mid-twenties, we accepted the challenge of establishing a new

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<sup>13</sup> Roberts, “We Need a Biblical Vision.”

<sup>14</sup> Thom Rainer, “Baby Boomers Are Returning to Church,” *Church Answers* (blog), July 16, 2018, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/baby-boomers-returning-church/>.

work in that city, during a time when new non-Mormon church plants there were rare. We served there for eleven years.

After leaving Utah, we served in a pastoral capacity in two other pastorates before moving to Cypress, Texas. Pioneering something new in midlife was a most challenging assignment – not being the prototypical, exciting, and energetic twenty- or thirty-something church planter. We experienced once again the struggles, pains, and hardships of starting from scratch and establishing a fresh local expression of Christ’s kingdom. We were compelled to renew the spiritual and mental essentials of active faith and trust in God in an endeavor where there were no promises. We were pressed to endure the concerns of isolation and loneliness and the temptation of the fear of failure.

Christ Family Church has developed into a church with a testimony of God’s presence, His grace, and His provision. Having embarked upon this new venture in midlife, and having experienced the journey of personal re-tooling and ministry re-invention, the intent through research and discovery is to discover ways to help other mid-lifers capture fresh possibilities and step boldly into new ventures for Christ’s kingdom.

During this season of life and ministry, I am called upon to offer assistance, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and missionaries. I serve on the board of a few mission organizations and the oversight team of local church boards and church plants, to help in their self-understanding to fulfill their God-given mission. In recent years, I have participated in helping young pastors, many of whom are engaged in new church planting, or who have taken pastorates of existing and sometimes troubled churches. As they face the challenges to stability and corporate health, I want to be able to speak about how the presence of mature and cooperative seniors can make a positive impact.

The idea of this research developed out of a life group we hold in our home for Empty Nesters. We have discovered that among the seniors in our congregation there is a motivation to be engaged in the advancement of the church in a meaningful way. While they understand that they must accept their limitations, they are intrigued by the fact that they have something valuable to offer to the community. Many Boomers discover that their later years are a time of renewed creativity and understanding of self to fulfill their God-given mission.<sup>15</sup>

### *Contextual Scope and Limitations of the Project*

The research methodology is both qualitative and quantitative in determining ways to mobilize Baby Boomers for meaningful ministry. The predominant objective is to discover ways for Boomer engagement and provide a path for their involvement in church ministry. Although the focus of many church programs may be to find ways to minister to the Boomer generation,<sup>16</sup> and view them as subjects of benevolent service, this research will primarily endeavor to find ways to envision and empower this cohort for effective ministry.

Also, the subject of this research will be ministry by Boomers in the life of the church. A concise examination of the Baby Boomer generation unearths a myriad of political, economic, educational, health, and social issues that impact their mindset and lifestyle.<sup>17</sup> These all are matters that require attention and must be addressed by seniors as they progress into the next

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Hughes and William Randolph, *Guidelines Adult Ministries: Help Adults Love God and Neighbor*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 20, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Taylor, "Ministering to Aging 'Baby Boomers,'" Word & Way, September 8, 2016, <https://wordandway.org/2016/09/08/ministering-to-aging-baby-boomers/>.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine Holodny, "9 of the Biggest Problems Baby Boomers are Facing Right Now," Insider, November 27, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/baby-boomers-biggest-problems-now-2017-11>



season of life. Although these matters are of great interest to entities seeking to attract Boomers through marketing efforts<sup>18</sup> and may be referred to during research, the project's main focus is limited to ministry in the individuals' latter years, as it pertains to the church and the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

The scope of the research has certain limitations. Although the biblical and contemporary research cover a broad social and ecclesiastical spectrum, the survey and interviews are facilitated within the framework of relationships at Christ Family Church, Cypress, Texas, and Destiny Ministries, a ministerial fellowship that offers oversight and resources for church leaders. The congregational survey and interviews with Baby Boomers were all conducted with participants of the church in Cypress, Texas. The senior pastors who were interviewed are members of Destiny Ministries, a ministerial fellowship that provides gatherings and resources for nondenominational ministers and churches.

### Definition of Terms

- Seniors. The use of "seniors" refers to those who are in or are entering into the third season of life, not necessarily the elderly who, because of age and other limitations, may lack the stamina and capability to effectively serve in ministry responsibilities. Although there may be a respectful reference to the elderly of the "Greatest Generation," primary attention is not given to those whom we call the elderly. The importance of caring for the elderly should certainly not be diminished, however, that is not the aim of this research.

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<sup>18</sup> Ethan Giffin, "Marketing To Baby Boomers: Understanding The Boomer Generation's Buying Habits To Sell To Them Successfully," *E-commerce News* (blog), July 25, 2019, <https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/baby-boomer-marketing/>

Consequently, the participants in the research conducted will be those who fall into the category of Baby Boomers, those between the ages of 57 and 75.

- Elders. The term “elders” denotes those who are the subject of the research, those who are in the Baby Boomer cohort, and not particularly those who hold the biblical position or office of a church elder.
- Generational Definitions. Reference will be made to the Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, Generation Z, and Generation Alpha. These categories overlap and there are no official designations of the groupings. However, this research has adopted the widespread consensus of definitions provided by the Pew Research Center<sup>19</sup> and the United States Census Bureau.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the study, the characteristics of the different cohorts will be discussed. The designation “Baby Boomers,” sometimes stated simply as “Boomers,” refers to those born between the years 1946 and 1964. The youngest in this generational cohort is 57 years of age. The oldest at the time of this study is 76. There are 70.68 million U.S. residents in this category.
- The term “Generation Xers,” sometimes shortened to “Gen Xers,” applies to those born between the years 1965 and 1980. This generational cohort consists of those between the ages of 42 and 55 years of age and comprises 64.94 million people in the United States.
- “Millennials,” often referred to as “Gen Y,” are made up of those who were born between the years 1980 and 1996. This group ranges from 26 to 41 years old. It is the largest cohort in the United States, totaling 72.26 million individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials.”

<sup>20</sup> America Counts Staff, “By 2030, All Baby Boomers Will Be Age 65 or Older,” The United States Census Bureau, December 10, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/12/by-2030-all-baby-boomers-will-be-age-65-or-older.html>.

- The term “Generation Z” is defined in demographic and sociological circles to be those born between the years 1997 and 2010. The 67.06 million young people who fit this age group range from ages 10 to 25.
- The newest generational group, “Generation Alpha,” consists of people born between the year 2010 to the present. It is the fastest-growing group, with over 10,000 babies being born every day.<sup>21</sup>
- Ageism. Ageism is a pejorative term most often thought of as prejudice against older people. This designation can denote discrimination against any individual strictly based on their age; in this research, it applies to those in their later years.

### *Research Participants*

The researcher serves on the presbytery oversight board of Destiny Ministries and as the lead pastor of Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas. The participants involved in this research will come from Christ Family Church in Cypress and churches and pastors from partnering churches in Destiny Ministries.

First, a generationally represented group of 40 members from Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas will be asked to participate in a survey consisting of questions regarding the subject of Boomers’ influence and involvement in the local church.

Second, a selected group of no fewer than 8 and no more than 12 Baby Boomers who identify as active believers and who are currently involved in local church life on some level will

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<sup>21</sup> Christine Michal Carter, “The Complete Guide To Generation Alpha, The Children Of Millennials,” *Forbes Women*, December 10, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinecarter/2016/12/21/the-complete-guide-to-generation-alpha-the-children-of-millennials/?sh=22f4d2d83623>.

be questioned through a survey instrument. These participants will be chosen from Christ Family Church and partnering churches.

The third group to be surveyed will consist of 8 pastors of partnering churches that are situated in urban areas. These pastors are leaders of congregations in urban churches ranging from 250 to 3000 in Sunday attendance. The interviews, which are to be conducted in person or via Zoom, will consist of questions concerning the mobilization of Baby Boomers in their churches.

#### *Research Question and Anticipated Results*

The question this project seeks to answer is the following: How can Baby Boomers be mobilized for effective church ministry during the latter years of their lives? The research will aim to discover the Boomers' thoughts and attitudes regarding their effective value to the church. What are the prohibiting factors that keep Boomers from engaging in meaningful ministry? The research will also reveal how churches can identify the worth of their older members, find areas where their ministry is needed, and determine how church leaders can best utilize their gifts.

#### *Project Goals and Objectives*

The overarching goal of this project stems from the research question, which is how to engage Baby Boomers in meaningful ministry within the local church. Contained within this overall purpose are two major goals. The first one is to provide practical proposals for Baby Boomers to help them see clearly how they can contribute to the ministry life of the church. The second goal

is to produce clear and practical mobilization methods for pastors to tap the resources of the Boomer cohort in their churches.

The first goal is to deliver viable and achievable directives to Boomers that help them see their worth and how they can make a contribution to the life of the church. It can be argued that there must be a fresh awakening within this cohort, a spiritual revival that will draw them into assisting with the current need for wisdom and maturity within the church.

The first objective of this goal is to present a theology that defines aging from a biblical perspective and that informs elders of their importance to the kingdom of God and their place in the local church. Biblical history reveals that at every age, God's people are called to be obedient to the call of God and productive in God's work.

The second objective is to provide findings that will help Boomers better understand themselves considering God's mission through the church. The process of aging is God's idea. Approaching the progression of life stages with an understanding of purpose is paramount to serving God with hope and joy. The present cultural compulsion to remain physically capable and look forever young stands in juxtaposition to reality. A change in attitude toward aging is often the first step toward recognizing one's present value to the enterprise, acknowledging that we grow older for a reason. Leon Kass proffers an argument against the popular pursuit of ageless bodies, stating that we need to take "an account of the goodness of the natural human life cycle, roughly three multiples of a generation, featuring a time of coming of age, then a time of flourishing, ruling, and replacing of one's self, and finally a time of savoring and understanding, but still sufficiently linked to one's descendants to care about their future and to take a guiding and supporting and sharing role."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Leon Kass, *Leading a Worthy Life* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2017), chap. 6, pt. 5, <https://www.perlego.com/book/663559/leading-a-worthy-life-pdf>.

The third objective is to present practical approaches to ministry involvement and initiatives that create a path for willing Boomer participants to follow.

The second goal is to help pastors and churches accommodate and celebrate the ministry of the older generation. The first objective of this goal is to provide a description of the present Boomer population in America and deliver information that will help leaders connect with and relate to Boomers. Because of the expanded life expectancy in the United States, the average age profile is increasing in America. “New detailed estimates show the nation’s median age — the age where half of the population is younger and the other half older — rose from 35.3 years on April 1, 2000, to 37.9 years on July 1, 2016. The baby-boom generation is largely responsible for this trend. Baby boomers began turning 65 in 2011 and will continue to do so for many years to come.”<sup>23</sup>

The second objective is to gather the information that reveals the current mindsets among pastors regarding Boomers in their congregations. A recent survey conducted by the USC Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging and funded by the John Templeton Foundation revealed indications that Boomers are returning to church. “One of the things we found in our study of Baby Boomers — particularly among the older Boomers — was that many are now more likely to be churchgoers or engage in spiritual practices than they did in their middle years.”<sup>24</sup> The possibilities for a new influx of Baby Boomers into the church cannot be overlooked and

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<sup>23</sup> James Kelly, “US Census-America Getting Older,” LTC News, June 26, 2017, <https://www.ltcnews.com/articles/us-census-america-getting-older>

<sup>24</sup> Michael Gryboski, “Are Baby Boomers Returning to Church?” *The Christian Post*, April 11, 2018. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/are-baby-boomers-returning-to-church.html>.

therefore any attitudinal barriers and generational biases within church leadership need to be disclosed and addressed.

The third objective is to show a solid biblical understanding of the inclusion of older men and women in the life of the church. Biblical examples and patterns will be examined, and theological foundations will be established.

The fourth objective of this goal is to provide useful and functional steps for involving Boomers in meaningful ministry. The intention of the research is that specific directives can be introduced for practical initiation in the local church.

### *Summary*

The idea of cross-generational ministry in Christ's church presupposes that all age-defined cohorts deserve the critical attention of leaders. Every generational cohort represents multiple needs and considerations. Baby Boomers cannot be left out of the equation. Boomers celebrate the distinction of being the second-largest single cohort group in the population of the United States. Those in this age bracket are a group to be reckoned with, not only important as objects of church service but as a generation carrying a unique calling and purpose in the church.

Some sources refer to the years between the mid-50s and mid-70s and beyond as the second half of life. Other contributors define this period as the third-third of life. Whatever the designation, the fact exists that this most important season in the life of the Christian must be embraced as a time of discovery and the implementation of God's call.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

#### *Theological and Biblical Dimensions*

Foundational to a biblically anthropological approach is the conviction that humanity is created in the image of God.<sup>1</sup> Throughout their entire life, human beings have an essential value to God and others. Though growing older may be treated as a problem for some people, aging is not a problem for God. Rather, it is a welcomed reality. In His design, He has fashioned old age as a time of life when people are to enjoy the collective wisdom and experience of a life well-lived; a unique season of continued development and a time of impartation to succeeding generations.

Following the creation of the first human beings, God’s initial injunction to mankind was to be fruitful and exercise dominion over the earth, as stated in Gen 1:28: “God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”<sup>2</sup> This fruitfulness is understood to involve the procreation and the rearing of offspring. Yet, additionally, the enterprise of human productivity includes the continued stewardship of all God’s gifts to implement God’s design for the whole earth. John Sailhamer proposes that this order to be productive is best viewed as a privilege of life. “The imperatives ‘be fruitful,’ ‘increase,’ and ‘fill’ should not be understood as divine demands here, since the introductory

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cameron, “An Introduction to ‘Theological Anthropology,’” *Evangel* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 53–61, [https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology\\_cameron.pdf](https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1:28 (NASB). All scriptures will be from the *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), unless otherwise specified.



statement identifies them as a ‘blessing’ (*wayebārek*).”<sup>3</sup> The accompanying command, however, is to subdue and rule over the creation.<sup>4</sup> There is nothing to suggest that this mandate is reserved only for those in a certain age bracket. The words subdue (*kabas*) and rule (*radah*) are strong words that carry a sense of dominion or domination. Taken in the biblical context of God’s grace and love for His creation, this cited dominion is not exploitive or abusive but rather “has to do with the securing of the well-being of every other creature and the promise of each to full fruition... The role of the human person is to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God.”<sup>5</sup>

King David, the Psalmist, declares concerning this unique status ascribed to the human creation:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
 The moon and the stars, which You have set in place;  
 What is man that You think of him,  
 And a son of man that You are concerned about him?  
 Yet You have made him a little lower than God,  
 And You crown him with glory and majesty!  
 You have him rule over the works of Your hands;  
 You have put everything under his feet,  
 All sheep and oxen,  
 And also the animals of the field,  
 The birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea,  
 Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.<sup>6</sup>

The blessing of dominion carries with it the responsibility of stewarding one’s gifts in fulfilling the purposes of God on the earth. Mark Roberts delineates this certain accountability of

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<sup>3</sup> John Sailhamer, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), pt. 1, sec. a2, <https://www.perlego.com/book/558326/genesis-pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 3, sec. 1, <https://www.perlego.com/book/560877/the-mission-of-gods-people-pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pt.1, chap.1, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2101006/genesis-pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Ps 8:3-8 (New American Standard Bible).

stewardship using the term, human flourishing. “When we do this, we flourish. Flourishing as a primary goal of human life is promoted in contemporary philosophical, psychological, theological, medical, and pragmatic discussions of what is called ‘human flourishing.’”<sup>7</sup>

Forster and Cross propose that the Genesis mandate reveals the intention of God for the flourishing of His people to have far-reaching consequences. “It is surely true that genuine flourishing at the deepest levels will not occur outside the kingdom, but the influence and impact of the kingdom surely do include a level of flourishing for those outside akin to Jeremiah’s seeking the welfare of the city.”<sup>8</sup> The Christian perspective of flourishing finds its authentic fulfillment in the kingdom of God, yet it certainly presents broad implications throughout the whole of society. To be sure, there is a generational cooperative that forms a foundation for growth.

Biblical flourishing as a privilege and expectation in senior years.

The Bible presents a perspective of flourishing in the latter years that transcends that of the current trend of social condescension and views this period in one’s life as a season of expected productivity.

The righteous person will flourish like the palm tree,  
He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.  
Planted in the house of the LORD,  
They will flourish in the courtyards of our God.  
They will still yield fruit in advanced age;

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Roberts, “We Need a Biblical Vision.”

<sup>8</sup> Greg Forster and Anthony R. Cross, *Human Flourishing: Economic Wisdom for a Fruitful Christian Vision of the Good Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 11.

They will be full of sap and very green.<sup>9</sup>

The Psalmist further testifies that,

Your eyes have seen my formless substance;  
And in Your book were written  
All the days that were ordained *for me*,  
When as yet there was not one of them.<sup>10</sup>

Humanity is instructed to appreciate the time allotted by numbering his days,

“That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.”<sup>11</sup>

The expectation of ongoing growth and productivity is prominent in scripture. The apostle Paul affirms that spiritual growth is an ongoing process in the life of the Christ follower.

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

In his famous sermon on the glorious and noble plight of aging Christians, Charles Spurgeon expounded on the text from Ps 31:15, “My times are in Your hand; Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.”<sup>13</sup> Affirming the belief that God has called us to participate in the enduring process of flourishing, Spurgeon makes the case that our vision and efficiency in fulfilling life’s calling are not our own doing, but rather God’s doing. Assurance of completion and protection from failure is in God’s hands for those who will boldly persevere in the work of God:

My Lord, if my times were in my own hands, they would prove a failure, but since they are in Your hands, You will not fail, nor shall I! The hand of God

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<sup>9</sup> Ps 92:12-14.

<sup>10</sup> Ps 139:16.

<sup>11</sup> Ps 90:12.

<sup>12</sup> Phil 1:16.

<sup>13</sup> Ps 31:15.

ensures success all along the line. In that day when we shall see the tapestry which records our lives, we shall see all the scenes therein with wondering eyes. We shall see what wisdom, what love, what tenderness, what care was lavished upon them! When once a matter is in God's hands, it is never neglected or forgotten, but it is carried out to the end. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.<sup>14</sup>

The subject of human flourishing has captivated the consideration of philosophers and theologians throughout history. Its study and application help define the relevant quest of those who want to make their lives count in the ongoing process of spiritual and intellectual growth. Aristotle used the term *eudaimonia* (happiness, the eventual English translation) as a primal idea underlying his virtue-ethics approach to life. “Aristotle’s term *eudaimonia* becomes one of the most important concepts in all of the Aristotelian philosophy; it was formerly translated into English as ‘happiness,’ but now is better glossed as ‘human flourishing.’”<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan Pennington presents an insightful treatment of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, suggesting that human flourishing is at the heart of Jesus’ message. He especially gives treatment to the redundant descriptor in the Beatitudes, variously translated as “blessed” (KJV) and “happy” or “humble” (NLT).

These have been called the “Beatitudes” in the English tradition by way of a transliteration of the Latin translation of *makarios*—*beatus*, which means “happy, blissful, fortunate, or flourishing.” A more technical literary term than “Beatitudes” is macarism (formed also via transliteration). A macarism is a *makarios* statement that ascribes happiness or flourishing to a particular person or state. A macarism is a pronouncement, based on observation, that a certain way of being in the world produces human flourishing and felicity. Macarisms are widespread

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<sup>14</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit [Volume 37]: Sermons Preached And Revised in 1891* (London, England: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1970), 287-288.

<sup>15</sup> Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek- English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1996), 708.

throughout the ancient world, within Judaism and without. The Sermon begins with a strong series of macarisms.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, according to Pennington, the preferred reading of the Beatitudes would be “flourishing are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, flourishing are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, flourishing are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth” and so forth (Matt 5:3-5). The Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes, presents a picture of the life immersed in the “kingdom of the heavenlies.”

Dallas Willard expands on the theme of kingdom inheritance in regard to the Beatitudes, noting that the conditions of the subjects are not to be considered qualifications for blessing, but rather signify the wide-scale inclusions of those who enjoy kingdom benefits. “Jesus did not say, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit because they are poor in spirit.’ He did not think, ‘What a fine thing it is to be destitute of every spiritual attainment or quality. It makes people worthy of the kingdom’.”<sup>17</sup> The poor in spirit are flourishing, not because their dreadful condition has warranted blessing from God, but quite the opposite. Notwithstanding their lamentable estate, those who were defined by their poverty now find themselves overwhelmed by the blessings of God’s great kingdom. The kingdom is among us!

From a biblical perspective, flourishing is an anticipated outcome of following Jesus Christ. The instructions provided by Jesus regarding the matter of flourishing as an enterprise accompanying the life-calling of His disciples is captured in His teaching on fruit-bearing. “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009). 102.

you.”<sup>18</sup> Henry Nouwen describes the contrast between success and bearing fruit and speaks to the production of spiritual fruit at every age:

A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another’s wounds.<sup>19</sup>

At every stage of life, flourishing is to be recognized not only as a privilege but as a demonstration of discipleship as well. In the latter years, the bearing of fruit is often devoid of overtly celebrated productivity but is marked by the quiet progress of faithful impartation to the next generation. Whereas fruitfulness may be confused with the contemporary definitions of success, which almost always are expressed in terms of numerical achievement, “Fruitfulness implies growth and flourishing, which cannot always be measured in quantitative terms.”<sup>20</sup>

Ralph Winter, the founder of the U.S. Center for World Missions, continued in active ministry well into his eighties. He pointed to the biblical examples of those who remained productive late in life for encouragement and the inspiration to engage in the enterprise of generational flourishing.

“Most men don’t die of old age, they die of retirement. I read somewhere that half the men retiring in the state of New York die within two years. Save your life and you’ll lose it. Just like other drugs, and other psychological addictions, retirement is a virulent disease, not a blessing... Where in the Bible do they see retirement? Did Moses retire? Did Paul retire? Peter? John? Do military officers retire in the

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<sup>18</sup> John 15:16.

<sup>19</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. (New York, NY: Harperone, 2006), 36.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, et al., *Joy and Human Flourishing Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers), 2015.

middle of a war? Many of the church fathers were graced with extended productive lives.”<sup>21</sup>

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea Martima in the fourth century, when already an old man, produced a lasting testimonial of his own unbounded affection and admiration for the first Christian emperor, in his *Life of Constantine*. “Soon afterward he followed his imperial friend at the advanced age of nearly, if not quite, eighty years.”<sup>22</sup>

John Piper joins with others in lamenting and challenging the currently accepted unbiblical idea of retirement in western society. The promotion of this conventional approach to the last third of life can invite a waste of twenty-plus years that could be used for the furtherance of the Gospel. Christians are tempted to acquiesce to the expectation of our culture rather than look to God’s word for personal direction in the latter years. Piper cautions, “How many Christians set their sights on a ‘Sabbath evening’ of life—resting, playing, traveling, etc.—the world’s substitute for heaven since the world does not believe that there will be a heaven beyond the grave. The mindset of our peers is that we must reward ourselves now in this life for the long years of our labor. Eternal rest and joy after death is an irrelevant consideration.”<sup>23</sup>

The early Christian writing called *Hermas*, or *Shepherd of Hermas*, was perhaps the most widely circulated non-canonical volume in the second and third centuries. Well known to the early Church Fathers, the authorship was ascribed to Herman, the brother of Pius, Bishop of

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<sup>21</sup>Ralph D. Winter, “The Retirement Booby Trap,” *Mission Frontier, The Expanding Vision*, July 1, 1985, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-retirement-booby-trap>.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Second Series, vol.1, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 26.

<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *Rethinking Retirement - Finishing Life for the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Intervarsity Press), 26, 27.

Rome.<sup>24</sup> Although not accepted as a part of the scripture, *Hermas* gives insight into the theological mindset of the church in the early centuries. The author appears to be endowed with a prophetic capability of interpreting dreams and one in particular speaks to the awakening of renewed spiritual vision.

Hear," said he, "this parable also. When one becomes somewhat old, he despairs of himself on account of his weakness and poverty and looks forward to nothing but the last day of his life. Then suddenly an inheritance is left him; and hearing of this, he rises up, and becoming exceeding joyful, he puts on strength. And now he no longer reclines, but stands up; and his spirit, already destroyed by his previous actions, is renewed, and he no longer sits but acts with vigor. So happened it with you on hearing the revelation which God gave you. For the Lord had compassion on you, and renewed your spirit, and ye laid aside your infirmities. Vigour arose within you, and ye grew strong in faith, and the Lord seeing your strength, rejoiced. On this account, He showed you the building of the tower, and He will show you other things if you continue at peace with each other with all your heart."<sup>25</sup>

Herman's vision illustrates the kind of renewal that spiritual awakening can produce in the latter years of one's existence. The discovery of an "inheritance," a fresh vision for life, has the potential for rejuvenated purpose and activity. Because of age, weakness, and lack of resources, the older person's attitude gives way to despair and non-productivity. But God's gracious endowment of newly realized possibilities ignites a fresh desire for accomplishing an assignment from God.

Les Brown makes an interesting observation regarding God's intention for the personal fruitfulness of His creation, "Everything a man does for himself he takes to his grave with him, but everything he does for others he leaves behind. Start to develop generational thinking. What

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Princeton Theological Seminary Library, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. and T. Clark, 1867), 319-320, <https://archive.org/details/antenicenechrist14robe>

<sup>25</sup> Claydon F. Snyder, *The Apostolic Fathers, a New Testament Translation and Commentary, the Shephard of Hermas*. Vol. 6. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968), 54.



can I leave for generations yet unborn?”<sup>26</sup> No matter what stage of life a person resides, they have not only the capacity, but the responsibility to contribute to others. It is incumbent upon Boomers, to embark on prayerful self-discovery to find where their personal piece fits into the mega puzzle of Christ’s kingdom. Jesus taught that self-preservation produces ultimate loss and disappointment, whereas generous sacrifice gains great reward. He said: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The one who loves his life loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”<sup>27</sup>

The secret to a flourishing life is found in exercising self-denial, resisting the temptation of allowing age to excuse nonproductivity, and finding ways to plant life-giving seeds into succeeding generations.

During the final moments with His followers before His passion, Jesus expounded on the commission to His disciples to be productive in matters of the kingdom. “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”<sup>28</sup> Implicit in the charge to bear fruit is the relational aspect of the Gospel. “Fruit-bearing” is not only concerned with producing the various expressions of Christ-like character within the individual but also with the impartation of truth from one to another. Fruit is seen in the lives that have been impacted by the believer.

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<sup>26</sup> Les Brown, *The Courage to Live Your Dreams*, (G&D Media, 2021), chap. 8, [https://www.perlego.com/book/1637480/the-courage-to-live-your-dreams-pdf?queryID=7276b760e77cb0208adc39d525b6747d&index=prod\\_BOOKS&gridPosition=1](https://www.perlego.com/book/1637480/the-courage-to-live-your-dreams-pdf?queryID=7276b760e77cb0208adc39d525b6747d&index=prod_BOOKS&gridPosition=1).

<sup>27</sup> John 12:24-26.

<sup>28</sup> John 15:8.

Biblical views on aging.

Solomon of old painted a rather depressing and disparaging view of old age, encouraging those in their youth to honor God before “life is not pleasant anymore,” and “before the stars are dim to your old eyes.” He proceeds to cite a litany of problems that aging brings; legs that begin to tremble, shoulders that begin to stoop, teeth that start grinding, and the fear of falling. The concluding capstone of this dispiriting diatribe is Solomon’s repetitive message of Ecclesiastes: “Futility of futilities,” says the Preacher, “Futility of futilities! All is futility.”<sup>29</sup>

Solomon’s dismal conclusion regarding the older years stands in manifest contrast to the attitude of many other ancients, including his father. King David had a much more positive view of old age. The heartfelt plea of the great psalmist reflects the inner conviction and unwavering motto of a visionary elder: “And even when I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.”<sup>30</sup>

St. Augustine, in his famous prayer, makes a plea reminiscent of King David’s request for hope and productivity in the latter years:

O Lord our God, under the shadow of Thy wings let us hope. Thou wilt support us, both when little and even to gray hairs. When our strength is of Thee, it is strength; but, when our own, it is feebleness. We return unto Thee, O Lord, that from their weariness our soul may rise towards Thee, leaning on the thing which Thou has created, and passing on to Thyself, who hast wonderfully made them; for with Thee is refreshment and true strength.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Eccl 1:2.

<sup>30</sup> Ps 71:18.

<sup>31</sup> “St. Augustine: For Strength in Aging,” Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.archspm.org/faith-and-discipleship/prayer/catholic-prayers/st-augustine-for-strength-in-aging/>.

God reminds the people of Israel and Judah that, in comparison to the lifeless earthly idols that are foolishly worshipped by some, He, through His ever-sustaining power, will faithfully preserve and protect.

You who have been carried by Me from birth  
 And have been carried from the womb;  
 Even to your old age I will be the same,  
 And even to your graying years I will carry you!  
 I have done it, and I will bear you;  
 And I will carry you and I will save you.<sup>32</sup>

In his commentary on Isaiah, George Adam entitled this particular chapter in Isaiah, “Bearer or Borne,” giving this explanation: “It makes all the difference to a man how he conceives his religion, whether as something he has to carry, or as something that will carry him.”<sup>33</sup> Calvin’s comment on this passage from Isaiah emphasizes lifelong human dependency upon God. “When he says, ‘Even to old age,’ it might be thought absurd; for we ought to become full-grown men after having been carried by God from infancy. But if anyone shall examine it properly, it will be found that we never make so great progress as not to need to be upheld by the strength of God, for otherwise the most perfect man would stumble every moment.”<sup>34</sup> As the follower of Christ reaches the last third of life, they are distinctively drawn to trust in God’s providential care. Maturity does not produce independence, but rather an unconcealed dependency on God’s

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<sup>32</sup> Isa 46:3,4.

<sup>33</sup> George Adam, *The Book of Isaiah, II, Revised Edition* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1927), 198.

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Printed For The Calvin Translation Society, 1850). 438

undergirding presence. As theologians Exell and Spence Jones observe, the message of Isaiah 46 accurately portrays God’s sustaining grace for those in their older years.

The nurse—even the mother—soon grows tired of carrying the child and leaves him to shift for himself. But God's tender care for his people lasts from their infancy, through their boyhood and manhood, to their old age. The everlasting arms never weary. God's watchfulness, his providence, his protection, never fail. I have made, and I will bear. The maker of a thing has naturally regard to what he has made, loves it, desires its good, seeks to defend and save it.<sup>35</sup>

The need to embrace God’s promises in the scriptures and to engage in fervent, effectual prayer as a means of survival and thriving increases with the passing years. Through life experiences and outcomes, personal trust in God’s immutability evolves with the aging process. It is this unique element of mature confidence that lends credence to the older generation’s ability to successfully impart wisdom and strength to those following.

The scriptures present a living testimonial to the expected effectiveness of the elders. Throughout biblical history, God used men and women in their later years to advance His purposes on earth. The scripture includes narratives of many spiritual and political leaders who did not enter their divinely preordained mission until they had reached their older years. To this day, societal attitudes in Eastern countries more closely reflect the biblical philosophy concerning the aged than their Western counterparts.<sup>36</sup> Aging, from a biblical perspective, stands in sharp contradiction to the utilitarian concepts of certain current atheistic bioethicists and to the more subtle ageistic attitudes that permeate our social environment. The Bible sets forth an ethos of honor and respect for the aging and a divine call to continued productivity.

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph S. Exell and Henry Donald Maurice Spence Jones, *Commentary on Isaiah 46. The Pulpit Commentary*, 1897, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/tpc/isaiah-46.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Michael S. North and Susan T. Fiske, “Modern Attitudes toward Older Adults in the Aging World: A Cross-Cultural Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 141, no. 5 (September 2015): 993–1021. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039469>.

In scripture, there is an unmistakable culture of deference toward the elderly. When the prophet, Zechariah, foresees the return of God's people to the restored city of Jerusalem after years of Babylonian captivity, he expresses the fact that the evidence of God's favor will be the visible reappearance of the aged in the marketplace: "Old men and old women will again sit in the public squares of Jerusalem, each person with his staff in his hand because of age. And the public squares of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its squares."<sup>37</sup> The prophet paints a compelling picture of blended generations, the elderly in a place of honor enjoying the spectacle of youthful vitality.

The recurring theme of the older generations participating in celebrative seasons of God's favor is also noted in Joel's prophecy concerning the forthcoming outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Just as Zechariah prophesied of an occasion when people representing all generations would joyfully revel in the realities of freedom from foreign bondage, Joel speaks of a day when God's sovereign visitation would touch people of all ages, setting them free to fulfill God's purposes. "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind, And your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants, I will pour out My Spirit in those days."<sup>38</sup> On Pentecost, when this foretold promise began to be fulfilled, the apostle Peter assures the listeners that what was unfolding before them was indeed Joel's prediction.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of the older believers in this outpouring is not a proverbial "pat on the back," a sort of conciliatory inclusion but rather a veritable declaration that the gifts of both the young and the old are employed in the prophetic completion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the earth.

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<sup>37</sup> Zech 8:4,5.

<sup>38</sup> Joel 2:28,29.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 2:17,18.

In the New Testament, the writer John affirms the significant attributes that complement the multiple generations:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you on account of His name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one.<sup>40</sup>

The knowledge and experience of those who are forebearers function in concert with the strength and triumphal vitality championed by the younger generation. The young have discovered strength and confidence in the spiritual battle against the devil, whereas the older believers have a decided comprehension of their estate in the kingdom and their relationship with God. There is a mutual trade of effectual respect between the generations, a combination of peculiar capabilities that compliments the work of God and forwards the purposes of His kingdom.

Concerning the matter of mutual generational respect, Paul admonishes Timothy regarding the elders, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, and to the younger men as brothers, to the older women as mothers, and to the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”<sup>41</sup> Also, “The elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”<sup>42</sup> Paul also implies that there should be a reciprocal veneration from the older crowd toward younger leaders, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself

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<sup>40</sup> 1 John 2:12-14.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Tim 5:1,2.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Tim 5:18.

an example of those who believe.”<sup>43</sup> As many of the epistles close with the directive to share the contents with the church at large, it can be assumed that all would hear what Paul says to Timothy, and thereby be instructed.

The matter of exchanged veneration between the generations cannot be overlooked. In his letter to the Magnesians, the church father, Ignatius, enlarges upon the need for deference toward younger church leaders by the older Christians. He warns them against dishonoring their young bishop because of his age, “not the ancient are [necessarily] wise, nor do the aged understand prudence; but there is a spirit in men.”<sup>44</sup> In his treatise to this church, he reminds them of the young prophet Daniel who through the Spirit spoke wisdom to the older generation; of the twelve-year-old Samuel’s reproof of ninety-year-old Eli; and of Jeremiah, who was cautioned by God not to confess, “I am just a child” (Jer 1:7). Throughout history, God in His wisdom has chosen people of all ages and generations to carry out His purposes. Those whom God has ordained, whether they be old or young are to be esteemed and affirmed. The acceptance among believers of God’s sovereign choosing is key to the productive unity in the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes this truth in his letter to the Corinthians:

If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But now there are many parts, but one body.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 1 Tim 4:12.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations*, 173.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Cor 12:15-20.

The Old Testament law instructs people to “stand up in the presence of the grayheaded and honor elders”<sup>46</sup> as an expression of their fear of the Lord. However, older men and women are not simply called by God to sit on the sidelines as recipients of dutiful honor but are to proactively serve and fulfill a much-needed role in the church. “Older men are to be temperate, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise *are to be* reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good.”<sup>47</sup> Paul describes the effective disposition of the elders as one of sobriety, dignity, soundness of faith, and impartation to the younger.

In contrast to the biblical celebration of aging, the absence of the aged is an indication of divine disapprobation. The Old Testament stranger who confronted the priest Eli with a firm message regarding the activities of Eli’s rebellious and immoral sons gave this solemn word of warning. “Behold, the days are coming when I will eliminate your strength and the strength of your father’s house so that there will not be an old man in your house.”<sup>48</sup> This alarming judgment to be imposed upon Eli and his descendants would affect the standing of future generations. His posterity would constantly experience the fate of premature deaths so that older men would not be found in the family. “By being denied elders, the most socially powerful age group of individuals in clan-based societies, the line of Eli would be denied a significant form of power and influence in society.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lev 19:32.

<sup>47</sup> Titus 2:2,3.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Sam 2:31.

<sup>49</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 82–84.



The accomplishment of God’s will on earth, the achievement of kingdom aims, is not an exclusive enterprise. It requires the participation of all generations, and the church is, or at least should be, the front-runner in fostering such inter-generational prerogatives. The church must embrace an effectual theology of “oikology”, to use Susannah Ticciati’s term,<sup>50</sup> to reimagine the church as truly a home, a unique paradigm distinctively described in the Ephesian letter: “So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household.”<sup>51</sup> Forster and Cross provide an insightful definition of a home. “A home is a dynamic set of relations marked by a particular ethic of care.”<sup>52</sup> It is in the church as a home that older members find their place of belonging and productivity.

Abraham and Sarah: The example of faith.

It was beyond their mid-years that Abraham, the father of faith,<sup>53</sup> and Sarah, who lived respectively to be one-hundred seventy-five years and one-hundred twenty-seven, received the promise that they would bear a son to be named Isaac, who would be the heir to their legacy and fortunes.<sup>54</sup> This promise of Isaac introduced a new phase of their faith journey that essentially carried an even greater impact on the legacy of faith than the original call to leave Ur of Chaldees, and subsequently Haran, to travel to regions unknown to them and establish residence

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<sup>50</sup> Susannah Ticciati, “Reconceiving the Boundaries of Home: The ‘Oikology’ of Ephesians,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, no. 21 (November 13, 2019): 408-430. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ijst.12384>

<sup>51</sup> Eph 2:19.

<sup>52</sup> Forster, and Cross, *Human Flourishing: Economic Wisdom*.

<sup>53</sup> Rom 4:1.

<sup>54</sup> Gen 17:1-18.

in Canaan.<sup>55</sup> The prophetic visitation in Gen 17 involved name changes for both Abraham (from Abram) and Sarah (from Sarai), changes that better define the prospective legacy they would employ. “The word ‘fruitful’ (*prh*) in v.6 (*hiprētī ’ōtekā*, ‘I will make you fruitful’) and ‘multiply’ (*rbh*) in v.2 (*we ’arbeh ’ōtekā*, ‘increase your numbers’) recalls the original divine blessing in 12:28.”<sup>56</sup> The decree also introduced the requirement of circumcision for all males as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham’s descendants. Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born, well beyond the normal natural reproductive age.

Abraham’s response to the messenger’s initial proclamation in Gen 17 involves two distinct reactions. First, Abraham counters the news by falling prostrate in a burst of laughter. Later, when the angel of the Lord appears again and reiterates the foretelling of Isaac, Sarah laughs at the announcement, as well.<sup>57</sup> Opinions regarding this emotional outburst vary, whether it was joy in response to good news, a reaction of disbelief, or outright unbelief. Edgar is of the opinion that it revealed their genuine doubt and unbelief: “It represents a human and skeptical response to God’s offer of grace. But God does not punish the unbelief or doubt of either Abraham or Sarah.”<sup>58</sup> Sailhamer suggests that, although Sarah’s laughter evoked a rebuke, Abraham’s laughter may have been a response to the incredulous nature of the promise: “Will a child be born to a man a hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth to

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<sup>55</sup> Gen 12:1-6.

<sup>56</sup> Sailhamer, *Genesis*, pt. 2, sec. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gen 18:12,13.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Edgar, *Laughter and the Grace of God* (Cambridge, England: The Lutterworth Press, 2020), 78, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2491338/laughter-and-the-grace-of-god-restoring-laughter-to-its-central-role-in-christian-faith-and-theology-pdf>.

a child?”<sup>59</sup> Calvin asserts, “We infer that he laughed not because he either despised or rejected God’s promise but laughed, as often happens when something least expected occurs.”<sup>60</sup>

Whatever the motivation for Abraham and Sarah’s outbursts of hilarity, one can conclude that God’s plan was not to be abandoned because of human response. And to vindicate Abraham’s stance, the scriptures verify his ultimate acceptance of and adherence to the prophetic message, stating, “yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”<sup>61</sup> And Sarah’s testimony also affirms steadfast concurrence with God’s plan. “By faith even Sarah herself received the ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.”<sup>62</sup> Without a doubt, both forerunners of faith were motivated to disregard their past circumstances and embrace a greater promise from God that an heir would be born. “In spite of initial incredulity, in which they both shared (Gen 17:17; 18:10–12), both achieved the ability to believe that parenthood was possible.”<sup>63</sup>

Abraham’s second response to the promise of Isaac in Gen 17 is a mixture of argument and request. “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before You!’”<sup>64</sup> God explains that Ishmael will be blessed and will raise up a great nation, but that the promise of blessing all the nations of the world, the promise that was originally given to Abraham, would be

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<sup>59</sup> Gen 17:17.

<sup>60</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis*. Allister McGrath and J.I. Packer, eds. Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), chap.17, pt.17, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1414866/genesis-pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Rom 4:20,21.

<sup>62</sup> Heb 11:11.

<sup>63</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, vol. 47B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 353.

<sup>64</sup> Gen 17:18.

executed through the lineage of Isaac. Much has already transpired in Abraham's life, yet God presents a new dimension to his life call with the promise of Isaac. Abraham, whose love for Ishmael and attention to the already expected fact that Ishmael would be his heir, is now confronted with a new dimension of divine intentionality. He must now reconcile to the certainty that this startling information is not the introduction of a new plan, but rather a part of the unfolding plan of God's providence. St. Ambrose applauds the virtues of Abraham's faith, writing: "Note how everything meets together here. Passion was not wanting, but it was checked. Here was a mind equable in action, which neither treated great things as unimportant nor little things as great. Here there was moderation in different affairs, order in things, fitness of occasion, due measure in words. He was foremost in faith, conspicuous in virtue, vigorous in battle, in victory not greedy, at home hospitable, and to his wife attentive."<sup>65</sup> Abraham's testimony illustrates the meeting of two dynamics, that certain intersection of divine favor and human obedience. James teaches that hearing God's promise alone is not sufficient, but that a responding conformity to the command is essential, stating: "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected."<sup>66</sup> Those who seek to pursue the will of God at midlife and beyond will often be called upon to navigate unexpected territories and adapt to change. However, as in the case of Abraham, what may seem like an alteration of direction is in reality a fulfillment of God's original plan.

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<sup>65</sup> Brian K. Kooy, "Christian Classics Ethereal Library." *Reference Reviews* 25, no. 7 (September 2011): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09504121111168424>.

<sup>66</sup> Jas 2:22.

Moses: Called out of seclusion in the last third of life.

The narrative of Moses' call to lead Israel's deliverance from Egyptian servitude provides a plausible study of someone who enters significant ministry in the latter years of life. His burning bush experience and the consequential outcomes are worthy of close examination. Moses lived to be one hundred twenty years old; however, his encounter with destiny on Mount Horeb occurred when he was eighty years old. From a contemporary viewpoint, this hero of the faith was beyond what would be referred to as midlife when he received and acknowledged the call of God. In fact, he had already lived two-thirds of his life. If perhaps a Baby Boomer in our century does live to be ninety,<sup>67</sup> the two-thirds mark would begin at sixty years of age. This observation puts into perspective what it may be like to experience a fresh call and mission in the last third of life. Not only is God not through with Moses, but the most important mission is now ahead. The call undoubtedly comes as a surprise to Moses. "At the beginning of the account of the most momentous experience of his life, Moses is presented not only as not seeking such an experience, but as totally oblivious even to the possibility of the confrontation that is to follow."<sup>68</sup>

Moses' life-changing encounter with God, his summons to be the deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage, does not occur in a vacuum, but rather falls into the overall context of God's sovereign plan for the Jewish people. After years of servitude to the Egyptian dynasty, the people of God began to groan ("*anechati*" from the root Hebrew word "*anach*" which is a sigh of mourning)<sup>69</sup> and cry out to God under the weight of the hard labor imposed upon them. God

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<sup>67</sup> Rebecca Forstadt-Olkowski, "60 Minutes Segment Reveals How to Live to 90 and Beyond," BabyBoomster, May 6, 2014, <https://babyboomster.com/want-to-live-to-90/>.

<sup>68</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*. vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 2018), 30.

<sup>69</sup> Chaim Bentorah, "Hebrew Word Study," Chaim Bentorah Ministries, May 26, 2014, <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2014/05/word-study-silent-scream-2>.

responded to their pleas. “So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.”<sup>70</sup> The fact that God “remembered” does not imply that he had forgotten about His chosen ones. As Sproul asserts, “When God ‘remembers,’ it means that He acts according to His covenant promises, especially in a way evident to His people. The Lord commences His work of redemption after He recalls His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>71</sup>

The Exodus narrative reveals a direct connection between the cry of the people and God’s interaction with them, and Moses’ call and His interaction with God at the burning bush. The abject despair of a persecuted and constricted people ignited the occasion of the call.

And the Lord said, “I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”<sup>72</sup>

The account of Moses’ call to lead the exodus is preceded by a description of the disparaging circumstances of the Israelites. “Yahweh knows the extent of Israel’s need, and the moment for his action on the matter has arrived. The urgency of the need is matched by the power of Yahweh’s expression; he has ‘come down,’ that is, from the place of his dwelling above the heavens to this place of his appearance to Moses, and he is about ‘to snatch’ his people

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<sup>70</sup> Exod 2:24,25.

<sup>71</sup> R.C. Sproul, n.d., “God Remembered Noah.” *Tabletalk Devotions*, Ligonier Ministries, accessed April 11, 2022, <https://www.idisciple.org/post/god-remembered-noah>.

<sup>72</sup> Exod 3:7-10.

forth from the grip of Egyptian power.”<sup>73</sup> The correlation between the circumstance of the nation and the call of Moses is clearly comprehended in this segment of the Exodus narrative.

God’s redemptive dealings with Israel are paralleled with His personal transactions with Moses and His carefully detailed attention to His servant’s mission in life. Having been forced into exile as the result of regrettable events forty years prior, Moses is now confronted with an exciting, albeit frightening, life assignment. “When God spoke to him from the burning bush at Mount Sinai, life suddenly launched Moses on a new trajectory, and the opportunities for creating higher meaning in his life shifted without warning. Harsh disappointments and unexpected opportunities for higher meaning—that’s what life gave Moses, and that’s what life gives most of us.”<sup>74</sup>

Of notable importance is that the mission to which Moses is called is not about his personal fulfillment in life, but rather it is a matter of divine initiative. “God tells Moses that *He* is concerned for *His* people, having seen how they are suffering and having heard their cries to him (3:7). He says that *He* will bring the people to the promised land, which is currently inhabited by ‘the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites’ (3:8)” (italics added).<sup>75</sup> The story of Israel’s deliverance is God’s story. God does not find Moses and build a story around him. He includes Moses in His story.

The emphasis is on God’s self-declaration as the author of the undertaking. His inclusion of Moses (the “now you go” mandate) in the venture follows repeated references to His own

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<sup>73</sup> Durham, *Exodus, Volume 3*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Maurice D. Harris, *Moses: A Stranger among Us* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), chap 9, sec. Rav Lach, <https://www.perlego.com/book/878756/moses-pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Life of Moses: God’s First Deliverer of Israel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018). pt.1, chap.5, [https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2508625/12?element\\_originalid=pz71-3](https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2508625/12?element_originalid=pz71-3).

purpose in freeing captive Israel from Egyptian slavery. This narrative of God’s liberating undertaking is a universal proposition, seen throughout redemptive history. As Ed Stetzer states, “The church is sent on mission by Jesus. It’s not that the church has a mission, but rather that the mission has a church. We join Jesus on His mission.”<sup>76</sup>

Moses does not greet this momentous invitation to God’s mission with an attitude of exuberance. His objection to the divine induction into service demonstrates the human response to difficult missions, especially as individuals enter into the last third of life. In view of the immense task before him, he enumerates his personal challenges, doubts, and inadequacies. His first reaction is a question filled with grave concern. “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?’”<sup>77</sup> His question is strongly countered by God: “Assuredly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”<sup>78</sup> As Durham infers, “Moses’ emphatic ‘I’ is echoed by God’s emphatic ‘I’.”<sup>79</sup> The message to Moses is clear; the mission is God’s idea and whatever He determines to accomplish will be accompanied by the essential resources needed for its fulfillment.

To prove that His vindicating presence will be with Moses, God displays three miraculous signs that would be used by Moses to demonstrate divine sanction to the leaders of Egypt. The first supernatural sign is the transformation of Moses’ shepherd’s staff into a serpent and then the return to its original properties (Exod 4:3-5). In F.B. Meyers’ devotional

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<sup>76</sup> Ed Stetzer, “God’s Mission Has a Church: My Interview with *Tabletalk Magazine*.” *Church Leaders*, July 11, 2022, <https://churchleaders.com/voices/425784-gods-mission-has-a-church-my-interview-with-tabletalk-magazine.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Exod 3:11.

<sup>78</sup> Exod 3:12.

<sup>79</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, 33.



commentary, he elaborates on the significance of Moses' rod.<sup>80</sup> The rod is not an object detached from Moses that is suddenly provided for this occasion; it is rather a familiar part of his livelihood, a companion to him in his normal existence. The message relayed is that God delights in using whatever innate ability, endowment, or talent one may possess to demonstrate His power. Moses' rod, as a visible extension of his faith, would be used on many occasions to advance the purposes of God. The second sign involved Moses' hand contracting the dreaded disease of leprosy and then being completely healed (Exod 4:6,7). Boice suggests that "the power of this sign came from the fact that the Egyptians were very fastidious about personal cleanliness. They did not want to be defiled, and leprosy was the ultimate defilement. Here God revealed himself as a God who is able to inflict illness and also to cure it."<sup>81</sup> The third miraculous wonder is the transformation of water into blood. Each of these signs represents God's ability to begin with something natural and ordinary and use it in an unusual fashion to authenticate His authority in mission.

This promise of God's presence and performance does not allay Moses' fear-driven reservations. He further dialogues with God, showing resistance to the divine directive and justifying his qualms by citing personal inadequacies in two specific areas, the probability of peer rejection and the inability to speak. "Moses voiced complaints about his assignment because of his sense of personal inadequacy. The detailed instructions in 3:16–22 may have heightened Moses' anxieties about his new role, so he posed two more objections: his fear that his compatriots would repudiate his authority (4:1) and his lack of eloquence (v. 10)"<sup>82</sup> God

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<sup>80</sup> F.B. Meyer, *Moses: The Servant of God* (Ft. Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2015), chap.5, <https://www.perlego.com/book/3566974/moses-the-servant-of-god-pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Boice, *The Life of Moses*, pt. 1, Chap. 5.

patiently and gently answers these objections first by showing the supernatural wonders He would do that would validate Moses' authority to the Israelites and the Egyptians. As for Moses' claim that he is "slow of speech," God assures him that He will be his mouth and teach him what to say.

As a final effort to circumvent his involvement in the Exodus undertaking, Moses boldly, albeit foolishly, presents an evocative question to God. "But he said, 'Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will.'"<sup>83</sup> Stuart suggests this statement is "a somewhat elliptical expression unattested elsewhere in the Bible and one apparently designed to mean, 'I don't want to do it' but worded as neutrally and non-offensively as possible."<sup>84</sup> Yet, this last response induces the anger of God. He states unequivocally that Moses' brother Aaron possesses the oratorical skills needed to buttress Moses' insufficiencies with speech.<sup>85</sup>

However, as Durham well observes, the critical issue here is not about human ability or lack thereof, but about the presence of the Lord God. Moses' inability and Aaron's ability are not the subjects of discussion at hand. Durham emphasizes the inconsequence of Moses' argument. "The mouth of Moses may well be heavy and clumsy, slow and halting in speech. It would not matter if it were dumb altogether, and Aaron's mouth, as well. Yahweh will be there, and

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<sup>82</sup> John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J.F. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 113.

<sup>83</sup> Exod 4:13.

<sup>84</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 136.

<sup>85</sup> Exod 4:14.

Yahweh will take responsibility for both the message and the messengers. The staff in the hands of Moses and Aaron is a symbol of this powerful Presence.”<sup>86</sup>

Notably, the character of Moses has for some years provided generous fodder for the contemporary study of leadership; however, the Moses narrative in Exodus primarily focuses on the attribute of simple, but not simplistic, obedience. For Moses to carry out his part in God’s mission required submission and humility, complete reliance on the Presence of God. A.W. Tozer wrote, “To admit that there is One who lies beyond us, who exists outside of all our categories . . . who will not appear before the bar of our reason . . . this requires a great deal of humility, more than most of us possess, so we save face by thinking God down to our level, or at least down to where we can manage Him.”<sup>87</sup>

The ultimate success of Moses’ participation in the plan of God is a testimony to devoted obedience to Jehovah God, and faith that God would do what He promised. Moses remained faithful to the mission for forty years, from the age of 80 to 120 – throughout the last third of his life. He took ownership of God’s vision, invested everything in preserving the legacy, and was faithful to the task of elevating the next generation of leaders. “It has been said that Moses spent forty years in Egypt learning something, then he spent forty years in the desert learning to be nothing, and then spent the last forty years of his life proving God to be everything.”<sup>88</sup>

The concluding days of Moses’ life are marked with critical lessons to the leaders and people of Israel. “Even at the age of 120, as he was preparing to die, Moses was bearing fruit and mentoring the next generation about the Promised Land through a series of three powerful

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<sup>86</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God; Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 33.

<sup>88</sup> Boice, *The Life of Moses*.

messages recorded in the book of Deuteronomy.”<sup>89</sup> His final delivery to the Israelites included (1) the transference of his leadership role to Joshua, (2) the composition of “the song of Moses” (an extensive poetic composition/teaching that would serve to give guidance and hope for generations to come), and a final blessing over each of the tribes of Israel reminiscent of Jacob’s blessing of his sons more than 400 years before.<sup>90</sup> The record of Moses’ ascension alone to Pisgah for a final look at the Promised Land provides testimony to his mental and physical competencies to the very end. “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, in accordance with the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows his burial place to this day. Although Moses was 120 years old when he died, his eyesight was not dim, nor had his vigor left him.”<sup>91</sup>

The reputation of Moses ever lives, as one who selflessly fulfilled the call of God on his life. The third chapter of Hebrews bestows an honor of him as the prototype, the foreshadowing character whose existence spoke ahead of time of the Person of Jesus Christ, one who gave his life for the cause of righteousness. The designation of “Moses the servant of the Lord” (Josh 1:2) carries with it not only the sense that he was a servant in that he was faithful to serve, but also speaks to the service that he rendered as “a minister, mediator, deputy, or vicegerent of God, the honored organ through whom he committed his will to his chosen people and managed all their varied interests.”<sup>92</sup> Moses serves a unique place in biblical history as a prototype of the coming

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<sup>89</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), chap.8, sec.4, <https://www.perlego.com/book/1694395/emotionally-healthy-discipleship-pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976). chap.6, pt. D, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2015735/the-book-of-deuteronomy-pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Deut 34:5-7.

<sup>92</sup> George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Joshua* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 2.

Christ, both in character and mission. The writer of Hebrews ascribes honor to Moses as one whose example of faithfulness foreshadowed Christ: “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession: Jesus; He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.”<sup>93</sup>

In the Revelation writings describing the final future victory of the saints, Moses is named as the venerable co-creator of the eschatological song of triumph. “And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who were victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”<sup>94</sup>

Joshua: A conqueror called beyond midlife.

Joshua is an Old Testament character with notable significance because he is chosen to succeed Moses as overseer of Israel and will be the one who leads God’s people into the Land of Promise. Like Moses, he is called to lead an entire nation into its long-promised destiny. The first two verses of the book of Joshua carry the weight of divine mission: “Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, ‘Moses My servant is dead; so now arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.’”<sup>95</sup> It is to be noted that Joshua is now 80 years old. He will live to be 110 years old. He is modeling the example of his mentor by entering into the most significant season of life and ministry in the third-third of life.

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<sup>93</sup> Heb 3:1,2.

<sup>94</sup> Rev 15:2,3.

<sup>95</sup> Josh 1:1,2.

God does not choose a younger man for the daunting task. He chooses someone with experience who has weathered the storms and remained faithful through extreme adversity. The fact that he is respected by both his peers and the younger generation is apparent in his initial address to the people when he conveys to them the directive that God has given to him to “be strong and have courage.” The leaders of Israel reciprocate by echoing the encouragement back to Joshua, emboldening him as the leader also to be courageous and strong (Josh 1).

The first mention of Joshua, the eventual successor of Moses, occurs in the Book of Exodus when he is chosen by Moses to convene an army that will wage war against the Amalekites. “So Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow, I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.’”<sup>96</sup> The victory over the Amalekites demonstrates the essential synergy produced when the strength of the younger generation is combined with the effective faith, wisdom, and authority resting upon the older generation.

Early in the journey through the wilderness, Joshua is chosen by Moses in Num 13:16 to enter the territory of the Philistines for the purpose of espionage. At his selection, Moses changes his name to a new name that reflects the mission which he was to fulfill. He is renamed from Hoshea to Joshua. “The name Joshua is composed of two parts. The first part is a shortened form of the divine name ‘Lord’ (Heb. *Yhwh*). The second part is the Hebrew word for ‘salvation.’ Thus, the name means ‘the Lord is salvation.’<sup>97</sup> The renaming has prophetic undertones, as his former name “Hoshea” simply meant, “he has saved.” his new name meant “the Lord saves.” The name is translated as Jesus in the New Testament Greek language. His renaming is reflective

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<sup>96</sup> Exod 17:9.

<sup>97</sup> J.D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient History. A Comparison Study* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1988), 114-115.

of the biblical practice of giving a new name to someone to define the new task they will perform. Abram's name is changed to Abraham, Jacob's to Israel, and Joshua assumes a new name that delineates the role he will serve, both historically and prophetically.<sup>98</sup> Among the twelve who are chosen for this reconnaissance mission, only Joshua and his distinguished contemporary, Caleb, return with a positive report, stating that victory against the land's inhabitants is imminent. The accompanying ten spies, representing other tribes, return from the surveillance with pessimistic reports, frightened at the prospects of entering the land of "giants." Their influence convinces the masses to rebel against the direction of Moses and to abandon all attempts of conquest. The outcome of the people's corporate faithlessness and insurrection against God's sanctioned leaders is the promise from God that that entire generation will be destroyed in the wilderness. Only the faithful ones, Joshua and Caleb, are spared the extermination (Num 13 and 14).

The subsequent success of Joshua's leadership is directly connected to his mentoring relationship with Moses. His association with Moses exceeds that of an underling who performs menial tasks. He is invited into the "tent of meeting" with Moses and is privy to the confidentialities of those meetings. "These sessions are particularly intriguing because we do not know for certain what each might have said to the other. We only know that when Moses went into the tent, 'the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance,' and that 'his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent' (Exod 33:9–11)."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 22-23.

<sup>99</sup> Lorin Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership: From Moses to Matthew -- Management Lessons for Contemporary Leaders* (New York, NY: Amacon, 2002), 200, <https://www.perlego.com/book/728124/the-bible-on-leadership-pdf>.

Joshua is chosen to succeed Moses in Num 27:18-23. His reputation includes an acknowledgment that he is one who “has the spirit.” Notably, Joshua does not assume the new role through self-appointment, or even the natural progression of the gifted drifting to the surface, ‘crème rising to the top,’ but he is commissioned for the assignment. He has served as Moses’ servant, as an example of faith, and as an effective warrior and leader.

For the Christian, this background exemplifies the preparation of a leader for Christian ministry. The leader is someone who, like Joshua, has already undertaken specific tasks successfully and who has demonstrated a loyalty to God’s Word even when that means standing out from the crowd... A leader like Joshua is someone recognized by the people of God and, most important of all, someone whom God clearly chooses.<sup>100</sup>

Hess concludes, “Yhwh exhorts Joshua with words that may be taken as the rallying cry for the entire holy-war project, ‘Be bold and resolute.’”<sup>101</sup> Many uncertain difficulties and obstructions will face Joshua and the Israelites. Their courage will be constantly challenged as they move into new territory and take possession of the land. Those who inhabit the lands will not concede without relentless resistance. There will be no terms for peace. The ultimate goal is total conquest. Joshua’s life stands as one of successful leadership. “The results of Joshua’s godly leadership were impressive: the land was pacified, the people settled in their allotted territories, and Joshua was buried in his own land at a ripe old age (Josh 24:29-31). Things had gone well and not one of the Lord’s good promises had failed. (Josh 21:43-45).”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Hess, *Joshua, An Introduction and Commentary*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Carolyn J. Sharp, *Joshua* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2019), 89.

<sup>102</sup> David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1998), 63.



Anna and Simeon: Calling fulfilled in old age.

The biblical record of the temple dedication of the infant Jesus includes the narrative of two distinct elderly saints, Simeon and Anna, who speak blessings and prophetic words over the Christ child.<sup>103</sup> Their appearance in the temple on that particular day when Jesus is brought before the officiating priest for circumcision demonstrates that even in times of spiritual darkness, God has preserved those who are a witness to the truth. God's word to Israel had been rendered lifeless by the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>104</sup> Simeon's visit occurs first with affirming words to the parents of the child Lord Jesus.

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now, Lord, You are letting Your bond-servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples: A light for revelation for the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."<sup>105</sup>

Simeon had undergone a lifetime of preparation by the Holy Spirit for that moment. An otherwise unknown biblical character, he surfaces in sovereign timing as a major contributor to the Messianic narrative. Gundry suggests that there is the unfolding of a three-fold work of the Holy Spirit in Simeon's narrative; (1) at some point in Simeon's devotional life God has promised that his own eyes would see the "salvation of Israel," (2) the Spirit moves him strategically to be present in the temple on this particular day, and (3) the Spirit anoints him to

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<sup>103</sup> Luke 2:25-3.

<sup>104</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke* (London, England: Steam Press, 1858), 66.

<sup>105</sup> Luke 2:25-32.

publicly declare words of affirmation to the parents.<sup>106</sup> Simeon’s welcome to an imminent departure from this life is not driven by resignation from the weariness of life, but by the satisfaction that he has now accomplished his life purpose.<sup>107</sup>

The deep and insightful content of Simeon’s song reveals that even prior to the gospel being declared, some Jewish believers had a grasp on the work and message of Christ. Here is an aged man using terminology like salvation being a light to the Gentiles. “Well would it have been for the letter-learned scribes and Pharisees of Simeon’s time if they had sat at his feet and listened to his word.”<sup>108</sup>

Anna is a woman advanced in years who has devoted herself to continuous prayer, fasting, and worship in the temple. She arrives at this specific moment to deliver vocal confirmation to Simeon’s prophetic words. “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna’s prophetic calling extends beyond this day’s joyous pronouncement and continues in her ongoing proclamation to all who are anticipating the deliverance of Jerusalem. Hence, she becomes a significant voice in preparing hearts for the coming ministry of Jesus Christ.

Simeon and Anna, both honored believers and faithful servants of God, performed their greatest service to God’s people by affirming the fulfillment of the promised Messiah. These stories and many others provide viable Biblical foundations for pursuing God’s mission in the older years of one’s life.

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<sup>106</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Luke* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), chap. Events in Jerusalem, sec. 2:25-26, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2050875/commentary-on-luke-commentary-on-the-new-testament-book-3-pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke*, 68.

Paul's relationship with Barnabas and Timothy.

A study of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul reveals unique relationships of friendship and brotherhood with several fellow laborers. Of particular interest are two unique characters whose support and companionship helped Paul accomplish the work of spreading the Gospel and establishing churches. Barnabas and Timothy are two fellow ministers of special prominence. Barnabas emerges as one who validates and affirms Paul and is instrumental in helping launch the great apostle into Christian ministry. Timothy is mentored by Paul and subsequently is one to whom Paul passes the torch of ministry.<sup>109</sup> Both relationships provide a deeper understanding of the gift of spiritual impartation and speak to present-day generational partnerships in the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.

Barnabas first appears in Luke's record of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:36). There has been some conjecture that this Joseph Barnabas was the same man named Joseph Barsabbas who, along with Matthias, was chosen as an apostolic candidate for the replacement of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:21-23). Albert Barnes agrees with most biblical scholars that there is no proof for such an association.<sup>110</sup>

Barnabas enters the scene of the Acts narrative as a person of notable generosity, during the early days of the growing church in Jerusalem. He sells a property and presents the proceeds from the transaction to the apostles for distribution to the needy. The deportment of sacrificial giving had become an integral part of the early church culture since its inception. "And all the

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<sup>109</sup> Ray Stedman, "The Passing of the Torch 2 Timothy 4:5-8," Ray Stedman Authentic Christianity, June 6, 1982, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/timothy/the-passing-of-the-torch>.

<sup>110</sup> Albert Barnes, Robert Frew and J.M. Fuller, *Notes Explanatory and Practical on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1863), 32.

believers were together and had all things in common; and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need.”<sup>111</sup> “The Jerusalem believers were in the habit of selling their possessions and their (personal) belongings. Among the possessions and property sold were land and houses, which indicates that some believers were wealthy.”<sup>112</sup> Though the scripture says that some sold all, Barrett gives treatment to the distinction between land and personal property, noting that this particular gift did not represent the totality of Barnabas’ wealth.<sup>113</sup>

Barnabas’ gift, which is only one of many contributions from various donors, demonstrates his character and generosity, yet it puts him in the middle of the uncomfortable narrative of God’s judgment against Ananias and Sapphira. Shortly after Barnabas’ munificent donation, this husband-and-wife team also presents a sizeable gift, making the bold claim that they are giving everything they have to the work of the church. They are smitten by God because of deceitfulness. Since many other believers were bringing their gifts, one can speculate why Barnabas’ gift is the one used as a comparison between truthful benevolence and dishonest self-centeredness. Whatever the reason, Barnabas emerges as a respected disciple among his peers in Jerusalem.

Barnabas reappears in Acts 9 as a friend to the Apostle Paul. Saul of Tarsus, whose name is later changed to Paul, has an encounter with Jesus while traveling to Damascus to oppose the growth of the church and to bring believers in Christ to trial. Following his dramatic conversion and baptism, he remains in Damascus and preaches the message of Christ in the synagogues

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<sup>111</sup> Acts 2:44,45.

<sup>112</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), chap. 6, sec. Acts 2:42-47, <https://www.perlego.com/book/558030/acts-pdf>.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: In Two Volumes* (London, England: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2010), 169.

(Acts 9:20). When life-threatening opposition arises (Acts 9:23), he escapes and returns to the city of Jerusalem. Arriving in Jerusalem, he seeks to join the disciples (Acts 9:26); however, his attempt to be included in the company of believers is met with fear and skepticism, and justifiably so, as Saul was well known for his aggressive persecution of the church. It is at this point that Barnabas comes into the narrative. He stewards his influence, assumes the role of advocate, and properly introduces Saul to the apostles leading the church in Jerusalem, confirming the authenticity of Saul's conversion. Barnabas' validation makes it possible for Saul to enjoy the freedom of fellowship among the Christians (Acts 9:28). Eventually, Saul is sent back to his hometown, Tarsus.

Barnabas continues to distinguish himself as an important personality in the early church, being sent by the apostles from Jerusalem to Antioch to assess the matter of Gentiles coming to Christ. Luke describes him as “for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”<sup>114</sup> Barnabas is favorably impressed with God's work at Antioch, and because the work is so overwhelming, he goes to Tarsus, finds Saul, and invites him to join the Christian movement in Antioch. “It is good to note here, that any leader who realizes his limitations, and is willing to bring in an associate to help — shows the marks of wisdom and an unselfish spirit.”<sup>115</sup>

From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are dispatched to new territories in Galatia to preach the gospel. The Book of Acts records the momentous ministry conducted by this leadership team during Paul's first missionary journey. Others participated in the church planting mission throughout the various cities of Galatia, but Luke's reference to Paul and Barnabas as a lead duo is unmistakable. “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with

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<sup>114</sup> Acts 11:24.

<sup>115</sup> Harold S. Martin, “Barnabas: A Generous Encourager,” Bible Helps Publishers, January 2015, <https://biblehelpsinc.org/publication/barnabas-a-generous-encourager/>.

fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”<sup>116</sup> Luke mentions Barnabas twenty-three times. At Lystra, when Paul was stoned by dissenting Jews and left outside the gates of the city as dead, Barnabas was among the associates who witnessed his torture and subsequent healing. Concerning this abysmal event, John Piper pens a fictional, yet fitting and moving ode to Barnabas from Paul: “Paul shook his head, ‘You prayed for me when I was stoned; you laid my head across your knees outside the gate at Lystra, and you cried to God until I breathed again. What do you mean you owe me then your life?’”<sup>117</sup>

Upon the return to Antioch in Acts 15, as Paul and Barnabas prepare to launch their “second missionary journey,” there is a sharp disagreement, triggered by Barnabas’ insistence that John Mark, his cousin (Col 4:10), be reinstated as a part of the ministry team (Acts 15:37-39). John Mark, who had accompanied Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey, had departed from the company abruptly and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Scholars have speculated regarding this action on John Mark’s behalf, inferring that he was perhaps homesick, or weary from the hardships of traveling, or leery of Paul’s evident assumption of key leadership over Barnabas. However, Longenecker postulates among others that John Mark’s withdrawal from the team was motivated by his disagreement with Paul’s predisposition regarding ministry to the Gentiles.<sup>118</sup> Paul’s impassioned opposition to Mark’s inclusion leads to the parting of ways between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-40). Paul chooses Silas as his companion in ministry, and Barnabas and John Mark travel to Cyprus.

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<sup>116</sup> Acts 14:23.

<sup>117</sup> John Piper, “Barnabas and Paul,” *Desiring God Ministries*, December 20, 1987. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/barnabas-and-paul>.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Longenecker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), chap.4, pt.2, <https://www.perlego.com/book/558128/acts-pdf>.

Although there was impassioned disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, there is biblical substantiation that their mutual love, respect, and appreciation for one another continued. Paul's writings dated after the dispute contain favorable mentions of Barnabas. When he writes to the Corinthians from Ephesus and contends with the Corinthians concerning the exercise of apostolic rights that he and other laborers had surrendered, to leave a testimony of sacrificial service, it is significant that he specifically names Barnabas as one who had forfeited rights for the sake of the gospel. "My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working?"<sup>119</sup> The date of this letter is somewhere around 56 A.D.,<sup>120</sup> at least five years after Barnabas and Paul went their separate ways. Paul's mention of Barnabas commends his ministry and attests to a loyal appreciation for a close friend with whom he had earlier parted company. Further, "In writing to the Galatians, Paul mentions Barnabas several times without bothering to explain who he is (2:1, 9, 13), so presumably, he is known to the Galatians."<sup>121</sup>

An exceptional aspect of Barnabas' character was the penchant for recognizing the God-given potential in others. He discerned something of significant value in Saul of Tarsus, validated Saul's worth to the work of God, and was instrumental in giving Saul a platform within the church. This quality of insightfulness is also displayed in his support of John Mark, who had fallen out of favor with Paul because he had earlier deserted the mission team and returned to

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<sup>119</sup> 1 Cor 9:3-6.

<sup>120</sup> Craig Blomberg, *First Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 21.

<sup>121</sup> James Montgomery Boice, Kenneth Barker, and John Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition: New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 705, <https://www.perlego.com/book/559457/the-expositors-bible-commentary-abridged-edition-new-testament-pdf>.

Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Barnabas' decision to separate from Paul's company and form another mission group in Acts 15 that included John Mark was a statement of leadership affirmation. Later, the scriptures allude to a reversal in Paul's sentiment regarding Mark.<sup>122</sup> He implores Timothy to bring Mark with him when he comes to Rome, stating how important Mark is to him (2 Tim. 4:11). Writing from prison to the Colossian church, Paul's letter contains admiring praise for John Mark, the "cousin of Barnabas" as one of only three Jewish believers standing with him during his incarceration (Col 4:10,11).

Barnabas is representative of those remarkable individuals in life who stand alongside others without the need to be number one. The very translation of his name, "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36), portrays the kind of person who facilitates the success of others. Saul of Tarsus, later named Paul, became the largest contributor to the New Testament canon. John Mark would author the Gospel of Mark. These two owe their beginnings in ministry to the person of Barnabas, who submitted himself to be used by God in the apostolic role of releasing others into their life calling.

Barnabas represents an exceptional class of human beings. Individuals who have been given the assignment to encourage and validate others are essential to God's work. Often, they are not recognized as principal players in panoptic narratives. The Genesis story of Joseph presents an applicable example of a strategic, serendipitous validation that modifies his life course. Joseph's ascent to national leadership and global recognition is preceded by a timely recommendation from an unlikely acquaintance. Joseph had been unjustly incarcerated and essentially forgotten in an Egyptian prison. The reigning Pharaoh had a troubling dream that none of the magistrates and seers could interpret (Gen 41:1-8). An acquaintance of Joseph who

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<sup>122</sup> Walter Wessell, Kenneth Barker and John Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Abridged Edition: New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 137, <https://www.perlego.com/book/559457/the-expositors-bible-commentary-abridged-edition-new-testament-pdf>.



had served time as a fellow prisoner in the same prison, and who had been released from incarceration and was now serving in the king's court, mentions Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams to the appropriate authorities (Gen 41:9-15). Through his successful encounter with Pharaoh and successful interpretation of the dream, Joseph is elevated to a place of great prominence in the kingdom (Gen 41:35-39).

An otherwise insignificant character in the Bible opens the gateway to Joseph's manifest destiny as a respected leader in a foreign land. "On the outside, Joseph was a prisoner, but on the inside, he was a great leader with wonderful potential, amazing gifts, and uncommon wisdom to influence and impact thousands of people. All he needed was the right opportunity, an opportunity that came when he received a divine recommendation."<sup>123</sup> Those in the church who embrace the aspiration to promote others in ministry understand that their opinions do count, and their public endorsement can pave the way for younger colleagues to succeed.

The New Testament writings reveal much concerning Paul's mentoring relationship with Timothy. The pastoral epistles were authoritative communications of an official nature through which Paul gave solemn guidance to his readers. "Yet they are combined with intense expressions of personal relationship and concern."<sup>124</sup> Such is the case with Paul's communications to Timothy. In both letters, after the brief obligatorily formal introduction, Paul immediately settles into a comfortable posture of affection, calling Timothy his son (1 Tim 1:2, 1 Tim 2:2).

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<sup>123</sup> Tesh Njokanma, "The Power of a Divine Recommendation," Tesh Njokanma Writings, April 11, 2022. <http://teshnwritings.com/6786-2/>.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*. (Louisville, KY. Presbyterian Publishing, 2012), 18, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2100619/first-and-second-timothy-and-titus-pdf>.

Timothy's emergence onto the early church scene is recorded in Acts 16 during Paul's second "missionary journey." However, there is a great probability that Paul had already known of Timothy and his mother and grandmother from his first journey to Lystra, recorded in Acts 14.<sup>125</sup> It is undoubtedly during this previous visit to Lystra that the young Timothy and members of his family would have been converted and would have also witnessed Paul's resilience during violent persecution from Jewish detractors (Acts 14:19). It is possible that Timothy was eagerly waiting for Paul's expected to return to his hometown.

Paul chooses to include him in the ministry team that will visit the churches previously established during the first missionary campaign.

Now Paul also came to Derbe and Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brothers and sisters who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to leave with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the ordinances for them to follow which had been determined by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."<sup>126</sup>

Paul's choice of Timothy as a ministry companion has been the source of much speculation and commentary. From a contemporary, cursory reading of scripture, the favorable selection of Timothy appears to be founded to a great degree on the reputation of his mother. Years later, the Apostle Paul would acknowledge Timothy's rich heritage of faith by celebrating the legacy passed down to him. "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first

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<sup>125</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful - Philippians* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2005), 80.

<sup>126</sup> Acts 16:1-5.

dwelled in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well..”<sup>127</sup>

A closer examination reveals the uniqueness of this astute individual who would become recognized for his intimate spiritual relationship with Paul. Characteristic of the author Luke’s journalistic approach, the introduction of a leading character like Timothy in the Acts of the Apostles contains critical information: (1) Timothy is recognized already as a sincere disciple. (2) He is the offspring of a mixed marriage. (3) His Christian devotion has been recognized by fellow believers in Lystra and Iconium. (4) Though an adult, he is circumcised according to Jewish law under Paul’s direction. The latter of these observations invites the most scrutiny.

The record that Timothy’s mother was married to a Gentile “suggests that there was less rigid social segregation among the Jews of central Asia Minor than among those of Palestine.”<sup>128</sup> The New Testament historian William Ramsay gives some insight into the socio-economic status of Timothy’s immediate family, “there can be little doubt that the Jews married into dominant families.”<sup>129</sup> Timothy does not appear to emerge out of social obscurity. His family is reputed among the citizens of Lystra. He has been validated by his peers and elders and as has been stated, it is not beyond comprehension that Paul has known about him even before coming to this city. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit directs Paul’s decision to include Timothy. However, Timothy’s racial pedigree could have been considered a problem, especially in consideration of the forthcoming travel destinations, and it could have been considered an advantage, in that his unique heredity gives him social standing with both Jews and Greeks.

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<sup>127</sup> 2 Tim 1:5.

<sup>128</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 304, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2015748/the-book-of-acts-pdf>.

<sup>129</sup> William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, (London, England: Hodder And Stoughton, 1915), 357.

The Acts 16 narrative of Timothy's inauguration into ministry is brief and to the point. However, in Paul's letters to Timothy, he elaborates on Timothy's initiation into the ministry. Timothy is encouraged to reawaken the gift that was bestowed upon him prophetically by the laying on of hands by the elders (1 Tim. 4:14). "There are indications in the Pastoral Epistles that the leaders of Timothy's home church associated themselves with Paul in commissioning him for the gospel ministry."<sup>130</sup> This ordaining presbytery would have included respected and qualified leaders in the church at Lystra. Paul places himself as a participant in this ordination event, reminding Timothy that he himself had laid hands upon him (2 Tim 1:6). Paul refers to the prophecies that were initially spoken over Timothy. The younger is admonished to maintain a steady, flourishing boldness based on the strength of these prophecies. Herein lies an example of genuine mentorship and impartation. The elder speaks prophetically into the life of the younger. The ongoing effectiveness of one's ministry call comes from the power of the Holy Spirit and also the validation of the leader(s). The Paul–Timothy relationship abides as a distinct paradigm for generational mentoring.

The matters concerning Timothy's racial mix and the rite of circumcision are significantly entwined. Timothy's heritage and status as a Roman citizen will prove to be an asset in reaching the Gentile communities with the Gospel. At issue, though, is the fact that although Timothy is half-Jewish, he has never been circumcised according to Jewish law. His future ministry mission would not be exclusively among the Gentiles. Often, when Paul's team entered a city, the initial audience was found in the local synagogue<sup>131</sup> Throughout his travels, the testimony of Paul's ministry calling and focus included both Jews and Gentiles. "For I am

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<sup>130</sup> Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 304.

<sup>131</sup> Acts 9:20, 13:5, 13:14, 13:42, 14:1, 17:1, 17:10, 18:4, 18:19.

not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”<sup>132</sup>

Hengel avers, “It was Timothy’s mixed parentage that made Paul decide to circumcise him before taking him along as his junior colleague.”<sup>133</sup> Although some have suggested Paul’s commission of and Timothy’s complicity in this ritual was an act of weakness or compromise, Gundry pointedly concludes, “Not to keep the law of circumcision, then, but to avoid putting a roadblock in the way of evangelizing the local Jews and stabilizing those who believed, Paul circumcised Timothy.”<sup>134</sup> Because the Jews in the surrounding area of his residence at Lystra knew that his father was Greek, it would be assumed that he was not circumcised. Timothy’s willingness to be circumcised indicates a perceptive understanding of God’s call and also allegiance to his mentor whose life motif was, “To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that I may, by all means, save some.”<sup>135</sup>

Willie James Jennings also addresses the matter of Timothy’s circumcision as being more than merely an act of religious acquiescence. Paul’s inclusion of Timothy in the work is a courageous move, it is a step toward Gospel inclusion, and acceptance of the nations into the family of God. Jennings implies that the presence of Timothy in this key position introduces a new paradigm in early church ministry, entitling this portion of Acts 16 “the beginning of the end of segregation.”<sup>136</sup> Timothy represents the “new Christian,” in that he is in one person the

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<sup>132</sup> Rom 1:16.

<sup>133</sup> M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London, England: SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd., 1979), 64. See also A.E. Harvey, *The New English Bible: Companion to the New Testament* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 459.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Gundry, *Commentary on Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2010), sec. Acts 16:1-5, <https://www.perlego.com/book/2050890/commentary-on-acts-commentary-on-the-new-testament-book-5-pdf>.

<sup>135</sup> 1 Cor 9:22.

proverbial fusion of both Gentile and Jew. He is the prophetic representation of racial parity, the embodiment of diversity within Christ's body. Calling him the "in-between disciple," Jennings further articulates, "Timothy appears, the mulatto child. He was destined to appear because they are always present in the diaspora where Jew and Gentile meet in spaces of exile and longing."<sup>137</sup> His life exemplifies the historic and contemporary realities of cultural diversity, "the shifting plates of identity on which we all stand."<sup>138</sup> Not only does Timothy hold a unique place in the evangelistic company, but he also ultimately becomes the closest associate to Paul. From the initial connection at Lystra the relationship between these two flourishes.

Following the story of Paul's choosing of Timothy as a participant in the company, the Acts narrative makes mention of him only a few times and then primarily in the context of a team member (Acts 17:14,15; Acts 18:5; Acts 19:22; Acts 20) Although not named directly, he takes part in the mission to Philippi, where the team encounters great opposition as the result of an exorcism performed by Paul (Acts 16:16-24). Paul and Silas are apprehended, beaten, and imprisoned by the magistrates. Timothy is spared the severe persecution, probably because he is half-Greek.<sup>139</sup> Bruce maintains that in the Acts 20 reference, "Timothy is included not as a church delegate from the churches of Galatia but as 'Paul's junior colleague and *fidus Achates*.'"<sup>140</sup> The significance of his involvement and importance in the work of the early church is manifest in the Book of Acts, however, the elaboration of his filial relationship with Paul as an

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<sup>136</sup> William James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation), 2017), chap. 16:1-21, 40, The Spirit and the End of Segregation. <https://www.perlego.com/book/2101046/acts-pdf>.

<sup>137</sup> Jennings, *Acts*.

<sup>138</sup> Jennings, *Acts*.

<sup>139</sup> Longenecker, *Acts*, chap. 4, pt. 2, <https://www.perlego.com/book/558128/acts-pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, pt. 16, sec. 2, <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2015748/27>.

understudy is mainly developed in the epistles.<sup>141</sup> Timothy is to play an important part in the record of the Acts of the Apostles<sup>142</sup> and in the Pauline letters.<sup>143</sup>

A most telling indication of the kind of trusting relationship that Paul has with Timothy is found in his letter to the Philippians. “For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven character, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.”<sup>144</sup>

Although Paul is surrounded by other seemingly qualified workers, he gives clear reasoning why he has confidence only in Timothy to truly represent him to the church at Philippi. Timothy is presented as one who is “like-souled”<sup>145</sup> to Paul, in contrast to others who are more interested in personal fulfillment than caring for God’s people.

It is widely accepted that when Paul neared the end of his life journey, he left the charge of the ongoing ministry in the hands of Timothy. The final instructions are recorded in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Tim, verses 6 through 18. “Two metaphors predominate sacrifice and departure. Paul was in effect saying: I have done what was necessary in my time; now you must do what is necessary in your time.”<sup>146</sup> His departing words are capsulized in at least four main thoughts: (1) He considers his present situation. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and

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<sup>141</sup> C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts*, 759.

<sup>142</sup> Acts 16:1; 17:14, 15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4.

<sup>143</sup> Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1, 19; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:2; Phlm 1; Heb 13:23.

<sup>144</sup> Phil 2:20-22

<sup>145</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 266, <https://www.christianbook.com/letter-philippians-revised-international-commentary-testament/gordon%20%20fee/9780802825117/pd/25110>.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 170.

the time of my departure has come.”<sup>147</sup> The metaphor is taken from the culminating performance of a sacrifice at the altar in the temple, the pouring out of the drink offering, as described in Num 15:1-12. The tense of the verb suggests that the pouring of the offering, though not completed, is already in process.<sup>148</sup> (2) He evaluates his past journey. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”<sup>149</sup> “Paul looks back on his life with triumph, and he uses three more-word pictures associated with victory.”<sup>150</sup> Paul speaks of his life and ministry being a fight, the engagement of spiritual warfare. He also alludes to the quality of endurance, using the analogy of the athlete running a race. His claim is not to have “won” the race, but to have “finished the race.”<sup>151</sup> Also, he had remained faithful, maintaining unswerving devotion and loyalty to his Master. (3) He considers the triumphant future. “in the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”<sup>152</sup>

Paul’s continued remarks in this epistle to Timothy reveal something of the mindset of one who is soon facing imminent earthly departure:

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take along Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When

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<sup>147</sup> 2 Tim 4:6.

<sup>148</sup> Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 171.

<sup>149</sup> 2 Tim 4:7.

<sup>150</sup> David Platt, Daniel Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013). 214.

<sup>151</sup> Platt, Akin, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy*, 215.

<sup>152</sup> 2 Tim 4:8.



you come, bring the overcoat which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.<sup>153</sup>

Paul's words reveal his longing for companionship with some of his closest friends and fellow workers, considering the backdrop of rejection and betrayal he has experienced during his imprisonment in Rome. Four times he requests the presence of Timothy and in the final request adds an element of urgency (4:9, 4:11, 4:19, 4:13, and 4:21). Although he concludes with greetings from some of the other workers in the final portion of the letter (4:19) and has previously made reference to some of the resident workers with whom he was in contact, this plea for the presence of Timothy and Mark discloses a felt need for peer-level camaraderie in the final chapter of his life. Close fellowship with perhaps his most trusted friends, Luke, Timothy, and Mark, would provide a much-needed antidote to the loneliness and abandonment he has experienced. The additional request for reading material gives credence to the fact that Paul demonstrates an enduring love for scripture and study. "Paul was clearly concerned to keep up his own reading and study, not least to be able to ponder and mull over the stories about, and teachings of, Jesus himself."<sup>154</sup>

Regarding the transference of mission to the next generation, and the bearing of one who seeks to successfully convey critical directives to followers, the example of Paul is indispensable. The Paul-Timothy relationship demonstrates an ideal for generational impartation in ministry. Timothy is given the charge to replicate the instructional approach that Paul has modeled, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust

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<sup>153</sup> 2 Tim 4:10-13.

<sup>154</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2004), 133.

these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.”<sup>155</sup> In testimonial remembrance of foregone leaders, Clement of Rome reflected: “Afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration (1 Clem. 44:2).”<sup>156</sup> The adherence to Paul’s standard of calculated transference ensures the reproduction of spiritual knowledge for four generations. If heeded to generation after generation, the replication essentially enters into infinity, a successful ongoing process of impartation.

### Summary

The biblical record, replete with examples of the successful transferal of authority and purpose from one generation to the next, is not devoid of accounts of failure. The book of Judges provides a record of Israel’s continuing dilemma in maintaining restraint over the Canaanite peoples. During Joshua’s administration, certain compromising agreements were made with the land’s inhabitants, which came back to plague Israel later (Josh 13:13, 15:63, 16:10, 17:11-12; 19:47). Butler suggests that the confusion in leadership after the conquest of Canaan developed out of a failure on Joshua’s part to name a successor as Moses did.<sup>157</sup>

The priest Eli was a faithful mentor of Samuel, but his fathering skills were dismal, in that he allowed his unfit sons to serve in the tabernacle. Although their reputation as adulterers and thieves was widespread, Eli failed to take decisive disciplinary action, and simply scolded them. Eli’s lack of leadership and the debaucherous lifestyle of his sons eventually resulted in

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<sup>155</sup> 2 Tim 2:2.

<sup>156</sup> Raymond Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2013), sec. 2:22-26, Third Exhortation, <https://www.perlego.com/book/3239101/i-ii-timothy-and-titus-2002-pdf>.

<sup>157</sup> T.C. Butler, *Understanding the Basic Themes of Joshua*. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), 27.

Eli's death and the loss of the Ark of the Covenant to the Philistines (1 Sam 2:22-24, 25b).

Samuel's record as a God-fearing leader of Israel, following the era of the judges, was impeccable. However, he also appointed undeserving sons to positions of prominence, an action that prompted the people of Israel to be ruled by a king, like other nations (1 Sam 8:1-6).

King David is one of the most celebrated characters in Old Testament history. His fame as a warrior, musician, and king is unsurpassed, yet his story is stained with repeated failure at fatherhood. He failed to administer appropriate punishment against his son Amnon following Amnon's scandalous rape of his sister Tamar (2 Sam 13). The mutiny of his son Absalom, an uprising that led to a temporary overthrow of the throne of his father, and the occupation of Absalom and his sympathizers in the city of Jerusalem, occurred following years of strained communications and confusing messages from David (2 Sam 15). When David was old, and the heir to the throne of Israel was brought into question, his son Adonijah tried to usurp the throne of Israel. "Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.' So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, with fifty men to run before him. And his father had never rebuked him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done so?'"<sup>158</sup> Again, David's consistent neglect of parental communication and relational oversight contributed to the confusion regarding the future of the nation. The fate of the nation is preserved when David heeded the advice of his counselors, who admonished him to follow through with his initial promise that Solomon would succeed him as king of Israel. "The king has also said this: 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted one to sit on my throne today while my own eyes see it.'"<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> 1 Kgs 1:5,6.

<sup>159</sup> 1 Kgs 1:47.

The church is afforded invaluable examples and lessons from the scripture regarding intergenerational communication and the processes of succession. These examples, both positive and negative, provide instruction for the present challenges the church faces in engaging and mobilizing effective disciples.

### *Issues from Related Contemporary Literature*

#### Introduction.

The purpose of this section/subject is to examine current contributions to the subject of Boomers, seeking a clearer understanding of the vital role they play in society and in the church. After a brief discussion of the current terminology used to describe the Boomer's season in life, an examination of the present culture of the Boomers in America will be made. A look at the physical, spiritual, sociological, and attitudinal issues surrounding the Boomer cohort and the intergenerational communication and lifestyle barriers will be executed. Then, a look at the Boomers from the church's standpoint, exploring leadership's responsibility in the task of engaging Boomers for meaningful ministry will be undertaken.

Contemporary theologians and sociologists have defined the seasons of life in different terms and with various approaches. In *Autumn Gospel*, theologian and counselor Kathleen Fischer writes particularly to women in their mid-life years and beyond who are entering the second half of life. She says, "The second half of a women's life offers some of the most complex and spiritually rich decades she will know."<sup>160</sup> Craig Miller, who holds a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Seminary, and presently serves as Director of Pastoral Leadership at The

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<sup>160</sup> Kathleen R. Fischer, *Autumn Gospel: Women in the Second Half of Life* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1995), 10.

United Methodist General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, also simplifies the seasons by identifying those who are fifty and beyond as entering the second half of life.<sup>161</sup> In his *Encore: Finding Work in the Second Half of Life*, Marc Freedman, a recognized social entrepreneur, thought leader and author, as well as founder and co-CEO of Encore.org, focuses on tapping the abilities and experiences of those beyond midlife to bring solutions to challenging social problems. He offers, among other intriguing life propositions, a futuristic yet realistic look at Boomers in the year 2030.<sup>162</sup> A leading author on men's issues, Patrick Morley, built one of Florida's largest Fortune 500 companies by the time he was 35 and later on went on to establish a ministry to men called Man in the Mirror. Morley presents a perspective that describes spiritual life as a somewhat linear journey of seven seasons, each stage engendering new developments and tasks. He submits that, "Each of us will go through all of these seasons through the course of his life, many seasons more than once."<sup>163</sup> Although his approach does not essentially fit the age-groups paradigm, one can adapt certain chronological experiences to the seasons. Paul Tournier, a renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss physician, theologian, and philosopher, simply broke human existence into three distinct seasons: Springtime, Summer and Autumn.<sup>164</sup>

The exact time period for present-day Baby Boomers may accordingly be delineated through various approaches. A suitable designation for the purpose at hand is to consider Boomer life as defined by the third third of life. Walter C. Wright, former president of Regent College in Vancouver, and present executive director of the Max De Pree Center for Leadership

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<sup>161</sup> Craig Kennet Miller, *Boomer Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2016), 11.

<sup>162</sup> Marc Freeman, *Encore: Finding Work in the Second Hal of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Group 2007), 6-12.

<sup>163</sup> Patrick Morley, *The Seven Seasons of the Man in the Mirror* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 16.

<sup>164</sup> Paul Tournier, *The Seasons of Life*, reprint (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 8,20,47.

at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA., speaks of the third season of life in terms of the ages 60 to 90.<sup>165</sup> Although it is impossible to determine a specific age guideline for the designation of the last third of life, because every lifespan is different, for the purpose of this study, the last third corresponds to that of the Boomer cohort, age 57 and beyond. As director of ENCORE Ministry, Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. oversees “the work of committee members providing consultation, training and support, resources, and networking opportunities for church leaders in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of The United Methodist Church for implementing and expanding intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults.”<sup>166</sup> He adopts a paradigm that divides life into three different stages: (1) From birth to the age of 30 is a season of “acquiring.” The individual is involved in learning and being equipped for life; (2) The second phase of life, from 30 to 60 years of age, is a time of ‘doing.’ Doers are engaged in career pursuits, rearing families and becoming established in life; and (3) The third stage, from 60 to death, is the time of ‘being,’ as the individual moves into a time of enjoying and imparting those things that have been attained in the first two seasons. Some people who live a shorter life nonetheless experience all three stages.<sup>167</sup>

How is the last third of life age span best defined? Mark Roberts, the senior strategist for the De Pree Center at Fuller and founder of De Pree’s Flourishing in the Third Third of Life initiative, gives an interesting perspective: “Technically, given the current average life expectancy in the U.S. of 78.7 years, the typical American enters the third third at 52½ years old.

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<sup>165</sup> Walter C. Wright, *The Third Third of Your Life: Preparing for the Future* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>166</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., n.d., Encore Ministry, Accessed October 5, 2022, [https://encoreministry.org/about/richard\\_gentzler/](https://encoreministry.org/about/richard_gentzler/).

<sup>167</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry by, with, and for Older Adults* (Nashville, TN. Discipleship Resources. 2018) chap. 2, para. 2, Kindle

Of course, if you end up living to 100, then your third third doesn't begin until you turn 66.7.”<sup>168</sup> He further affirms that the exact time or season is not what counts. It is the “well-being, faith, productivity, and fulfillment” of those who seek to maximize their potential during this season of life. Richard and Leona Bergstrom, founders of Ignite Ministries, a ministry that serves to promote vision and purpose for Baby Boomers, have adopted the last third paradigm in identifying those who are entering into their third calling. “Third Calling people are leading-edge Boomers. They are the ‘Do-Bees,’ kids of the 50s and 60s, revolutionaries, and some hippies. They are called to something more than a life of only play and leisure; they are ready to change the world. Third Calling people are people of faith. They believe in God, his mission and his people.”<sup>169</sup>

This section of research will be divided into three segments: (1) The Boomer in Focus will seek to examine the Baby Boomers themselves, where they presently fit into the generational and sociological picture in America; (2) Boomers’ Challenges in Purpose and Inter-Generational Relationships will seek to provide a greater understanding of the major difficulties, anxieties, and obstacles facing the Boomer cohort; and, (3) The Church and Boomers will take a look at the church’s attitudes and relationship with Baby Boomers.

The Boomer in focus.

Sam Rainer, lead pastor of West Bradenton Baptist Church and president of Church Answers,

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<sup>168</sup> Mark Roberts, “Flourishing in the Third Third of Life: A New Initiative of the de Pree Center,” De Pree Center, February 28, 2020, <https://depree.org/flourishing-in-the-third-third-of-life-a-new-initiative-of-the-de-pree-center/>

<sup>169</sup> Richard and Leona Bergstrom, *Third Calling: What are you doing the rest of your life?* (Edmonds, WA. Re-Ignite, 2016), pref., para. 8, Kindle

presents some pertinent facts regarding the presence and influence of Baby Boomers and their relationship to the church.<sup>170</sup> First, the number of people who comprise the Baby Boomer cohort. He states that there are 76 million Boomers in the United States and 40 percent, or 30 million, go to church. Ten thousand retire every day. Second, with the expected lifespan increasing, they will be around for another 30 years. Third, they have a higher level of church commitment than millennials. This amazing cohort can bring a wealth of resources to the local church. Rainer advises that pastors must develop intentional strategies to involve this power base in the local church. “I believe it’s a gold mine of gospel energy. Could the next great gospel movement in America bloom from the flower children?”<sup>171</sup> Baby Boomers are not to be overlooked. They are the second largest generational cohort in America and control 74 percent of disposable income.<sup>172</sup> The power and influence of the Boomer cohort is a “force to be reckoned with.”<sup>173</sup> Susan Ward, whose consulting firm presents courses on how to promote small businesses, joins with other voices encouraging entrepreneurs not to overlook Boomers in launching new businesses. “The baby boomer market is an extremely desirable market because of its sheer size.... Contrary to popular belief, there are a great many baby boomers that are not retired. Even better, many baby boomers are at the peak of their earning years and have comparatively large discretionary incomes to spend.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Sam Rainer, “The Big Baby Boomer Opportunity for the Church,” *Church Answers* (blog), March 17, 2021, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/the-big-baby-boomer-opportunity-for-the-church/>.

<sup>171</sup> Rainer, 2021, “The Baby Boomer Opportunity.”

<sup>172</sup> Opeyemi Olagoke, “How to Market to Baby Boomers in 2022,” Woculus Marketing, March 2022, <https://www.woculus.com/how-to-market-to-baby-boomers-in-2022/>.

<sup>173</sup> Mary C. Fridley, “Baby Boomers as Caregivers, a Force to Be Reckoned with – Caregiving Articles,” Empowering Caregivers, <https://care-givers.com/articles/baby-boomers-as-caregivers-a-force-to-be-reckoned-with/> Accessed March 2, 2022.

<sup>174</sup> Susan Ward, “Target the Huge Boomer Market with These Small Business Ideas,” LiveAbout, January 27, 2019, <https://www.liveabout.com/small-business-ideas-for-the-baby-boomer-market-2947936>.



As with any generational group, individuals within the Boomer cohort cannot be uniformly characterized. However, there are certain inclusionary features that can be discovered. The following graph from a broad study of a recognized secular institution<sup>175</sup> reveals some interesting statistics about the Baby Boomers:

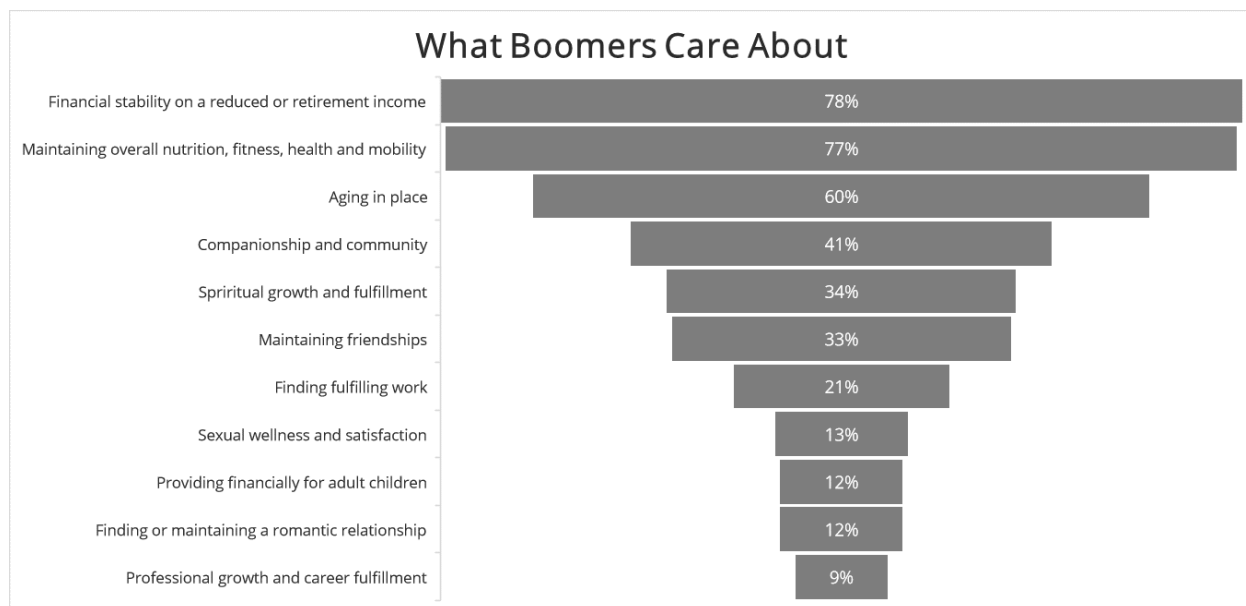


Figure. What Boomers care about. Released by Coldwell Banker Inc.

As their history has revealed, the Boomer generation will not age silently but will make their voices heard. They are not quiet concerning their preferences and desires. A governmental study regarding the 2020 US Census reveals some startling statistics about the growth of this aging cohort. In the previous 2010 census, the oldest Boomer was 65. “Since then, about 10,000 a day have crossed that age threshold and by 2030, all boomers will be at least age 65.”<sup>176</sup> The same study puts the population of Boomers in America at 73 million, giving it a numerical status

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<sup>175</sup> CFI Team, “Baby Boomers - Overview, Characteristics, Major Events.”

<sup>176</sup> America Counts Staff, “By 2030, All Baby Boomers.”

second only to the millennials. “By 2030, millennials will hold five times as much wealth as they have today, and are expected to inherit over \$68 trillion from their predecessors in the Great Transfer of Wealth. What will they do with this wealth?”<sup>177</sup> On a parallel ecclesiological trajectory, efforts have been made to train the church to acknowledge the wealth of support and productivity resident among those who are of the Boomer cohort. Gentzler maintains that churches that focus entirely on the spiritual development of young people are overlooking the need and the potential of helping older adults grow in their relationship with Christ.<sup>178</sup> He further argues that vitality in congregations is not only produced by growing the numbers of children and young people, but also by including the older in the equation of healthy and vital ministry. If the older constituency is not involved, the church is not complete.<sup>179</sup> The incalculable contributions of Boomers to the church are habitually overlooked. “While the church is grateful for the financial contributions made by older adults, it must also recognize that the wisdom, faith, and experience of older adults are also of great importance to the future of the church.”<sup>180</sup>

Leona and Richard Bergstrom, make note of the fact that Boomers with a sense of destiny will find themselves swimming against the stream of societal expectations. They refer to the mindset exhibited by the development of retirement communities in the southwest during the last century that catered to the whim of wistful retirees who purportedly wanted a simple life of ease in their golden years. They propose that the opinions of present-day Boomers do not align with the retirees of the previous generation. “But, because of the old marketing schemes for places

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<sup>177</sup> Coldwell Banker Staff, “A Look at Wealth: Millennial Millionaires,” *Coldwell Banker Luxury* (blog), October 16, 2019, <https://blog.coldwellbankerluxury.com/a-look-at-wealth-millennial-millionaires/>.

<sup>178</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity*, chap. 3, para. 6, Kindle

<sup>179</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity*, chap. 5, para. 3, Kindle

<sup>180</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity*, chap. 5, Role of the Church, para. 3, Kindle

like Sun City, an entire generation was sold on the idea that this stage of life is a time for withdrawal and leisure. Boomers are not too sure about that script. Most want to age with purpose and possibility.”<sup>181</sup>

Over a decade ago, J. Walker Smith, senior partner and president of Yankelovich, Inc., a marketing research company, and Ann Clurman suggested three positive features marking the emerging attitude and mentality of the Boomer generation: (1) “Youthfulness: A belief in an ageless engagement with life that is active, spirited, and exuberant; (2) Impact: A desire to have an enduring influence in making a difference; and (3) Possibility: A sense of personal development built upon empowerment and continuous progression.”<sup>182</sup>

Those who make up the Boomer cohort, entering their mid-fifties and getting older, are not only obliged to contend with cultural mindsets that tend to undermine their social significance, but they also often deal with many self-deprecating thoughts about their own shortcomings.

Dallas Willard, an American philosopher known for his extensive writings on Christian spiritual formation, gives insight into the problem of disappointment and disenchantment with life that some have as they grow older. He suggests that having an understanding of the kingdom of God in the present time and effectively living with purpose hinges upon a clear understanding of the future, stating: “The experiences we have of this life as his co-conspirators now fill us with anticipation of a future so full of beauty and goodness we can hardly imagine. ‘When Christ, who is our life, shall appear,’ Paul says, ‘then you too will be revealed with him as glorious’

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<sup>181</sup> Richard and Leona Bergstrom, *Third Calling: What are you doing,*” 137, Kindle

<sup>182</sup> J. Walker Smith, and Ann Clurman, *Generation Ageless: How Baby Boomers Are Changing the Way We Live Today--and They're Just Getting Started* (New York, NY: Collins, 2007), 29.

(Col. 3:4).”<sup>183</sup> John, in his first epistle, expresses the joyful vision of the believer’s future status, declaring:

“See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and in fact, we are. For this reason, the world does not know us: because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”<sup>184</sup>

A vision for the future can and should inform one’s activity for the present. Many enter the later years of life bearing the burden of unfulfilled dreams and carrying regret over yesterday’s flawed decisions or even doubting whether God has been there all along. For those who “wish to relive the lost years, their lives are thrown out of step. They do not win back the past and they lose out in the present.”<sup>185</sup> This disconsolate self-evaluation not only puts them in a condition of despondency that is mentally and emotionally paralyzing but also affects their ability to contribute to the betterment of others. Willard suggests that the antidote for such despondency is to discover a way, with God’s help, to incorporate the resolute truth of our future life into the decisions we are now making concerning this side of eternity.<sup>186</sup> To be sure, the eventual change from this life to the next is a matter of joyful transition. The fact that our life is hidden in Christ, that we already live in His kingdom should inform our present lifestyle and motivate us to productivity.

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<sup>183</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 375.

<sup>184</sup> 1 John 3:12.

<sup>185</sup> Tournier and Gilmour, *The Seasons of Life*, 48.

<sup>186</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 212.

Boomers' challenges in purpose and inter-generational relationships.

“Ageing defies an exact definition, but it is commonly known as that eventual period of life that occurs beyond the process of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.”<sup>187</sup> “We talk about aging as a wide-ranging phenomenon: it is a physical process, but also a psychological one, a social one, and so on. As we age, we acquire positive values such as knowledge and experience. From the strictly biological point of view, our organs start to lose their ability to function.”<sup>188</sup> Formiga suggests that all humans have both a chronological and a biological age. The chronological age is the number of years we have been alive, whereas the biological age is the age we appear to be. For example, some people who are ninety-year-olds present themselves as twenty years younger. Conversely, a younger elder might exhibit characteristics normally attributed to agedness.

As people grow older, one of the stark realities they face is the matter of aging, with all the accompanying accouterments of physical, mental, and emotional change. Aging is a fact of life. It is God's plan to carry individuals through the seasons of life with dignity and acceptance. Thomas Aquinas' famous statement, *gratia non tollit naturum* (grace does not suppress nature)<sup>189</sup> has a relevant ring of truth. There is no amount of acquired knowledge, no advancement in scientific achievement, and no spiritual revelation that will displace the reality of growing old.<sup>190</sup> As the special creation of God, humans give honor to God when humbly embracing the journey of life that His plan has prescribed. An internal personal audit of attitude

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<sup>187</sup> Fransesc Formiga, “What Is Aging?” Senesciencia, Accessed February 19, 2022, <http://www.ub.edu/senesciencia/noticia/what-is-ageing/>. Accessed February 19, 20

<sup>188</sup> Formiga, “What Is Aging?”

<sup>189</sup> James T. Bretzke, *Consecrated Phrases: A Latin Theological Dictionary: Latin Expressions Commonly Found in Theological Writings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 54.

<sup>190</sup> Tournier and Gilmour, *The Seasons of Life*, 10.

and perception of aging is critical to the Boomer's emotional health, mental stability, and spiritual vitality.

Leon Kass, a celebrated American author and scientist who has gained recognition as a prominent defender of human dignity, poses a compelling argument for embracing the reality of aging with grace and humility. In the wisdom of God, mankind is destined to age. "What is needed to complete this argument against the pursuit of ageless bodies is an account of the goodness of the natural human life cycle, roughly three multiples of a generation, featuring a time of coming of age, then a time of flourishing, ruling, and replacing of one's self, and finally a time of savoring and understanding."<sup>191</sup> Elaborating on the conundrum of an ageless life, he proposes an absurd scenario: "What incentive would there be for the old to make way for the young if the old slowed down but little and had no reason to think of retiring – if Michael Jordan could play until he was eighty?"<sup>192</sup> Indeed, at what point would there be a differentiation of generations, the beauty of role transformation, and the loving exchange between generations that characterizes the healthy continuum of family and society? God's continuing purpose is fulfilled in the process of aging.

However, the challenge of overcoming one's negative inner view of aging is exasperated by prevailing opinions about aging. Boomers face an intimidating challenge, that of dealing with social mindsets regarding 'ageism'.

The presence of 'ageism' is ubiquitous in today's Western societies. 'Ageism,' a word first popularized in America in 1969,<sup>193</sup> is used to define the "prejudice or discrimination against

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<sup>191</sup> Kass, *Leading a Worthy Life*, sec. 2, chap. 6, Perlego.

<sup>192</sup> Kass, *Leading a Worthy Life*, 2017.

<sup>193</sup> R.N. Butler, "Age-Is: Another Form of Bigotry," *The Gerontologist* 9, 1969, no. 4, pt. 1: 243–46. [https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article-abstract/9/4\\_Part\\_1/243/569551](https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article-abstract/9/4_Part_1/243/569551).

a particular age group and especially the elderly.”<sup>194</sup> Some practices of ‘ageism’ in our current society may be imperceptible on the surface, such as the reluctance to employ older people, the practice of taking unfair advantage of seniors in business transactions, or their exclusion from certain social opportunities. However, other ageistic perceptions are more blatant and extremely troubling, as seen in the advances in the field of bioethics, including the proposition that euthanasia is a viable means of ridding society of those who are no longer useful.<sup>195</sup> Obviously, such a ghastly overt mindset toward the elderly would not be reflected by the church, nor would it be tolerated, but there is an undeniable assault, whether it be sociological or spiritual, on the inherent worth of those who are advanced in years. On biblical grounds, the position of our elders in the church should be honored and celebrated. The church, as it adheres to Scripture as its standard for living, is the one place where the prevailing societal notions of ageism can be effectively reversed.

Nguyen and Jeste, professors of psychiatry and neurosciences at the University of California, San Diego, have written extensively on ageism and the problematic prejudices of the public toward aging people. “Certain segments of western culture sadly equate aging with such ‘d’ words as degeneration, decline, disability, diseases, dementia, depression, and death. Policymakers and economists are outspoken in their fear that spending money on older people’s care will mean less money for children and younger adults, who represent the future.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> “Definition of AGEISM.” n.d., Accessed January 19, 2022, [www.merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ageism#h1).  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ageism#h1>.

<sup>195</sup> C. E. Koop & Edward R. Grant, “The Small Beginnings of Euthanasia: Examining the Erosion in Legal Prohibitions against Mercy-Killing,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 2, no. 3 (1987): 585.  
<https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp/vol2/iss3/2>

<sup>196</sup> Tanya T. Nguyen and Dilip V. Jeste, “Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back.” *Cerebrum: The Dana Forum on Brain Science* (July 1, 2021): cer-5-21,  
[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8493820/#\\_\\_sec2title](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8493820/#__sec2title).

Following are some of their observations concerning accepted public opinion regarding the elderly:

- Older people are treated as though aging is an incurable disease.
- Many feel guilty for living longer and becoming a burden on others.
- There exists the idea that their continued place in the workforce prevents someone younger from gaining a much-needed job.
- In the medical field, fewer future practitioners are entering the fields of geriatric medicine and psychiatry.
- Older people are not as productive and their continued existence deprives ensuing generations of much-needed resources for their lives.<sup>197</sup>

Nguyen and Jeste have countered the myths and misconceptions concerning aging with data collected from extensive studies, including their Successful Aging Evaluation (SAGE) study at the UC San Diego Center for Healthy Aging. Their findings affirm that aging is not only a physical process, it also includes psychosocial change. Not all mental functions deteriorate; in fact, some brain functions increase. As individuals grow older, their physical capabilities do ebb, but their cognitive functionalities improve. This phenomenon of “neuroplasticity,” the strengthening of existing synapses and the development of new ones, accounts for certain brain and emotional capacities exhibited in older people. The demonstration of wisdom and calculative decision-making among older people is often surprising. It was discovered during the Covid-19 pandemic that the fear of dying was less prevalent in older people than younger people and that they were more emotionally resilient.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Nguyen and Jeste, “Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back.”

<sup>198</sup> Nguyen and Jeste, “Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back.”



A skewed vision of ageism is one of the principal deterrents to the inclusion of Boomers in meaningful ministry. James M. Houston, respected founder of Regent College and a strong advocate for cross-generational ministry, makes the observation: “Ageism is not just another issue churches need to be conscious of but a neglectful sin that has resulted in the loss of life of older members.”<sup>199</sup> Gentzler interjects that “The aging stereotypes of decline, dementia, and dependence must be replaced with empowering values of independence, activity, well-being, and service.”<sup>200</sup> Houston declares that, from a scriptural perspective, no individual should ever be evaluated from the utilitarian viewpoint. When seniors are dismissed as though the church has no use for them, it is a sign that the church is bowing to the materialistic attitude of present-day culture. “Likewise, in the church, how do we view our elders? Are they simply there to be entertained and humored in age-segregated groups? How do we demonstrate the intrinsic value of all persons through our treatment of the oldest among us?”<sup>201</sup> Noting that the church tends to readily adopt the prevailing cultural mindsets toward those who are aging, Amy Hanson, who has devoted her life to the cause of older engagement and has become a recognized voice in the ministry to and with Boomers, says: “Not only is our society obsessed with youth, but we’ve also grown accustomed and, dare I say, even comfortable with the negative attitudes surrounding aging.”<sup>202</sup>

The widespread devaluation of intrinsic human worth is a mindset that minimizes the contributions older people have made and can make to the community. This demoralizing

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<sup>199</sup> James M. Houston and Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*. (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011) 30, Kindle

<sup>200</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity*, chap 5, para. 3, Kindle

<sup>201</sup> Houston and Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*, 106.

<sup>202</sup> Hanson, *Baby Boomers and Beyond*, 14, Kindle

cultural outlook does not emerge out of a vacuum. Some of the most respected thinkers in the bioethical and sociological arenas have fostered views that openly stand at variance with the fundamental biblical idea that one's intrinsic value is held in the hand of the sovereign God. "The basic contention of a relational ontology is simply that the relations between entities are ontologically more fundamental than the entities themselves."<sup>203</sup> How society and subsequently how the church regards the concept of human life itself comes into question. Opinions that contradict the sacredness of life have a domino effect upon all matters of life.

Bruce Demarest, former missionary educator and now the director of the program for formation and soul care at Denver Seminary, and James R. Beck, professor of counseling at Denver University, have combined efforts to coauthor a remarkable anthropological Christian volume that addresses what it means to be a human from a biblical, theological, and psychological perspective. They warn: "Certain recent voices in philosophy and theology reject the classical substantialist-psychological model of the human person in favor of the late-modern-postmodern modern socio-relational model rooted in a metaphysic of becoming"<sup>204</sup> The authors further explain, "The classical view of the person is rooted in the theory of external relations, which states that relationships are only external to the person, so they do not affect personhood in an essential way."<sup>205</sup> The individual possesses an identity with the capacities of intellect, will, and emotions that interacts with the constantly changing relations in the world. Relations are not necessary for the identity of the person.

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<sup>203</sup> Wesley Wildman, "An Introduction to Relational Ontology." Boston University, May 15, 2006, <https://www.wesleywildman.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/docs/2010-Wildman-Introduction-to-Relational-Ontology-final-author-version-Polkinghorne-ed.pdf>.

<sup>204</sup> James R. Beck and Bruce Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), chap. 10, Kindle

<sup>205</sup> Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, chap.10, Kindle

The biblical view of the fundamental worth of the individual has been the cornerstone of Christian anthropology. Augustine most assuredly held to the classical view of the substantive individual, describing the person as “a certain kind of substance, sharing in reason, fitted to rule the body.”<sup>206</sup> Thomas Aquinas taught that “man is composed of a spiritual and corporeal substance.”<sup>207</sup> John Calvin held that the essential component of the person is the soul/spirit, which is an “immortal yet created essence.”<sup>208</sup> The inner person dwells in a house of clay and the occasion of death separates it from the “corruptible tabernacle.” For his part, Aristotle’s approach to personhood acknowledged the purpose and need for community; however, his position fell short of declaring that a person’s worth was solely determined by relationships. He wrote, “The individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing, and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But whoever is unable to live in society, or who has no need of it because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.”<sup>209</sup>

Bioethicist Michael Tooley, faculty emeritus at the University of Colorado, has written and debated extensively regarding abortion and euthanasia, contending that no moral difference exists between the two actions and that both are legitimate.<sup>210</sup> He submits that a fetus is only a potential person. Further, he maintains that an individual is at three months of age only a “quasi person.” To qualify as a truly *bona fide* person, one must possess a self-consciousness, “the

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<sup>206</sup> Augustine, *On the Immortality of the Soul*, trans. Ludwig Schopp (New York, NY: CIMA Publishing Company, 1947), 14.

<sup>207</sup> Peter Kreeft, *A Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 243.

<sup>208</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1960), 1:192.

<sup>209</sup> Mortimer Adler, *Great Books of the Western World*, 2d ed. trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990), 8:439.

<sup>210</sup> Louis Pojman and Francis Beckwith, *The Abortion Controversy: 25 Years After Roe vs. Wade* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998), 209-233.

property of being an enduring subject of non-momentary interests,” which, according to Tooley, basically happens at the end of the first year.<sup>211</sup> Tooley volunteers that, “New-born humans are neither persons nor even quasi-persons, and therefore their destruction is in no way intrinsically wrong. At about the age of three months, however, they probably acquire properties that are morally significant, and that makes it to some extent intrinsically wrong to destroy them.”<sup>212</sup> Of course, Tooley’s perspective is riddled with inherent contradictions, i.e., at exactly what point in the three-month period does the “quasi-person” status take effect? Or, on exactly which day around the 365-day mark can we be assured that this member of the homo sapiens species is truly a person? However absurd the incongruity of Tooley’s position, it appears evident in that such reasoning from prominent influencers in psychology has contributed to the prevalent societal degradation of life. An approach to life that supplants the sovereignty of God, wherein humans subjectively usurp the authority regarding life decisions, threatens the fundamental value of life – at all stages, from birth to death.

One of the leading voices among American Protestant theologians during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Joseph Fletcher. “His concept of ‘situation ethics’—a moral philosophy whereby one’s ethics must be adjusted to suit the circumstances—has transformed the United States’ religious, cultural, and political values.”<sup>213</sup> Fletcher weighed in heavily on the topic of conception when life actually begins. He proposed that during development in the womb, the fetus is considered a member of the homo sapiens species, but not truly a person because it does not possess two

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<sup>211</sup> Michael Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 128.

<sup>212</sup> Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide*, 411-12.

<sup>213</sup> Trevor Loudon, “Joseph Fletcher: The Marxist ‘Christian’ Who Warped the Morals of a Nation,” *The Epoch Times*, July 17, 2019. [https://www.theepochtimes.com/joseph-fletcher-the-marxist-christian-who-warped-the-morals-of-a-nation\\_2966469.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/joseph-fletcher-the-marxist-christian-who-warped-the-morals-of-a-nation_2966469.html).

components: (1) some measure of intelligence, and (2) an independent state of existence.<sup>214</sup>

Since neither the fetus nor the newly born human possesses these faculties, Fletcher's conclusion is that termination is not murder. His position concurs with that of Australian philosopher Peter Singer who distinguishes between a human and a person. To be considered a person, one must have the capacity to reason, be independent, and have a degree of self-awareness.<sup>215</sup> N.J. Berrill, a biologist and ethicist from Canada, determines that the fetus cannot be considered a person until all organs appear. Even at this point, there is "a long, long way to go to be fully human."<sup>216</sup>

These speculations do damage to shaping the mindset within our society. Distorted concepts about the nature of human identity move even beyond the travesties of abortion and euthanasia and find a home in the subjective examination of the very worthiness of human life – in every circumstance. The viability of anyone's worth as a true person in any setting and at any age comes into question. The social behaviorist George Herbert Mead, a University of Chicago scholar, furthered the influence of relational ontology. He suggested that "the self can only exist in relation to other selves."<sup>217</sup> It is through the faculty of relationships that individuals discover their identity. Karl Barth posed this idea: "The minimal definition of our humanity, our humanity generally, must be that it is the being of man in encounter, and in this sense determination of man as a being with other man."<sup>218</sup> By this estimation, our claim to be identified as humans is determined by our relation to others.

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<sup>214</sup> Joseph F. Fletcher, *The Ethics of Genetic Control* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), 171.

<sup>215</sup> Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.), 94, 130, 178, 189.

<sup>216</sup> N.J. Berrill, *The Person in the Womb* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1968), 45-46.

<sup>217</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1934), 164.

<sup>218</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark Publishers, 1960), 3.2.248.

Millard Erickson, Christian theologian, professor of theology, and author, makes the argument against the “relational ontology” as espoused by theological luminaries such as Barth, disclosing its profound defectiveness. Proponents of this theological and sociological opinion are “led astray by their wholeheartedly anti-substantialist presuppositions, which we have suggested stemmed from existentialism.”<sup>219</sup> Existentialism deprecates essences or substances and values experience, which is present when a relationship is active. Erickson asserts that the image of man refers to his unique and essential existence; it is not defined by something he possesses or something he performs. Lewis and Demarest argue the rationale for a theological-relational ontology collapses in the face of the reality that “a person’s essential attributes and capacities inhere in something.”<sup>220</sup> A person is a person within him or herself. It is not person-to-person relationships that define personhood. Interpersonal connectivity is the outflow of the uniqueness of the spiritual and substantive individual.

From the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we learn the significance and worth of the individual, that it is found in relation to God, who is Lord over all His creation. He sees humans as His prized possession, the crown of His creation, as belonging to Him. Jesus reveals the extent of a person’s importance and God’s transfixed attention to just one individual with such extreme assertions as: “But even the hairs of your head are all counted”<sup>221</sup> and comparison to His omniscient detail to lesser creatures, “Are five sparrows not sold for two *assaria*? And yet not one of them has gone unnoticed in the sight of God... But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not fear; you are more valuable than a great number of sparrows.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1984), 511.

<sup>220</sup> Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 143

<sup>221</sup> Luke 12:7

<sup>222</sup> Luke 12:6,7b

The essential uniqueness of the creature does not preclude the necessity for the community; it is rather the basis for social productivity. The God-given privilege of independence does not excuse a kind of individualism that rejects community or discards the essential need for relationships. Biblically, the fact that a person possesses “human rights,” founded in their intrinsic value, does not supplant the necessity of flourishing in community. Jesus explains that the fulfillment of one’s life is realized through the surrender of one’s personal entitlements: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The one who loves his life loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”<sup>223</sup>

The matter of participating in community, relating to and friending others, is at the center of the cross-generational conversation. Genuine spiritual growth occurs in the arena of relationships. Community is essential to certain developmental steps in human growth. Aristotle described the person who is separated from others thus: "The individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing, and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But whoever is unable to live in society, or who has no need of it because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god."<sup>224</sup> Robert Bellah, Elliott Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, who is internationally known for his work related to the sociology of religion, describes the essence of community as people in relationships. He says that community is “a

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<sup>223</sup> John 12:24-26.

<sup>224</sup> Mortimer I Adler, *Aristotle, Politics: Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990), 8:439.

group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices . . . that both define the community and are nurtured by it."<sup>225</sup> Derek Kidner, who served as warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge and wrote several volumes in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series, interjects in his commentary on the creation of mankind that an individual “will not live until he loves, giving himself away to another on his own level.”<sup>226</sup> The fulfillment of purpose in life is not found in isolation but in relationships with other persons, enjoying the connectedness that invites support, friendship, and belonging.

However, the emphasis on community cannot sabotage the intrinsic worth of the individual. One’s value is not exclusively measured by that person’s contribution to the community. From the biblical viewpoint, a person’s value is primarily founded on their relationship with God. Paul affirms the infinite standing that the children of God have with Him, verifying that out of His own will, He has deemed them “accepted in the Beloved.”<sup>227</sup> Created in His image, the individual possesses a unique position of God-given honor, and it is from that divinely imputed station of significance that the development of community participation ensues. Beck and Demerest state: “Applied to theological anthropology, the theory of external relations holds that the identity and nature of a person are independent of that person's relation to another person or persons.”<sup>228</sup> Scripture reveals that the contribution to the community flows out of one’s essential position of worth with God.

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<sup>225</sup> Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 333.

<sup>226</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis, Old Testament Commentaries* (London, England: Tyndale Press, 1967), 65.

<sup>227</sup> Eph 1:6.

<sup>252</sup> Beck and Demerest, *The Human Personality in Theology*, chap. 10, Kindle



Counter-generational distinctives.

Whereas many contemporary contributors extol the positive virtues of Boomers – such as their propensity to be more grateful and kinder – not everyone shares that optimistic viewpoint. A recent article denoting generational differences referenced a viral TikTok post published by an Instacart carrier after a grocery delivery to a Boomer. “Posting from her car, she highlighted the generational divide between older and younger customers. Young people tend to be grateful and friendly to delivery drivers, while baby boomers or older customers are mean and entitled.”<sup>229</sup> Her message continued, laced with stinging comments about the stinginess and ungratefulness of older people. Within twenty-four hours, the post was viewed by 200,000 people and garnered 34,000 likes. The responses were quite revealing. One responder replied, “I do Shipt [delivery service] and it’s the same. Older people never tip either. Younger people are like ‘everything was subbed but you did great here’s \$20 thank you.’”<sup>230</sup> Another reader responded with a telling question, “Literally, why are boomers so mean?”<sup>231</sup>

The admiration of Boomers by some younger Americans is contrasted with stark criticism by others. Helen Andrews, a columnist who has written for the *Washington Examiner* and *National Review* and now serves as a senior editor of the *American Conservative*, in her recent book concerning the failures of the Boomer generation, derides the economic legacy of the Boomer generation, “Only in the lifetime of the boomers, and especially after their rise to financial maturity in the 1980s, was debt widely used simply for the accumulation of stuff”

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<sup>229</sup> Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, “Literally Why Are Boomers so Mean?” *Daily Dot*, November 25, 2021. <https://www.dailydot.com/unlick/tiktok-instacart-boomers-millennials-customers/>

<sup>230</sup> Baker-Whitelaw, “Literally, Why Are Boomers So Mean?”

<sup>231</sup> Baker-Whitelaw, “Literally, Why Are Boomers So Mean?”

rather than as an investment instrument.<sup>232</sup> She laments that in many other areas of social development, Boomers have failed. In “technology, entertainment, economics, politics, law – what they passed on to their children was worse than what they inherited”<sup>233</sup> Bruce Gibney, a venture capitalist, and author of the controversial 2018 book, *A Generation of Sociopaths, How the Baby Boomers Betrayed America*, brutally blames the Boomer generation for the economic, environmental, political, and social failures of this century and the feat of the Baby Boomers. He states: “Simply: Boomers are sociopaths. They're antisocial and unburdened by conscience. They squander prosperity, ravage the land of wealth and salt the earth so that the seeds of some future fortune may never again find purchase.”<sup>234</sup>

As a Boomer himself, sector expert Michael Ballanger opines with frustration that his own generation has betrayed the very principles that shaped it. He laments that when the children of the 60s grew up and entered into the 70s and 80s, they abandoned their idealistic pride, and “Boomers embarked on careers not in the Foreign Service or the Peace Corps, but to the astonishment of those that can today reflect, they tossed the love beads and headbands and bell-bottomed blue jeans into the wastebasket in favor of pinstriped suits and investment banking.”<sup>235</sup>

#### Temporal factors facing Baby Boomers.

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<sup>232</sup> Helen Andrews, *Boomers: The Men and Women Who Promised Freedom and Delivered Disaster* (New York, NY: Sentinel, 2021), 34.

<sup>233</sup> Andrews, *Boomers: The Men and Women Who*, 196.

<sup>234</sup> John Selmey, “Bruce Cannon Gibney’s a Generation of Sociopaths, Reviewed: How Boomers Mortgaged the Future.” *The Globe and Mail*, April 18, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/book-reviews/bruce-cannon-gibneys-a-generation-of-sociopaths-reviewed-how-boomers-mortgaged-the-future/article34414304/>.

<sup>235</sup> Michael Ballanger, “A Boomers Plea,” *Street Wise Reports*, April 21, 2020. <https://www.streetwisereports.com/article/2020/04/21/a-boomers-plea.html>.

The 2020 census of the United States has provided information that assists the government with demographic and financial decisions pertaining to the care and accommodation of an aging population. America Counts, a department within the resource library of the United States Census Bureau asserts that by the year 2030, the youngest Boomer will have turned 65. The reality of more citizens entering retirement is augmented by the fact that the expected lifespan is steadily increasing. “Baby boomers have changed the face of the U.S. population for more than 70 years and continue to do so as more enter their senior years, a demographic shift often referred to as a ‘gray tsunami.’”<sup>236</sup> For those who reach the age of 65, the expectancy of life extension increased from 11.9 years in 1902 to 19.1 in 2010.<sup>237</sup> The Bureau projects that by 2034, for the first time in U.S. history, older adults will outnumber children under the age of 18. Grace Whiting, president and CEO of the National Alliance of Caregivers, shares with concern the implications of this soon-coming generational mismatch and the implications it will have on those older Americans who want to age in place and rely on in-home caregivers. She says, “We aren’t having enough children to take care of us in our old age.”<sup>238</sup>

An issue that affects the lifestyle and productivity of many Baby Boomers revolves around the responsibility of providing care for aging parents or relatives. A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control revealed that one out of four Baby Boomers are caregivers.<sup>239</sup> This undertaking is perhaps one of the most time-consuming and exhausting undertakings for

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<sup>236</sup> America Counts Staff, “By 2030, All Baby Boomers Will Be.”

<sup>237</sup> He Wan, Daniel Goodkind, and Paul Kowal, *An Aging World: 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p95-16-1.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> Nancy Olumekor, “APWU Retirees Still Fighting for Justice.” American Postal Workers Union, July 9, 2021, <https://apwu.org/news/apwu-retirees-still-fighting-justice-5>.

<sup>239</sup> Christina E. Miyawaki, Erin D. Bouldin, Christopher A. Taylor, and Lisa C. McGuire, *Boomers as Caregivers: Results From the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in 44 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico* (Atlanta, GA: Centers For Disease Control, August 13, 2020), [https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/20\\_0010.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/20_0010.htm).

Boomers. The interaction between the generations can become tense and lead to damaged relationships. Both the younger and the older are responsible for taking ownership of the task of cooperation and embracing an attitude of empathetic mutual understanding. “It is important to remember that caregiving is primarily about a relationship. You don’t get to make all the decisions in a vacuum and then execute the plan under martial law. You are connected to your aging parent, who is fully vested in his or her adulthood.”<sup>240</sup> Freidman lays part of the problem of conflict at the feet of the older generation, pointing to the fact that some seniors’ stubborn resistance to change is not necessarily a mindset that has developed with aging, but a disposition of self-centered childishness that was tolerated by others early in life and has grown through the years. Now it manifests as a self-absorbed entitlement. “Often they were too important to their parents for the latter to take stands, and often they contracted marriages that perpetuated their immaturity. When their children became their parents, because these offspring have their own lives and children, they are sometimes more willing to take the kind of stand their grandparents failed to take.”<sup>241</sup>

Whether this issue of elderly entitlement comes into play across the spectrum of the care of the elderly, the fact remains that Boomers given the responsibility of tending to their aging parents are being handed another of many tasks to manage. No two situations are the same; however, this obligation often becomes a prohibiting factor for Boomers to engage in other ministry involvements and should be approached as a part of kingdom ministry. The Scripture puts forth a strong position concerning the treatment of the family. Paul wrote in his first letter to

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<sup>240</sup> Terry D. Hargrave, *Boomers on the Edge: Three Realities That Will Change Your Life Forever*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan. 2008), 68.

<sup>241</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2011) 151.

Timothy: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”<sup>242</sup>

Another pertinent matter of concern that American Boomers face is what Jeff Hoyt, editor-in-chief of seniorliving.org, calls “elder orphans.” He reports,

According to Dr. Maria Torroella Carney, Chief of geriatric and palliative medicine at NorthWell Health, the populations of ‘elder orphans’ increases as baby boomers retire every year. More boomers may find themselves without a support system ‘because the majority of care provided as we get older is provided by family’. In Carney’s pioneer research, she found that 22 percent of Americans 65 years and above are aging alone and lacking family or support that would take care of them. A majority of them are women. In the updated 2015 U.S. census, the percentage of older people living alone increased to 42.8 percent.<sup>243</sup>

This one statistic alone points to a critical need for ministering to the Boomers and giving them an opportunity for involvement beyond the predictable chores of mid-life in American society that furthermore provides an opportunity for the 21st-century church. Not only are many Boomers facing life in isolation, but they are also an untapped resource for mutual ministry. Can earnest research of our communities reveal the hidden possibilities? Effective ministry to Boomers can result in reciprocal blessing to the cause of Christ’s kingdom.

The Church and the Baby Boomers.

The church now faces an opportunity to engage Boomers or lose out on one of the greatest sources of potential growth for the kingdom of God. An interesting statement from the past regarding the Boomer generation comes once again to challenge the church. Mark Senter III,

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<sup>242</sup> 1 Tim 5:8.

<sup>243</sup> Jeff Hoyt, “Living Without Family: 5 Stages of Self Care Seniors Should Know.” Senior Living, August 31, 2018, <https://www.seniorliving.org/health/aging/no-family/>.

whose ministry over the past three decades has included such roles as youth pastor, pastor of adult education, and seminary professor, wrote about the church's relationship to the phenomenal population growth after the Second World War. He states, "The postwar baby boom caught the church without a strategy for dealing with the sudden influx of people whom the media began to call 'teenagers.'"<sup>244</sup> The disturbing thought is that once again the absence of strategic projection could result in overlooked possibilities for the church.

The dilemma of perceived Boomer exclusion from the core life of the church, although perhaps unintentional, falls to a great extent at the feet of pastoral leadership. David Kinnaman, CEO of Barna Group, a leading research and communications company that works with churches and nonprofits, and Mark Matlock, who has focused on youth ministry for two decades and is now director of the consulting firm Wisdom Works, have pooled their creative talents to write about the present picture of the church in America. They point to the prevalent culture of Christian leadership that is focused more on the preaching and teaching aspect of pastoral life than with providing the loving, personal touch that is essential to making disciples. There exists a proliferation of conferences and publications that showcase people whose charisma and public persona draw large numbers. The detrimental outcome of this phenomenon is that it encourages a ministerial self-absorption approach that leaves others out. They state:

"The point here isn't to rag on pastors but to suggest that, in order for the church to engage in healthy mission today, we need strong leaders who aren't focused on themselves—who embody the countercultural, kingdom way of deflecting attention to Jesus. This may seem counterintuitive, but we need more leaders who accomplish less in the limelight and more behind the scenes to shape the hearts, minds, and souls of the next generation. We can't power our way to kingdom impact. It just doesn't work that way."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Mark Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry: And Its Radical Impact on the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 142.

<sup>245</sup> David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2019) 188, Kindle

A study of the Baby Boomers' influence on the 21st-century church in America would not be complete without considering Boomer pastors and church leaders who presently serve at the helm of church congregations and leadership positions. Author Thom Rainer, former CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources and presently executive director of Revitalize Network, communicates that local congregations being led by Boomer pastors are facing a variety of challenges.<sup>246</sup> He notes that the retirement of pastors from some churches will produce unfilled vacancies because many younger pastors are reluctant to assume pastorates in Boomer-dominated churches. Many Boomer pastors feel confused and alienated from the world around them because they have not continued to improve their technical prowess and they struggle with their adaptation to technological advancements. Many older pastors are disillusioned by the disheartening fact that the dreams they had in their younger years have failed to materialize. Some who have devoted themselves to a career of fulltime ministry are simply not financially prepared for retirement and face a future of uncertainty. Others struggle with being able to envision how their next phases of life and ministry will unfold.

However, Rainer asserts that these real-life challenges are equally met with some palpable opportunities. Many Boomer pastors exhibit a strong desire to mentor the next generation(s) and many who represent the younger generations display a corresponding desire to learn from the elders. Boomer leaders have a wealth of wisdom and experience that can be tapped for effective cross-generational exchange. Rainer suggests that "Great proactivity is needed for strategies to utilize the Boomer generation pastors and staff."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Thom Rainer, "First Person: When Boomer Pastors Retire," Baptist Press, March 3, 2014, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-when-boomer-pastors-retire/>

<sup>247</sup> Thom Rainer, "First-Person: When Boomer Pastors."

As a Baby Boomer, Presbyterian Pastor Jan Edmiston shares palpable concerns she has with her generation. She notes that while many Boomer pastors are creative and productive, there are also leaders in the Boomer cohort who are weary and ready to enter retirement, yet they hang on to their positions for several reasons. “I believe that every Boomer Pastor should have a trusted colleague or friend who can tell us when it’s time to step aside and make way for a Generation X Pastor- or someone even younger.”<sup>248</sup> Rainer states frankly that the greatest reason Boomer pastors are reluctant to step down at a traditional age for retirement is financial.<sup>249</sup>

Tony Brooks, discipleship specialist and field strategist for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, shares that, while the churches are seeking to discover ways to reach the millennials, those born between 1980 and 2000, they need to be aware that they are surrounded by Boomers. Borrowing from advice given by Keith Lowry, an adult discipleship specialist with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, at a Boston conference for church educators, Brooks provides five insightful directives for churches in America.

1. Don’t exclude Boomers from ministry focus. While many churches invest resources and planning into reaching young adults, there is a tremendous impact that Boomers can have on the life of the church. Having spent their lives achieving personal ambitions and acquiring wealth, they now have concluded that true satisfaction is found by making investments in others. Brooks inserts, “As a baby boomer, I don’t want to sit in a chair and listen to someone lecture or sit in a pew. I want to participate and know my participation counts in the church and community.”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Jan Edmiston, “The Last Boomer: Who Will Be the Last Baby Boomer Pastor?” *A Church for Starving Artists Blog*, August 19, 2020. <https://achurchforstarvingartists.blog/2020/08/19/the-last-boomer/>.

<sup>249</sup> Thom Rainer, “First-Person: When Boomer Pastors.”

<sup>250</sup> Brooks, “5 Considerations to Help Your Church.”



2. Consider Boomers in ministry planning. Think about social events that would enrich their lives. For many, the church is the only family they have close by. They appreciate in-depth Bible study and, in many cases, would enjoy participating in the teaching of a class. They often need educational opportunities, like estate planning for retirement.

3. Boomers need to know that they are valued. They question whether they are important, feeling overlooked and forgotten. Their presence needs to be publicly celebrated. Their opinions need to be acknowledged. They need to have a sense that someone is listening.

4. Do not impose predictable labels on them. Boomers resist stereotypical monikers. They do not respond well to being called “seniors” or “senior adults.” Giving titles that further differentiate them from the church and society at large will drive them away from involvement. Although Boomers are regularly subjected to discriminatory attitudes and are constrained to deal with them, church can be one place where the barriers of separation are removed.

5. They feel the weight of being stuck between the generations. Loneliness and alienation come when there is the perception that others do not understand the unique problems they face, such as caring for elderly parents or figuring out how to manage limited financial resources.

Although many in church leadership demonstrate an appreciation for the persons and the contribution of seniors, that is not always the case. Michelle Van Loon has written extensively for over a decade about spiritual development during the second half of life. Among the positive testimonies she has encountered, there are also some disheartening stories that reveal a problem with the unbalanced perspective in churches regarding elders.

Sharing the narrative of one experience in which 25 older members of a particular congregation were asked to leave and worship for a few months at another affiliated church

while the leadership attempted to plant a new church in the present location, Van Loon deduced, “Older members hear the message they’re not valued in a variety of ways: a worship team comprised of members under 40, a range of programming designed for younger attendees or a lack of pastoral care when they’re in the trenches of long-term illness or caring for aging parents.”<sup>251</sup> There exists a need for younger generations to more kindly display an appreciation for their elders, understanding that they are privileged to reap the benefit of ancestral sacrifices. As one noted author stated, “Praise the bridge that carried you over.”<sup>252</sup>

Boomers want to be heard. Intentional inclusion of Boomers in the decision-making process is often overlooked in today’s churches, especially if someone does not hold a leadership position. They are “a group of people who often feel that the church is not listening.”<sup>253</sup> The art of listening begins with developing an authentic Christ-like interest in people, allowing them to share without interruption or the insertion of one’s opinion. Purposefully engaging others in meaningful conversation is a biblical directive, “Now everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”<sup>254</sup> However, because of the self-focused human tendency to be heard, listening without making personal interjections is a learned skill. Peter Scazzero calls this kind of authentic connecting –“incarnational listening.” One pastor described his experience in discovering the art of listening. “When I began to listen to other people’s stories and hearts, many of them cried. They felt valued, worthy, and loved.”<sup>255</sup> Henry Nouwen, an outstanding

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<sup>251</sup> Michelle Van Loon, “Your Church Needs Boomers,” *Christianity Today*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/older-church-members-not-welcome-boomers-gen-x.html>.

<sup>252</sup> “George Coleman Quotes,” BrainyMedia Inc., accessed March 14, 2022, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/george\\_colman\\_182722](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/george_colman_182722).

<sup>253</sup> Brooks, “5 Considerations to Help Your Church.”

<sup>254</sup> James 1:19b.

<sup>255</sup> Peter Scazzero, Warren Bird, and Leighton Ford, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A*

academic, teacher, and psychologist whose life and writings impacted thousands of leaders and pastors, offered invaluable insight into pastoral caring. Equating genuine listening to the ministry of caring, he shares, “To care means first of all to be present to each other. From experience, you know that those who care about you become present to you. When they listen, they listen to you. When they speak, they speak to you. Their presence is a healing presence because they accept you on your terms, and they encourage you to take your own life seriously.”<sup>256</sup>

Regarding the engagement of Boomers in meaningful ministry, in contrast to merely getting them involved by providing activities and events for them, James Houston, one of the founders of Regent College and author of over twenty books dealing with various issues of the Christian life, presents a valid balance: “Our vision includes ministry to and from seniors, and it is highly likely that some elders involved in ministry might very well be the recipients of the same ministry down the road.”<sup>257</sup> Because Boomers instinctively discern the needs of the elderly, they will undoubtedly be the most likely to develop appropriate ministries. Although caring for the elderly is not by any means the limit to a Boomer’s involvement in ministry, it is a strong consideration. The church needs people who can envision, organize, and carry out those missions that serve the aging population, and Boomers appear to be a likely fit for that ministry.

COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic concerns.

The whole spectrum of church ministry has been impacted by challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, a worldwide crisis that began in the spring of 2020 and continues at the

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*Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2009), 190.

<sup>256</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1974), 36.

<sup>257</sup> Houston and Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*.

time of this writing. Churches were already experiencing “waves of historic-level crisis prior to the pandemic”<sup>258</sup> Church attendance, which had been declining in the last five decades, has now reached a startling low. Some churches have been forced to close their doors, due to a lack of interest or financial struggles.<sup>259</sup> A study conducted by the Barna Group after one year of the pandemic discovered that 32% of pre-COVID-19 church attendees had dropped out of congregational participation completely, including watching services online. According to a recent Gallup poll, volunteerism has dropped nearly twenty-five percent from pre-pandemic numbers.<sup>260</sup> “With millions of people having stayed home from places of worship during the coronavirus pandemic, struggling congregations have one key question: How many of them will return?”<sup>261</sup> This question will undoubtedly remain unanswered for an extended period from now.

Rev. David Wilson Rogers, a pastor and regular columnist for the *Current-Argus* Newspaper in Carlsbad, New Mexico laments that the church has failed during the pandemic.<sup>262</sup> He contends that the church has not escaped the influence of the culture wars that have

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<sup>258</sup> Gary Pelusi-Verdend, “Church Attendance, the Pandemic, and Discipleship.” Phillips Theological Seminary, January 11, 2022, <https://ptstulsa.edu/rpli/church-attendance-and-pandemic>.

<sup>259</sup> Bente Bouthier, “Amid the Pandemic, Many Rural Churches Are Struggling to Stay Open,” WFYI Public Affairs, January 12, 2022, <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/amid-the-pandemic-many-rural-churches-are-struggling-to-stay-open>.

<sup>260</sup> Jeffrey Jones, “U.S. Charitable Donations Rebound; Volunteering Still Down,” Gallup News. January 11, 2022. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/388574/charitable-donationsrebound-volunteering-down.aspx>.

<sup>261</sup> Mariam Fam, Luis Andres Henao, and Hannah Fingerhut, “Churches Have Lost Millions of Congregants during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Will They Return?” *Associated Press*, June 29, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-pandemics-lifestyle-health-religioncd5fbac2318cb58e1d5ec4a5d1c00ecc>.

<sup>262</sup> David Wilson Rogers, “The Church Has Failed in COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, November 13, 2021. <https://www.currentargus.com/story/life/faith/2021/11/13/church-has-failed-covid-19-pandemic/6394207001/>.

mushroomed during this time of medical, political, and social uncertainty. The adherence to Jesus' teaching concerning love and compassion has in many cases given way to hatred, anger, and division, even among fellow believers. James Emery White, founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, articulates a sobering commentary on the church's disposition during the pandemic when he said, "A church's doctrinal statement is less important than a church's 'cultural' statement. As a result, incongruence between personal and a church's perceived 'cultural statement' is now the grounds for not only the breakup of the community but the permission to act with a lack of civility."<sup>263</sup> Some pastors and church leaders found themselves so intensely caught up in the battle with conspiracy theories, racial tensions, misinformation about COVID-19 and political radicalization that they surrendered to resignation.<sup>264</sup> While many Christians have acted as though they are honoring God with their vitriolic hostilities, Gary Peluso-Verdend, executive director of the Center for Religion in Public Life at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, asserts, "Most Americans, and perhaps the majority of church-goers, believe hyperpolarized partisan political identities are causing dangerous damage in public life."<sup>265</sup>

Boomers have faced unique challenges during the pandemic. The aging population is more susceptible to the disease and the consequence of dying from it. Many seniors have been forced to adopt a lifestyle of extreme social distancing and isolation. They are often marginalized by negative attitudes in society and the devaluing of their personhood in the consideration of

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<sup>263</sup> James Emery White, "How the Pandemic Has Changed the Church," *Outreach Magazine*, July 9, 2021. <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/leadership/68023-how-the-pandemic-has-changed-the-church.html>.

<sup>264</sup> Sophia Ankel, "Pastors Are Leaving Their Congregations after Losing Their Churchgoers to QAnon," *Business Insider*, March 14, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/pastors-quit-after-qanon-radicalize-congregation-2021-3>.

<sup>265</sup> Peluso-Verdend, 2022, "Church Attendance, the Pandemic, and Discipleship."

public policy.<sup>266</sup> To compound these personal challenges, studies show that many Boomers, 1 in 4 in fact, are themselves caregivers to their aging parents.<sup>267</sup>

According to Richard Gentzler, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the problems of an aging membership within the church.<sup>268</sup> Whereas the pandemic has significantly impacted the lifestyles of the general population, the Baby Boomers have felt its effects in unique ways. For many, their retirement plans have been disrupted. They have been faced with new health concerns and have witnessed unanticipated sicknesses and even the deaths of friends and family. They have faced financial challenges, been forced to cancel travel plans for visits with family, and have been exposed to a myriad of social factors resulting in loneliness and isolation. “Boomers may also see their anticipated next stage of life evaporate as the pandemic continues to have a grip on their lives. Because Boomers do not identify with labels such as older adult, senior citizen, or elderly, and because they have enjoyed the illusion of youthfulness for so long, it is difficult for them to realize that, during the pandemic, they have been placed in the *high-risk group*.”<sup>269</sup> The pandemic has effectively interrupted the independent lifestyle of Boomers, forcing them to rethink their future and make unexpected adjustments accordingly.

However, not everything that has transpired during the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered negative or permanently damaging within the church. As the people who possess the

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<sup>266</sup> Hans-Joerg Ehni and Hans-Werner Wahl, “Six Propositions against Ageism in the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *2020 Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 32, no. 4-5 (June 3, 2020): 515–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2020.1770032>.

<sup>267</sup> Miyawaki et al., “Boomers as Caregivers: Results From.”

<sup>268</sup> Richard Gentzler, “Boomers: Reframing Aging and Transforming Elderhood.” ENCORE Ministry, January 23, 2021, <https://encoreministry.org/boomers-reframing-aging-and-transforming-elderhood/>.

<sup>269</sup> Gentzler, “Boomers: Reframing Aging.”

biblical description of being “more than conquerors,”<sup>270</sup> the church has been presented with an opportunity to be “salt and light”<sup>271</sup> in the most unique and exceptional ways. Believers are to be reminded that according to the words of Jesus Christ, the church will never be destroyed<sup>272</sup> and that Jesus will be the empowering presence for his followers through every situation in life.<sup>273</sup> These scriptures are among the many biblical promises that define a distinguishing status for those who walk in faith.

Early in the pandemic, a congregational study by the American Baptist Churches USA revealed that “many congregations have delivered a hardy response to the adverse effects of Covid-19.”<sup>274</sup> A study called *Impact of Pandemic on Nazarene Churches and Pastor 2020* found that despite the challenges churches and leaders experienced, many pastors were embracing the future with a great deal of hope and optimism. “The survey found that approximately 84% of pastors agreed that ‘their church will emerge stronger from the pandemic,’ and a similar percentage agreed with the statement, ‘Personally, the pandemic has given my ministry new significance.’”<sup>275</sup> Yet, as the pandemic continued to persist, many pastors were concerned about whether they would survive. The reality of church buildings sitting empty week after week, the financial consequences of job loss, the daunting disconnect among members, and so many other discouraging factors produced overall anxiety about the future. However, out of this abyss of

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<sup>270</sup> Rom 8:38.

<sup>271</sup> Matt 5:19.

<sup>272</sup> Matt 16:18.

<sup>273</sup> Matt 28:20.

<sup>274</sup> Sarah Brown, “Impact of COVID-19 on American Baptist Churches USA Congregations,” Faith Communities Today, June 15, 2020, <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-american-baptist-churches-usa-congregations/>.

<sup>275</sup> Christine Spicer, “The Church, the Pandemic and Change,” PLNU Viewpoint, June 23, 2021, <https://viewpoint.pointloma.edu/the-church-the-pandemic-and-change/>.

despair, there appears to have risen within the church an impetus to look afresh at the future and understand that this present season is a time for resetting and reshaping the ministry of the church.<sup>276</sup>

The challenges introduced by the COVID-19 crisis have driven the church to rethink its ministry. Uninvited difficulties and unexpected trials have the potential for producing positive outcomes. J.R. Briggs, author and founder of Kairos Partnerships, an organization committed to serving leaders, has written *A Time to Heal* with hopes of providing redemptive answers to the problems presented to the church during COVID-19. In his response to the disrupting effects of the pandemic, Briggs shares that the Christian’s foundational understanding of suffering is the simple and clear acknowledgment we cannot escape suffering in our present human condition. “Those who possess this faith-filled understanding often ask a different set of questions. Instead of ‘Why is this happening to me?’ or ‘When will this suffering end?’ they are asking ‘What is it God might be wanting to show me through this experience?’ and ‘Where can my faith and hope deepen in my suffering?’”<sup>277</sup>

Such faith-imbued thinking has welcomingly evoked cathartic initiatives among many pastors and congregational leaders, guiding them to develop fresh ways to reach out to congregants, focusing more on discipleship than numerical church attendance.<sup>278</sup> Many pastors have noticed that people joining services online are interacting with the church and other viewers

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<sup>276</sup> Kyuboem Lee, “How Might the COVID-19 Crisis Reshape Our Churches for Good?” *Christianity Today Pastors*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2021/fall/how-might-covid-19-crisis-reshape-our-churches-for-good.html>.

<sup>277</sup> J.R. Briggs, *A Time to Heal: Offering Hope to a Wounded World in the Name of Jesus*. (Oviedo, FL: Higherlife Publishing & Marketing, 2021), 16.

<sup>278</sup> Peluso-Verdend, “Church Attendance, the Pandemic, and Discipleship.”



in meaningful ways.<sup>279</sup> COVID-19 has unexpectedly unlocked opportunities for the church to display God-given gifts of love, acceptance, and forgiveness - attributes that stand in sharp contrast to prevailing societal responses to conflict. Rogers states: “The fact is nobody likes mandates—least of all government ones. Yet, Christ also gave a mandate that applies in the case of COVID-19. While speaking in the Upper Room on the night that he was betrayed. ‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.’”<sup>280</sup>

White proposes that the church must resist a narcissistic mentality that puts personal needs and desires at the center of attention and instead demonstrate the Christ-ordained principle of servanthood. “Jesus said: ‘I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many’; ‘Whoever wants to be first must become last’; ‘Whoever wants to be great among you must become the slave of all; ‘Not my will, but thine’” (See Matt. 20:25-28; Luke 22:42). We need to respond by reminding people to be more like Jesus. The four-word mantra, ‘It’s not about you,’ must be upheld.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Spicer, “The Church, the Pandemic and Change.”

<sup>280</sup> Rogers, “The Church Has Failed”

<sup>281</sup> White, “How the Pandemic Has Changed”

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROJECT NARRATIVE AND FIELDWORK

#### *Introduction*

The constituency of the church must be multigenerational in order to be healthy and successful in its purpose of expanding the kingdom of Christ. Although much attention has been given to Gen Xers and Millennials in church growth, an oft-overlooked consideration is the sheer size and influence of the Baby Boomer cohort in America. There are positive signs on the horizon that the church is becoming more aware. The ‘rediscovery’ of Boomers presents an opportunity for a new kind of spiritual renewal.<sup>1</sup> The church in America is strategically positioned to access and utilize the gifts and resources of the second largest generational cohort, the Baby Boomer generation. Although often left out of the growth and development equation of the church, perhaps inadvertently, now is the time for significant intentional strides to be made in involving the Boomers. The research has sought to define those areas of latent possibility and discover ways to implement a fresh vision and change in the ministry to *and* from Boomers.

The pursuit of objective information regarding any subject is a challenging process. In the area of the study of Baby Boomers and their potential contribution to the life and ministry of the church, this fact was extremely evident. Research demonstrates that pastors tend to be subjective practitioners rather than objective investigators.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, this research has sought a thoughtful and prayerful posture of impartiality that would not impose personal preferences on the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Lim, “Are Baby Boomers Returning to Religion?” *USC News*, April 10, 2018. <https://news.usc.edu/140334/baby-boomers-and-religion/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Meyers, “Objective and Subjective Pastors.” *Restoring Kingdom Builders* [blog], December 5, 2014. <https://blog.restoringkingdombuilders.org/tag/objective-and-subjective-pastors/>.

The aim to gather objective answers to the research question was well served in the data collection process. The exploration of scripture in chapter two revealed many biblical examples of men and women who, during the last third of their lives, were called by God to do amazing exploits for the purposes of God. The Bible details their ventures, the obstacles they faced, the personal challenges they had to overcome, their vital relationships with younger and older generations, and the successes they enjoyed. Biblical narratives were mined to reveal relatable attitudes and pertinent examples for the Boomer and for church leaders. The research sought to develop a biblical theology on aging, productivity, and honor that would provide foundational truth to the issue of flourishing in the third third of life.

In chapter two, contemporary sources reflect information that was gathered from a broad spectrum of the church in America, leaders in the area of generational studies, and other sociological resources. The review of current literature revealed a wealth of secular, multigenerational, and religion-based information regarding Boomers in present times. Curiosity concerning this generational cohort has not escaped the imagination of sociological and ecclesiological scholars. The research shows that many current thinkers are addressing the challenges and potentials of Boomers. The author sought to engage both secular and religious contributors in the Baby Boomer cohort.

This chapter concentrates on how the qualitative and quantitative research was executed, and how the data were obtained from specific non-denominational pastors and church attendees. The interviewees were divided into three categories: (1) Senior pastors who are members of Destiny Ministries, (2) Baby Boomers who are involved on some level in participating churches, and (3) a cross-section of attendees at Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas.

Destiny Ministries is a ministerial network created to bring Christian leaders together to further the purposes of God with integrity and excellence. Members come from diverse church circles, but membership is primarily comprised of independent and non-denominational pastors and leaders. As its website states,

Destiny is an organization focused on leveraging resources toward common purposes in the Kingdom of God. We coach and train Christian leaders helping to develop higher levels of effectiveness and excellence in their personal, spiritual, and professional lives, as well as provide opportunities for cooperative ministry activities. Our organization is composed of Christian leaders from virtually every stream of Christian faith and endeavor.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019, the Destiny Ministry network was joined by Global Network of Christian Ministries. This merger occurred as an effort to consolidate efforts, as both groups were seeking the same aim to provide support and fellowship among independent ministers and many participants were members of both organizations. The author is a former chairman of Global Network of Christian Ministries, having served in that position from 1999 to 2005, and was instrumental in helping unite the two ministerial entities. Destiny has a membership of approximately 520 members, provides ministerial ordination and oversight, and conducts an online training school that enjoys a matriculation arrangement with Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. An annual Gathering and several regional Connect Meetings throughout the year are conducted to promote connectivity, encouragement, and share resources.

The pastors were interviewed via the Zoom video conferencing platform in sessions that lasted from one to two hours. The Boomers who were chosen represented both people involved in local church ministry and others who were not presently serving in any ministry capacity. They were interviewed in one-hour in-person meetings. For most of the Boomer interviews, the

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<sup>3</sup> Destiny Leaders Staff, "Let's Do Something Great Together," Destiny Leaders, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://destinyleaders.com/about/>

dialogue involved married couples. The Christ Family Church attendees were volunteers from a cross-section of age groups.

### *Research Methodology*

First, the research involved the examination of extensive biblical and theological resources to discover the theological premise for ministry in the latter years. A helpful collection of resources for theological study was located at the Lanier Theological Library located in Houston, Texas. Accompanying onsite studies at Lanier, online sources from Perlego, a subscription library of online books and academic texts, and Logos Bible Software were accessed. Also, an open-source online site, Internet Archive, which provides online lending of numerous sources, was extensively utilized. The hours spent at Lanier Theological Library provided a comfortable setting for quiet study and reflection. Having access to multiple resources poses the problem of focus. As Michael Kibbe suggests, one of the greatest challenges the researcher faces is the tendency to get distracted, spending time reading every resource that emerges.<sup>4</sup> The topic at hand of generational interactivity lends itself to an ever-broadening scope of interests. During the research, the challenge was to consistently narrow the subject focus, not to expand it.

Theological research is similar to other forms of research, yet there are evident dissimilarities. The distinction of theological research has to do with the embodiment of its predominant subject. Kibbe explains: (1) Since the subject is God, it is of necessity an act of confession. The researcher must assume a posture of humility, confessing personal limitations in the matter of knowing and understanding God. (2) Theological research assumes that research is

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Kibbe, *From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 56,57.

enabled and assisted through the agency of the ever-present Holy Spirit, who is the revealer of truth. One listens to the Holy Spirit during the entire process of the research. While searching through what others have written about the subject being examined, the researcher remains constantly attuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit. (3) The researcher is subject to God's sovereign intent to reveal Himself. One cannot know God apart from His gracious activity of self-revelation. The ultimate act of God's self-revelation is of course the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ. Intimacy with Jesus Christ, identifying with His death, burial, and resurrection, is paramount in the matter of theological research. Theological research is essentially an act of humble and reverential worship.<sup>5</sup>

Practical theology begins with the examination of human experience. It is understood that we cannot derive God's truth completely out of human experience, however human existence is the framework in which the gospel is rooted, embodied, and given expression.<sup>6</sup> Experience is relative to the task of witnessing the activities of God. Rather than viewing human experience as something that is distanced from genuine spirituality, practical theology respects the groundwork of the experience. We can know God greater through the relationship between mankind's activities and divine involvement. For instance, seeing the body as the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19), we are reminded of the intimate and inseparable relationship between human activity and God's purposes.

Swinton and Mowat further provide a framework for understanding practical theology research by offering a working definition. It is summarized in these four imperatives:

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<sup>5</sup> Kibbe, *From Topic to Thesis*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research: Second Edition*, (London, UK: SMC Press, 2016), 301

(1) It is critical. Inquiry into the practices of the church and its proponents must be faithful and honest. Practical theology respects and examines what is going on in the context of the church from a critical posture. It does not take the road of applied theology, which formulates doctrine from other disciplines and imposes its conclusions on the setting at hand. Rather, it goes directly to the setting and examines it critically with a faithful deportment that is willing to challenge the norms and assumptions. Human experience is certainly not the foundation for new revelation but going to the place of human experience and discovering the questions that emerge out of that research produces a unique understanding that otherwise would not be found.

(2) It is theological reflection. Theology is the primary source of knowledge, and it guides the process of practical theology. Authentic research cannot abandon its theological roots. It is possible to allow the use of social sciences to push into the background the very foundation of truth. Practical theology must always keep God and His purposes at the center.

(3) Practical theology views the practices of the church and also observes the practices of the world. There are certain similarities, but there are obviously many differences. However, the theologian explores the relationship and interaction between these two entities in a certain way. All human beings fall into the purview of God's unfolding revelation. He is God over the whole earth. There is a radical difference between the way the Church views things and the way the world approaches things. For example, the world's approach to friendship is its expectation to get receive some personal satisfaction from the engagement. The Church embraces relationships in an entirely different way. Following the example of Jesus, the Church extends itself to forming friendships where there is no guarantee of mutual recompense. "God so loved the world," with no promises of reciprocal benefit or blessing.

(4) Practical theology holds at the core of its intention the commitment of enabling faithful Christian practice. That is at the heart of its purpose. Though it respects and begins with the scrutiny of the human experience, it does not blindly validate that experience, but rather seeks to discover how the human experience interacts with God and His intention for humanity.<sup>7</sup>

The second stage of the research involved amassing information and data derived from reliable authors who are recognized specialists in the matter of generational studies, and data collected from various sociological and ecclesiastical research sources. These sources consisted of books, journals, articles, and dissertations that concentrate on and give insight into the current culture of Baby Boomers and how Boomers relate to other generational groups. Considerable attention was given to the sources authored in the last five years. However, this selection of sources did not preclude the use of older reliable sources that address generation issues.

#### *Narrative Description of Project Execution*

The method of collecting relevant data was both qualitative and quantitative. Three groups were targeted to gather opinions and insights: members of Christ Family Church, Baby Boomers, and senior pastors.

- The quantitative research involved a group of 40 members of Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas who represent a cross-section of vocations and generations. They were invited to participate in a survey consisting of questions regarding the subject of Boomers' influence and involvement in the local church. This portion of the research was

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<sup>7</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 7-10.



accomplished using a survey form made available on Planning Center Online, a church administration software.

- The qualitative initiative included interviews with Baby Boomers who identify as active believers and who are currently involved in local church life on some level. They were engaged to participate in an interview focused on their present and desired areas of ministry. They were sent the Boomer questionnaire in advance and then interviewed either on Zoom, an online meeting platform or in person with the researcher. These participants were chosen from Christ Family Church and partnering churches.
- The other qualitative strategy involved interviews with senior pastors leading urban and suburban churches with a membership between 350 and 4,000. These survey sessions were conducted in person or through the internet medium of Zoom. The participating pastors primarily represent churches within the Destiny Ministry network.

Congregational participants.

The invitation to participate in the survey was presented to the congregation of Christ Family Church by means of announcement for three Sunday morning services, via Facebook, and in an e-news communique to congregants and extended participants in the life of the church. Unlike the pastors and Baby Boomer participants who were hand-picked for interviews, the congregational contributors were individuals of all ages who randomly volunteered as a response to the invitation. This method was used to gather more objective data regarding the subject of Baby Boomers' involvement in the life and ministry of the church. Though the survey consisted primarily of specific questions with an impact measurement scale as the answering device, the

inquiry also included space for added comments and suggestions. These additional comments proved invaluable to the process of data collection.

Senior Pastor participants.

Those who were interviewed in the research were the senior pastors of independent, non-denominational churches within the Destiny Ministries fellowship. They were chosen because of their significance to their respective communities and to the church at large. The participants were initially chosen because of their close proximity to the researcher, with the intention of making visits for personal interviews; however, scheduling and COVID-19 restrictions prohibited conducting one-on-one interviews. All interviews were conducted through the medium of Zoom. The following graph provides statistical information about the participants.

**Table 1. Senior Pastor participants for interviews**

Pastor	Age	Church Size	Tenure at Church	City	Interview Date
Pastor A	60s	3500	30+ Years	W. Monroe, LA	January 17, 2022
Pastor B	70s	350	20+ Years	Slidell, LA	January 20, 2022
Pastor C	40s	400	15+ Years	Winnsboro, LA	January 19, 2022
Pastor D	60s	1000	15+ Years	Shreveport, LA	January 12, 2022
Pastor E	70s	3000	30+ Years	Austin, TX	January 21, 2022
Pastor F	50s	4500	25+ Years	Houston, TX	January 19, 2022
Pastor G	40s	750	15+ Years	Ft. Worth, TX	January 20, 2022

Early in the preparation for field research, the study was framed in a series of questions that would become the basis for dialogue with participating pastors. The points of inquiry were designed to discover pastors’ opinions and practical propositions concerning the church’s engagement with Baby Boomers. The approach to the interview process, which was intentionally relaxed and conversational, invited candid and straightforward interchange. The risk mitigation

factor was handled by maintaining the namelessness of any subject characters and dealing with specific instances on an anonymous footing.

There are some noteworthy similarities between the participating pastors. It should be stated that all those pastors in their 60s and 70s have younger co-pastors working with them, and in each situation, the church leadership has already specified who the succeeding senior pastors will be. Also of significance is that Pastors C and G, while in their 40s, exhibited a great appreciation for the succeeding pastors of their churches and have welcomed them to remain actively involved in certain aspects of the ministry. Further individual narrative of the participating pastors will be integrated into the Chapter 4 analysis of the research.

Although it is common in many churches and denominational cultures to encourage the retiring senior pastor to discontinue association with their former church so that new leadership may enjoy greater freedom in pursuing change and promoting growth,<sup>8</sup> this practice is not as widespread among non-denominational churches or in church settings where relational leadership is emphasized. Three of the pastors interviewed are sons who succeeded their fathers in the pastorate. Also, three of the churches have designated the pastors' sons to be future pastors. The subject matter of this research is of personal interest, as I presently co-pastor with my son, who has been an integral part of the church plant from the beginning and will soon be named lead pastor. It is possible for the practice of leadership succession within the family to engender problems with nepotism, whether real or perceived,<sup>9</sup> however, the research does not address this potential problem. It does however seek to demonstrate the positive outcome of familial and relational mentoring in assessing inter-generational ministry, which is at the fulcrum

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<sup>8</sup> Maleah Bell, "When a Former Pastor Won't Go Away." Pastor Resources, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://pastorresources.com/when-a-former-pastor-wont-go-away/>.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Fickling, "Nepotism in the Church." B. H. Carroll Theological Institute, November 1, 2018, <https://bhcarroll.edu/2018/11/01/nepotism-in-the-church/>.

of the research. Inviting the pastor-emeritus, or whatever their ongoing title might be, to be included in the life of the church can generate healthy, vibrant ministry for, by, and with Baby Boomers.

Baby Boomer participants.

The Boomers selected for interviews were chosen because of their unique and varying degrees of participation in ministry. All are followers of Jesus Christ and are committed to some level of service in the local church. They have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of the research. The descriptions and interview results of the candidates will reveal a broad cross-section of career involvements, personal pursuits, spiritual experience, and ministry aspirations.

Participants in all interviews were married except for one person, a Boomer who has recently been widowed. A brief narrative of each participant and participating couple helps create an appreciation for their contribution to the study.

(1) George and Jennifer brought valuable insight into the plight of Boomers seeking to become involved in effective church ministry. As a part of the younger Boomer cohort, they were founding members of Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas. Seeing a media announcement advertising the church plant, they attended services on the day of the new church launch and immediately became involved in the core group. Jennifer is a teacher by profession, and George is a successful engineer. Having developed leadership and serving skills in previous church settings, they utilized their abilities and gifts during the first years of CFC and were a significant presence in the church. Eventually, George's new job took them to another state. In the past three years, they have irregularly attended local churches in their new city, but have

unfortunately not found a place for meaningful involvement. They have much to speak on the subject of churches extending welcomes that are intentional and inviting.

(2) Frank and Dana are younger Boomers. Frank, whose father was a nondenominational evangelist and then pastor, has always been involved in church life. Throughout his life, he has participated in the area of music and worship. He applied himself and developed into a capable guitarist and singer. Frank and Dana met when she began attending his father's church, and they were married at a young age. When Frank was in his early twenties, his father suddenly passed away from heart issues and the church that he had planted was thrown into a season of difficulty and disorientation. Frank did not believe he had the calling to the pastorate, but he, along with his mother and family, became a part of the ongoing leadership of the church until an incoming pastor made it clear that the family's services were no longer needed.

Throughout the following years, Frank and Dana attended various churches, and Frank served in "helps" ministries and leadership positions. In each of those church situations, his evident faithfulness and willing investment of talent engendered close relationships with the leadership. Dana has been a faithful attendee but not as intimately involved in church work. Frank and Dana have both established successful careers, he is a salesman in the oil and gas industry, and she is a product representative for a well-known cosmetics firm. In recent years, they made a move into the Cypress area and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, did not attend church in person. Searching for a church home, they began attending Christ Family Church. They are now in the process of becoming involved in various areas of ministry.

(3) Mark and Gina are presently serving in important areas of ministry in the local church. He is the head usher and is also being prepared to oversee the Connect Groups of the church. Mark's testimony of salvation and deliverance has undergirded his successful ministry to

the church. Early in life, Mark struggled with alcoholism until he had a life-changing encounter with Christ. He and his first wife, who passed after a battle with cancer in her 50s, became involved in the Episcopal Church and were exposed to the deep workings of the Holy Spirit through the charismatic movement in that church. God's grace brought him and Gina, a dear friend of the family, together in marriage and they served as Life Group leaders in a local Episcopal church. One of the Life Groups was in a retirement community where the residents requested that they have their own church. Mark went to seminary, received an MDiv, and gave pastoral leadership to the new church for several years. Mark and Gina have now joined CFC and are serving on the Serve Team. All this time, Mark has remained in corporate America and devoted his service to the church without remuneration. Mark and Gina are prime examples of effective Boomers in ministry.

(4) Henry and Mary are younger Boomers. They were chosen from within the Christ Family Church membership because of their faithfulness in ministry participation and the interesting contribution they are making to the lives of others. Mary grew up in church and remembers her family as being deeply involved in serving. She distinctly recalls overseeing the trash disposal when her family cleaned the church together on Saturdays. Henry grew up in the Catholic faith, but his family was not regular in their participation. In later years, when his widowed father began attending a Christian Church, he and Mary and their children began attending as well and committed their lives to Christ. They joined Christ Family Church recently after their adult son and his wife began attending. Together, Henry and Mary own and operate a picture-framing business. The business complements Henry's profession as a photographer for the Houston Texans NFL football team. He volunteers his photographic talent and services at CFC. When the team is not playing home games on Sundays, he can be seen moving throughout

the facility, capturing activities with his camera. Heather serves in the children's ministry as a teacher and joyfully volunteers during special events.

(5) Martin and Beatrice are younger Boomers with three adult sons and one son still in high school. Martin played football in college on a scholarship and received a degree in engineering. Because of his passion for evangelism during his college years, many of his friends came to know the Lord and be discipled. After marriage, his calling for ministry led him to become ordained and carried him to India several times for crusade evangelism. However, the responsibility of providing for a growing family compelled him to seek employment with a major firm in the oil and gas industry for the next 15-plus years. He and Beatrice continued to serve where needed in the local church setting. During the recent downturn in the industry, Martin was laid off and accepted a position with an international mission that trains pastors through an online seminary. He and Beatrice work together overseeing the educational ministry for the Southeast Asia region. During the last year, Martin was asked to assume a position as project manager for an international energy company, overseeing the major construction of a massive alternative power plant. Martin and Beatrice are prime examples of Boomers who are finding their niche in kingdom expansion.

(6) Brenda is an older Boomer, an ordained minister whose husband recently passed away. Her many years of ministry include giving pastoral leadership to the women's ministry of a megachurch, conducting women's retreats, leading intercessory prayer groups and counseling. Following the death of her husband, she continues to maintain membership with the church her husband pastored and remains active in prayer ministry.

(7) Craig and Barbara are older Boomers who have served in multiple local church positions over the years. Craig was ordained in the early years of marriage and primarily used his

gifts to establish and operate Christian schools. Barbara has worked in church administration and teaching women's classes. Now in their late 70s, they provide stability and encouragement in the areas of Connect Group leadership, teaching, and intercessory prayer. They have been instrumental at Christ Family Church in the area of connecting with unchurched Boomers and bringing them back into church fellowship and participation.

(8) Keith and Cathy are Boomers; he is in his 60s, and she is in her 50s. Originally from Texas, they met at Bible college, married, and went directly into ministry. Their first assignment was in children's ministry. Throughout the years, they served as support to pastors and ministries in various functions and positions, maintaining bi-vocational careers in construction and teaching. Eventually, they were offered the pastorate at a small church in the Midwest, but after a brief season, that church was disbanded as the result of a natural disaster. Upon their return to the Houston area, they sought to become involved in churches of their own denominational affiliation but found their presence was met with subtle resistance from the leadership. Disappointed that they were not openly welcomed, perhaps because of suspicion or distrust, they sought fellowship elsewhere and ended up at Christ Family Church. There, they found fulfillment by becoming involved in the children's ministry while continuing their work in the areas of public-school teaching and the construction industry. They markedly represent the prototypical Boomer who has much to offer the local church but cannot readily find a place to call home. During the fall of 2022, they moved to a small town in East Texas to be closer to family. They have expressed their hopes to find a church home where their gifts are celebrated and utilized.



Congregational survey.

The congregational survey was conducted through an invitation to members of Christ Family Church. The survey was announced during three consecutive Sunday morning services and the participants were solicited through means of a regular church e-news campaign. Participants were not hand-picked; each one contributed their insights voluntarily. The multi-choice questionnaire and the results are found in Appendix F and will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.

### *Summary*

The research undertaking was served by three major attempts: (1) establishing a biblical and theological premise for ministry in the latter years from the scriptures, (2) discovering present-time cultural and social perspectives by examining current literature, and (3) collecting pertinent information through qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey.

It should be noted that because of logistical limitations and time constraints for the research, all survey and interview participants are from my immediate fellowship and sphere of connections. The results of these research initiatives will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4. The findings from the discussions revealed that most pastors and church members have a positive outlook on the engagement of Boomers in ministry. It was also revealed that there are some challenges – some cultural, social, and spiritual barriers to overcome – that will be addressed specifically in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROJECT EVALUATED

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of chapter four is to bring together information from all the research components in order to produce informed action steps for churches and ministries seeking to effectively utilize the gifts of Boomers. It is the intent of the biblical, theological, and data collection to discover ways Baby Boomers can be engaged and mobilized for meaningful service in the local church, gain a general idea of that demographic's self-assessment, discover the predominant factors that prevent Boomers from church ministry involvement, and gather relevant knowledge that will serve as a catalyst for churches to incorporate the latent capabilities of Baby Boomers for the work of Christ's kingdom.

Within the framework of this research inquiry, I have suggested two major goals. The first goal focuses on Boomers themselves, with the aim to provide relevant information (biblical, theological, and sociological) that will help the Boomer cohort formulate a better understanding of their position before God and their importance to the church and community. From the results of the research, it is anticipated that the information compiled will be more than statistical or factual data, but that it will catalyze a God-given motivation for Baby Boomers to become involved in ministry. The second stated goal is to examine the mindsets and commitments of churches and pastoral leaders in the intentional mobilization of the Boomer cohort. The research sought to provide insight into cultural attitudes, both affirming and inhibiting, that affect the consequential engagement with and for Boomers.

### *Analysis of Data*

The assessment of the information that has been gathered is drawn from (1) the Congregational Survey conducted with the participation of a cross-section of local church members, (2) the interviews with Baby Boomers, and (3) the interviews with senior pastors. The discoveries resulting from these perspectives will be correlated with biblical examples, theological themes, and information derived from the literature research.

The research gave a glimpse at the various approaches current literature uses to describe the season of life particular to Boomers. This season is called the second half, beyond halftime, the autumn of life, and even the latter of seven seasons.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, the term “third third” was adopted to define this period of potential, focusing on the three groups of thirty years in a person’s life.<sup>2</sup> Although some people do not live a full ninety years, they nevertheless experience all three stages.<sup>3</sup>

The questionnaires presented to the Boomers and Pastors were used to launch discussion and were intentionally broad enough to give participants ample leverage in sharing with transparency and liberty. The questions presented to these two groups were different, in that they were intended to mine specific viewpoints peculiar to Boomers and Pastors. However, the questionnaires contain similarities in thought and content, understandably, because they deal with the same subject. To present the analysis with clarity and efficiency, the main ideas of both questionnaires were integrated into four cohesive topics for an orderly presentation of the results. The principal topics representing the main themes are (1) the current picture of Boomer

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<sup>1</sup> Morley, *The Seven Seasons of the Man in the Mirror*.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *The Third Third of Your Life: Preparing for the Future*.

<sup>3</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry by, with, and for Older Adults*.

involvement in the local church, (2) inhibiting factors and issues of inter-generational cohesiveness, (3) understanding the felt needs of the Boomer generation, and (4) incorporating Boomers in the advancement of the local church and Christ's kingdom.

The current picture of Baby Boomer involvement in the local church.

Thom Rainer, a leading strategist in church development, reported that out of the 76 million Baby Boomers in the United States, 30 million, or 40%, claim to be churchgoers.<sup>4</sup> Even if this number includes those with a nominal relationship with churches, this report presents a staggering statistic. It however rings true, considering that the church pastors interviewed reported anywhere from 25 to 50 percent of attendance is represented by Boomers.

Pastors were asked to share the percentage of their church attendance that included people in the Baby Boomers' age bracket, those between the ages of 57 and 76. Five pastors responded that their Boomer attendance was approximately 25-30 percent. One pastor estimated 30 to 40 percent. Another shared that his Boomer attendance was 50 percent or more. Most pastors offered that the participation of the Boomer generation in the congregation was ascribed to their own ages and the endemic culture of appreciation for all ages within the church. To protect their identity and maintain anonymity, the pastors are referred to as Pastor A through Pastor G.

Pastor A, whose congregation is over 50 percent Boomer, feels the need to attract younger generations. The board is comprised exclusively of Boomers, younger and older, except for one Gen Xer. The hope is that as his pastor son takes more of a leadership role, growth will occur among the younger generations. Recent improvement in the children's ministries and

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<sup>4</sup> Rainer, "The Big Baby Boomer Opportunity."

positive progress in the youth ministry has ignited interest among younger families. Despite the lack of past growth among Gen Xers and Millennials, the church has been blessed financially. The pastor attributes this primarily to the involvement of the Boomer generation.

Pastor B considers his 15-year-old church somewhat of an anomaly. They started primarily with high school and college students. Gen Xers and Boomers began to join because they wanted to participate in a work that was successfully reaching the younger generations. They were welcomed and included in the life of the church. Pastor B's father is an ordained and esteemed pastor in the community. He serves on the pastoral team and his and his wife's presence has encouraged the involvement of Boomers. This church, which is remarkably sizeable for the town's population, started primarily with Boomers because Pastor B's family joined in the launching of the church. It has gradually grown, with a comfortable mixture of ages. All board members are Boomers, except for the lead pastor. According to Pastor B, the church enjoys a mutual and healthy appreciation between generations. Though a Gen Xer, he states that he is a Boomer at heart.

Pastor C assumed the pastorate of the church over thirty years ago when he was in his thirties. The church at that time consisted of older people, with whom he developed an affectionate rapport, although there were some "cantankerous" board members. Given the official leverage to make leadership decisions regarding board appointments, he managed deleterious influences by gradually adding new board members. Today, there are twenty board members and three trustees, the average age being 45. Recently, during a building renovation and expansion, the six members of the finance committee were Boomers. The church has an evident culture of respect for older generations, and although the majority of members are Gen Xers and Millennials, 50 percent of the key leadership positions on the serve team are filled by

Boomers. Pastor C reports that recent growth has included many couples in their thirties and forties, primarily because they relate to his children and mentorees, who are significantly involved in the ministry. The leadership is in the process of transition. The new Lead Pastor is already in place, and Pastor C will assume the new title of Senior Pastor. Far from simply acquiescing to the change, he is enthusiastically welcoming the future and the new role he will play in the life of the church.

Pastor D served as a youth pastor for 15 years and then was appointed lead pastor. The former pastor has been his mentor and spiritual father for 23 years, and still maintains membership and involvement in the church. Everyone serving on the board is a Boomer. Of the seven on the pastoral team, there is one person who is in the Boomer cohort. Serve teams are comprised of 25 percent Boomers.

Pastor E reported that approximately 30 percent of the church members are Boomers. He is the only Boomer on the preaching team. Because “what you have in the pulpit is what you get in the church,” the leadership attempts to keep younger people on the platform so that their generations are attracted. He states that the church is growing younger all the time, yet they have retained a healthy mix of generations. Pastor E believes that having the Boomer and older generations visible brings security and a sense of stability in the church. He admits that it is hard to build that if it is not already in place. He says, “We celebrate a multi-generational church, attractive to young and old.” The six-member executive board has all but one Boomer. During the thirty-plus years of his pastorate, he reports only two board members resigned. One struggled with the vision of the church when Pastor E initially assumed the pastorate upon the retirement of his father. The other could not see his way to agree on the purchase of an adjacent piece of property. The pastor does not attribute either of these disassociations to age, but to philosophical

and ideological differences. He conducts a small group, made up of successful businessmen in the area, all of whom are Boomers. Promoting the indispensability of the Boomers, he states that they “foster the climate” of hospitality, prayer, caring for the sick, and many other services in the local church and community.

Pastor F shared candidly about the challenges his 4,000-member church has endured during the last few years. The church went through a dramatic loss of Millennials when an attempt to do something for the college and career group created the opportunity for someone in leadership to instigate a church split. That new church launch depleted the home church of hundreds of Millennials and Gen Xers, and they have “worked very hard to build a generation after the loss.” As a result of the loss, the main workers who remained were Boomers and high school students. The middle crowd of young Xers and older Millennials was essentially missing. Then the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges affecting the Boomer membership. Many members chose to disaffiliate due to political issues. When in-person services resumed, another group was reluctant to return due to health precautions. The past year has been a time of rebuilding, and by God’s grace, the church is prospering, both numerically and financially. Pastor F shares that there was never a decline in finances during all these trials. The church Boomer population is approximately 25 percent. With a preaching staff of six, only one is a Boomer. A large percentage of leaders and servers on Sunday mornings are Boomers. Although very grateful that the Boomers have stood in the gap, he wonders, “How does a new young person feel coming in on Sundays with all those Boomers greeting?” He is working on bringing a generational mixture to the first impression ministry.

All pastors who were interviewed championed the involvement of the Boomer generation in their churches at some level. None deemed their presence to be a detriment to the life of the

church. Though recognizing that younger generations are more likely to be drawn to younger churches, there was a consensus of acceptance of Boomers. The pastors who in recent years have planted churches highly esteem the Boomers as major players in the building process. They have relied on their skills and faithfulness to build the base.

In the congregational survey, an overwhelming ninety-seven percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the absence of Boomers' influence in the church would be a great loss (see Appendix F, Figure 5). Ninety-five percent believed that it was important for Boomer to be involved in the leadership of the church (see Appendix f, Figure 4). The majority of the participants, eighty-two percent, acknowledged that in the past year, one or more Boomers had made a significant contribution to their spiritual life (see Appendix F, Figure 3).

Richard Gentzler's assertion that a congregation's vitality is predicated on a healthy mixture of children, young people, adults, and elders<sup>5</sup> found agreement with all the pastors who were interviewed. All conceded that the combination of ages completes the social and spiritual picture of the community. Contrary to Tony Brook's assertion that Boomers feel like they are being unheard,<sup>6</sup> the communities researched in the interviews demonstrated an open ear to the opinions of Boomers. It was found that Boomers have unique serving capabilities that have developed over a lifetime. There were some ministries that were best accomplished if put into the hands of Boomers. Houston's concept of Boomers being the ones most likely to reach out to and serve the elderly resonates with the discovery in the church study.<sup>7</sup>

The Boomer participants were asked about their present involvement in local church ministry. A common characteristic of the Baby Boomers who were interviewed was their sense

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<sup>5</sup> Gentzler, *An Age of Opportunity*, "loc. 919, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Brooks, "5 Considerations to Help Your Church."

<sup>7</sup> Houston and Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*.



of divine calling. The desire for meaningful service was not simply wanting to be useful, but rather the result of an explicit directive from the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Most of those interviewed believed their ministry engagement was making a significant difference/impact on the life of the church.

Keith and Cathy are moving and settling into a new town, entering the retirement phase of life. They have been involved in ministry and want to find a church where their gifts can be utilized. Having been in pastoral ministry, and having a heart for the church, they are the quintessential candidates for a ministry assignment in a church. They expressed concerns they have about building new relationships in this transition.

Beatrice has filled several volunteer positions where needed: teaching youth, participating on the worship team, serving in children's ministry, and doing hospitality. At present, her main focus is prayer. Vocationally, her husband Martin oversees a major energy project for a large US company but also serves as the Southeast Asia director of an online pastoral training mission. His broad mission experience and passion for the unreached bring value to the local church outreach endeavors. He is also meaningfully connected to the men's ministry of the church.

George and Jennifer have had a hard time finding a church in their new city. They were accustomed to being immersed in the inner circle of leadership and ministry. Their record of healthy and immersive participation in churches, including Christ Family Church, indicates undoubtedly that their lack of connection is largely due to the response of the churches they have visited. Some of the discouraging issues they have faced with churches and pastors will be discussed in the fourth section of this chapter. This resourceful couple has become less motivated

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<sup>8</sup> John 15:16.

to connect, as they have sensed that the local church ethos typically aims toward maintaining the programs rather than reaching out to new people.

Inhibiting factors and issues of intergenerational cohesiveness.

A problem concerning Baby Boomers is their perceived aversion to modern technology. Thom Rainer shares that many Boomers feel confused and alienated because they have failed to stay in stride with technical advancements.<sup>9</sup> Although this lack of enthusiasm for technology may be the case in some circles, this research found receptivity to the changing world of technology. Frank, a younger Boomer, has the opinion that most active and thoughtful Boomers are somewhat tech-savvy, and he feels that technology is not a problem. A disparity does exist in the manner with which social media is used and the content that is communicated. One particular generation cannot be faulted for using social media to express strong opinions that fuel existing disagreements and drive further wedges in relationships. Younger generations are not solely to be blamed for irresponsible expression; however, Boomers are not as disposed to post frivolous content. He says that his job has conditioned him to keep current with technological trends. Boomer Martin states that in his present workplace, there are no land phones, no phones on the desk, not even cell phones – all phone calls are made through computers. Functioning in the corporate world requires adaptation to technical innovations.

However, Pastor E shares about the challenge he has witnessed among Boomers as they seek to relate to the changes in technology. Those involved in music and worship ministry have had to adapt to technical systems never used before in church services. Boomers who participate

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<sup>9</sup> Thom Rainer, "Eight Implications of Aging Boomer Pastors and Church Staff." Church Answers (blog). March 3, 2014. <https://archive.thomrainer.com/2014/>.

instrumentally or vocally are obliged to embark on a technical learning curve to connect with new norms. Also, so much of the church's activities are done through technology. If someone wants to be baptized, be a part of a particular outreach, or join a small group for example, they have to go online to register. Though younger people are more than willing to comply, since online communication is the world they are familiar with, older members may consider connections through the internet as impersonal and confusing.

Boomer and pastor participants were asked to address the inter-communication challenges of Boomers relating to the church and vice versa. Pastor D shared that the biggest challenge he sees for Boomers seeking to be a part of a younger church is the conflict of culture and lingo. They struggle with how to intelligibly communicate with young people. As a Boomer pastor, he finds himself occasionally retracting and not wanting to engage in conversation for fear that he will not read the situation correctly and say something that could be an embarrassment.

Boomer Beatrice states that people her age are often offended by the noticeable sense of entitlement among Millennials. To her, it seems younger people are oblivious to the sacrifice older people have made to provide the conveniences Millennials enjoy. On the other hand, there are younger people who blame communication discord between the generations on Boomers because of their demands for preferential treatment.<sup>10</sup> Boomer Martin believes there is a need to assume a self-sacrificial posture, that the weight of responsibility for building bridges across the generational gap lies largely upon the shoulders of Boomers. In the workplace, Boomers are dealing with three distinct generations younger than themselves, and they must steward their maturity to accept the informational deficiency of younger people and make intentional strides

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<sup>10</sup> Baker-Whitelaw, "Literally Why Are Boomers so Mean?"

toward reconciliation. Boomer Mark concurred that in his own work environment, he is compelled to take the initiative in understanding how the way different generations think and relate. He is cognizant of the division among generational mindsets and is constantly working to adapt. It is well for Boomers to note that the example of Paul demonstrates someone in the later years seeking intimate friendships, giving attention to studies, and keeping himself educationally current.<sup>11</sup> Millennials and Gen Zs have never known life without a laptop, and yet there are Boomers who do not even have a laptop. He says that he must realize that the younger generations know more about technology than he does, and he has found a pathway to building relational rapport through reverse mentoring, seeking advice and information from them. Inter-generational unity is not resolved by comparing who has the biggest attitude of entitlement. It is found in the self-giving grace of believers submitting their lives to Christ and the purposes of His kingdom.<sup>12</sup> A disposition of wisdom and unselfishness is seen in the willingness to compensate for one's limitations by soliciting the aid of others.<sup>13</sup>

Beatrice said that she finds great consolation in God's last-day promise of generational reconciliation through the prophet Malachi. "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers so that I will not come and strike the land with complete destruction."<sup>14</sup> Whatever eschatological position one takes regarding this passage, the conclusion can be made that prior to the culmination of all things God will do a work of preparation by bringing mutual peace between the generations.

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<sup>11</sup> Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters*.

<sup>12</sup> John 12:24-26.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, "Barnabas: A Generous Encourager."

<sup>14</sup> Mal 4:5,6.

Pastor B considers his church a generation-bridging church. The Boomers enthusiastically fan the flames of the young people. The staff is comprised of young people in their twenties, and they are surrounded by older workers who champion their success. The youth pastor is nineteen years old and one of the most effective couples who work with him are in their 60s. As a Gen Xer, Pastor B says that he and his wife have always related to older people. He regularly visits one of his best friends in a nursing home. Though the church has many members in their twenties and thirties, he states that his personal strength is that of connecting to and relating to older people. He acknowledges that intergenerational harmony is in the DNA of the church, because of the nature of its birth and development. He shares that there are many areas subject to improvement, but the unity among the generations is a triumph they celebrate.

Pastor D concedes that there have been challenging times when older members approached him with questions about the way the church is now operating. They share their misgivings about change and how they “miss their church.” He states that his approach in dealing with Boomer negativity is to honor them with respect and understanding, even when they confront with probing questions and opposing opinions. He seeks to explain the benefits of spiritual alignment. Consequently, among his Boomers, there are members who have taken ownership of the fresh church culture and encourage others to affirm the younger leaders. Boomers’ validation means much and goes a long way toward building confidence. If Boomers will embrace younger leaders and will not oppose them, they can catalyze healthy and successful growth. Pastor B seeks to regularly impart the necessity of aligning with God’s vision for the kingdom, communicating that rather than the church singularly focusing on its own needs, concentration should be on reaching those who do not yet know Christ. The biblical mandate to

flourish looks beyond self-aggrandizement and personal satisfaction. It is rather a kingdom-centered mandate that champions the welfare of others.<sup>15</sup>

Boomer Jennifer shares that in her church relationships, she has seen the older and younger generations meld together. For her, this experience has been more serendipitous than calculated. She has enjoyed the spontaneous development of friendships with younger mothers and fathers. She finds Gen Xers eager to learn and open to counsel. Millennials are more difficult, yet the primary difference is in lingo, movies, and music. Her husband George describes his involvement with interns at work in positive terms. He shares that in his vocational setting, Gen Xers and Millennials are eager to be mentored and taught. Sixty percent of those who completed the survey agreed that Boomers face challenges when it comes to relating to younger generations (see Appendix F, Figure 8); however, eighty-seven percent believed they should do more to seek guidance from Boomers in life decisions (see Appendix F, Figure 7).

Most of the pastors in the research reported that their churches suffered from the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The attendance statistics provided by the Barna Group's studies and Gallup polls during the pandemic largely coincided with findings in the interviews with the pastors.<sup>16</sup> Research revealed that churches in America were already dealing with historically unprecedented crises prior to COVID-19, and the pandemic exasperated the problems.<sup>17</sup> Pastors shared disheartening stories of people leaving the church during COVID-19 because of political ideologies. Although they and the church leaders sought to address the controversial matters pertaining to masks, vaccines, distancing, and other divisive issues, with a

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<sup>15</sup> Forster and Cross, *Human Flourishing: Economic Wisdom for a Fruitful Christian Vision*.

<sup>16</sup> Associated Press, "Churches Have Lost Millions of Congregants."

<sup>17</sup> Pelusi-Verdend, "Church Attendance, the Pandemic, and Discipleship."

conciliatory approach, the criticisms were extremely dismaying. In some settings, accusations of fearfully caving to governmental pressure were manifest. In other instances, there were allegations that the church was being too lenient with safety precautions. Sadly, these conflicting opinions found strength in the polarity of America's political world and brought discord to the church. Some sources have lamented the failure of the church to weather the storm with Christian unity.<sup>18</sup> James White decried the lack of unity and Christian love during this testing time.<sup>19</sup>

Pastors shared that the most opinionated and vocal members were Boomers. This inclination is perhaps due to the propensity of older people to be intransigent and resistant to compromise. The apostle Paul's interpersonal policy of "becoming all things to all men"<sup>20</sup> to win some to Christ is certainly applicable to this area of life. One pastor suggested that in some cases, the inclusion of Boomers back into the mainstream of the church would entail a mindset transformation, from political allegiance to a biblical worldview that elevates Christ's kingdom above everything else.

Pastors were asked to expand on the advantages and the disadvantages of involving Boomers in significant positions of leadership in their church. It is essential to remember that all Baby Boomers cannot be typecast into one single paradigm. The cohort is comprised of differing ages, opinions, and aptitudes. However, the research sought to capture and report the perceptible similarities.

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<sup>18</sup> Rogers, "The Church Has Failed in COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>19</sup> White, "How the Pandemic Has Changed the Church."

<sup>20</sup> I Cor 9:22.

Boomer B makes the case for the strategic involvement of Boomers in church leadership. Many Boomers have a history of faithfulness, a mindset of loyalty, and they are beyond the years that they feel they must prove something. They have neither the energy nor the inclination to be the one in charge. Having comfortably acclimated to their position in life and ministry, they are not striving for authority and position. Therefore, they are not a threat to existing leadership. This distinctive characteristic of self-acceptance opens the door for healthy intergenerational relationships.

The literature research showed that many Boomers have come to understand that being fruitful is not measured in numbers, but in impact.<sup>21</sup> Also, they see their retirement years as a time to utilize their gifts for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom, not as a time to merely bask in the rewards of hard work in early life.<sup>22</sup>

Pastor G describes from his experience some of the positive advantages gained through including Boomers in leadership positions in the church. The obvious advantage is that they have already developed a culture of giving. They have reached a point in life that truly encourages them to make a difference. They seek to contribute to a cause and purpose bigger than themselves. Boomers have been on a long journey. Early in life, they were not too impressed with what their elders had accomplished. They were ambitiously determined to reinvent the wheel, no matter what their area of occupation. The 1960s and 70s social revolution fermented an anti-establishment mindset, yet a broad change occurred that motivated Boomers to reach out for help and counsel. Boomers have endured a unique life journey that has produced a humble desire for enduring productivity.

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<sup>21</sup> Moltmann et al., *Joy and Human Flourishing*.

<sup>22</sup> Piper, *Rethinking Retirement - Finishing Life for the Glory of Christ*.



This research dealt with the matter of ageism in today's culture. Ageism is defined as the "prejudice or discrimination against a particular age group and especially the elderly, especially the elderly."<sup>23</sup> Public opinions often espouse negative assessments of older people, such as treating aging like it is a disease or harboring the idea that elders' presence deprives younger generations of opportunities.<sup>24</sup> People in their retirement age often find themselves swimming upstream against a fixed cultural mentality, being stereotyped by the community as people who simply want to relax and live a leisurely life, when in fact, they want to live a life filled with adventure and purpose.<sup>25</sup> The church must understand that excluding elders from the core life of the church not only deprives the church of needed resources, but this alignment with cultural with the cultural mindset of ageism is a neglectful sin.<sup>26</sup>

Not only are Boomers confronted with cultural opinions concerning ageism, but they are also subject to their own personal misgivings regarding their age. This negative self-assessment prevents them from entertaining the notion of being a valuable part of God's plan. Counter to prevailing pessimistic attitudes about old age, studies have shown that some mental faculties improve with age.<sup>27</sup> A study of the biblical patriarchs, matriarchs, and heroes of the faith reveals that many of them produced their greatest accomplishments as they entered the last third of life. Sarah, who died at 127, was 90 when she gave birth to Isaac.<sup>28</sup> Moses was 80 years old when he

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<sup>23</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. "Ageism," accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ageism>.

<sup>24</sup> Nguyen and Jeste, "Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back."

<sup>25</sup> Bergstrom and Bergstrom, *Third Calling: What are you doing with the rest of your life?*

<sup>26</sup> Houston and Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*.

<sup>27</sup> Nguyen and Jeste, "Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back."

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 17:17.

began to fulfill his epic mission of divine purpose. He lived to be 120. Joshua, whose life spanned 110 years, assumed the reigns of national leadership at 80 years of age. A common age of death for those in the postdiluvian era was around 120. It is common today for one's lifespan to reach 90 years of age.<sup>29</sup> From a relative standpoint, the biblical 80 would be a contemporary 60. This fact presents a perspective of the possibility that a Boomer entering the third third of life may experience a fresh call and mission. The conundrum of aging and the fact that it is part of God's plan is a fact that all humans are constrained to embrace.<sup>30</sup> Nothing can change the reality of growing old.<sup>31</sup>

There are matters of importance where the message of scripture stands in sharp contradistinction with the present cultural ethos. This contrast in outlook is true in attitudes espoused by many regarding those who are older. God's instruction is to "stand up in the presence of the gray-headed and honor elders"<sup>32</sup>

Research reveals that churches can unintentionally send signals that devalue the older generation; for example, when everyone on the platform is younger than forty, when all the church programs are designed for younger people, or when there is an obvious lack of pastoral care to minister to their unique needs.<sup>33</sup> Pastor G says that church leaders must understand the unique mindsets of Boomers. If they are to be included, they must be valued and made to know that their opinion matters. He further advises that unless they are pre-informed about change, they will resist and choose not to be involved.

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<sup>29</sup> Forstadt-Olkowski, "60 Minutes Segment Reveals How."

<sup>30</sup> Bretzke, *Consecrated Phrases: A Latin Theological Dictionary*.

<sup>31</sup> Tournier and Gilmour, *The Seasons of Life*.

<sup>32</sup> Lev 19:32.

<sup>33</sup> Van Loon, "Your Church Needs Boomers."

Though Pastor G is appreciative of Boomer participation and maintains a strong rapport with this segment of the congregation, the focus of the church is primarily on the younger generations. He purposefully shares upfront with all new Boomers that when the church was established, it was built with a vision to serve succeeding generations. Their goal is to celebrate young people and make a place for them. He finds that Boomers who understand and who are attracted to the opportunity to make a difference will stay. Those who do not simply find another place of fellowship. His church does not proactively try to accommodate the desires of Boomers, other than including them in the existing program.

Biblical research demonstrates that healthy spiritual and emotional living for anyone rests in the capacity to see beyond their own lives, embrace generational thinking, and consider what they can leave for those yet to be born.<sup>34</sup> Jesus' parable of the seed and the sower is unquestionably applicable to the matter of generational thinking.<sup>35</sup> The legacy of a life well-lived, a life that effectively lives on beyond the grave, is at the core of the generational mindset.<sup>36</sup> Flourishing in life is the dedicated stewardship of one's abilities and spiritual gifts to further the purposes of God's kingdom on earth.<sup>37</sup> This predisposition calls for the Biblical instruction to "number our days so that we may have a heart of wisdom."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Les Brown, *The Courage to Live Your Dreams* (New York, NY: G&D Media, 2021). <https://www.perlego.com/book/1637480/the-courage-to-live-your-dreams.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Matt 13:3-9

<sup>36</sup> Bob P. Buford, *Beyond Halftime*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 44.

<sup>37</sup> Roberts, "We Need a Biblical Vision for."

<sup>38</sup> Ps. 90:12

Pastor B notes the positive aspects of Boomer involvement. They lean toward a higher level of commitment. Researchers observe that they do desire to be included.<sup>39</sup> They tend to be more generous because they are at the age where they have the resources to give financially. His church bears the fortune to have a number of Boomers still involved who were charter members. Their willingness to embrace changes as the church has grown is an indication of their spiritual quality. Pastor B proactively honors the older members who have made the journey. Although he can see where other churches experienced disadvantages in engaging Boomers, his church has not witnessed major problems in this area. Pastor B gave five specific advantages to Boomer presence. Understanding that just as in every age group, Boomers cannot be typecast, there are some general qualities that characterize the Boomers with whom he is associated: (1) They are faithful. (2) They are generous financially. (3) They have weathered the storms of life. (4) They have garnered a greater degree of wisdom and understanding. (5) They display the marks of maturity. New Boomers are attracted to the church by Boomer members.

According to Pastor B, the one disadvantage he has observed relates to the reluctance to change. Being more set in their ways, they are inclined to move slowly when new methods or systems are introduced.

Pastor C applauds the work of Boomers in the church that he pastors. The prayer team is comprised primarily of Boomers. They are mentoring younger people in the prayer ministry, but for the most part, the Boomers are carrying the load for intercessory prayer. During the seasons of prayer and fasting, the Boomers are the most likely to willingly participate. His opinion is that Boomers have young hearts, undoubtedly a reflection of his example. Those who might perhaps pine for the old days are few. He has observed that those who have sought to take the advantage

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<sup>39</sup> Rogers, "Why 'Baby Boomers' May Never See Themselves."

of educational opportunities and have curated a professional mindset want to be a part of something vibrant and productive. He further states that it is important to share the vision of generational inclusion, establish a church atmosphere that models the love of Christ, and maintain the temperament of hospitality.

Pastor F agrees that the advantage of Boomer participation in key positions lies in the fact that many older participants do have a history of involvement and the responsibilities associated with belonging. They understand church culture and church ways. Those who are lifetime church attendees have a basic knowledge of doctrine and theology. However, the downside is that they are not as likely to be seeker aware. Displaying an acquired church lingo, their “churchese” can be a put-off to visitors. Some practices of church etiquette, like doffing your hat when you enter or dressing a certain way, cannot be expected from new people.

Despite a few negatives, Pastor F submits that pastors serve the church and themselves well by leveraging the abilities and talents of Boomers. This approach entails seeking to understand their reaction to the current events in our nation and in the church. Recent circumstances have tested their vulnerabilities: the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and the post-pandemic recession. Among the congregants, the Boomer cohort has perhaps suffered the most physically and financially. They are the most threatened by the demand to adjust. How have all these events affected them? Pastor F wonders what it will take to reconnect with many Boomers. What will it take to get them back into the church and recruited into operative ministry?

Pastor E offered that he could not think of any disadvantages. He said that if Boomers are griping or complaining, it is usually because they are not feeling loved or have a basic disagreement. His church has established special times of fellowship, which included a catered

dinner and words of encouragement from the pastoral staff. They need to be shown love and made to feel that they are wanted and respected. They have given their best years to the church and cannot feel that they have been put out to pasture.

Boomer Frank detailed a difficult situation he endured in recent months with an older church that was facing a transition into the future. The church facility was in an older area of the city that is undergoing a sort of commercial and residential renewal. Real estate investors are buying up outdated properties, demolishing buildings, and erecting high-end residential and commercial structures. As a longtime resident of the community, he joined the church with hopes of helping them remain a Christian presence in the area. When the older pastor resigned, the church was faced with options for the future. One option entertained was an offer from a megachurch to adopt this church as an extension work. The incoming “mother church” would invest a substantial amount of money, encourage members living in that area to attend the satellite church, and provide ministry resources. The night of the vote attracted scores of “inactive members” who voiced their opposition to the venture. The plan was sabotaged by peripheral individuals’ influences. The healthy, spiritual and psychological approach for the Boomer is the duality of enjoying personal flourishing and at the same caring about the next generations and their success.<sup>40</sup> Jesus’ teaching on the Beatitudes provides the context for a flourishing life as an existence of selflessness that insures the reciprocal blessings of God.<sup>41</sup>

Pastor D shares that when he was installed into the position of Lead Pastor, he was granted the authorization to formulate a freshly appointed church board. He believes that one of the best decisions he made was to ask all of the existing board to continue to serve. Not only did

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<sup>40</sup> Kass, *Leading a Worthy Life*.

<sup>41</sup> Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*.

this measure provide him with access to their indispensable connection to the history and culture of the church, but it also went a long way toward establishing trust with the congregation.

Shortly after he assumed the pastorate, one board member passed, and the replacement was a Boomer female, the first woman to serve on that church board. He rejects the often-peddled idea that pastors should get older people out of decision-making positions. God's view of the older generation is one of inclusion. In the Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming age of the Holy Spirit, he includes the old with the young in the promise of Holy Spirit power and giftings.<sup>42</sup>

Pastors were asked to describe the attitudes among church people in general toward Baby Boomers and older people. Pastor A says that he has witnessed both positive and negative actions on the part of the church. He cites a situation in which a younger pastor was installed in a church and, perhaps being oblivious to the church's culture, his ostensible approach was to totally reinvent the wheel. New age-bracketed groups were formed, and Boomers were marginalized. Invariably, the older members would not attend the newly specified old groups. This reality concurs with Jane Rogers' discovery that while Boomers want to be included in the community, they do not want to be pigeonholed as "seniors."<sup>43</sup> Research by Tony Brooks also revealed that Boomers resist stereotypical titles that further distinguish them from the rest of the community and the church has an opportunity to model inclusion, the place where walls of generational division can be abolished.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Joel 2:28,29.

<sup>43</sup> Rodgers, "Why 'Baby Boomers'"

<sup>44</sup> Brooks, "5 Considerations"

The information gathered brings hope to the present and future intergenerational possibilities in the church. Despite the often-perceived lack of intergenerational cooperation and the obvious cultural distinctions between the demographics, there is substantial evidence that the church is the one place that provides the setting for the generations to engage in collaborative initiatives for advancing Christ's kingdom.

#### Understanding the Felt Needs of the Boomer Generation.

The research attempted to find those social, spiritual, physical, and practical concerns that are most experienced by Boomers. If Boomers' talents and abilities are to be utilized in the church, their needs also must be addressed. The research sought to discover those personal areas that are the most problematic or challenging, understanding that the lack of involvement may be attributed to felt needs that are not being addressed by the church. Baby Boomers are impacted by a variety of social, political, economic, and health issues that shape their mindset and lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> The question is whether the church truly cares enough to study the world of the Boomers and seek to understand their needs.

The most obvious challenge mentioned by the Boomers had to do with physical changes. Martin and Beatrice, younger Boomers in their fifties, admitted that they already have experienced a loss of energy. Craig and Barbara concur that physical stamina is also an issue in participating on the same level have in the past.

Martin and Beatrice are now responsible for their parents' care. Fortunately, siblings on both sides share the responsibility, but the emotional and physical burden is very real. George

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<sup>45</sup> Holodny, "9 of the Biggest Problems Baby Boomers."



and Jennifer have moved further away from their parents, and the stress of caring for them long distance is one of the most difficult things they are required to handle. Mark and Gina state that caring for their parents is one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks facing them.

George and Jennifer have discovered that calling themselves Empty-Nesters is somewhat of a misnomer because their adult children still often return home. This added responsibility puts extra stress on emotions and finances. Gina also notes the increasing instances in which extenuating circumstances require Boomers to have the responsibility of raising grandchildren.

Jennifer notes another challenge. With a rapidly changing culture, Boomers often feel they are not fitting into society. Boomers often feel ignored and unappreciated. They miss the attractiveness of their youthfulness, the gratification of being readily accepted and recognized. They are aware that along with aging has come a reduction in physical appeal and social popularity. These factors lead some seniors to experience an inexplicable sense of loneliness and isolation. Several Boomers interviewees pointed out that moving frequently with their careers in their earlier years prevented them from making long-term friendships, and now in the last third of life, they deal with a sense of isolation. Boomers want to be heard. They often feel that no one is listening to them.<sup>46</sup>

Pastor G shares that there are no special programs, like seniors' ministry, for Boomers in his church. They are incorporated into the small group ministry. He states that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the strong groups got stronger, and the weak ones got weaker. Dana laments that she does not see the church as a whole truly caring for the elderly. One author in the research presents a social dilemma that surrounds people whom what he refers to as "elder orphans." Studies show that twenty-two percent of citizens in the United States who are 65 years

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<sup>46</sup> Brooks, "5 Considerations to Help Your Church."

and above are aging alone or lack family support to care for them.<sup>47</sup> This information reveals the disturbing reality that millions of seniors are essentially living in isolation. This staggering statistic has huge implications for the church and could truly be a major avenue of ministry for Boomers.

The research not only focused on engaging church-going Boomers but also on reaching Boomers who in vast numbers have either dropped out of church attendance or who have never had a relationship with Christ. The interviews entertained discussion of possible initiatives the local church could take that would attract unchurched Baby Boomers. The church should and can take the advantage of the positive assets that Boomers bring to the church. Research shows that they are more likely to be involved in church than they were in their middle years.<sup>48</sup> Boomers respond to informal, relationally oriented opportunities for connection. Community dinners, holiday events, or special kids' productions offer an invitation that opens the door for potential connections.

Pastor C believes that the Boomer generation took the biggest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying complications. Problems with mental and emotional health have become even more evident. Many Boomers who have a history of faithfulness to church have now found themselves struggling with personal identity, a fact that affects their relationship with the church.

Frank and Dana represent a Christian couple who have recently experienced a season during which they were unchurched. They moved into a new community during the COVID-19 pandemic and, being inclined to reconnect to church, began the search for a new church home. Frank's aging mother also moved into her own home close by, so they would be able to assist her

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<sup>47</sup> Hoyt, "Growing Old without Family."

<sup>48</sup> Gryboski, "Are Baby Boomers Returning.?"

with age-related issues. She made a connection with two Boomer-aged sisters who live together across the street from her home. They began to reach out to her, cook meals for her, bring supplies, pray with her, and help tend to her medical needs. The family was touched by this heartfelt gesture of love. After COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, as a result of this connection and the gestures of love, the entire family, which represents four generations, began to attend the sisters' church and ultimately joined. They are now active and invested in the ministry of the church. Frank explains that their decision to become a part of this local church body was not the result of any outreach program, but directly connected to the love and caring her new neighbors exhibited.

As defined by Forster and Cross, a healthy church is best described as a home, where “a dynamic set of relationships (is) marked by a particular ethic of care.”<sup>49</sup> It is in the fact of being a home that the church provides a place for all to belong, and especially for those who are getting older. There are many lonely and isolated Boomers who fear that as they grow older, there will be no one to take care of them.<sup>50</sup>

Mark, who is an active leader in his local church, says that as the pandemic subsides, there are still older Boomers who are reluctant to be in crowds. Small group activities in homes have likewise been squelched. As the fear of COVID-19 abates, the church must consider ways to re-engage older people and prayerfully strategize the evangelization of the unreached. He shares that Boomers are not receptive to artificiality and are only won through authenticity. The church must understand the age-related concerns of Boomers and seek to find ways to

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<sup>49</sup> Forster and Cross, *Human Flourishing*.

<sup>50</sup> Nancy Olumekor, “APWU Retirees Still Fighting for Justice.” American Postal Workers, Union. July 21, 2021. <https://apwu.org/news/apwu-retirees-still-fighting-justice> 5.

accommodate those felt needs. Issues such as facing retirement, healthcare options, financial management, caring for aging parents, and dealing with family relationships pose opportunities for the church. Mark believes that small groups, topic-specific retreats, and getaways are some ways Boomers can be engaged. Providing pertinent fellowship/learning opportunities outside the realm of the conventional programmatic template conveys the message that the church is truly concerned with the needs of Boomers, more than just operating business as usual.

Including Baby Boomers in the local Church for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Current literature reveals a renewed interest in strategically mobilizing Baby Boomers in the life of the church.<sup>51</sup> In America, the Boomer generation, those between 57 and 76 years of age, represents the second-largest generational cohort, next to the Millennials.<sup>52</sup> The wealthiest generation in America, they will monetarily be passing on an astounding amount of 68 trillion dollars to the younger generations during the next two decades.<sup>53</sup> Every day, 10,000 Boomers cross the 65-year age threshold, and by 2030, the youngest Boomer will be 65.<sup>54</sup> Many retirees have devoted themselves to building careers and have not built long-term relationships, and now they are ready to enjoy connecting with peers.<sup>55</sup> Church leaders who overlook the intentional

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<sup>51</sup> Brooks, "5 Considerations."

<sup>52</sup> Fry, "Millennials Overtake Baby Boomer."

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, "Millennials Will Become Richest Generation."

<sup>54</sup> America Counts Staff, "By 2030, All Baby Boomers Will Be."

<sup>55</sup> Rodgers, "Why 'Baby Boomers'."

strategic recruitment of Boomers in forging a vision for the next two decades could be missing out on the next revival movement of the church in America.<sup>56</sup>

Scripture communicates that a call of one's life for ministry plays in concert with a specific need on earth. God does not call an individual to meaningful service merely to placate one's emotional or psychological necessities. Moses' burning bush experience was not the result of his seeking to find a place of fulfillment;<sup>57</sup> it came as the result of the cry of the children of Israel that had reached the heart of God.<sup>58</sup>

The discussion with pastors and Boomers concerning the matter of churches developing deliberate strategies for Boomer involvement lies at the center of the research question. What can churches do to intentionally reach out to Boomers, show them their indispensability in the progress of Christ's kingdom, and envision or re-envision them for service in the local church? Studies have shown that 20 percent of those occupying the Boomer cohort are returning to religion.<sup>59</sup> This figure, of course, is a broad statistic and envelopes a broad viewpoint of religious interest, but the implications are huge for the church. Although Boomers understand their limitations, they view this season of life as one of creativity and productivity.<sup>60</sup>

Humans are created by God to live in community, enjoying the strength and health that emanates from social interdependence and the nurturing benefits of close relationships.<sup>61</sup> At the heart of the thrust for proactive inclusion of Boomers in the life of the church is the deliberate

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<sup>56</sup> Rainer, "Baby Boomers Are Returning."

<sup>57</sup> Durham, *Exodus*.

<sup>58</sup> Exod 2:24,25.

<sup>59</sup> Rainer, "Baby Boomers Are Returning."

<sup>60</sup> Hughes and Randolph, *Guidelines Adult Ministries: Help Adults Love God and Neighbor*.

<sup>61</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

reimagining of the church as essentially a family, where all generations are included and each with its part in the life of the church body.<sup>62</sup> All believers maintain the same status as a part of God's household.<sup>63</sup>

Pastors were asked to give their insight into the responsibility of the church, and Boomers were likewise asked to give their viewpoints as subjects on the receiving end of the church's solicitation. Pastor D stated that there is no unilateral way to incorporate the gifts of Boomers. It is not just about the building, the preaching, or the institution of programs. It truly is about Boomers reaching Boomers. The early church example does not include outreach program; it demonstrates the accomplishment of a Spirit-empowered church population, consumed with the love of Jesus Christ and living out the life of Jesus in the community. Because of their cultural compatibility, Boomers are more likely to reach Boomers. Systems are needed to accommodate the influx, but there is a dependence upon the Holy Spirit to do the work through willing participants. Among the congregants surveyed, fifty-five percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the church should be taking proactive steps to attract more Baby Boomers to the church. Forty percent were neutral regarding intentional outreach to Boomers.

The pastor's place is to equip the saints for the achievement of ministry objectives.<sup>64</sup> This calling necessitates a discerning observance of the spiritual qualities and natural competencies that church members possess and taking the necessary discipleship strides to help them experience growth, adjustment, healing, and proper inauguration into the big picture of ministry. The outcome is individual wholeness and corporate completion for effective ministry.<sup>65</sup> Each

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<sup>62</sup> Ticciati, "Reconceiving the Boundaries of Home."

<sup>63</sup> Eph 2:19.

<sup>64</sup> Eph 4:11-13.

<sup>65</sup> I Cor 1:10.

person has a part to play in the comprehensive ministry of the church. The process of discovery and implementation of one's gift is not solely the responsibility of the individual; it is the work of leadership to guide the process.<sup>66</sup> Pastors are sensing the need to occupy themselves less with the observable public aspects of ministry and devote more creative time to discipleship, shaping lives for kingdom effectiveness.<sup>67</sup>

Often pastors and leaders are reticent to engage gifted people, including Boomers, in key positions because of the fear of their own inadequacies. It is incumbent for leaders to take the advantage of the growth and educational opportunities that help them move beyond such anxieties, so that they can include gifted people with confidence.<sup>68</sup> The biblical mandate to equip the saints for ministry involves recognizing their abilities, gifts and potentiality and fitting them into the overall plan for the community of believers.<sup>69</sup>

Pastor E referred to the productive interaction he had with a retired Boomer who had joined the church and attended the Next Steps class. The story epitomizes the reality of a pastor intentionally mobilizing a Boomer for ministry. In a random conversation, this individual shared that he had been praying about involvement but had not found anything that he could do. The pastor enquired about his life career and discovered that he had a military and law enforcement background. After a time of building rapport with the pastor and the church, he became the head of security, serving a much-needed position for the church. Barnabas, a key church leader in the Book of Acts, represents the exceptional class of leaders who recognize, validate, and facilitate

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<sup>66</sup> Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership: From Moses to Matthew*.

<sup>67</sup> Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*.

<sup>68</sup> Al Lopus, Cory Hartman, and Peter Greer. *Road to Flourishing Eight Keys to Boost Employee Engagement and Well-Being*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2022)

<sup>69</sup> Eph 4:11-13.

those who are chosen by God for specific tasks and roles.<sup>70</sup> Paul's mentoring relationship with his son in the faith, Timothy, endures as the consummate model for mobilizing and equipping disciples.<sup>71</sup>

Boomer Frank believes that Boomers have much to offer, especially in the area of validating the younger generations and giving them hope for the future with the voice of experience. However, exercising the gift of encouragement and mentoring is a learning curve for many Boomers and they need training in this area. Effective leaders must be given purposeful instruction, and pastors who flourish are inclined to consistently grow in their own education, both formal and informal.<sup>72</sup>

The research revealed the terminology for growing the church is distinguished by the size of the church. Megachurch pastors speak in terms of outreach and growth from the perspective of using a large net. Smaller church pastors tend to speak more in terms of individual connectivity. No matter the outreach paradigm, it is imperative that growth systems be instituted that give intimate attention to the individual in mobilizing ministry. Such effort is certainly the case in marshaling the participation of the Boomer. Most participants shared that healthy growth is about relationships. Pastor A stated that whereas the earlier church growth movement mantra was focused on geographical location, today's theme is relationships. "Location, location, location has turned to relationship, relationships, relationships." Frank shared that Boomers do not respond well to kind of judgmental communication that lectures them about their need to be in

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<sup>70</sup> Acts 9:28.

<sup>71</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*.

<sup>72</sup> Lopus, Hartman, and Greer, *Road to Flourishing Eight Keys to Boost Employee*.



church, rather they are most motivated when the church conveys the message that they are needed.

All the pastors interviewed have incorporated the use of media in the production of online services, with COVID-19 serving as the catalyst for many of the churches. Pastor B stated that the expectation of an online presence to increase in-person attendance has been disappointing. The research dialogue with some participants brought out that online communications need to convey information about the church's specific mission and how watchers can become involved.

Boomers who have a history of church involvement dread the process of re-engaging, especially if they have made a geographical move. Leaders need to adopt the model established by Barnabas and help mature newcomers make more of a lateral move into fellowship, rather than leave them to find their own way up the ladder of connectivity. Leaders must exercise intentionality in reaching out to productive and active people exercising deliberate discernment and careful attentiveness to people and their potential.

Keith and Cathy shared what a challenge it was to find a church home after moving into a new city. A storm had caused major damage to the community where they lived and pastored. Following the closure of their small church, they moved back to a city where they had lived and served before, found good jobs in their respective fields, and began looking for a church within their denomination to call home. Their visits were often met with what seemed to be suspicion and distrust by pastors. Rather than church leadership opening arms of welcome, there appeared to be subtle resistance.

Cathy offered helpful insight regarding the procedure churches use in mobilizing volunteers, which certainly applies to Boomers, especially those who have a record of productive ministry experience. She has served in both paid staff positions and on volunteer teams. She

offered that one hindrance to serving effectively is the fact that people do not know you or the level of authority bestowed on you. People on the serve team need public recognition that verifies and authenticates their station of service. Such validation gives non-paid staff the liberty to function freely and efficiently within the scope of their assignment. Seasoned and qualified Boomers are viable candidates for unpaid staff positions.

Pastor G surmised the pastors are often paranoid regarding new talent, fearing that qualified people may potentially be a threat to their position. George expressed bewilderment at church leadership, wondering why they do not reach out to him and ask for his help. He says that “Sons do not birth fathers. Fathers birth sons and daughters.” Biblical research noted the disappointing accounts of fathers and leaders who failed to address the matters of succession.<sup>73</sup>

Mark shared that tragic personal stories in his lifetime have served to prepare him for the ministries with which he is now involved. The shocking rape and murder of his seventeen-year-old sister, the heart-rending loss of his first wife to cancer, his years of alcoholism, and eventual deliverance – all these experiences have contributed to his spiritual and ministry preparation.

Martin suggested that the most important thing for the church leadership is to let Boomers know that they are needed and provide a pathway for them to discover their gifts and become mobilized for ministry. They need to know that a theology degree or theological training is not essential for positions of ministry. Where people lack confidence in their knowledge of scripture and in the practical outworking of ministry, training can be provided to fill the empty spaces.

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<sup>73</sup> Butler, *Understanding the Basic Themes of Joshua*.

Mark and Gina lament that from their observation, much of the church's leadership modus operandi is modeled after the business world, rather than the Jesus model. Boomers often repelled when they observed self-serving attitudes in church leadership.

Dana shares that although she has always been settled in her faith and her relationship with God, it was difficult to re-engage with church attendance and participation after an extended season of detachment. The impetus for the recent renewal of commitment was a concern for her grandchildren. Seeing her family reconnect to church fellowship and Christian growth has been fulfilling. She suggests that one way of involving Boomers like herself follows the discovery of a sense of purpose. Boomers need to be needed.

Pastors were asked what ministries they would like to see implemented in the church to serve the specific needs of Boomers. Pastor G offered that his preference would be to invest in those initiatives that are created by the Boomers themselves. They are selective when it comes to involvement in fellowship and ministry. They are particular, choosing where they want to spend their physical and emotional budget. Pastor D agrees that the most successful initiatives for Boomers need to be created by the Boomers themselves. Capable Boomers need to be commissioned to use their adeptness and spiritual abilities to create relevant Boomer ministries.

Pastor C is not inclined to start Boomer-specific ministries, opting to include them in existing programs. Pastor A approached this discussion by describing ministries to and for the Boomers, defining tasks by younger people like doing home repair and yard work. Pastor D puts the onus for ministry involvement back on the shoulder of the Boomer. "I need a Boomer to catch fire, follow their dream, utilize their talents and create something that will reflect the life of Jesus and that ministers to the community." He asserts that genuine ministry happens in small

groups. It is not a top-down initiative but a bottom-up engagement. The pastor's role is to lead and empower people to dream and implement the dream.

Pastor C shares that his church is intentionally aiming for the younger generations. However, he and his leadership are concerned about unchurched Boomers. In their team discussions regarding the progress of the church have addressed the matter of first impressions. They seek to make sure that when a Boomer attends a church service, there is some element of the experience that makes them comfortable.

The salvific message conveyed by the church plays a great part in how Boomers respond. They have an informed aversion toward pressure and judgmentalism. George was especially expressive regarding the person's response to pulpit communication. His comments were reflective of all the conversations with the boomers in the research. Preaching that focuses on human failures can ignite negative introspection, whereas communication about the limitless love of God affects the elimination of spiritual darkness and brings about the needed inward change. This insight is helpful in reaching Boomers. The church must realize that many Boomers, although they may at one time have been affiliated with a church, nevertheless lack a clear understanding of the gospel. Those brought up in legalistic church environments may have never truly grasped the message of God's unconditional love. The church has an opportunity to share what may be a new understanding of the ancient message of Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."<sup>74</sup>

Pastor A would like to see more Boomers taking the initiative to proactively approach the younger generation and building friendships that open the door for impartation. As David in the

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<sup>74</sup> 2 Cor 5:19

Old Testament, be faithful to share and not retain valuable information.<sup>75</sup> Boomers have much to offer through sharing with younger people life experiences that create success, the necessity of commitment, how to develop a productive work ethic, how to set goals and implement vision, and other essential life lessons.

Some of the pastors interviewed have enjoyed exponential growth in the past. Most pastors have seen success in the area of engaging Boomers. None can singularly point out a particular program or system that made that possible. They express that growth has been organic, through intentional relationship building. Pastor C likened healthy growth to the planting of the seed and its subsequent growth, as taught by Jesus.

Most of the pastors interviewed are Baby Boomers. Despite a commonly held idea that members would prefer Boomer pastors to get out of the way and allow the younger generation to take over, the literature research and surveys concurred that there is widespread appreciation for Boomer leaders who are remaining culturally current and actively serving with stamina.<sup>76</sup>

### *Data Analysis Summary*

Resources from the scripture and from current literature were ample. Biblical references and examples dealing with the accomplishment of purposeful ministry in the later years of life are plentiful. The research presented only a handful of possible narratives. The abundance of current material addressing the subject of Boomers in today's world gave made the literate review a meaningful pursuit. Those informative resources continue to grow.

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<sup>75</sup> Psa 40:9,10

<sup>76</sup> Thom Rainer, "Eight Implications of Aging Boomer Pastors."

The invitation to complete the congregational survey was readily accepted by participants. The request for participation was made on three Sunday mornings and as a portion of a church e-newsletter. All those who were asked to volunteer in the interview process responded positively and eagerly contributed their thoughts. Promising messages from current literature lead this researcher to hope for healthy change as there are positive signs that leaders are focusing more on the essentials of discipleship than numerical markers to gauge effectiveness.<sup>77</sup>

### *Synthesis with Ministry Context*

The research regarding engaging and mobilizing Baby Boomers for effective ministry in the church is at the center of the researcher's passion and sense of calling in this life stage. A quick online search for national conferences and church leadership events shows that the bulk of resources and church development attention is aimed at reaching the younger generations. Of course, it is not only desirable but necessary to learn as much as possible about Gen Xers, the Millennials, and now Gen Z and prayerfully develop strategic ministries that will prepare them for the future. The perceived fault is in the lack of attention being given to the inclusion of Baby Boomers in the tactical planning for the next two decades. Research reveals that they have the potential to be a major player in the next spiritual movement in America.

The research has addressed the deficiency of Boomer participation in the American church and the potential for positive change. By the grace of God, it will be an added voice to the emerging crescendo within specific Christian circles calling for a fresh look at Boomer ministry.

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<sup>77</sup> Peluso-Verdend, "Church Attendance, the Pandemic, and."

As has been explored, there are voices rising to make the church aware that it could be quite possibly missing out on the inclusion of potentially one of its most vibrant assets. The intent of the ongoing work is to effectively inform the church of Boomer presence and potential. In fact, in the minds of many, the Boomer cohort has had its day and is considered passe – it has seen its time. However, there is a resurgence of conviction in certain quarters, a call for renewal among Baby Boomers. God’s gifts and callings are irrevocable. It is the prayer of the researcher that out of what may now be a faint chorus emanating from a few concerned organizations and individuals, a widespread resonance will reverberate in the church, making known that there is a yet unfulfilled purpose for the Boomer generation. Following the example of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, kingdom-minded people will not simply fade away; they continue to flourish. Those Boomers who accept God’s call have nothing personally to prove but rather seek to position themselves for God’s empowering approval.

### *Summary*

The initial inquiry of this research aimed at determining whether there is an exigent call in the church for latent Baby Boomers to be reignited for meaningful Christian service and if so, to explore what that partaking might look like. The biblical research focused on the examples of believers who in the third third of life fulfilled the purpose to which they were called. Scripture was explored to establish theological precedence regarding the older generations, how God sees them and how they view themselves. Current literature about Baby Boomers, those who have entered or are entering into the last third of life, provided a framework for understanding the cultural mindset of Boomers and envisioning the possibilities for significant participation in the church.

The voluntary survey and series of interviews with Boomers and senior pastors gave the researcher practical insight into the church's opinions of Boomers and the common traits of self-assessment that Boomers harbor. The research ascertained an existing appreciation for the Boomers and the roles that they can play in the fulfillment of kingdom advancement. It was confirmed that they are a viable force in the church. There is a general desire within the church for the unifying connectivity of the generations and a pervasive yearning among Boomers to be included in the ministry agenda.

It is my passion to carefully embrace that which has been discovered in this project, enlarge its borders, expand upon its themes, and prayerfully encourage other Boomers to rise to the challenge. Some considerations for future initiatives will be outlined in chapter five.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

#### *Introduction*

The possibilities for the engagement and mobilization of Baby Boomers in the life of the church in America are numerous. Biblical studies provide examples that establish a scriptural precedent for the accomplishment of divine imperatives in the latter years of life. The examination of current secular and religious literature reinforces the certainty that the Boomer generation possesses the potential for making a remarkable difference in the life of the church.<sup>1</sup> The sheer quantity of the numbers of this cohort, “76 million, with 10,000 Boomers retiring every day,”<sup>2</sup> is a sobering wake-up call for the church. Reports suggest that over the next two decades, an immense amount of wealth will be transferred to succeeding generations.<sup>3</sup>

The need for Boomers to be intricately entwined in the life of the church, coupled with the unique need the Boomers have for belonging and contributing, provides an exceptional context for God-honoring synergy. This research concurs with the forward thinking of Mark Roberts, who maintains a fresh vision is needed for this colossal opportunity.<sup>4</sup> The vision, the insight into God’s heart for this quandary in our present world is not beyond reach. New voices that address the problem are being heard, voices from the academic community and voices from

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<sup>1</sup> Fridley, “Baby Boomers as Caregivers, a Force.”

<sup>2</sup> Rainer, “The Big Baby Boomer Opportunity.”

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, “Millennials Will Become Richest Generation.”

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, “We Need a Biblical Vision for Flourishing.”

church leaders. These voices are encouraging to those Boomers who are impassioned with a desire to flourish and accomplish their God-ordained purpose.<sup>5</sup>

As has been stated, the qualitative and quantitative portion of the research comprises perceptible limitations, in that all the participants exist within the purview of my personal and professional relationships. The congregational survey and the Baby Boomer interviews were conducted within Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas, and the senior pastors who were interviewed are affiliated with Destiny Fellowship. It is understood that investigative outcomes can be greatly influenced by the culture of the setting.

However, it is my passion to carefully embrace that which has been discovered in this project, enlarge its borders, expand upon its themes, and prayerfully encourage other Boomers to rise to the challenge. Some considerations for future initiatives will be outlined in chapter five.

### *Lessons Learned*

The study of Boomers cannot be set apart from the examination and consideration of all younger and older generations. Although the research focused on those entering the third third of life, the information acquired must be put into context and synthesized with the community at large. Boomers do not live as a solitary demographic entity. They embody a defined generational cohort, yet with overlapping relationships. What a Boomer does with the rest of his or her life, whether that includes proactive cohesive involvement or fragmented isolation, will directly affect the next generation.

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<sup>5</sup> Hanson, *Baby Boomers and Beyond*.

Relationships with younger generations cannot simply be tolerated; they must be embraced with fervor and happy acceptance. It has been noted that Boomers can unfortunately allow their antipathy for the immature attitudes and lifestyles of Gen Xers and Millennials to exceed their call to genuinely embrace them with the love of God.<sup>6</sup> Making a difference by investing spiritually, relationally, and financially in succeeding generations is not just a good idea; it is a calling and a command.

Boomers often find it difficult to know how to reach out to others. They frequently find it difficult to break out of the incapacitating confinements of selfishness and isolation. The research reveals areas of deep concern about the need for self-introspection and change among Boomers. They are often the targets of social criticism, the object of negative mindsets about aging, and, perhaps most debilitating, the victims of self-imposed denigration. In correlation with biblical understanding and spiritual impartation, Boomers must be informed about the mental capacities of aging people regarding their calling and potential. Although physical abilities diminish, studies show that the resilience of the mental competencies among older citizens are remarkable.<sup>7</sup>

Prayer is a pathway through which God imparts His will. The fact that one is still alive and breathing confirms God's ongoing intention for that individual's productivity. As has been demonstrated in the biblical patriarchs, and witnessed in contemporary examples, a person's calling in the last third of life is not something that just arises out of a vacuum, but rather a piece of the person's lifelong puzzle, an addendum to the continuing outflow of God's grace. Through the power of prayer, Boomers can overcome debilitating confrontations with emotional despondency and mental complacency.

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<sup>6</sup> Baker-Whitelaw, "Literally Why Are Boomers so Mean."

<sup>7</sup> Nguyen and Jeste, "Ageism: The Brain Strikes Back."

The fulfillment of one's life call flows out of the complementary personal attributes of obedience and passion. God tells his people through the prophet, "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best of the land."<sup>8</sup> The response of obedience means being compliant to a command; however, the response of willingness suggests passion, the inner inspiration to be productive. Boomers are admonished to reawaken the youthful pursuit of God, to be open to hearing Him revealing a fresh challenge. "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."<sup>9</sup> God does not require from the person that which He has not given. Biblical worship is the return of that which He has given. The scripture's approach to living in such a way that divine intention is accomplished is for the believer to be willing to take uncomfortable steps all the way to the final phase of life.

Boomers must have a renewed self-awareness that recognizes and accepts their position in life.<sup>10</sup> Spiritual and mental renewal provides the freedom to think beyond themselves and to dream about what they can do for the next generations.<sup>11</sup> Present American culture demonstrates a deficiency of fatherhood and motherhood, as well as the gift of endorsement and validation. Selfless Boomers can revolutionize lives of juniors by giving the kind of reinforcement that paves for success in others. Boomers who think beyond themselves understand that life's greatest success is making others successful.

The Boomer vision for productivity is connected to the primal scriptural message in Genesis. God's command to exercise dominion over His creation is an ongoing theme

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<sup>8</sup> Isa 1:19.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor 8:12.

<sup>10</sup> John 12:24-26.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *The Courage to Live Your Dreams*.

throughout the Bible.<sup>12</sup> The lessons learned in this research focused to a great extent on the ever-present narrative in scripture and literature about human flourishing.<sup>13</sup> Flourishing involves the stewardship of one's gifts to insure personal fulfillment and the perpetuity of legacy. This dynamic of flourishing does find pragmatic expression in the secular world; however, it is more completely realized in concert with fulfilling the imperatives of Christ's kingdom.

The discovery of viable initiatives for change will not be accomplished without intentional pursuit and much prayer – Boomers who care will not treat the pursuit with an indolent nature, nor will they be content with norms. The quest for spiritual renewal and church revitalization rests on the willingness to search the heart of God for this present generation and on the development kingdom-focused strategies. It must be realized that a lethargic attitude concerning the spiritual condition of the church does not simply bring the church to a standstill; it affects a loss of ground. The believer is admonished to “fight the good fight of faith.”<sup>14</sup> Flourishing is the descriptive intonation of the church, for believers of every age. The kingdom is advancing, and Christ beckons every believer to participate on the respective level of their calling.

The practical demonstration of renewed ministry among Boomers happens within the context of the church. Therefore, the burden of employing the valuable gifts and talents of this generational cohort for effective ministry does not rest entirely on the shoulders of the Boomers themselves. The church must be receptive to their presence and potential. In the interviews with pastors, it was learned that all had a pronounced appreciation for the Baby Boomer generation. The common theme that emerged from the pastors was that the Boomers had made it possible for

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<sup>12</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*.

<sup>13</sup> Forster and Cross, *Human Flourishing: Economic Wisdom for a Fruitful Christian Vision*.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Tim 6:12.

the church to be planted and continue to exist. What was lacking in most instances was a proactive plan for enlisting Boomers, both those existing in the membership and potential Boomers in the community, for effectual ministry involvement. This lack of engagement is a perceived area of deficiency in the church. Baby Boomers are sometimes treated as pillars in the organization, but not necessarily instruments of growth.

### *Considerations for the Future*

There are ever-growing volumes of literature available on this subject. The continuing research and study of accessible resources will help interested leaders to grasp a great understanding of the Baby Boomer cohort and will serve to inform possible initiatives for the future. This study of Boomers, and their participation in God's plan provides a catalyst for future courses of action.

It is anticipated that the information gathered, and the lessons learned will serve the church in meaningful ways. The youngest Boomer at the time of this writing is 57 years old. Some Baby Boomers could have 20 to 30 years left on earth to make an impact on the church and society. It is my opinion that the next decade holds tremendous opportunities for Boomers to genuinely make a difference. The suggested initiatives, which are not fully developed, serve as embryonic launchings for future ministry.

### Legacy Cohorts.

These are online meetings designed to motivate Boomers who are seeking to discover God's plan for the last third of life. The curriculum will be developed by the researcher and a selected team

of co-presenters. The cohort groups will be comprised of 8-10 participants. These special meetings will include Boomers who have been or are involved in full-time ministry and those who are wanting to better understand their place in life and are searching for the next steps in God's service. Participation will be solicited online and in churches within the framework of the researcher's fellowship.

The six-week curriculum will address matters of concern for those within the Boomer generation. The meetings, which will be designed to last an hour or more, will provide the opportunity for interaction and prayer. The purpose will be to lead participants into life-changing encounters with the Holy Spirit and dialogue with God that leads to the discovery of operational purpose.

The curriculum will offer insights and opportunities for discussion around the subjects of gift discovery, personal improvement, mental health, physical well-being, finances, and ministry possibilities. Participants will be encouraged to find a place in the local church or in the community to offer their service and make a substantive contribution.

Mobilizing pastoral benefactors.

A Boomer who has reached the point in life when the accomplishments, such as raising a family and fulfilling vocational undertakings, have been achieved is in a strategic position to have a transformational effect on the life of a young leader or pastor. These Boomers will be invited to strategically address the question, "What can I do to make this pastor's load lighter?" Those in the prime of their vocational life are often rearing a family and struggling to make financial ends meet. It is a tremendous thing when a Boomer assumes a position of assistance, offering extra

resources, being a financial blessing, or assisting with the children. There are so many ways a benefactor can assist a young pastor through the challenges and difficulties of ministry.

This presupposes the establishment of a mutual relationship of trust. It requires patience and time as a comfortable rapport is forged. Older colleagues do not present a challenge to the younger pastor's authority. There is an unlikely threat that they will seek to usurp the younger pastor's position. A Boomer is in a unique position because their presence is not as intimidating or threatening. Elders who have accomplished much in life tend not to have the inclination toward proving themselves. They do not have the stamina or social positioning to arrogate power. These distinguishing realities open the possibility for trust to be developed and a healthy relationship with the pastor to be established.

Legacy Advance.

A Legacy Advance will be a three-to-four-day getaway for Boomers in ministry. These retreats will be offered annually or bi-annually as a time for relaxation, instruction, and spiritual refueling for those in or entering the third third of life. The main purpose will be to promote the narrative of ministry fulfillment in the senior years and to send Boomers home invigorated and envisioned so they are viable instruments for God's service.

The proposed plan is to hold Legacy Advances in comfortable resort venues that would possibly have some interesting attractions and things to do nearby. Sessions would be simple and informal, including worship and prayer, teaching, and moments of mutual sharing. The schedule would include plenty of "downtime," as many ministers and volunteers are in meetings all the time, and they need opportunities to just relax and enjoy fellowship. The idea would be to endow



this endeavor so there would be minimal charge to the participants. Often, ministers who need this kind of retreat are the ones who cannot afford it. Participants would attend by invitation from the host committee. They would cover their own travel expenses and the Advance would cover meals and lodging.

### Small Groups.

As has been discovered, Boomers are the ones who can best reach other Boomers. Empty-nester groups, retiree groups, etc., are regularly incorporated into the small group ministry of the church. However, these opportunities do not necessarily have an outreach focus but serve to provide fellowship and Bible study for members who are Boomers.

### *Limitations to the Project*

The initial question of this research asked how Baby Boomers can be mobilized for effective church ministry during the latter years of their lives. The implied assumption is that such mobilization is possible. The question revolved around the practical outworking of such a possibility. Results reported in this project should be considered in light of some limitations.

Since a larger percentage of survey participants came from the Boomer cohort, further search for comprehensive objectivity would necessitate the inclusion of a broader representation of all generations. The positive response among Boomers did give the researcher an indication of their keen interest in the subject of their position and future in the church; however, future surveys should be designed to give equal attention to the opinions of all generations.

The pastors and Boomers who were interviewed were selected from independent, nondenominational churches, as were the voluntary survey participants. This focused selection of participants limited the scope of objective interview data. Results are useful within the context of the researcher's ministry and life connections, but for future studies, the range of participants will need to be expanded.

It is significant that Congregational Survey drew noticeable participation from Baby Boomers (over half the participants were Boomers). All the Boomers who were interviewed are members of Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas. Although they come from a broad spectrum of church backgrounds and professional involvements, their opinions are conceivably influenced by a church culture that is inherently amenable to the presence and categorical involvement of the Boomer cohort. Pastors who contributed to the information largely represent a church culture of respect and appreciation for their elders.

### *Concluding Remarks*

This project is the outcome of my passion for renewal and revival in the church in America. Engaging Baby Boomers in the equation of spiritual renewal is more than a desire to make sure they are included; it assumes the inclusion is imminent and essential. They represent a generational cohort that has tremendous potential to make a pronounced change in the church and the community.

The biblical research unearthed examples of some of the greatest leaders in history whose chief accomplishments occurred in the third third of their lives. The study of scripture revealed God's heart for the elders and even the aged and His instruction concerning the preferred attitude toward those in their later years. In many ways, the church in this season of history is due for a

fresh revelation of intergenerational harmony. Together, the generations can formulate a path forward.

The attention given to Boomers in this research and the attending considerations for their effectual involvement do not circumvent the importance of the Gen Xers, the Millennials, and the succeeding generation. It rather enhances the prospects of spiritual awakening in America. As the church focuses on reaching the youth and the young adults, it is being called upon to also bring the Boomer generation into the enterprise.

The information uncovered in this research has ongoing implications for the church in the future. Every succeeding generation will face the challenges of intergenerational relationships and at the same time, the potential for working together successfully to accomplish the purposes of God and his kingdom.

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FORMS

#### Consent Form for Senior Pastor Participants

Dear Pastor \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, which contains a request for you to participate in my research project. As you may know, I am pursuing my Doctor of Ministry degree at Southeastern University. My dissertation is titled, "Engaging and Mobilizing Baby Boomers for Effective Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church." The aim of the study is to discover the attitudes of churches and pastors toward the Boomer cohort (those born between 1946 and 1964), the viability of Boomer participation in meaningful ministry, and generally to get a better understanding concerning the Boomers' role in the life and ministry of the church.

I would like to meet with you at your convenience for an interview to get your perspectives on Boomers' involvement in ministry. Preferably, we would meet in person, but if not, on an online format. If you are in agreement with this request, I will contact you to schedule the meeting.

Your participation is voluntary and there are no risks greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. It is important that you do not feel any pressure in the interview. It will be a question-and-answer format, allowing you to tell your story and share experiences related to the nature of the study. You will be free to skip any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. The interview will be conducted in a relaxed format and will take approximately one hour.

The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. All recordings, transcriptions and notes will be kept confidential, and names will not be disclosed. All files will be kept in a private database and at the completion of the project, will be destroyed. You will have the right to see the results of this study before they are published. You may want to retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

There is no compensation for participation, except for the satisfaction that the perspectives gained in this interview, added to the information gathered through the research in total, will provide the church at large with insights for the inclusion of Baby Boomers in effective ministry.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Thank You and Blessings,

Paul D. Russell [REDACTED]

Dr. James Stewart [REDACTED]

Institutional Review Board Southeastern University  
1000 Longfellow Blvd Lakeland FL, 33809 irb@seu.edu

## Consent Form for Baby Boomer Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, which contains a request for you to participate in my research project. As you know, I am pursuing my Doctor of Ministry degree at Southeastern University. My dissertation is titled, "Engaging and Mobilizing Baby Boomers for Effective Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church." The aim of the study is to discover the attitudes of churches and pastors toward the Boomer cohort (those born between 1946 and 1964), the viability of Boomer participation in meaningful ministry, and generally to get a better understanding concerning the Boomers' role in the life and ministry of the church.

I would like to meet with you at your convenience for an interview to get your perspectives on Boomers' involvement in ministry. Preferably, we would meet in person, but if not, in an online format. If you are in agreement with this request, I will contact you to schedule the meeting.

Your participation is voluntary and there are no risks greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. It is important that you do not feel any pressure in the interview. It will be a question-and-answer format, allowing you to tell your story and share experiences related to the nature of the study. You will be free to skip any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. The interview will be conducted in a relaxed format and will take approximately one hour.

The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. All recordings, transcriptions, and notes will be kept confidential, and names will not be disclosed. All files will be kept in a private database and at the completion of the project, will be destroyed. You will have the right to see the results of this study before they are published. You may want to retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

There is no compensation for participation, except for the satisfaction that the perspectives gained in this interview, added to the information gathered through the research in total, will provide the church at large with insights for the inclusion of Baby Boomers in effective ministry.


If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign below.


\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Thank You and Blessings,

Paul D. Russell 

Dr. James Stewart 

Institutional Review Board Southeastern University  
1000 Longfellow Blvd Lakeland FL, 33809 irb@seu.edu

## APPENDIX B

## CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY INVITATION



KNOW GOD   FIND FREEDOM   DISCOVER PURPOSE   IMPACT YOUR WORLD

---

**'BABY BOOMER' RESEARCH SURVEY**

Would you take a few moments to share your thoughts?

As you may know, I am completing work on my doctorate (Doctor of Ministry) and doing research on the Baby Boomer Generation (those born between 1946 and 1964).

The focus of the research has to do with engaging and mobilizing Boomers for effective ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church. The questions involve your relationship with those in the Boomer age bracket.

Your answers, and those of fellow participants, will help the research by providing a clearer understanding of the congregational attitudes toward the Boomer generation and will assist in developing ministries that more effectively include those in this age bracket.

Thank you and Blessings,

Pastor Paul

---

Pastor Paul Russell  
Christ Family Church  
22722 Schiel Road  
Cypress, Texas 77433

APPENDIX C  
CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

“BOOMERS IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE” SURVEY

1. What generational cohort do you represent?

Centennials/GenZ 5-25  Millennials/GenY 26-44  GenX 45-56  Boomers 57-76  77+

2. Baby Boomers are among some of the closest friends I have in the church and community.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

3. In the past year, Boomers have made a significant contribution to my spiritual life.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

How:

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4. It is important for Boomers to be involved in the leadership of the church.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

5. The absence of Boomers’ effective influence in the church and community would be a great loss.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

6. I would appreciate having a mentoring relationship with a Baby Boomer.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

What would they provide: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

7. I should do more to seek guidance from Baby Boomers in life decisions that I make.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

8. Boomers face obvious challenges when it comes to relating to younger generations.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

9. The church should do more to involve Boomer members in meaningful service in the church.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

Where could they serve: \_\_\_\_\_

---

10. The church should do more to attract unchurched Boomers to become a part of the church.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

11. Our church regularly honors those who are in the Baby Boomer generation.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

How:

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## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR PASTORS

#### **Lead-in questions for pastors' interviews**

Thank you for taking the time for this interview. The focus of this research is engaging Baby Boomers (people born between 1947 and 1964) in effective church ministry. On a broad scale, this would obviously include ways the church can minister to Boomers, but the specific intent of the research is to discover ways to engage Boomers in meaningful ministry in their productive senior years.

1. What percentage of your church attendees are in the Baby Boomer category – ages 57-76 (born between 1946 and 1964)?
2. What percentage of Boomers are involved in key positions within the church? I.E., The Board of Trustees, Preaching Team, Serve Team, Financial committee, etc. What roles do they serve? How effective are they? Are these positions they were given years ago and they are holding onto them?
3. Describe the advantage of having Boomers involved in meaningful positions of leadership in your church? Conversely, have you experienced disadvantages because of their involvement? How?
4. From your perspective, what challenges do you see in relating to Baby Boomers and what are the challenges they may feel in relating to the church?
5. What initiatives would you like to see Boomers take toward increased involvement in the church ministries?
6. What ministries in the church are designed specifically to minister to Boomers?
7. What ministries would you like to implement that would target the specific needs of Boomers?
8. What attitudes have you witnessed among the congregation regarding the Baby Boomers?
9. As the church moves forward in advancing Christ's kingdom, what advice would you share about engaging Boomers in meaningful and effective ministry in the local church?
10. Any further comments or reflections? What would you hope this research would reveal?

## APPENDIX E

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BABY BOOMER PARTICIPANTS

**Baby Boomer Interview Questionnaire**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me in person or on Zoom for an interview. The focus of my doctoral research is engaging and empowering Baby Boomers (people born between 1947 and 1964) for effective church ministry.

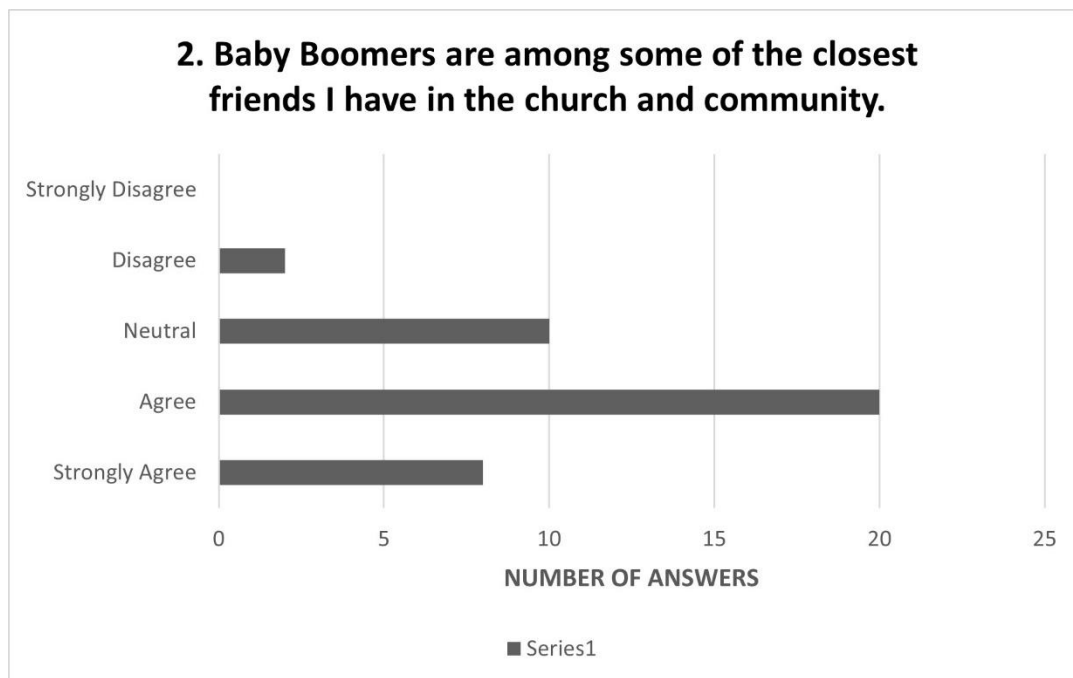
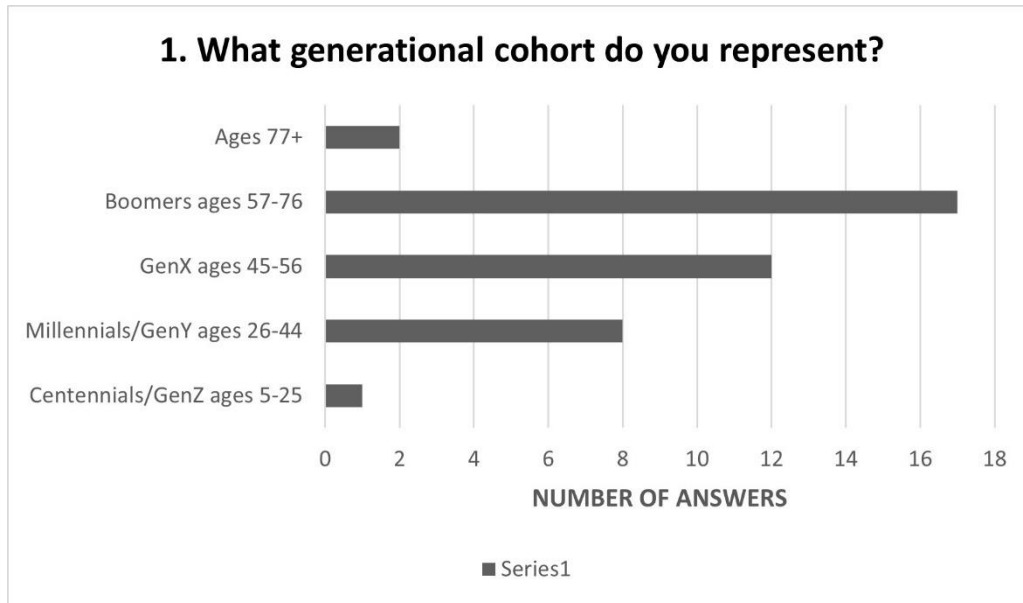
On a broad scale, this would obviously include ways the church can minister to Boomers, but the specific intent of the research is to discover ways to engage Boomers in meaningful ministry in their productive senior years.

I am sending these questions in advance so you can scan over them and perhaps be thinking about input you may have.

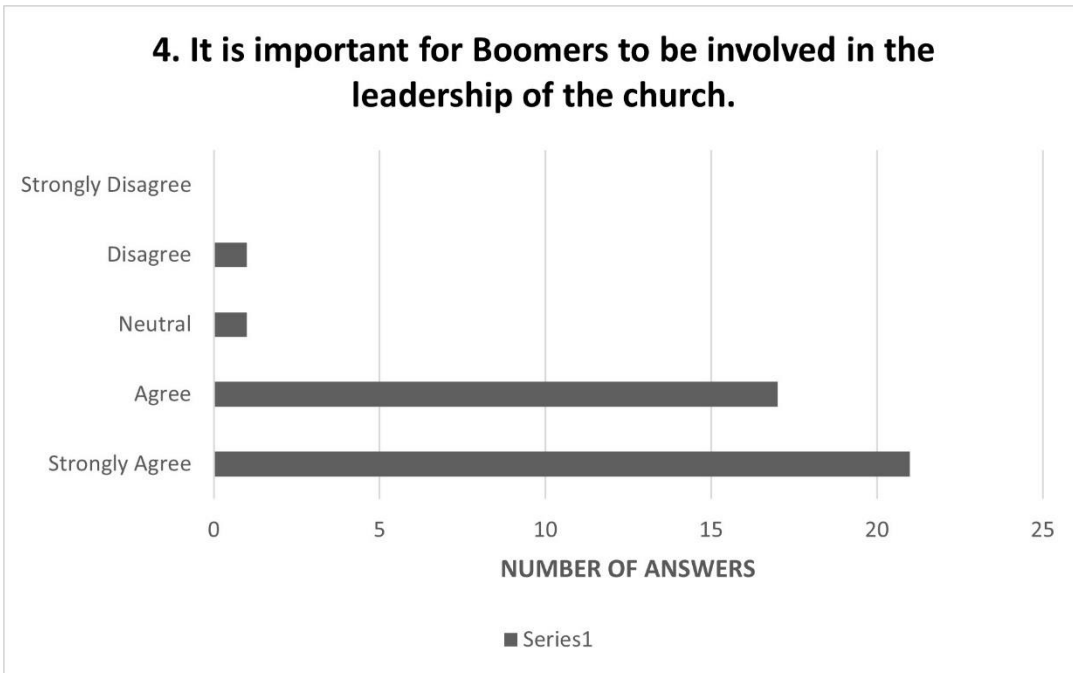
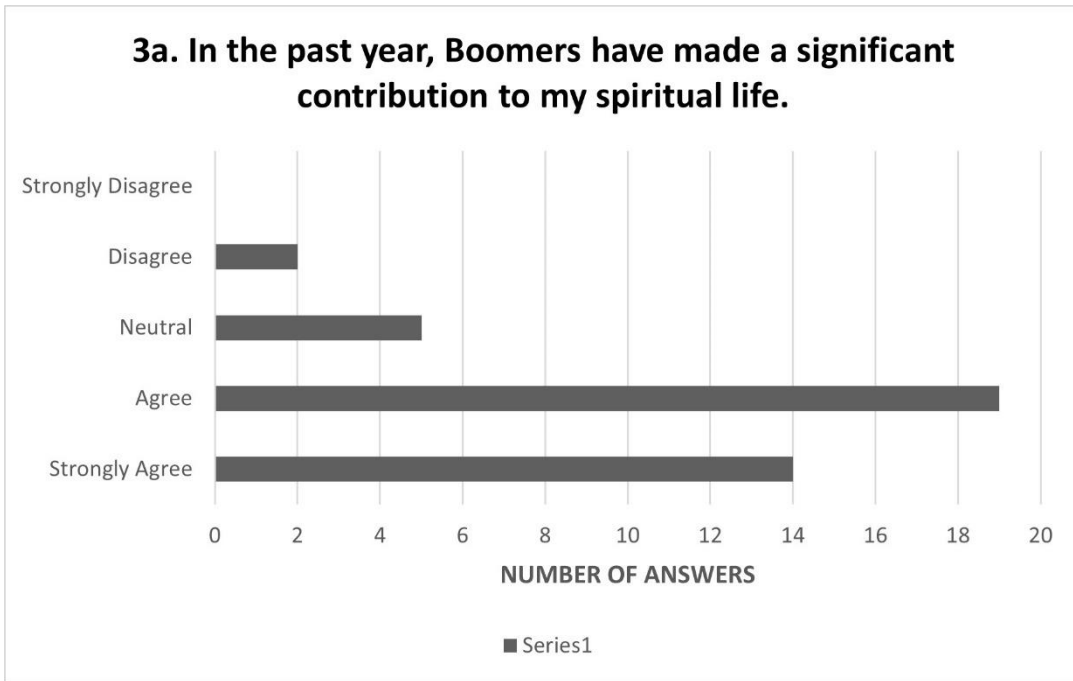
1. What is your age group? 57-62 63-68 69-72 73-76
2. Are you presently involved in serving in some capacity in the local church? If so, please describe; if not, please share reasons for lack of involvement.
3. What areas of service have you participated in throughout your life as a church member?
4. What programs/opportunities/ministries do you feel the church could implement that would attract unchurched Baby Boomers?
5. What are the biggest challenges you experience in relating to the younger generations?
6. What life challenges have you faced as you enter in your senior years?
7. From your perspective, what opportunities could the local church provide you that would engage your participation?
8. Any further question or suggestions? What would you hope this research would reveal?

## APPENDIX F

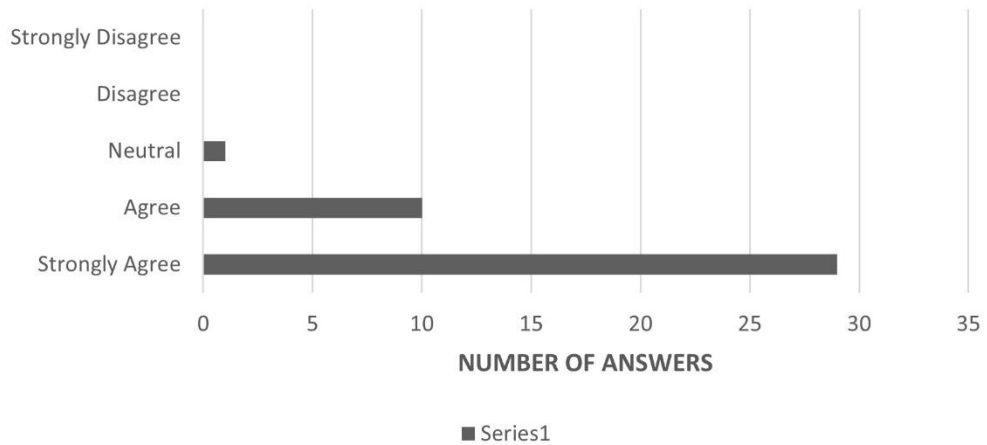
### CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESULTS



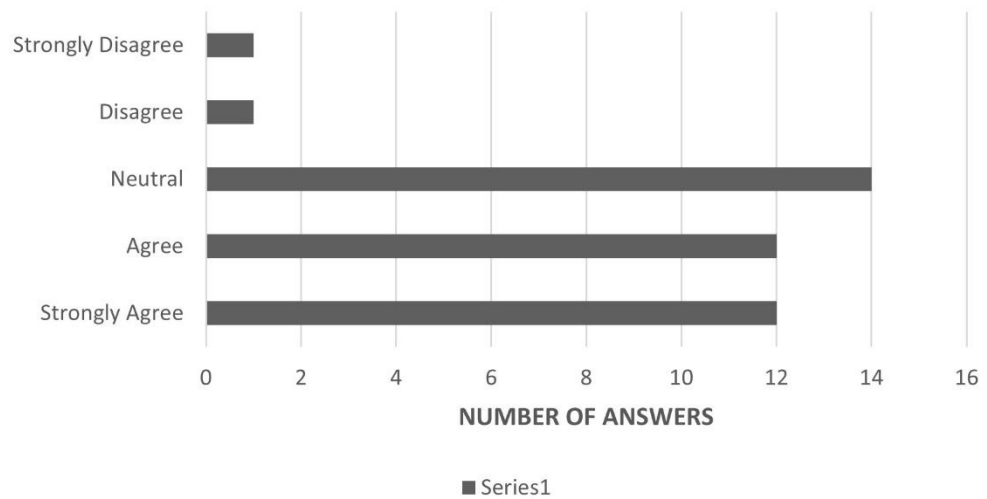


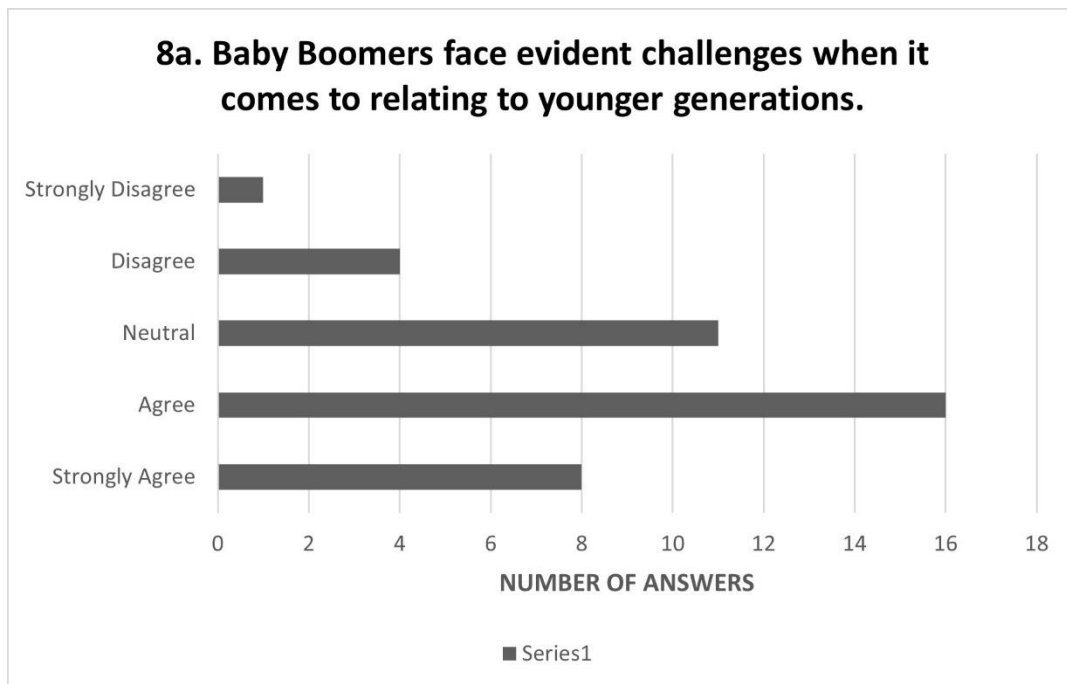
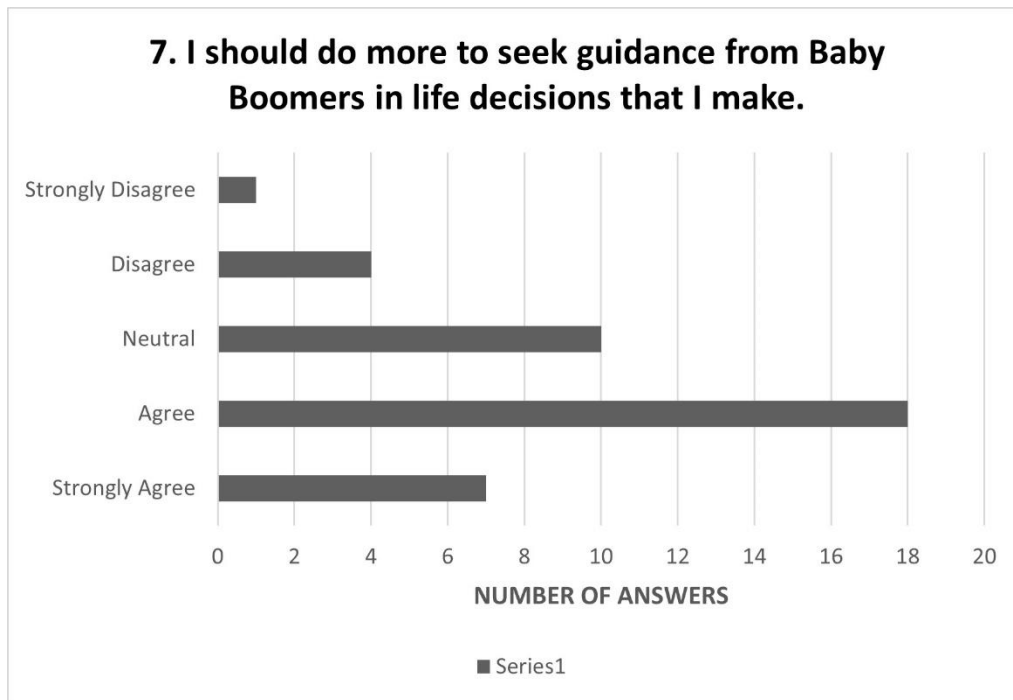


**5. The absence of Boomers effective influence in the church and community would be a great loss.**

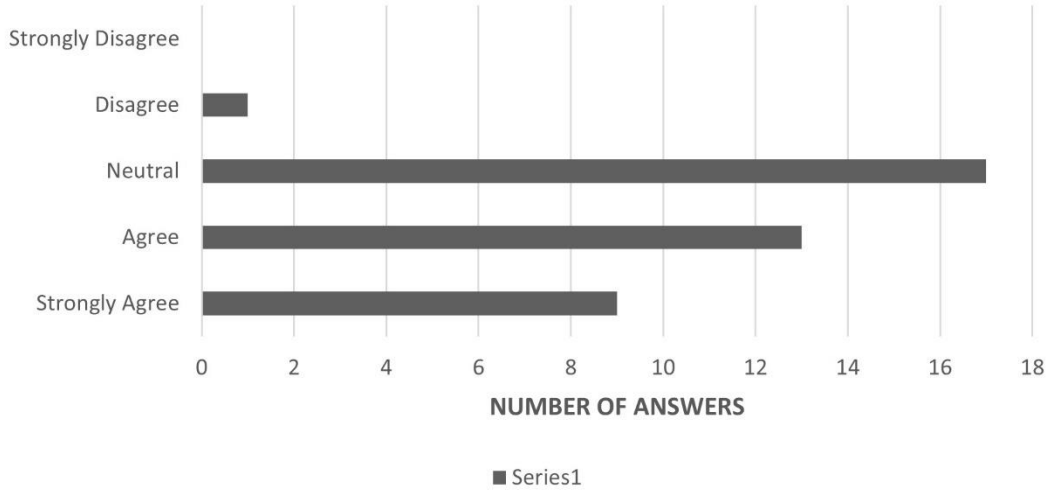


**6a. I would appreciate having a mentoring relationship with a Baby Boomer.**





**9a. The church should do more to involve Boomer members in meaningful service in the church.**



**10a. The church should do more to attract unchurched Boomers to become a part of the church.**

