

Copyright © 2015 Barry James Gibson

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

EMERGING ADULTS AND THE ELUSIVENESS
OF COMMITMENT

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Barry James Gibson
December 2015

APPROVAL SHEET

EMERGING ADULTS AND THE ELUSIVENESS OF
COMMITMENT

Barry James Gibson

Read and Approved by:

John David Trentham (Chair)

Brian Combs

Danny Bowen

Date _____

To my wonderful wife and children: you have been patient, encouraging, and enduring.

I am blessed beyond measure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCING THE EMERGING ADULT	1
Presentation of the Problem	2
Defining Features of Emerging Adulthood	4
Summary of the Problem	6
Research Questions	9
Forthcoming Critical Biblical Analysis	10
Purpose of Research.....	11
Limitations	12
2. GENERATIONAL TRENDS OF EMERGING ADULTS AND THEIR LEVELS OF COMMITMENT.....	13
Overview of the Millennial Generation	14
Significant Trends to Consider.....	16
Technology.....	17
Implications from Technology Regarding Commitment.....	19
Education.....	19
Implications from Education Regarding Commitment.....	22
Work.....	23
Implications Regarding Commitment in the Workplace	26
Marriage	28
Implications from Marriage Regarding Commitment	30

Chapter	Page
Religion/Spirituality.....	32
Implications from Religion/Spirituality Regarding Commitment.....	36
An Embedded Force: Mass Consumerism	37
Conclusion	38
3. EXTRAPOLATION OF SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH AREAS AND THEORIES CONCERNING EMERGING ADULTS AND THEIR LEVELS OF COMMITMENT.....	40
The Perry Scheme and Commitment	41
Commitment Realized and Refined.....	43
Significance of Perry’s Research to the Emerging Adult and Commitment.....	43
Elmore’s Research Corroborating Perry’s Findings.....	45
Theory of Socialization Introduced.....	47
Relevance of Socialization Theory Regarding Emerging Adults	48
Broad vs. Narrow Socialization.....	49
A Shift in Parenting.....	52
Too Much Too Soon	54
Brain Matters.....	55
A Response	57
4. A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF MATURITY AND RESPONSIBLE COMMITMENT AMONG EMERGING ADULTS	60
A Theological Framework	60
Articulating Biblical Truth	61
Exposing, Debunking, and Reinterpreting.....	73
5. A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMITMENT: INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING	81

	Page
CompIn’s Third Priority.....	81
Commitment Re-Visited	84
An Existentialist View of Commitment	84
An Evangelical Perspective of Commitment.....	86
A Way Forward: Proposed Pathways to Aptly Reach Adulthood	88
Intentionality.....	89
Mentoring and Community	90
A Revealing Disconnect	91
Intergenerational Mentoring: A Biblical Platform	93
Biblical Portrait of a Mentor.....	95
The Biblical Posture and Instruction Concerning Mentees	97
Contexts and Implications of Intergenerational Mentoring toward Maturation and Responsible Commitment of the Emerging Adult	99
Intergenerational Mentoring: Structural Components	100
Three Areas of Focus for Intergenerational Mentoring: Implications and Applications Regarding Commitment	105
Perceived Challenges to Intergenerational Mentoring.....	109
Conclusions	112
Avenues for Future Research.....	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	116

PREFACE

As I ponder all those who have been such a huge help during this journey, many people come to mind. Were it not for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, none of this journey would have been possible and certainly not fruitful. I proclaim with the Psalmist, “For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me” (Ps 31:3).

My lovely wife, Julie, who regularly encouraged, and even gave a necessary push every once in a while toward the right direction, has been, and continues to be, an invaluable companion. Our four children have patiently, and joyfully, endured this journey, and I am so thankful and blessed because of them. Johnny and JoAnn Gambrel, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, have supported and walked alongside of me during this entire process, and for them I am truly grateful. To my mother and father, who have molded me in so many ways, I am forever indebted.

I must also thank my cohort and the faculty of the Doctor of Education program who have modeled for me an attention to excellence in academics, teaching, and leadership. In particular, I am thankful for Dr. John David Trentham, who, in his willingness to guide me, took the time to invest in my work and provide opportunities to engage in the world of academia which I would have never otherwise had. Dr. Michael Wilder has played a significant role in obtaining credit for the right classes, and helping me not only at the doctoral level, but at the master’s level as well. I also am quite grateful for the graciousness of Dr. Randy Stinson in allowing me to grow and learn under his tutelage as his research assistant for the past couple of years.

I wish to thank my pastor, Dr. Timothy Beougher, for his wisdom, guidance,

behind the scenes work, and generosity. He has been more than instrumental, and I cherish our friendship. My “other” church family at Jenson Baptist Church has given my family and me magnanimous support through their prayers and giving. I am forever grateful for them. Finally, to the men in our Wednesday night Bible study at West Broadway Baptist Church, I thank them for their constant encouragement, prayers, and support. I cannot fully express what they mean to me.

All for His glory and kingdom.

Barry J. Gibson

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE EMERGING ADULT

Adulthood is the ever-shrinking period between childhood and old age. It is the apparent, yet unintended, aim of modern industrial societies to reduce this period to a minimum.¹ Most would agree the period in a person's life between the ages of 18 and 29 is of great significance. The plethora of life-altering choices and the seemingly endless pathways are at an all-time peak during this stage of life. This period represents the process of an individual becoming an adult in the twenty-first century.² The primary theory of life course concerning psycho-social development first purported by Erik Erikson around 1950 postulated adolescence as a life stage beginning at the onset of puberty and ending during the late teens, being followed thereafter by young adulthood.³ Erikson's theory made perfect sense in the mid-twentieth century, when the majority of people in industrialized countries were married and engaged in full-time employment by their early twenties.⁴ This given time frame is not the norm any longer. The coming of age, the essence of adulthood, is now a slow and winding process, which to some may appear never ending.

As a case in point, by the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, median ages for marriages had risen from early 20s to late 20s. Specifically, the median

¹T. Szasz, *The Second Sin* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 3.

²Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (June 2000): 469.

³Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), 17.

⁴Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?" *Society for Research in Child Development* 1, no. 2 (February 2007): 68.

age for marriage in 1970 in the United States was 21 for women and 23 for men. However, by 2009, this median had risen to 26.5 for women and 28.4 for men.⁵ Also, the long-term stability of a career coming directly after a secondary education has become a thing of the past. Post-secondary education has nearly become a necessity for even a consideration toward a reputable career and, as a result, frequent career changes have become normative. Jeffrey Arnett observes, “Most young people now spend the period from their late teens to their mid-20s not settling into long-term adult roles but trying out different experiences and gradually making their way toward enduring choices in love and work.”⁶

The stage of life concerning the developmental period of transition in becoming an adult has become known as *emerging adulthood* (18-29). Although culturally constructed, emerging adulthood attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of this complex, bewildering, and seemingly overlooked period of time spanning from approximately age 18 to 29.⁷

Presentation of the Problem

Since the late twentieth and the turn of the twenty-first century, a keen sense of awareness has been displayed by a number of psychologists and sociologists⁸ regarding emerging adults. Much of the recent research has revealed that “one of the most convincing pieces of evidence that emerging adulthood is a unique period in development

⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009, *American Community Survey* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office).

⁶Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: What Is It,” 69.

⁷Jeffery Jensen Arnett is recognized as a formative pioneer of the theory of what is known as Emerging Adulthood. This nomenclature has become widely accepted and is used to describe this stage or process in the lifespan.

⁸Jeffrey Arnett, Larry Nelson, Jean Twenge, Christian Smith, and Sharon Parks are just a few of the professionals who have recognized, performed research, and written volumes of material concerning the emerging adult.

is the ambivalence that emerging adults have about their own status as adults.”⁹ In a number of studies regarding emerging adults, when young people between the ages of 18 and 25 were asked if they had reached adulthood, a great majority of them responded by answering “in some respects yes and in some respects no.”¹⁰ Emerging adults tend to have a wider scope of possible activities than persons in other age periods because they are less likely to be constrained by role requirements, and this setting makes their demographic status unpredictable.¹¹ The line of demarcation for adulthood is, at best, blurred in the present generation. Nowadays, only in their late twenties and early thirties do the majority of people demonstrate that they have reached full adulthood.¹²

While this list is anachronistic, in order to understand better when a person arrives at adulthood, five milestones have traditionally been offered: completing school, leaving home (permanently), achieving financial independence, marrying, and becoming a parent.¹³ The present generation achieves these five milestones, known as the *Big Five*, on average, five or more years later than Baby Boomers. To give the *Big Five* a statistical perspective, Robin Henig and Samantha Henig report “In 1960, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men had passed all five by the time they had reached thirty. Among thirty-year-olds in 2000, fewer than half of the women and one-third of the men had done so.”¹⁴

Larry Nelson and Carolyn Barry give insightful analysis when they state, “In

⁹Larry J. Nelson and Carolyn M. Barry, “Distinguishing Features of Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Self-Classification as an Adult,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20 (2005): 243.

¹⁰Separate studies conducted by Jeffrey J. Arnett and by Larry Nelson are just a few among studies corroborating such statistics mentioned above.

¹¹Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist* 55, no.5 (2000): 471.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Robin M. Henig and Samantha Henig, *Twenty Something: Why Do Young Adults Seem Stuck?* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2012), 3-4.

¹⁴Ibid.

general, emerging adulthood tends to be characterized as a state of moratorium, extensive exploration with little commitment.”¹⁵ An example to give sway to the previous statement is that approximately 25 percent of American men, ages 18 to 30 have not left home in the first place.¹⁶ This notion of “making a life,” as it were, is a concept of the past. The ideology of how you were reared, of growing up and effectively striking out on your own, managing the best one could was the idea of making a self. Somewhere between then and now the middle has gotten lost. It appears, at first glance, the notion of producing grown-ups in their early twenties is, for the most part, lost in antiquity.¹⁷

The looming question then becomes, “Why the delay?” The timing and meaning of the coming of age has changed tremendously in the past fifty years or so. As has been observed by many sociologists, the individualization and deinstitutionalizing of entry into adulthood has increased, and self-reliance on resources and other critical means by which to “grow up” have become the norm. As such, adulthood in the twenty-first century means learning to stand alone as a person of self-sufficiency and independence. As a result, “thirty is now the new twenty.”¹⁸

Defining Features of Emerging Adulthood

To provide a logical and organized understanding of the phenomenon known as emerging adulthood, Jeffrey Arnett has proposed five primary features that make this period of life distinct. The five features are the age of identity explorations, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of

¹⁵Nelson and Barry, “Distinguishing Features of Emerging Adulthood,” 245.

¹⁶Ibid., 245-46.

¹⁷Diana West, *The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁸Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context,” *Human Development* 41 (1998): 295-315. J. Cote, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity in the Late Modern World* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

possibilities.¹⁹ These features, as proposed by Arnett, are not purported to be universal, but are observed as most common among those 18 to 29 years old.

However, Arnett attempts to give attention to the different aspects of this peculiar stage of life in order that one may make sense of this transient and often tumultuous process. Each feature presents a time of great opportunity as well as uncertainty. On the other hand, it is worthy of note that this period known as emerging adulthood could not only be viewed as a rich and varied time of exploration and self-discovery, but just another way of expressing “self-indulgence.”²⁰

Another marked feature of the emerging adulthood is self-focus, better known as narcissism to the psychological world. Narcissists are not just confident, they are overconfident. They are not only admired, but admire themselves too much. Narcissists have an over-inflated view of self. However, measured objectively, these people almost always tend to fall along the same levels of intelligence, looks, likeability, etc. as mainstream society.²¹ Emerging adults tend to view themselves, at varying levels, as described above. This period in human development is typically viewed by emerging adults as a temporary point to place their primary focus on themselves as they prepare for a lifelong career, loving relationships, and full-fledged adulthood.²²

The choices and possibilities for the emerging adult truly seem endless. Where to go to college, what to major in college, what type of career to finally settle into, or who

¹⁹Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age,” in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, ed. Joan Grusec (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 7.

²⁰Sally Koslow, *Slouching toward Adulthood: How to Let Go So Your Kids Can Grow Up* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 12.

²¹Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria Books, 2010), 18-19.

²²Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*. Cote, *Arrested Adulthood*. R. Larson, “The Solitary Side of Life: An Examination of the Time People Spend Alone from Childhood to Old Age,” *Developmental Review* 10, no. 2 (June 1990): 155-83. Each speaks to this idea of self-focus primarily in a positive light as a necessary time period of working through significant issues and understanding one’s self in the journey to adulthood, through identity crises, work commitments, love and relationships, etc.

to marry? These life-altering questions are just a selection of the plethora of inquiries that this demographic is making. Sally Koslow quotes one man's observation about this phenomenon: "Why commit to something if the world is still full of possibilities?"²³ Therefore, the concept of *commitment*²⁴ is integral in understanding the stage of emerging adulthood, particularly in working through the age of possibilities.²⁵

Since the possibilities and choices are abundant and seemingly overwhelming, it would seem significant that many opportunities for future success, particularly in the worlds of work and relationships, would be recognized as a motivation for arriving at adulthood status.²⁶ Often emerging adults feel as if a relationship or a job is too permanent, so, out of fear, they fail to commit to either. What must be recognized is that this time period is a beginning, not an ending. Living the day-to-day life by planning and committing to a job and/or a relationship is how it is done, is how it starts.²⁷

Summary of the Problem

Since the conceptual understanding of the emerging adulthood has only come into a coherent view since the late twentieth century and more specifically the twenty-

²³Koslow, *Slouching toward Adulthood*, 39.

²⁴Commitment is defined in several ways. A couple of definitions are in order here for explanatory purposes. Commitment could be defined as the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, or as an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action. In other words, significant decisions, such as vocation, marriage, parenthood, living independently are often delayed, and even avoided, during the emerging adult years (18-29). According to psychologist James Marcia, "Commitment refers to the development of settled conviction about one's beliefs and ways of living." James Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," in *Human Development*, 3rd ed., ed. Rhett Diessner (Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill, 2008), 184. Further, the lack of commitment among emerging adults is an unfortunate by-product of the broad socialization/individualization during this stage in the life course. The concept of commitment will be explored in depth throughout this research.

²⁵Stacey R. Friedman and Carol S. Weissbrod, "Work and Family Commitment and Decision-Making Status Among Emerging Adults," *Sex Roles* 53, nos. 5-6 (2005): 318.

²⁶Ann S. Masten, Jelena Obradovic, and Keith B. Burt, "Reliance in Emerging Adulthood: Developmental Perspectives on Continuity and Transformation," in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, ed. Joan Grusec (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 188.

²⁷Meg Jay, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—and How to Make the Most of Them Now* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2012), 63-65.

first century, much research is still necessary. Much of the early research concerning emerging adults does more to identify the unique and distinguishing features of this life stage. A significant amount of the research has little to offer in the way of more viable reasons and solutions for this prolonged and expansive transition toward adulthood. As one of the earliest advocates and researchers of this life stage, Jeffrey Arnett, says, “Emerging adulthood merits scholarly attention as a distinct period of the life course in industrialized societies. Of course, much more work remains to be done on virtually every aspect of development during this period.”²⁸

On the other hand, some researchers have begun to offer some valid points as to why this life stage or process has seemingly arisen in the past fifteen to twenty-five years in post-industrialized societies. Christian Smith, a leading researcher in the area of sociology and cultural trends has offered six macrosocial changes that have occurred, spurring on the birth of emerging adulthood. These six changes are as follows: the dramatic growth of higher education, the delay of marriage, an unstable economy, an over-extension of parental financial support, wide availability of birth control (“the pill”), and postmodernism. These sociocultural transformations, along with others, have given rise to the alteration of the experience of this demographic.²⁹

Further, when one considers these six markers, it begins to become perspicuous as to why this new stage in the life course has come about. For example, the expansion of the university experience, allowing the majority of young people in post-industrialized societies to explore various educational alternatives is unprecedented.³⁰ Because of the past fifteen to twenty years of instability in the Western economy, job

²⁸Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development,” 476, 479.

²⁹Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13-15.

³⁰Paivi Fadjukoff, Katja Kokko, and Lea Pulkkinen, “Implications of Timing of Entering Adulthood for Identity Achievement,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 22, no. 5 (September 2007): 505.

security and stability have become a premium.³¹ The expenses of life after high school are often overwhelming and are primarily carried by the parents of emerging adults. In their study concerning parental financial assistance of emerging adults, Schoeni and Ross found that, on average, parents provide approximately \$38,000 in material assistance over the period of transition to adulthood.³²

What is more, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s is wreaking havoc on our adolescents and even more so on emerging adults. Christian Smith observes, “Not far beneath the surface appearance of happy, liberated emerging adult sexual adventure and pleasure lies a world of hurt, insecurity, confusion, inequality, shame, and regret.”³³ Finally, the post-modernistic relativism that seems to pervade many emerging adults leaves a majority with an individualistic and unique perspective on life, religion, politics, and the like that often lacks commitment and long-term stability in almost any adult-revealing category of their lives.³⁴

The aforementioned traits of emerging adults further reveal that these sociological shifts often create a sizeable gap, or delay, in making the adult-sized choices in life (e.g., marriage, career, parenthood, etc.). As psychologist James Marcia puts it, delayed crises result in delayed commitments.³⁵ Marcia uses a continuum to establish ego-identity achievement, or, in other words, viable signs of the onset of adulthood.³⁶ The culmination of the sociological factors discussed above yields a glaring deficiency in

³¹R. Schoeni and K. Ross, “Material Assistance Received from Families during the Transition to Adulthood,” in *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy*, ed. R. A. Settersten Jr., F. F. Furstenberg Jr., and R. G. Rumbaut (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 396-416.

³²Ibid.

³³Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 193.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 184. Marcia defines a crisis as a period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives and commitment as the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits.

³⁶Ibid.

many among the emerging adults today, namely *commitment*. There simply appears to be a lack of sustained and sacrificial investment from the emerging adult toward distinguishing achievements of true maturity.

Research Questions

Although some research has approached and provided some explanation and solutions to many critical questions regarding emerging adults and the unique indicators that so mark this life stage, a number of significant questions are left unanswered. As a result, this research sought to answer the primary question that appears to lie beneath the indicators, explanations, and even proposed solutions of this life stage. What are the primary factors that permit an *allowable* delay in responsible commitment (i.e., reaching the full onset of adulthood) among the emerging adult populace? Further, what viable solutions exist to effectively address this delay in responsible commitment among emerging adults?

These questions are of distinct import in light of much of the research that has developed over the past decade or so. For example, Arnett says, “The focus of socialization theory and research has been on childhood and adolescence, there is little to draw on directly for conceptualizing socialization in emerging adulthood.”³⁷ The socialization process is significant to understand and it appears that it is at its broadest during the years of the emerging adult life stage. Beyond these two questions, correlating factors of sway upon the emerging adult has been explored. These correlating factors

³⁷Jeffrey Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” in *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 209, 213. Broadly speaking, socialization is “the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups.” Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” 209. Socialization is multi-faceted in that it involves a variety of outcomes. These outcomes include the acquisition of certain standards, roles, and values across the sociological spectrum. Socialization is an ongoing process, deeply ingrained during early childhood, but arguably persists throughout the entire life course. Many individuals are significant contributors to socialization such as parents, siblings, teachers, persons of the media, etc. Arnett argues that “socialization is broadest in emerging adulthood in the sense that this is when people have the most freedom to decide for themselves how to live and what to do and when to do it.” Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” 210. In light of the discussion, socialization theory provides, in part, a framework for which to illustrate the delay in responsible commitment among emerging adults.

involve exploration and the synthesizing of psycho-social, collegiate, and other related theories and findings regarding this populace in order to yield deeper explanation and viable solutions for promoting responsible commitment among emerging adults.

Forthcoming Critical Biblical Analysis

Ultimately, a biblical analysis is in order for understanding and offering effective solutions for the lack of responsible commitment among emerging adults. In particular, chapters 4 and 5 include a use of what is known by some as Comprehensive Internal framework, or CompIn. CompIn is defined as a utilization of biblical counselor David Powlison's three epistemological priorities to analyze biblically what secular society has offered as explanation for and solutions toward a construct, phenomenon, etc.³⁸ More specifically these three epistemological priorities are as follows:

The first priority: articulating biblical truth and developing our systematic theology of care for the soul. *The second priority:* exposing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models. *The third priority:* learning what we can from other models.³⁹

These priorities are the primary springboards by which to provide biblical analysis.

The philosophical understanding that buttresses these priorities is the sufficiency of Scripture for informing and providing a framework for responsible commitment in the life of a young adult. That is not to say Scripture is exhaustive. It is to say that God's Word is thoroughly capable of informing and transforming and yet must be applied into situations and lives sensitively and practically. Astutely articulating biblical truth in a useful manner, as well as wielding a discernment that exposes and debunks theories and models that offer options that assert different interpretations of the meaning of mature adulthood is a significant piece in the final analysis regarding

³⁸David Powlison, "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in appendix 4 of *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007), 277-79.

responsible commitment in an emerging adult.

Finally, learning what one can from theories and models offered by seasoned and informed scholars is the final piece in the (CompIn) framework. This priority allows one to not simply dismiss alternatives that may be in disagreement with one's point of view, but rather glean the redeemable qualities of that particular theory and/or model through a biblical frame of reference. In doing so, the research is able to offer a more broad and balanced analysis and solutions thereto by synthesizing a biblical and secular view through a theological lens.⁴⁰

Purpose of Research

While there has been significant research by a handful of psychologists and sociologists in the past ten to fifteen years regarding emerging adulthood, very few, if any, have linked this stage of human development specifically to a vivid lack of responsible commitment tied with the strong cord of a critical biblical analysis.⁴¹ Research of this particular nature has not been pursued, or if so, has been quite sparse. By properly synthesizing the present research of psychologists and sociologists such as Jeffrey Arnett, James Cote, William Perry, and Christian Smith, with particular emphasis on the lack of commitment among emerging adults, a both needful and pragmatically fruitful pursuit resulted. Furthermore, by utilizing the aforementioned Powlisonian Approach, as well as weaving in significant works from researchers such as David Setran, Chris Kiesling, Richard Dunn, and Jana Sundene, an important critical biblical

³⁹Powlison, "Cure of Souls," 277-79.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Many of these researchers are utilized in my research and listed in the bibliography of this work (e.g., Arnett, Cote, Dunn, Nelson, Perry, Smith, etc.).

analysis provides both viable and practical solutions to this lack of responsible commitment.

Limitations

First, due to the rather large population of this demographic, a text-based study has been chosen for practical and time-constrained purposes. Appropriate and accurate measures concerning either a qualitative or quantitative study is not conducive to this research given the time constraints and the demand for a large sample to receive valid results. Second, given the breadth of the literature base concerning emerging adulthood, a narrow focus was formed in order to gain proper depth and insight. Therefore, a restricted perspective of emerging adulthood has been explored, namely a focus on the significance of responsible commitment among emerging adults.

Because the emerging adult populace is so large and covers a multitude of culturally diverse backgrounds, there is an obvious limit in asserting generalizations concerning this demographic. However, endeavoring to find and explore the plethora of literature that already exists on the topic allowed a synthesizing, with some certainty, of generalizations regarding the emerging adult. Another aspect of the limitation for generalization involves the narrow scope of study as compared to considering the entire spectrum of the emerging adult, namely focusing only on the supposed lack of responsible commitment.

CHAPTER 2

GENERATIONAL TRENDS OF EMERGING ADULTS AND THEIR LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

Chapter 2 seeks to illustrate the trends, patterns and tendencies of the emerging adult. By careful perusal and providing insights concerning this generation of young people, this research aims to elucidate areas that reveal reasons why and areas of focus to aid in what has been noted as a lack of responsible commitment among emerging adults. This chapter will provide specific and practical definitions regarding the generation that houses emerging adults as well as focus on *five* significant trends or areas of life and living.¹ The goal, therefore, is to better understand the issues, both good and bad, of the emerging adult's life in order to provide explanations and viable direction for this populace, particularly regarding responsible commitment.

Once properly ascertained, the reader will then be able to notice these generational trends as some of the foundational building blocks and impetus regarding the research and discussion for the subsequent chapters of this work. Specifically, the gaining of insightful realizations and a deeper understanding toward a sustainable reservoir of viable and practical solutions relating to responsible commitment among the emerging adult demographic are the desired outcomes.

¹It is important to note here that the generational nomenclature Gen Y and, more often, the Millennial Generation will often be used interchangeably with the terms emerging adult and/or emerging adulthood.

Overview of the Millennial Generation

To begin, a definition of the generation of the emerging adult is in order. Their generation has been called Generation Y, or Gen Y and more notably the Millennial Generation. The latter nomenclature seemed to “stick” more so than the previous. Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer define the Millennial Generation as “a group of young people whose birth years range from 1980 to 2000. This generation edged out the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) to become the largest generation in America’s history.”² As this generation is making the passage toward adulthood they are leaving a trail of traits in their wake. For example, they are the most diverse, ethnically and otherwise, generation in the history of the United States.³ The Millennials are less religious, less likely to join the military, and the most educated generation ever. At the same time, they exude confidence, are upbeat, and open to experience change.⁴

On the negative side, Millennials are often seen as narcissistic, materialistic, and addicted to technology. For example, the Millennial Generation is so convinced of how great they are that “the National Study of Youth and Religion found the guiding morality of 60 percent of Millennials in any situation is that they’ll just be able to feel what’s right.”⁵ Further, many of the typical adult-like engagements such as marriage and a steady career are being delayed significantly. These young people are postponing typical adult roles for their desire to put themselves first. For example, during the age of the Baby Boomers, the average age of marriage was 23 for men and 21 for women. The Millennials are marrying at age 27 for men and 25 for women. As for a career, the Millennial is beginning the seemingly inevitable search for just the right position, one

²Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds., *Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010), 1, accessed October 12, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/millennials.

⁵Joel Stein and Josh Sanburn, “The Next Greatest Generation,” *Time*, May 9, 2013, 27.

that is more of a calling in life, not just another job. As Jean Twenge asserts, “Overall, it’s the pursuit of individual wants at its most undiluted.”⁶

On the positive side, in *The Millennials*, the Rainers give an encouraging overview of some of the major themes that one encounters when peering into the lives of this generation. Their study revealed a recurring theme of being hopeful. Hopeful here is being defined as the idea of doing something great for the good of the people around them. Therefore achieving fame, wealth, or power is not the end in and of itself, but it is a means toward a greater good for others.⁷

Another significant theme among the Millennials is their tendency and desire to be educated. Already, this generation has surpassed all generations before them in earning undergraduate degrees. One clear factor concerning the Millennials receiving so much education is their parents instilling the importance of a college education. Secondly, Millennials themselves at least recognize the tough economy and the uncertain realities of the marketplace. Their perspective is that more education gives one a competitive edge in landing a good paying job.⁸

A large study performed by the researchers from the Pew Research Center cites many notable features of the Millennial Generation that are briefly mentioned below.⁹ The Millennials are among the least religious of the generations before them. One-in-four are unaffiliated with any religion. That is not to say this portion of Millennials is atheistic, but that they are not officially associated with organized religion

⁶Jean Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 98.

⁷Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 18. However, this supposed positivity should be met with caution because much of the evidence given to the characteristic of undiluted individualism of many millennials/emerging adults.

⁸Ibid., 20.

⁹Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 1. This study surveyed 2,020 adults across the nation in 2010, conducted over the telephone with a margin of error of +/- 3 percent, in order to compare Millennials ages 18-29 with previous generations.

(e.g., members of a church or parish, or regular attendees of a religious institution). Another significant feature is that only about 60 percent of Millennials were raised by both parents. From that, it is estimated that one-third of women, 18-29 years old have given birth unmarried. Again, these statistical characteristics are far higher than was the case in previous generations.¹⁰

Further, another significant trait of the Millennials discovered in the Pew Research Center's study is the work ethic and moral values held by this generation. In particular, when asked who had a better work ethic, approximately 75 percent of the respondents said that older people have a better work ethic. What is more is that these young people also agree that when it comes to moral values and overall respect for others, the older adults are by far superior in these categories. Regarding Christian and moral values, nontraditional family arrangements, such as adults living together without being married and homosexual relationships are more readily accepted by the Millennials than by previous generations. Although these findings are comparative of younger to older generations, it is nonetheless instructive.¹¹

Significant Trends to Consider

The remainder of this chapter will delve deeper into the specific trends and patterns uncovered by a number of researchers regarding the Millennial Generation. Further, this chapter's intent is to yield from these trends and patterns a pointed direction of why many of the emerging adults within this generation are lacking in responsible commitment regarding the typical roles of an adult. Specifically, the following paragraphs are going to focus on five particular patterns/trends (technology, education, work, marriage, religion) and the driving force of mass consumerism revealed among the

¹⁰Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 2.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 6-7.

Millennials by which to shed light upon the aforementioned purpose.

Technology

Nearly all researchers would characterize Millennials as tech-savvy, a quality noted in nearly every facet of their lives. Quite unique is the fact that the Millennial Generation is the first to grow up in a post-digital world. As one study reports, “They grew up untethered—with wireless devices, workplace mobility, and texting—and remain connected with friends via social networks.”¹² More than any other group, the Millennials connect to the Internet using a laptop or some other mobile/handheld device. Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter discovered that “many Millennials say their use of modern technology is what distinguishes them from other generations.”¹³

According to Pew Research, approximately 90 percent of Millennials use the internet on a regular basis, and 88 percent periodically use wireless internet away from home. Compared to other generations, Millennials are significantly more likely to use their phone for texting, even while driving. As a matter of fact, a full 83 percent of this generation keeps their cell phones next to them 24 hours a day. One more statistic worth noting is that 41 percent of the Millennial Generation has cell phones without a landline. Simply noting these figures reveals the deep and close connection Millennials have with technology.¹⁴

What is more, one type of technology that the Millennials seem to spend hours on is playing video games. Both game consoles and online gaming has become a multi-billion dollar industry, and the Millennials have a lion’s share in this market. For many of the Millennial Generation, much of their free waking hours are spent playing and

¹²Shele Bannon, Kelly Ford, and Linda Meltzer, “Understanding Millennials in the Workplace,” *The CPA Journal* 81, no. 11 (November 2011): 61.

¹³Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 25.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

communicating on some type of video game. The Rainers keenly observe “not one other generation has embraced a technology like the Millennials have embraced video games.”¹⁵

Social media. Taylor and Keeter speak to the what and why of the seeming explosion of social media. Their research explains, “Social media is a web-based technology that transforms how people communicate by enhancing interactive conversations. Social media is basically a template for the user who can then personalize the source’s uses and productivity.”¹⁶ It is typically a free, public platform on the internet where the creation and exchange of user-generated content occurs. In particular, three-fourths (75 percent) of the Millennial Generation have created a social networking profile on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn. What is more, 55 percent visit these sites daily, while over 1 in 4 visit numerous times each day.¹⁷ Rainer and Rainer observe, “The average Millennial spends thirty-four hours per week on a computer for work and personal use.”¹⁸ The use of social media by the Millennial populace seems often to fall under the category of overuse.

It appears that the majority of studies done regarding social media and Millennials reveal that Facebook is their primary social media outlet. The key components to social media such as Facebook are communication and building relationships. However, it appears that many of the relationships formed and maintained directly via social media outlets are often superficial and non-committal.¹⁹ Moreover,

¹⁵Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 189.

¹⁶Jaclyn Cabral, “Is Generation Y Addicted to Social Media?” *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 5.

¹⁷Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 29.

¹⁸Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 198.

¹⁹Cabral, “Is Generation Y Addicted to Social Media,” 4-5.

what is disturbing is the line that is erased between public and private, open and confidential matters. Too often information is shared on social media platforms that has no business being there and the implications resulting from such improper sharing can be devastating both on a personal and professional level.²⁰ The Millennials are certainly the foremost catalysts in this arena and, as a result, deserving of much caution.

Implications from Technology Regarding Commitment

The use of technology and other multi-media platforms have tremendous benefit and are nearly second nature to most of the Millennial Generation. However, caution should be regularly coupled with the provision of these “conveniences.” Social media outlets and other similar technology can possibly lead to lower commitment levels and large amounts of wasted time if not used and appropriated properly. The apparent formation of relationships that are distant and almost exclusively “digital” seem to remove most any real form of commitment towards those people and the relationships forged under the ruse of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. However, much has been revealed in relation to the seeming lack of commitment and technology.

Education

Exposure to higher education tends to change how people think and act. Further, education exposes one to more people and provides a platform for a social network and job market that is set apart from those who do not attend a college or university. For the Millennial Generation, higher education will have a huge impact upon their lives. Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt point out, “Millennials started arriving in university classrooms in 2002 and will be a part of our student bodies until 2020.”²¹ The Millennial students are well on their way to being the most educated

²⁰Cabral, “Is Generation Y Addicted to Social Media?,” 4-5.

²¹Jill Singleton-Jackson, Dennis Jackson, and Jeffrey Reinhardt, “Academic Entitlement:

generation ever before.²² Approximately 40 percent of Millennials are still in college, high school, or trade school. However, only 19 percent are currently college graduates.²³ So, what does these statistics mean for the Millennial, and more than this, what is the trending of education in the context of the Millennial Generation?

The general characteristics of the Millennials, many of which have been discussed above, have a number of direct implications on their education both how it is received and delivered. For one, from the cradle to college, many parents have sheltered their Millennials. Andrea McAlister observes, “Parental control can be found in car monitoring devices to their own Facebook accounts as a means of tracking their child’s online activity. In addition, teachers of this generation have found that parents are quick to come to their child’s defense.”²⁴ As a result, Millennials are typically achievement oriented and under sizeable amounts of pressure to perform. These traits can forge together and prove to be a double-edged sword.

Academic entitlement. The overwhelming focus on this generation of young people entering the post-secondary world of academia has begun transforming the whole structure of how education is viewed and delivered to its students. Further, there has been a label placed upon this construct: *academic entitlement*. Academic entitlement is understood as “A cultural shift affecting education wherein the focus of education shifts away from the values of education and toward a more achievement awarded focus.

Exploring Definitions and Dimensions of Entitled Students,” *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 5, no. 9 (November 2011): 230.

²²Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 36.

²³Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 41-42.

²⁴Andrea McAlister, “Teaching the Millennial Generation,” *American Music Teacher* (August 2009): 14.

[Much of the research] charges educators to consider their role in the emergence of an educational system driven by entitlement.”²⁵

Often Millennials feel that the center of the world is at their feet and have a tendency to think short-term success equals long-term achievement. For example, Benefer and Shanahan note, “Millennial students see failure as a foreign concept and [he or she] may be stunned when their performance does not result in high praise. In part, it is because millennial students were taught as children that they are ‘winners’ for participating and are accustomed to receiving awards for participation.”²⁶ To further solidify this perception, in their research, Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt suggest that academic entitlement has the following facets:

1) a sense of deserving more than others (or preferential treatment), and 2) with little consideration of one’s qualities or performance, 3) a belief that some reward is deserved that is not justified based on one’s actual academic achievement, 4) that a high academic entitlement disposition implies a diminished role for personal responsibility in actual academic achievement, 5) that a high academic entitlement disposition also implies expectations about the role of instructors that are above and beyond their obligation of providing educational opportunities and effective, quality instruction.²⁷

Transforming the teacher. Millennials have a very different view towards teachers and supervisors. The authoritative, top-down approach towards teaching is nearly universally rejected by the Millennial student. Benefer and Shanahan keenly observe, “They expect a collaborative learning environment. Millennial students are accustomed to a model of education that is a co-partnership with supervisors and teachers.”²⁸ The shift for the educator is quite dramatic. It is one where the teacher who has historically been seen as the authority and one who knows what is the best and most

²⁵Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt, “Academic Entitlement,” 230.

²⁶Emily Benefer and Colleen Shanahan, “Educating The Invincibles: Strategies for Teaching the Millennial Generation in Law School,” *Clinical Law Review* 20, no. 301 (Fall 2013): 9.

²⁷Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt, “Academic Entitlement,” 232.

²⁸Benefer and Shanahan, “Educating the Invincibles,” 11.

significant information to learn for a particular course is now viewed as one who should facilitate the knowledge, in part, as the student sees fit. The educator is no longer the expert but a guide on the pathways of knowledge. The teacher-centered classroom is transformed into a student-centered one.

As the educator transitions toward a new role of facilitator rather than lecturer, for example, some researchers suggest that classroom discussion would be the best mode of delivery and learning environment for Millennials. Benefer and Shanahan give an important reminder that “Millennial students have been raised in an entertainment-focused, multimedia environment in which they rapidly shift their attention from one source of information or stimulation to another. [As a result,] students consistently report that discussions help them ‘focus better,’ ‘make it easier to pay attention,’ and stop them from ‘zoning out.’”²⁹ This context is not such a bad thing. In fact, facilitating effective classroom discussions does in fact promote critical thinking, deeper understanding, and higher retention rates of learning. However, the expertise of the teacher is valued less and the students often elevate opinion to near fact and/or truth status. The fact of the matter is that sometimes the professor needs to speak while the students intently listen.

Implications from Education Regarding Commitment

Both the educator’s view and the students’ view of themselves should be one of ‘scholar’ and not ‘customer.’ For the student, some questions in the forefront should be one: “Why am I here at university ‘X’?” and further, “Am I committed to achieving, at high levels, learning to bolster my understanding and my abilities to be productive?” The questions that are not to be at the forefront of every Millennial student are: “What can my professor do for me?” and “How can I get an A in this class with minimal effort?”

²⁹Patricia Roehling, “Engaging the Millennial Generation in Class Discussions,” *College Teaching* 59, no. 1 (2011): 2.

Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt report, “Students are entitled to quality educational experiences and opportunities for growth and success; they are not, however, entitled to guaranteed success or unrealistic customer service. [Actually, at stake are] the core values of higher education if entitlement trumps achievement at our colleges and universities.”³⁰ An entitlement mentality and attitude brings the commitment level of the millennial or emerging adult to a low point or even to naught. If a people believe themselves to be owed something at the forefront, then commitment is not a necessary factor toward obtaining it, in this case, a quality education.

Work

Numbering between 50 and 80 million, the Millennial Generation already makes up 10 to 15 percent of the labor force.³¹ So, the starting point must be to understand what the Millennials look like as employees. Both their upbringing and education are two key factors in better understanding how the Millennial Generation operates in the workplace. For one, they will look and act much different than the older Gen Xer’s and Boomers. As a result, the Millennials’ attitudes and dispositions will not necessarily be wrong, just different. Wherefore, it is significant to gain understanding in these areas in order to better perceive the construct of commitment from the Millennial and/or the emerging adult in the context of his job.

A sense of entitlement. Unfortunately, many from the Millennial Generation will arrive to work with a strong sense of entitlement, feeling they deserve all the perks of a seasoned worker right away. However, Twenge notes that this generation “has been raised thinking they were special and getting lots from Mom and Dad, but when they hit

³⁰Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt, “Academic Entitlement,” 234-35.

³¹Charles Thompson and Jane Gregory, “Managing Millennials: A Framework for Improving Attraction, Motivation, and Retention,” *The Psychologist-Manager Journal* 15, no. 4 (October 2012): 238.

young adulthood they face an enormous mismatch between what they expect and what they actually get.”³² Knowing these insights to be true, one cannot blame this generation for absorbing the culture around it, and so it behooves the employer to understand and build positively upon what he or she has with the Millennials. Thompson and Gregory assert, “This generation has been shaped by, among other things, helicopter parents, frequent positive feedback and reassurance, significant leaps in technology, and political and economic turmoil.”³³ In other words, it is little wonder that many of the Millennial Generation bring to the workplace this type of attitude and mindset.

All too often, this generation has been rewarded for participation rather than performance. In everything from sports to academics, Millennials have been given the proverbial “thumbs up” and an “A for effort.” Again, Thompson and Gregory insightfully observe, “Millennials are perceived as having inflated self-esteem, unrealistic and grandiose expectations for prime work, promotions, and rewards, and a general lack of patience and willingness to drudge through unglamorous components of work.”³⁴ Whether it is always true, the attitude of entitlement among Millennials has often been linked to higher rates of materialism, narcissism and diminished work ethic.

Job hopping. How does the lack of responsible commitment sometimes translate in the workplace? One manifestation among Millennial employees is what is known as “job hopping.” In other words, it is the act of moving often and sporadically from one, perceptively dead-end, job to another. Taylor and Keeter find, “Remarkably, nearly six-in-ten employed Millennials say they already have switched careers at least once. A majority, 57 percent, of younger workers say it is not very likely or not likely at

³²Twenge, *Generation Me*, 217.

³³Thompson and Gregory, “Managing Millennials,” 238.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 241.

all that they will stay with their current employers for the remainder of their working life.”³⁵

The statistics that reveal such a high level of moving from one job to another illuminate an attitude of disloyalty. Another root of disloyalty holding back the Millennials comes from the recession that led organizations and employers to sharply lower or even show the door to the most loyal and committed employees. As a result of this attitude, Millennial employees are not as likely to stay with an employer just for conscious’ sake, or because it is the right thing to do. Thompson and Gregory explain, “Millennials will expect organizations to continually re-engage them and remind them of why they should stay. This sense of entitlement represents a tremendous shift in thinking for human resource departments.”³⁶

Flexibility and balance. Millennials tend to hold family relationships with a fairly tight grip, and specifically close relationships with their parents. The significance of family explains, in part, why this generation values a job that provides for a work/life balance. As one young man puts it, “There is more to life than this job.” Not only is this balance significant in job selection, but it is just as important in job retention.³⁷ In other words, most Millennials will not become married to their job, but tend to place more value on relationships than a career.

What is more, Millennial employees see significance in performance and productivity and not so much in what they wear or even where they do their work. What is seen as ideal among Millennials is a workplace setting that blends work, social responsibilities, and personal business together throughout the workday. Thompson and

³⁵Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 46.

³⁶Thompson and Gregory, “Managing Millennials,” 240.

³⁷Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*,131.

Gregory perceive, “This is [actually] a contrast to the work-life balance (in which workers continue to compartmentalize work and life demands, but seek to find a manageable balance between the two) that has been so strongly emphasized in recent years.”³⁸ This work/life balance seems to be a most comfortable fit for many Millennials making the stereotype of being too casual and lazy all too familiar.

A significant factor contributing to the importance of work/life balance to the Millennials is the idea that “they do not want to repeat what they perceive to be the mistakes of their parents, many of whom worked long hours at the expense of family and friends, only to get downsized.”³⁹ Millennial employees expect and seek out opportunities to work in a setting that provides latitude and flexibility to work around personal commitments and offer less restrictive schedules and flextime.⁴⁰ Interestingly, this generation is driven to prioritize what matters most to them and it is not job first, but family. Ultimately, Millennials are intentionally attempting to balance workplace success with a healthy lifestyle.⁴¹

Implications Regarding Commitment in the Workplace

What ties these workplace factors together for the Millennials? In particular, what points toward a responsible commitment in the trends found at this generation’s place of work? In their research of surveying some twelve hundred Millennials, Thom and Jess Rainer noticed a common thread that ran throughout the significant factors aforementioned. Primary factors such as flexible working hours and life/work balance

³⁸Thompson and Gregory, “Managing Millennials,” 242.

³⁹Bannon, Ford, and Meltzer, “Understanding Millennials,” 64.

⁴⁰Timothy K. Ellison, Yu Kyoum Kim, and Marshall J. Magnusen, “The Work Attitudes of Millennials in Collegiate Recreational Sports,” *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 84.

⁴¹Bannon, Ford, and Meltzer, “Understanding Millennials,” 64.

were held together by the thread of relationships.⁴² Not only are these trends noted in order for these young people to spend time with friends and family, but also to build meaningful relationships with colleagues and supervisors on the job.

In another study concerning relationship management, a major dimension of commitment involved an emotional bond or attachment. In the workplace, Millennials said more interaction and more mentoring could improve commitment and long-term career retention.⁴³ In fact, an immediate manager who takes the time to pour into the life of a Millennial and provide time for teamwork building and cohesion raises the bar of commitment significantly. Gallicano, Curtin, and Matthews observe, “For this age group, commitment appears to take on a very personal face.”⁴⁴

Much research has revealed that a setting for meaningful work, allowance for a flexible schedule and work/life balance, along with authentic relationships between colleagues and supervisors can contribute to a strong satisfaction, commitment, and retention among Millennials. Therefore, relationships are a critical component of the workplace for this generation. Gallicano, Curtin, and Matthews give the reminder that “Millennials have generally been raised in environments that are rich with feedback, individual attention, praise, guidance, and direction. Managers essentially fill the role of the guiding parent once Millennials enter the workforce.”⁴⁵ For good or for bad, these are the trends and the realities of what are soon to be the largest populace entering the workforce.

⁴²Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 138.

⁴³Tiffany Gallicano, Patricia Curtin, and Kelli Matthews, “I Love What I Do, But...A Relationship Management Survey of Millennial Generation Public Relations Agency Employees,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 24, no. 3 (June 2012): 235.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 238.

⁴⁵Thompson and Gregory, “Managing Millennials,” 239.

Marriage

One of the most significant life events of a Millennial and/or an emerging adult is that of marriage. Now that statement has been true of young people for centuries, however the trend in marriage has made an interesting turn in the latter part of the twentieth century. For example, the number of those marrying in their twenties since the 1950's has significantly dropped. For instance, married couples in their twenties were a majority in the 1970s and by the year 2000 were atypical. The norm has now become to stay unmarried through your twenties. The delay in marrying is a significant shift and represents a foundational piece in the adulthood's roles as it generally affects the timing of having children, housing needs, economic demands, etc. Robert Wuthnow asserts, "The importance of this shift in marital patterns can hardly be overstated."⁴⁶

The Pew Research Center gives insight to these statements above with specific statistical analysis of the status of marriage among Millennials:

Three-quarters (75 percent) have never married, compared with only 52 percent of Boomers and 67 percent of Gen Xers at the same ages. Just one-in-five (21 percent) Millennials is currently married and just one-in-eight (12 percent) is married with children at home, half the proportions (42 percent and 26 percent, respectively) of Boomers at the same age.⁴⁷

These statistics certainly provide a tell-tale sign of the changing views of marriage and family from previous generations compared to the Millennials. Further, what is interesting to note is that while not being married at near the rate of previous generations, many of the Millennial Generation, between the ages of 18 and 29, are still living at home or with other family members.

Jeffrey Arnett's Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (Millennials) interviewed 1,029 18 to 29 year-olds concerning a number of issues and roles of coming adulthood, not the least of which involved marriage. One question of significance

⁴⁶Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 23.

⁴⁷Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 11.

particularly involved asking what criteria are involved in marking the attainment of full adulthood. One of the top traditional markers has always been getting married. However, interestingly enough, only 4 percent chose marriage as a marker of reaching adulthood. The obvious question then becomes, what would cause such a shift in the culture?⁴⁸

A plethora of factors seem to be contributing to the shift in marriage being a secondary, or even tertiary, marker of adulthood. Again, Arnett places in his research the following factors:

Marriage used to mark, for most people, their first sexual relationship, but now it does not, with the average age of first sexual intercourse about 17. It used to mark, for most people, especially young women, the first time they lived with anyone outside their family, but it no longer does.⁴⁹

Although marriage is still significant in the lives of Millennials, it no longer marks a monumental transition to the world of adulthood, and as such is no longer perceived as such an important marker.

The way of thinking toward marriage has obviously transitioned significantly. Before, generations have looked at marriage as a primary entry point of adulthood and a defining vehicle for the onset of maturity as an adult. Hymowitz, Carroll, Wilcox and Kaye relay, “In this new environment, marriage is transformed from a cornerstone to a capstone of adult identity. No longer is marriage the stabilizing base for the life one is building; it is now more of a crowning achievement. [A whopping] 91 percent of young adults believe that they must be completely financially independent to be ready for marriage.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Jeffrey Arnett and Joseph Schwab, *The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults* (Worcester, MA: Clark University, 2012), 7.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁰Kay Hymowitz et al., *Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2013), 24-25, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://nationalmarriageproject.org/resources/knot-yet-the-benefits-and-costs-of-delayed-marriage-in-america/>.

Cohabitation. What seems to have replaced the early significance of marriage is that of cohabitation. In fact, Millennials are beginning to live together about the same age as couples used to marry. In theory, cohabitation is perceived to be a safer and preferred alternative to marriage. However, statistically, more cohabitants split up sooner and more often than do married couples. Further, those who live together are also more likely to be depressed than are their married counterparts. More than this, cohabiting couples report being less satisfied with their lives and more likely to drink too much alcohol.⁵¹

Although many young people may view cohabitation as a precursor to marriage, it is still considered categorically distinct from marriage. For example, it is seen as a temporary season for companionship, both emotionally and sexually, and has been found to be a less suitable setting for parenthood. However, what is somewhat surprising is that

first co-residential relationship [is entered] at about the same age as in the past; it's just now they are far more likely to be 'living together' than married. [Statistically,] the percentage of younger twenty something women in co-residential unions has not fallen from 1988 to 2010; indeed, it has held steady at about half. What has changed, clearly, is that they are substituting cohabitation for marriage.⁵²

Implications from Marriage Regarding Commitment

What is telling from these findings is the lack of commitment revealed among many Millennials. Cohabitation, for example, displays, at best, vague commitments by both parties involved, and typically has shown to end in separation the vast majority of the time. In the society in which we live, there seem to no longer be well defined guidelines for appropriate behavior in the arena of intimate relationships, and Jamison and Proulx conclude "Individuals self-define and self-direct the formation of committed

⁵¹Hymowitz et al., "Knot Yet," 10-11.

⁵²Ibid., 28.

partnerships.”⁵³ The gap between early and loosely committed relationships and marriage has significantly widened leading to more varied trajectories in how the millennial generation, specifically emerging adults, form responsible commitments. The conclusion, therefore, from research studies, surveys, and observations suggests that most emerging adults (Millennials) view cohabitation as an acceptable living arrangement.⁵⁴

From the beginning, our Creator God made man and woman to be together. Once a decision is made to enter a serious and intimate relationship with a person of the opposite sex, the Designer formed man as such to remain in that relationship, monogamously, for life. In other words, this arrangement is known as marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Originally, this verse is set in the context of God forming Eve, Adam’s helpmate, to be a companion and a helper fit for him. From the outset of creation, God ordered it as such that man and woman would be placed together and stay together. If one follows the lives of Adam and Eve, even after the Fall, the two remain together through toil, strife, a murderous and murdered son, etc. As a matter of fact, Adam lived until the ripe old age of 930. Adam and Eve serve as the prototype of faithfulness to one another until death do us part.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes in a number of places concerning the commitment a couple must make if they choose to be together. The commitment should always be set in the view towards the covenant of marriage. Ephesians 5 offers much insight toward the interactions of a man and a woman in the

⁵³Tyler Jamison and Christine Proulx, “Stayovers in Emerging Adulthood: Who Stays Over and Why?” *Personal Relationships* 20, no. 1 (June 2012): 155.

⁵⁴Jamison and Proulx, “Stayovers in Emerging Adulthood,” 158. A number of studies reveal such conclusions as briefed above. A. Thornton and L. Young-Demarco, “Four Decades of Trends in Attitudes Toward Family Issues in the United States,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 4 (December 2001): 1009-37. S. Sassler, “The Process of Entering into Cohabiting Unions,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 2 (May 2004): 491-505. T. Jamison and L. Ganong, “We’re Not Living Together: Stayover Relationships among College-Educated Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 28, no. 4 (June 2011): 536-57.

context of marriage. In particular, verses 22 through 33 paint a beautiful, but often rarely seen, picture of a couple in mutual submission and unconditional love for one another. The woman is to submit under the caring and protecting leadership of her husband (22-24), and the man is to love his wife as Jesus Christ loved the church, even willing to give up his own life for her (25-33). Paul's concluding statement on the matter of a couple's relationship: "Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."⁵⁵

Simply viewing this brief excursus from a biblical perspective illustrates that the original intent of the level of commitment between two adults (man and woman) desiring to be in an intimate relationship is much higher than present day society holds it to be. However, that is not to say that all from the Millennial Generation are delaying marriage and involved in relationships that are characterized by loose and low levels of commitment. At the same time, the findings of much of the research in this arena are astonishing, revealing the institution of marriage to be one of fairly low priority for Millennials and typically preceded by a number of relationships characterized by overnight stays and/or cohabitation. Millennials would do well to learn from our Creator the seriousness and even sacredness of an intimate partnership between a man and a woman.

Religion/Spirituality

The decline of those engaged in organized religion has declined dramatically over the past thirty years or so. Only 18 percent of Millennials, or emerging adults (18-29), attend religious services on a weekly basis.⁵⁶ Entering college freshmen who claim

⁵⁵A sampling of other portions of Scripture that speak to marriage and commitment in the New Testament are Matt 10, Luke 16, Rom 7, 1 Cor 7, Col 3, Titus 2, and 1 Pet 3.

⁵⁶Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 85.

to having no religious preference has doubled from 1985 to 2003.⁵⁷ As of 2010, one-in-four of the Millennial Generation is unaffiliated with any particular faith. Further, few of these young people say that religion⁵⁸ is significant in their lives. To put this phenomenon in perspective, comparatively, Millennials are twice as unaffiliated with a religion as were the Baby Boomers when they were young adults.⁵⁹

From a religious standpoint, these statistics are troubling and even quite startling. What is interesting from these numbers is the deeper fact that a large proportion of these young people were engaged in religion and religious activity and yet left their upbringing without continuing in their faith, particularly upon arriving at a college campus. Between the ages of 18-29, 31 percent of young people are completely disengaged from any religious activity, particularly related to attending church services and the like. By comparison, the statistics during the 1970s and 1980s were half of the amount of unaffiliated people of the same age group.⁶⁰

In their survey of approximately 1,200 Millennials, Thom and Jess Rainer uncovered similar relativistic and anti-religion sentiments among this generation. Over 70 percent say that American churches are irrelevant today. The majority of these young people see the church as inward focused, tradition-bound, and often unwilling to take on the challenge of uniquely reaching a new generation. Their study reveals that the perception of the Millennials toward the church is one of apathy and disconnect. As a result, the Rainers report that this generation “is largely anti-institutional church in its

⁵⁷Twenge, *Generation Me*, 34.

⁵⁸Religion may be defined in general as the belief in a god or in a group of gods; an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods; an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group. In the context of the research cited, religion is typically utilized in this manner. This definition is usually viewed in a negative light by most conservative evangelicals.

⁵⁹Taylor and Keeter, *Millennials*, 85.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 89.

attitude.”⁶¹

Religious types. With Millennials, many religious beliefs are highly individualized. Whatever you wish to believe about God and how and who he is seems to be just fine with many of the Millennial Generation. A personal set of religious beliefs is acceptable as long as there are no impositions placed upon another person. As one might have guessed, a great many Millennials have abandoned organized religious systems due to their rules and obligations placed upon its adherents. Often times, religious institutions and organizations have morality and ethical decisions couched in such a clear cut, black/white way of thinking and acting that has Millennials turning the other way in large numbers.⁶²

For many in this generation, morality is a personal choice. As Christian Smith aptly explains, “Moral rights and wrongs are essentially matters of individual opinion. Furthermore, the general approach associated with this outlook is not to judge anyone else on moral matters, since they are entitled to their own personal opinions and not to allow oneself be judged by anyone else.”⁶³ While these gestures may sound thoughtful and illustrating deference toward others, it actually reveals a postmodern relativism where anyone’s truth is “true” thereby leaving a society with no objective standards by which to set one’s moral compass.

Christian Smith, in his massive study and research concerning late adolescents and emerging adults (Millennials), places the Millennial Generation in six major religious categories. Following is a brief synopsis of these categories. First are the *Committed Traditionalists*. These emerging adults embrace a strong religious faith, whose beliefs

⁶¹Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 244.

⁶²Twenge, *Generation Me*, 34-35.

⁶³Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

they can reasonably well articulate and which they actively practice. Personal commitment to faith is a significant part of their identities. Second include the *Selective Adherents*. These young people believe and perform certain aspects of their religious traditions but neglect and ignore others. This group has had fairly solid religious upbringings but as emerging adults, they are more discriminating toward their religious tradition's beliefs and practices. Third are the *Spiritually Open*. This category of emerging adults are not deeply committed to a religious faith but are nonetheless receptive to and at least mildly interested in some spiritual or religious matters. They may be skeptical or critical toward certain forms of religion or spirituality but are definitely open to others. Fourth include the *Religiously Indifferent*. The religiously indifferent neither care to practice religion nor oppose it. They are simply not invested in religion either way; it really does not count for that much. Fifth are the *Religiously Disconnected*. Emerging adults who fall under this category are those who have little to no exposure or connection to religious people, ideas, or organizations. Faith simply has not been a part of their lives in any significant way, and may never be. Finally, sixth involve the *Irreligious*. These young people hold skeptical attitudes about and make critical arguments against religion in general, rejecting the idea of personal faith. They may concede that religion is functionally good for some people, but their general attitude is incredulous, derogatory, and antagonistic.⁶⁴

A more specific category of religious belief/spirituality worthy of note among emerging adults is what is known as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.⁶⁵ Smith notes in his

⁶⁴Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition : The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166-68.

⁶⁵Ibid., 154-56. In his second book of the trio on emerging adulthood, Christian Smith further explores this phenomenon, as it were, among teenagers and the emerging adult populace. He defines Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD) in his first book: Christian Smith and Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Smith presents five key beliefs of MTD: (1) God exists as Creator. (2) God wants people to be good, nice and fair. (3) The central goal in life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. (4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. (5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

research of those whom he studied, from ages 13-17 and then from 18-23, somewhat wavered in Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). A significant sector of those interviewed had been heavily influenced by their parents during their early childhood and adolescence. Yet, due to personal experiences and a modest distance from parental influence, Smith notes “the consistency and coherence of MTD seems to be breaking down into either less or more assurance about faith in general, and into either looser or tighter connections to more traditional religious faiths specifically.”⁶⁶

While not all emerging adults and Millennials fit nicely into one of these six categories mentioned above or even the category that Smith calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, it does give one a snapshot of where many from this generation fit concerning religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. Further, it appears that only one, possibly two, of these religious types display a commitment level fitting for a religious and/or spiritual person, self-proclaimed or otherwise.

Implications from Religion/ Spirituality Regarding Commitment

What is plain in reviewing the trends and patterns related to the religious matters of the Millennial Generation is the major transition that appears to have occurred among a great majority of this populace. Unfortunately, the resulting transition is from some type of religious affiliation in their younger years to little if any religious affiliation as the Millennials are entering college and beyond. More specifically, the categories or types of religious young people seem to have one word that is operative in each of the six major categories briefly discussed above: *commitment*. Commitment, particularly the lack thereof, is quite revealing when surveying much of the research and findings from a number of studies regarding religious aspects of the Millennial Generation. Religiously, or spiritually speaking, the Millennials (emerging adults) are leaving behind their

⁶⁶Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 156.

commitment to faith. That is not to say all of this generation is responding in this manner, but enough of them are so as to raise more than an eyebrow. Further, the question then becomes what can be done to renew a religious commitment to faith among the Millennials?

An Embedded Force: Mass Consumerism

Emerging adults have responded both verbally and behaviorally that consumerism, on a grand scale, is not necessarily a bad venture, rather possibly a good one.⁶⁷ As Smith comments from the results of his research, “Contemporary emerging adults are either true believers or complacent conformists when it comes to mass consumerism. Most like shopping and buying things. Most enjoy consuming products and services. It is the way of life with which they are both familiar and content.”⁶⁸ What is more, the critical voices toward mass consumerism, materialism and the environmental concerns resulting from such a society are almost non-existent among the emerging adult populace. Therefore, as Smith says in another research setting, “The idea of having any questions or doubts about the cycle of shopping, buying, consuming, accumulating, discarding, and shopping appeared to be unthinkable to them [emerging adults].”⁶⁹

The implications regarding such a mentality are numerous and concerning. A materialistic and consumerist mindset almost always has an inward gaze and selfish gains as its ends. Items that are the latest and greatest technological inventions for communication and entertainment are basic necessities.⁷⁰ Emerging adults conclude that

⁶⁷Mass Consumerism may be defined as the belief that it is good/economically desirable to spend considerable amounts of money on goods and services. Akin to materialism, a consumerism attitude sees nothing wrong with buying and spending on whatever one likes as long as he or she has the means to do so.

⁶⁸Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 72.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

any money they earn, or anyone else earns is entirely their own to do with whatever they please. Having the notion or idea of thinking of the needs of others, or “Living a good life not defined by material consumption rarely crosses their minds.”⁷¹ Emerging adults see the individual as the liberated decision-maker and spiritually, their god is often staring back at them from the mirror.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on five particular patterns/trends (technology, education, work, marriage, religion), along with the undercurrent of mass consumerism revealed among the Millennial Generation. More than this, it has been the intent of this chapter to yield from these trends and patterns a pointed direction of how a great many of the emerging adults within this generation are lacking in responsible commitment regarding the typical roles of an adult. Specifically, the preceding paragraphs have, at the least, begun to elucidate some very real and practical reasons why this generation of emerging adults is wanting in the area of responsible commitment, a critical ingredient in the pursuit of mature adulthood.

The following chapter takes a deeper look into well-researched areas of work involving emerging adults in order to yield some direction and fortitude toward viable solutions for building appropriate steps to maturation, particularly responsible commitment. Specifically, the research concerning the theory of socialization during the emerging adult years by Jeffrey Arnett and the research concerning ethical and intellectual development of college-age students by William Perry will both be explored. The studies and theories derived from these researchers are going to provide a framework in order to begin making conjectures and offering conclusions that will fit my goal of revealing avenues of solid commitment for emerging adults to follow.

⁷¹Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 108.

Therefore, the chapters beyond the next will seek to provide a corrective theological lens of the studies and theories pressing in on the issues of the emerging adult utilizing Powlison's Comprehensive Internal framework while also offering a biblical picture of maturity and responsible commitment. Finally, from this biblical framework will come proposed viable solutions toward avenues of timely maturity and responsible commitment for emerging adults. While not comprehensive in nature, the pathways to mature adulthood will be made perspicuous.

CHAPTER 3

EXTRAPOLATION OF SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH AREAS AND THEORIES CONCERNING EMERGING ADULTS AND THEIR LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

Whereas chapter 2 provides trends and characteristics of the typical emerging adult and their implications toward commitment, chapter 3 seeks to explore and extrapolate significant theories put forth by William Perry in what is known as the Perry Scheme, and Jeffrey Arnett's theory of socialization concerning emerging adults. While these theories will capture the majority of the focus of this chapter, other worthwhile research will be weaved in as well and discussed where appropriate. The intent then will be to gain further insights to significant scholarly work on understanding the elusive nature of commitment during this stage in the lifespan.

First, this chapter is to focus on William Perry and his schematic approach to explain the overall development of college-age students. In particular, the focus is on the latter end of his theory involving what Perry considers a necessity in maturing as an adult, namely commitment. Second, an intense view of Arnett's theory of socialization among emerging adults with the purpose of highlighting explicit and implicit findings from Arnett that illustrate the necessary quality of commitment is to be explicated. Finally, a priority is placed on integrating other related research within both the theories and findings of Perry and Arnett.

Once the aforementioned work is accomplished, it will coalesce to form a greater understanding of the social aspect of the emerging adult and the relation to responsible commitment within their Western society. From here, it is my task to make connections from a number of conjectures, conclusions and other insights as to why

commitment appears elusive among the emerging adult populace. Further still is to be able to illustrate how one begins to remedy the lack of such a significant and necessary characteristic of a mature adult.

The Perry Scheme and Commitment

William Perry's research proves to be foundational to almost any significant work involving the development of emerging adults. Although the majority of scholarly research regarding emerging adulthood has primarily been conducted in the twenty-first century, Perry's seminal work was published in 1970. His focus is on the undergraduate college student (18-23), all of whom fall under the definition of an emerging adult. Therefore, it behooves one to begin with Perry and his influential work on the cognitive and moral development of this particular demographic.

Perry charts the development of college age students (18-23) through nine different positions (stages). Perry's positions move from concrete to varying levels of abstract complexity, including relativism, and, interestingly enough concludes with four positions focused on the area of commitment. This research will focus on these last four positions of commitment.¹ As Perry sees it, one must surrender, as it were, to one of three ideologies, or way of living in order to solidify one's identity and place in this world.² In other words, how does one "give in" to growing up? He briefly explains these three options in his seminal work.

Option one is to deny little or any need for meaning beyond one's immediate context and situation. In other words, live for the moment, plan for little, and leave the rest to chance. A second option is to become a "self-avowed opportunist." As Perry contends, "a limited selfhood is achieved; the loss is to depth of feeling and to the social

¹William G. Perry, Jr. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), 134.

²Ibid.

responsibility that springs from compassion.”³ Perry categorizes these options as a defensive stance to life, often involving denials of responsibility. This crisis of identity and formation Perry considers beginning around the ages of twenty-one to twenty three.

The third option Perry provides to aid in a sense of identity solidification in the emerging adult is that of commitment.⁴ Perry defines “Commitment” as “an act, or ongoing activity relating a person as agent and chooser to aspects of his life in which he invests his energies, his care and his identity.”⁵ Further, Perry explains that commitment is a series of affirmations in which a person makes significant investments toward responsibilities in such things as truths, relationships, activities, purposes, etc.⁶ Perry sees this choice as being transcendent and ultimately optimal in the beginnings of realized maturation of a young adult.

The discovery and realization Perry comes to in his research is significant for the emerging adult population in that the climax, or near climax, of the maturation process of a young adult is in developing and maintaining responsible commitment. The adjective “responsible” is purposefully placed with commitment here as Perry maintains the close tie of responsibility with that of commitment. Perry asserts that “commitments require the courage of responsibility.”⁷ What is more is that, at this point in development, Perry notes the “individual is faced with the responsibility for choice and affirmation in his life. Accordingly, Positions 7, 8, and 9 express degrees of ripening in an art [namely, responsible commitment].”⁸

³Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 134-35.

⁴It is in this stage or position of development of the emerging adult that commitment is seen as necessary and even desired although not yet experienced.

⁵Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 134-35.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 153.

Commitment Realized and Refined

According to Perry's stages or positions of maturation in the emerging adult, the last three (7, 8, and 9) involve commitment realized and the developing/refining of said commitment. Speaking of the emerging adult, Perry asserts this theme of responsibility (Position 7) as "he (the emerging adult) expands the arc of his engagements and pushes forward in the impingements and unfoldings of experience, he discovers that he has undertaken not a finite set of decisions but a way of life."⁹ The drama of maturation is experiencing a mark of stability due to a marked decision to take on responsible commitment by the emerging adult. Further, at this position/stage, there is a sense of relief, settled purpose, and a felt identity to the external forms that this commitment brings.

As Perry explains, Positions 8 and 9 describe a "level of experience in which commitment has emerged in greater prominence and a maturity in which a person has developed an experience of 'who he is' both in his commitments both in content and style of living."¹⁰ Although Perry admits that the actual observations of these latter positions in the process of adult maturation is rarely if ever noted during the college years (18-23), it is assumed as the natural progression of a young (emerging) adult to attain to these levels of firm and responsible commitment. What is interesting concerning Perry's research is that he seemed almost ahead of his time. He perceived the sociological construct that was slowly forming that is now known, thirty years later, as emerging adulthood.

Significance of Perry's Research to the Emerging Adult and Commitment

What Perry highlights in 1970 is the phenomenon that moves its way to the

⁹Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 153.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 154.

surface in a notable manner in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, namely delayed adulthood. In other words, revealing what is now seen as an elusiveness of responsible commitment that so often hallmarks adult maturity. While Perry is focused on college-age students between the ages of 18 and 23 almost five decades ago, now in the twenty-first century psychologist Jeffrey Arnett observes a very similar scheme that stretches to near thirty years of age.¹¹ Commitment to the emerging adult nowadays is almost a frightening proposition. To suggest that a person would settle down into a long term relationship (e.g., marriage), focus in on a consistent career, and have children not too long after high school is a rare and almost ludicrous route for a young person to take at the present.

Perry astutely noticed what he termed “alternatives to growth.” He observed three states or alternatives taken by his subjects known as *temporizing*, *retreat* and *escape*.¹² These alternatives provide a spectrum or continuum of the college age student eluding responsible commitment. It is also interesting to note that these alternatives to growth are made after a couple of years of college life (19-21 years of age).

Temporizing is defined by Perry as a pause of at least a year in the life of the college age student (emerging adult) “as if waiting or gathering his forces.”¹³ Perry describes this alternative to growth as intentional, not alienation, but an “I’m not ready yet” state. Perry defines *retreat* as “an entrenchment undertaken in reaction to the complexities, envisioned or experienced, of more advanced Positions [Stages].”¹⁴ In other words, it is a regression, in particular when faced with the plethora of choices, perspectives, and viewpoints that are thrown at the college student, and it seems simply

¹¹Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

¹²Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 177.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 182.

too much. Lastly, Perry explains *escape* as the “detachment offered by some middle Position [Stage] on the scale, in the deeper avoidance of personal responsibility.”¹⁵ Perry notes this position as the most distinguished of the three types of disengagement towards maturation. This route is a perception of the middle ground, or as Perry asserts: “a passive delegation of all responsibility to fate.”¹⁶

Perry appears a bit more diplomatic in his description of findings among these college age students, but is essentially reporting quite similar findings as discussed from other prominent sociologists and scholars who presently study this same demographic. Ultimately, it is revealing that what Perry observed in the late 1960s has mushroomed in the twenty-first century, namely the shirking of responsible commitment. It appears these college age students, and now emerging adults, are often just drifting along with no real sense of direction, or willingness to sacrifice, much less make a firm and lasting commitment. Perry’s research and observations truly paved the way for much of the significant research being done even to this day concerning this same demographic, now known as emerging adults.

Elmore’s Research Corroborating Perry’s Findings

Over fifty years later, Tim Elmore gives sway and credibility to Perry’s assertions of pursuing alternative paths to growth and maturity. He does so by purporting four penetrating and insightful words to elucidate this generation of emerging adults. Elmore sees the emerging adult population as *overwhelmed, overconnected, overprotected and overserved*.¹⁷ The critical observation in his initial observations is the prefix *over*. It appears that the pendulum of our culture, our education, and other

¹⁵Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 190.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 19.

significant areas has swung to the extreme of being overly involved in nearly every aspect of our now “grown-up” adolescent. Within each of these four categories given by Elmore, helpful observations are provided regarding the emerging adult and have as a primary source of contention this whole notion of responsible commitment.

For example, with regard to an emerging adult having a sense of being *overwhelmed* with life in general, Elmore points out numerous sources of stressors to that end. From external pressure from parents and peers, to internal pressures to be competitive, to live up to the specialness they have been told they are going to be, the emerging adult has numerous points of pressure that culminate in becoming overwhelmed. Elmore queries and suggests: “What if this generation grows up and never finds a healthy way to handle all this pressure? I wonder if we’ll see normal responsibilities today reduced to bite-size chunks in the future: McJobs. McMarriages. McCommitments.”¹⁸ Elmore is insightful in his conclusion regarding the mysterious absence of responsible commitment, and even the seeming unwillingness to attempt real commitment among the emerging adult populace.

Further, when Elmore speaks of similar phenomena of emerging adults being *overprotected* and *overserved*, he continues to illustrate the elusiveness of this generation being responsibly committed to almost none of the significant norms of adulthood. As Elmore asserts, “This generation has been so sheltered by their parents, teachers, counselors, and an overregulated government that many have trouble developing strong, independent coping skills. More to the point, will our overemphasis on safety and security produce a generation of kids who simply don’t know how to find their way in the world?”¹⁹ In terms of being *overserved*, the typical emerging adult has been made to believe that they are at the center of the universe. The problem occurs, Elmore asserts,

¹⁸Elmore, *Generation iY*, 20.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 24-25.

“when we give our young people an overinflated idea of their own importance. As they move from teenagers to twenty-somethings, they’re often impatient, demanding, self-centered and short-tempered, with a poor work ethic and minimal sense of long-term commitment.”²⁰

Theory of Socialization Introduced

Jeffrey Arnett, a psychologist and research professor at Clark University, has pioneered much of the research toward, and coined the term “emerging adult.” He asserts that a great deal of what the emerging adult experiences and the trap they find themselves in concerning indecisiveness, a lack of responsible commitment, and the like comes from a unique socialization process found thriving in many Western, post-industrialized, cultures. The research found here concerning the socialization of the emerging adult begins with a brief historical sketch of the concept in reference to the general population.

Broadly speaking, socialization is “the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups.”²¹ Socialization is multi-faceted in that it involves a variety of outcomes. These outcomes include the acquisition of certain standards, roles, and values across the sociological spectrum.²² Socialization is an ongoing process, deeply ingrained during early childhood, but arguably persists throughout the entire life course. Many individuals are significant contributors to socialization such as parents, siblings, teachers, persons of the media, etc.

Socialization theory, and its components coherently explained, began in the early to mid-twentieth century. Behavioral responses and the teaching of good habits was a dominant point of view of the socialization process in the 1950’s and immediately

²⁰Elmore, *Generation iY*, 26-27.

²¹Joan E. Grusec and Paul D. Hastings, eds. *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 1.

²²Ibid.

thereafter. Maccoby explains, “Skinnerian and Hullian learning theories placed reinforcement as the central process in the formation of habits.”²³ During the same period another view emerged that argued socialization as primarily being the ability of parents and other adults of authority to regulate impulses. It was believed, by psychodynamic theorists such as Freud and Whiting, that “socialization moves from a process of external control by parents to [internalizing their controls and thus] self-control by the child.”²⁴ Without belaboring the historical foundations of socialization theory, suffice it to say that the streams of thought and associated theories that followed become ever more passive concerning timely maturation. Even original theories were ‘reconceptualized’ in their approach to how socialization occurs.²⁵

Relevance of Socialization Theory Regarding Emerging Adults

Historically speaking, almost all the literature concerning socialization theory focused primarily on the family and in particular the parent-child relationship. It is not until the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first that early adulthood, specifically emerging adulthood, has been strongly considered in the socialization process. On the front end of this developmental stage, much has been researched and discovered in terms of adolescents and their look to the future, namely young adulthood. Developmental trends over the past century have changed considerably in relation to the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Hernandez purports, “The major changes [include]

²³Eleanor E. Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory” in *Handbook of Socialization*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Pauk D. Hastings (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 15.

²⁴Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory,” 16.

²⁵One may note a sampling of psychologists and sociologists such as Kurt Lewin and Alfred Baldwin (parenting as democracy), Diana Baumrind (triad of parenting styles, authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative), Grusec and Goodnow (parenting from variable contexts and domains), G.R. Patterson, (bi-directional parenting) to review in order to better understand the progression and changing perspectives of socialization theory.

the shift to non-farm work by fathers, a drastic constriction of family size, large shifts of the populace from rural to urban environments [and] enormous increases in educational attainments.”²⁶

Despite these sociological transformations, it remains that little research has been conducted specifically related to emerging adults and socialization. Since emerging adults are very much interested in what it looks like to become a mature adult, they are acutely in need of assistance. According to Grusec, the need for assistance is at the root of socialization.²⁷ Further, one could argue that this period in the life course is an impetus for socialization to occur. However, with less parental oversight and influence, who, or what, are the significant contributors to the socialization of emerging adults? In the following paragraphs, it is my intent to offer a description concerning broad and narrow socialization and its relation to individualism over against collectivism.

Broad vs. Narrow Socialization

Globally speaking, there are primarily two categorical positions of socialization, namely broad and narrow. According to Arnett, broad socialization widens the boundaries of emerging adults and allows for, and even encourages, a strong sense of “individualism, independence, and self-expression.”²⁸ Conversely, narrow socialization refers to a more restricted set of boundaries for those growing up in such a culture. Further, obedience and conformity are held in high esteem and culture’s expectations and norms are highly regarded. According to Arnett, the concepts of broad and narrow socialization are understood by how cultures “Differ in the degree of restrictiveness they

²⁶D. J. Hernandez, “Child Development and Social Demography of Childhood,” *Child Development* 68, no. 1 (February 1997): 150.

²⁷Grusec and Hastings, *Handbook of Socialization*, 2.

²⁸Jeffrey Arnett, “Broad and Narrow Socialization: The Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57, no. 3 (August 1995): 617.

impose [upon their citizens].”²⁹

Arnett asserts that emerging adulthood thrives under western industrialized cultures due to their broad socialization leanings over against non-Western societies.³⁰ Since emerging adulthood is a self-focused age, less restrictive limits are typically imposed upon them. In fact, Arnett argues that “socialization is broadest in emerging adulthood in the sense that this is when people have the most freedom to decide for themselves how to live and what to do and when to do it.”³¹ While the idea of having a plethora of life choices and avenues which to take, emerging adults are the most likely age group to neither be working in a stable career or in school. Further, as Arnett reports, this phenomenon appears ironic seeing that multiple studies of industrialized cultures consistently find that “the top three criteria for adulthood are accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent...which reflect common underlying values of independence and individualism.”³² However, in many cases, none of these top three criteria are occurring shortly after adolescence, when, in the past, these three criteria have been quite normative. Instead, it is not until many emerging adults are in their late twenties or early thirties when these criteria are met.

Arnett argues that there are three goals of socialization and seven sources of socialization by which these three goals are met. Arnett lists the three goals of socialization as

²⁹Ibid., 618.

³⁰Many sociologists use the words “individualism” and “collectivism” synonymously to Arnett’s identification of “broad” and “narrow” socialization respectively. It is important to note that I will use the terms broad socialization and individualism/individualization interchangeably. A couple of examples are Sarah Badger, Larry Nelson and Carolyn Barry, “Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood Among Chinese and American Emerging Adults,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30, no.1 (January 2006): 84-93. Hong Xiao, “Independence and Obedience: An Analysis of Child Socialization Values in the United States and China,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 641-657.

³¹Jeffrey Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” in *Handbook of Socialization*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Paul D. Hastings (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 213.

³²Ibid., 216.

(a) Impulse control, including the development of conscience, (b) role preparation and performance, including occupational roles, gender roles, and roles in institutions such as marriage and parenthood, and (c) the cultivation of sources of meaning—that is, what is important, what is to be valued, what is to be lived for.³³

These goals are measured and reached through the context of family, peers, school, work, community, media, the legal system, and one’s cultural belief system. As Arnett takes the reader through each of these sources, as listed above, he asserts that the basic cornerstone and foundation of Western culture, particularly American culture, is individualism. Specifically, Arnett purports individualism to be “the most important and influential source of broad socialization, because it forms the ideological foundation for socialization [in America].”³⁴ Therefore, this ideology allows young people, specifically emerging adults, to have a broad range of freedom toward significant life choices such as marriage, parenthood, and long-term work which are some of the very hallmarks of adulthood. What results is the majority of these young people waiting to at least their mid-20’s to begin a serious pursuit of the above roles.³⁵

Notably, a logical developmental outcome of broad socialization among emerging adults is the weakening of institutional frameworks such as parental oversight and school. As a result, individualization strengthens, and yet with it comes much individual responsibilities. Arnett keenly observes, “The absence of social and institutional control may allow for greater freedom and choice, but it also requires greater resources from individuals. Lack of constraint also means lack of guidance and support.”³⁶ What further results is that of individualization turning back in upon the individual. The very sources that Arnett argues to aid in socialization, and thus maturity

³³Arnett, “Broad and Narrow Socialization,” 618-19.

³⁴Ibid., 619-25.

³⁵Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” 227.

³⁶Jeffrey Arnett, “The Psychology of Emerging Adulthood: What is Known, and What Remains to be Known,” in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, ed. Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Tanner (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 305.

toward adulthood, are often absent when individualization is promoted at such a high level in this culture.

Jeffrey Arnett's conclusion concerning the matter of socialization, specifically broad socialization, among emerging adults is a bit two-edged. Ultimately, Arnett concludes, "socialization can become so broad that it provides inadequate support and guidance, so that the goals of socialization remain elusive."³⁷ Arnett would admit, in extreme cases that broad socialization, while seen on the surface as a constructive and liberating approach to the emerging adult, can actually be a hindrance toward true maturity.

In light of the research portrayed above, it is possible to leave one with more questions than answers. Some significant inquiries that come from the apparent phenomenon of broad socialization occurring, as it were, among emerging adults are: where did this pathway begin, or what are some of the precursors to this decade long exploring/driftng of emerging adults that often results in delayed responsibilities and commitments? It is my intention to provide a selection of plausible answers to the previously stated queries.

A Shift in Parenting

From a historical perspective, some of the answers to the questions stated above are found in a seismic shift in the practices of parenting. Somewhere around the mid-twentieth century a significant transformation in the concept and practice of parenting occurred. A vast amount of research and nearly incalculable volumes has been written concerning Baby Boomers. However, one of the most insightful analysis of

³⁷Arnett, "Socialization in Emerging Adulthood," 227. The goals of socialization for the emerging adult are (a) Impulse control, including the development of conscience, (b) role preparation and performance, including occupational roles, gender roles, and roles in institutions such as marriage and parenthood, and (c) the cultivation of sources of meaning—that is, what is important, what is to be valued, what is to be lived for.

parents and their children written concerning this era, and in particular concerning who is now known as the emerging adult, is that of Midge Decter.³⁸

While written forty years ago, Decter's book *Liberal Parents, Radical Children* captures the very essence of emerging adulthood in the twenty-first century. Decter describes three significant observations, along with intervening commentary, concerning the twenty-somethings and even those in their early thirties (emerging adults), and their parents. Observations and insights are made that get at the heart of the shift of parenting and the resulting conundrum of their offspring.

In short order, the following are the three keen observations Decter makes concerning what one would now classify as emerging adults:

The first thing to be observed about you, then, is that taken all together, you are more than usually incapable of facing, tolerating, or withstanding difficulty of any kind. The second thing to be observed about you is that you are, again taken as a whole, more than usually self-regarding. And the third thing to be observed about you—it is really in some sense a concomitant of the first two—is that you are more than usually dependent, more than usually lacking in the capacity to stand your ground without reference, whether positive or negative, to your parents.³⁹

What is fascinating concerning this work of forty years past is that it summarily describes many among the present-day emerging adult population. The parenting shift that has taken place in the mid-1940s has persisted, and if anything, expanded since then. The results of our young adults are no different, and are in many ways more acute than in the decades before. More than this, the research findings of both Perry and Arnett articulated in the previous sections of this chapter yield validation to the observations and reveals the author's perspicuity.

³⁸Midge Decter is an accomplished journalist, author, and editor. These include significant works from a conservative perspective regarding women's liberation and the feminist movement. Her book *Liberal Parents Radical Children* (Toronto: Longman Canada Limited, 1975) offers a common sense approach to a look at the parenting shift in America after World War II and the resulting adults who did not display adult characteristics in a number of ways. The book outlines a descriptive piece concerning the state of parents and children in the mid-seventies and further gives four plausible and insightful profiles of twenty-somethings.

³⁹Decter, *Liberal Parents Radical Children*, 30-33.

Finally, Decter's conclusions concerning the results of the parenting shift are quite telling in their parallelism regarding the emerging adult. She asserts,

Yet surely if a whole generation of our grown children have been left with such a great deal to undo in themselves before they can take on what we all know, deep down, to be the essential requirements of membership in the adult tribe—surely in such a case no one's shortcomings and failures are better reflected than our own.⁴⁰

What parents have, in part, created and are still creating is a group of young people (emerging adults) that are neither prepared nor equipped for the inherent and inevitable requirements of adulthood.

Too Much Too Soon

Yet some more of the answers to the queries regarding precursors and pathways leading to broad socialization and emerging adulthood begin during the adolescent years. In a Western, post-industrialized culture, the teenage years set the stage for the allowance of broad socialization in the twenties and even into the thirties of an emerging adult. Typically, one thinks of adolescents growing and maturing in four major areas: biological, cognitive, social, and emotional.⁴¹ Most would not question that the majority of young people are growing rapidly biologically with puberty coming sooner than ever before in both boys and girls, cognitively with a vast and wide array of data and other knowledge being poured into adolescents at a rate unprecedented, and socially with plenty of friends both at school and on numerous social media outlets. However, emotionally there is a different story unfolding.

Take, for example, the high school experience that is now understood as a norm in our society. From the early twentieth century age grading and schooling children through their late adolescent created, among other things, an unintended consequence. Although the experience of secondary school and the purpose of the curricula developed intends to

⁴⁰Decter, *Liberal Parents Radical Children*, 35.

⁴¹Elmore, *Generation iY*, 62.

prepare young people for adult life, it also heightens the socialization of teens among their own peers.⁴² Further, the development of high school kept older adolescents at home with their parents longer than had typically been in the past. Therefore, as Elmore asserts, “One of the unintended outcomes of the high school experience was that adolescents delayed moving out into adulthood, and peer influence was prolonged.”⁴³

As a young person now enters emerging adulthood at the age of eighteen or so, he finds a new world of possibilities and yet a sense of being overwhelmed at the pathways that lie ahead. As Jeffrey Arnett rightly notes, “They [emerging adults] struggle with uncertainty even as they revel in being freer than they ever were in childhood or ever will be once they take on the full weight of adult responsibilities.”⁴⁴ It appears that while they have been given quite a bit of freedom during their adolescent years under the safety net of parents and guardians, now this ever expanding freedom as an emerging adult often seems too much to handle with the removal of many of the security mechanisms once enjoyed.

Brain Matters

Another perspective with regard to the precursors to emerging adulthood and the resulting scale of broad socialization involve the area of brain research, particularly during the adolescent years (approx. 11-18). Recent advances in technology and neuroscience have allowed scientists and doctors to explore the brain in much more depth and gain greater insight as to what is occurring neurologically in the adolescent brain. As researcher Daniel Keating reflects, “Much of the underlying action is focused on specific developments in the prefrontal cortex, but with an equally significant role for rapidly

⁴²Ibid., 60.

⁴³Elmore, *Generation iY*, 60.

⁴⁴Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 3.

expanding linkages to the whole brain.”⁴⁵

Several reasons are given for the focus aimed at the prefrontal portion (front) of the brain during adolescence.⁴⁶ Primarily, this part of the brain governs the crucial executive functioning of the mind. As Merlin Donald explains, executive functioning is that which sustains “Many high-level metacognitive operations, such as self-evaluation, long-term planning, prioritizing values maintaining fluency, and the production of appropriate social behavior.”⁴⁷ In particular, Keating notes, the prefrontal cortex controls the complexity of integrating both memory and preparatory set that “creates the conditions for a broader, more fully conscious control of cognition and behavior, [specifically] decision making and planning.”⁴⁸

What has been discovered is that significant “specialized synaptic pruning” occurs during the adolescent years, particularly in the frontal areas of the brain.⁴⁹ As the brain is being developed from a child brain to an adult one some connections are lost (pruned) for a season in this part of the brain. In conjunction with this finding is the discovery that the development of the brain during adolescence is from back to front. Therefore, Keating reports that the prefrontal cortex “is the latest brain systems to develop.”⁵⁰ Many neuroscientists have concluded that the frontal lobes of the brain are not fully mature until the early twenties. Therefore, the implications and inferences are

⁴⁵Daniel Keating, “Cognitive and Brain Development,” in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 48.

⁴⁶The prefrontal cortex is located at the front portion of the brain and governs decision making and planning as well as a regulator of emotion, attention, and behavior. This area of the brain is the primary focus of the research discussed here due to its direct impact upon the emerging adult and its implications towards responsible commitment.

⁴⁷Merlin Donald, *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 198.

⁴⁸Keating, “Cognitive and Brain Development,” 49.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

many when it comes to the cognitive and executive functions of the teenage mind, and further, the mind of the emerging adult.

According to brain researcher Daniel Keating, there are three particularly significant implications for the adolescent [and this research contends for the later to come emerging adult] concerning the integrative functions of the prefrontal cortex.

First, patterns of individual differences in how cognition, emotion, and behavior become integrated during adolescence may well have a long reach with respect to normative habits of the mind that influence trajectories of competence and coping. Second, the pubertal influences on many hormonal and neuroendocrine systems are dramatic, entailing the cascading reorganization of body and brain systems. Third, recent evidence from animal models demonstrated the partial reversibility of damage acquired during early development, at both the behavioral and the physiological levels, as a function of enriched environments during puberty.⁵¹

In other words, the proper development of the brain, as well as the environment during the pubescent years has not only immediate, but far reaching impact upon an individual in areas of great import. Areas such as long-term planning, appropriate decision-making and behavior, as well as responsible commitment are closely linked to the overall development of the brain. It is no small wonder that one observes some of the ill-advised choices, lack of commitment in relationships, education and careers as it relates to the neurological and physiological goings-on in the brain of an adolescent and young emerging adult.

A Response

A response would seem necessary at this point to the precursors discussed above relating to apparent contributions made for the phenomenon of broad socialization among emerging adults. Stemming the tide of the allowance of adolescents to experience too much too soon as well as developing and maintaining an appropriate environment regarding the physiological and neurological transformations taking place is certainly a start in the right direction. Bringing a balanced approach of responsiveness and proper

⁵¹Keating, "Cognitive and Brain Development," 49.

expectations for the adolescent is a significant means of preparing the young person for coming adulthood. Requiring accountability as well as developing an understanding of the proper structures of authority is critical for the adolescent to comprehend and, at some level, embrace. These are ingredients that allow us to flourish within a free society such as our own.

Much of the right ingredients for the adolescent depend upon timing. Timing of when and how these young people are exposed to weightier issues, real responsibilities, and acquiring an accountable autonomy is proving to be quite significant. Further, even if the neurological pathways in the adolescent brain are not fully developed, this process gives no excuse to allow irresponsibility and or low levels of commitment in areas of significance.

More than this, an adolescent, and an emerging adult need well-lit path, as well as a firm hand guiding them along life's way. As Elmore states, "What an adolescent needs is an adult who makes appropriate demands and sets appropriate standards for them in a responsive environment of belief and concern."⁵² An adolescent, and later, an emerging adult, needs someone in their lives (preferably a parent, grandparent, employer, and/or spiritual leader) willing to be supportive, patient, attentive to their needs, and yet establishing high expectations and directing them to regularly live up to those expectations.

The brief response above provides a sample of a full-orbed discussion which is forthcoming (chap. 5) concerning proposed solutions for the emerging adult who seems often to elude responsible commitment. A discussion from this chapter has been telling regarding the emerging adult and the elusiveness of responsible commitment. The following chapter is going to focus on a proper biblical perspective and analysis concerning maturity and responsible commitment. How one takes the significant works

⁵²Elmore, *Generation iY*, 66.

that have been completed and then discussed here regarding the emerging adult, and places them in a biblical context and views them through a theological lens is the primary intent of the chapter to come.

CHAPTER 4

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF MATURITY AND RESPONSIBLE COMMITMENT AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

The purpose and intent of chapter 4 is to bring theological clarity and focus to the concepts of maturity and responsible commitment. Particularly, how Scripture reveals the appropriate context and pathway to maturity, along with the characteristics accompanying adulthood. Much of the discussion has primarily been secular in nature and content concerning the emerging adult and responsible commitment. I assume a biblical worldview while not ignoring secular and social scientific research. Therefore, an intentional biblical perspective regarding the above material is to be explored and expounded, as well as a theologically circumspective view of research and theories, much of which were introduced in chapter three.

A Theological Framework

In order to provide a logical and consistent basis for a biblical analysis and critique, I have chosen to utilize what is known by some as Comprehensive Internal framework, or CompIn. CompIn is defined as a sociological framework that is theologically informed.¹ David Powlison developed this framework which is undergirded and driven by three epistemological priorities in order to biblically analyze what secular society has offered as explanation for and solutions toward a construct, phenomenon, etc.² More specifically, these three epistemological priorities are as

¹David Powlison, "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in appendix 4 of *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007), 277-79.

²Ibid.

follows:

The first priority: articulating biblical truth and developing our systematic theology of care for the soul. *The second priority:* exposing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models. *The third priority:* learning what we can from other models.³

These priorities are to be the primary springboards by which the researcher is to provide his biblical analysis.

Although this research is not directly tied to the field of counseling, the philosophical understanding that buttresses these priorities is the same for informing and providing a framework for responsible commitment in the life of a young adult, namely the sufficiency of Scripture. That is not to say Scripture is exhaustive, to be sure. However, it is to say that God's Word is thoroughly capable of informing and transforming an individual, or for that matter an entire segment of the population (e.g., emerging adults), and yet must be applied into situations and lives sensitively and practically. Astutely articulating biblical truth in a useful manner, as well as wielding a discernment that exposes and debunks theories and models that offer options that assert different interpretations of the meaning of mature adulthood is a significant piece in the final analysis regarding responsible commitment in an emerging adult.

Articulating Biblical Truth

By affirming the authority and sufficiency of the Bible to speak to all areas of God's creation, it is then paramount to be able to appropriately articulate biblical truth and develop a systematic theological understanding. In particular, the Bible seeks to reorient our thinking and actions, including one's perspective regarding emerging adulthood. Therefore, the following paragraphs will articulate biblical truth from passages of Scripture regarding maturity and commitment in order to provide a backdrop for appropriate steps and solutions the emerging adult may take in becoming a

³Powlison, "Cure of Souls," 278-79.

responsibly committed, mature adult.

First things first. The beginning of an appropriate path to maturity is that of biblical fear and wisdom. Therefore, the works of Solomon are the first focus primarily due to the unparalleled wisdom granted by God to Solomon.⁴ As author of Proverbs, Solomon begins by emphasizing these truths in the opening of this book of wisdom in chapter 1, verses 2 through 4, and 7:

To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.⁵

Solomon, in a precise and straight-forward manner, provides the aim and purpose of his writing. To know wisdom, instruction, and insight is the first order of business.

Secondly, the *receiving* of these is critical in being wise as it relates to living (i.e.— righteousness, justice, and equity). Further, Solomon specifically notes a particular age (youth) in his introductory remarks. In other words, knowledge and discretion are of great import particularly to a young person, and even more so to one who is about to embark upon the journey to adulthood.

Then Solomon gives a point-blank injection of truth to know, understand and practice wisdom is “the fear of the Lord” (1:7). Immediately an open and honest query may be, “what does it mean to fear the Lord?” This knowledge is not just a knowing, or an intellectual assent to some truth(s). As Kidner asserts, “Knowledge, in its full sense, is a relationship, dependent on revelation and inseparable from character.”⁶ In other words, knowledge and wisdom in their purest form is directly tied to person, a divine being,

⁴The Scripture passages from First Kings 4:29-31 as well as Second Chronicles 1:7-12 reference this truth.

⁵All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

⁶Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2008), 56.

namely God. As Longman recognizes, “As a beginning, this statement [speaking of Proverbs 1:7 quoted above] claims that there is no knowledge apart from a proper attitude and relationship to Yahweh.”⁷ Thus, the understanding of “the fear of the Lord” is not in the sense of being frightened or afraid, but tied to pursuing a healthy and meaningful relationship with the Creator of all things.

Therefore, it is my aim and understanding at the outset to first explicitly recognize that maturity and responsible commitment toward adulthood is most fully known and grasped by and through a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ. On this bedrock of knowledge wed with fearing the Lord, as explained above, rests the biblical preface of a full-orbed comprehension of maturity and commitment. Furthermore, the biblical passages to come will be predicated upon this notion that to fully grasp and grow in wisdom leading to full adulthood is, in many ways, directly linked to knowing God.

Hebrews 5 and maturity/commitment. While the Hebrew writer is taking his readers through a comparative look of Christ’s superiority as high priest over against the Jewish high priest, it becomes apparent that their understanding is not on par with the level of discourse taking place, although it should be. The complexities involving this discussion are many and the expectations are high; however, the Hebrew writer has presumed his exchange would be comprehensible by mature Christian believers. The author appears to realize toward the end of the chapter that his readers cannot digest his writing. With a hint of frustration, he contends in Hebrews 5:11-14,

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

⁷Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 100.

Notice the descriptor the writer uses of his readers, namely that they are *dull* or *slow* of hearing. This word means lazy. As John Owen explains, “The apostle declares that these Hebrews are at fault here. ‘You are, he says, in your listening to the Word, like lazy people, who do no work and achieve nothing because of their dull, inactive inclinations.’”⁸

The author of Hebrews is pointing out that the normal course of events and time in a Christian’s spiritual life are to be marked by steady growth toward maturity, and, if not, something is wrong. As Kistemaker points out, “The words of the author of Hebrews are sharp and pointed. Something has gone drastically wrong in the learning process. By all standards the readers should have graduated, but they have failed their examinations because of a lack of interest, diligence, and adequate preparation.”⁹

In this passage two poignant analogies are utilized in order to drive home the point of uncharacteristically and frankly, unacceptably slow growth toward spiritual maturity. Specifically, the analogies of teacher versus pupil based on mental/intellectual maturity, and solid versus liquid food choice based on physical maturity. In other words, instead of these Hebrews being able to teach others the fundamental truths of Christianity, it was still necessary to teach them “the basic principles of the oracles of God.” Further, instead of these Hebrews being able to enjoy a diet of solid foods, it was still a necessity for them to live on milk. Kistemaker brings clarity and insight to the latter analogy.

The author indicates that just as infants do not know the difference between right and wrong, so the recipients of his letter are unacquainted with the teaching about righteousness. The writer calls adults mature people—those who are constantly making decisions concerning ethical conduct. Their mental and spiritual training is perpetually put to use when they distinguish between good and evil. Adults are

⁸John Owen, *Hebrews*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 1998), 131.

⁹Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 148.

repeatedly confronted with moral decisions that need to be made. And because of their experience, adults are able to make wise choices in distinguishing between good and evil.¹⁰

In other words, the Hebrew author is providing us with the quintessential definition of maturity. Being able to regularly exercise one's powers of discernment to distinguish good from evil, and further make appropriate decisions is foundational in maturing as an adult. Through a steady diet of God's word, along with responsibilities of decision-making and keeping commitments, an emerging adult finds their way toward maturity. Paul reinforces this truth in Romans 12:2 when he declares: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Therefore, it makes sense then that the lack of these ingredients results in delayed growth and maturity in both human and spiritual development.

The expounding of these biblical commentators on this particular passage in Hebrews sounds strangely familiar to much of the research and observations among the demographic of emerging adults. Although, much of what is being said here is spiritual in nature, it has sociological implications and applications as well. The majority of emerging adults, while in their twenties and even approaching thirty, by normative standards are delaying responsible commitment toward characteristic markers of full adulthood. As sociologist Christian Smith poignantly puts it, "Often an uncomfortable unevenness typifies this period, as emerging adults pursue lives with one foot in what seems like helpless dependence and another in what feels like complete autonomy and total responsibility."¹¹

On the other hand, a more common look by psychologists and sociologists such as Sharon Parks describes this hesitancy and delay of adult-like commitments as an

¹⁰Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 150.

¹¹Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 280.

extended phase that has developed and, in some ways, may be embraced by Western culture. Specifically, Parks contends this particular perspective by stating,

Typically, in the years from seventeen to thirty [emerging adulthood] a distinctive mode of meaning-making can emerge, one that has certain adult characteristics but understandably lacks others. This mode of making meaning includes (1) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just. Thus, society finds its orientation, in part, in a commitment to the formation and flourishing of young [emerging] adulthood.¹²

In other words, Parks and others with similarly held positions believe that society is practically obligated to encourage and embrace this developmental period of finding oneself for what could be twelve years or even longer. This perspective is exactly the kind of thinking and practice that the Bible (such as in Hebrews 5) speaks out against and calls society back into a right way of thinking and living concerning human development, specifically young adulthood, as it relates to maturity and adult-like commitment(s).

One can quite easily come to the conclusion that there is little toleration, from a biblical perspective, of a prolonged or delaying of spiritual maturity among those who name the name of Christ. A steady and well-balanced growth rate, over a reasonable period of time, leading to mature and responsible Christians is a primary goal and purpose of the teachings of Scripture. Although God's grace and mercy do provide plenty of opportunities for improvement, there is an expectation of a steady, upward growth as a Christian strives to be like Christ.

Colossians 3 and maturity/commitment. In the Pauline epistle to the Christians at Colossae, the apostle Paul offers practical and useful admonishments regarding maturity and responsible commitment in the latter half of his letter to them. In particular, Paul uses a familiar metaphoric illustration of the changing of clothes. As

¹²Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 6-7.

Robert Wall explains, “Paul’s choice of metaphors draws from Jewish teaching, where dress symbolizes the character of a community’s relationship to God: taking off vice and putting on true devotion to God is a change of spiritual clothes.”¹³ For many theologians and Christians in general, it is known as the “putting off” and “putting on” passage. The specific passage to be explored at this juncture is from Colossians 3:8-14.

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Here in his discussion, Paul is first explicating negatively (vv. 8-9), the sense of growth and maturity as believers in Christ. Negatively, in this context, is defined as what not do, or the sense of “putting off,” denying, and intentionally avoiding wrong and sinful tendencies that inhibit spiritual and social growth and cause division among relationships. As commentator Robert Wall explains, “In this case the sins are social and deal primarily with speech that reveals hatred toward others and usually results in broken fellowship. The real issue at stake when people talk with each other is not so much the verbal transmission of ideas, but how those ideas affect human relationships.”¹⁴

Specifically, this passage points out five social ills/sins that are to be denied, avoided, and laid aside by maturing Christian believers: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. Murray Harris appropriately and concisely defines, in the same order as listed in the previous sentence, these repudiated sins as “chronic anger (wrath), a passionate outburst of anger (anger), malicious spite (malice), abusive, [untruthful], or

¹³Robert Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 142.

¹⁴Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 140-41.

scurrilous language directed against God or a human being (slander), and foul language, obscene speech (obscene talk).”¹⁵ Further, Paul puts an emphasis on lying concerning others, etc. Since the old man has been “put off,” being truthful in one’s conversation and practices is a hallmark of a maturing Christian believer.

Positively, the apostle Paul begins in Colossians 3:10 to admonish the “putting on” of the new man in Christ. It is interesting the Paul uses the word *neon* here in the Greek language to describe the “new man.” As Gordon Clark clarifies, “Neos properly means a young man. Perhaps Paul was hinting that the Colossians were young, recently converted Christians.”¹⁶ What makes this note an interesting one is how it relates to the emerging adult. Scripture is not simply suggesting but is giving an imperative for young men and women to transition toward behaving as mature believers in Christ (i.e., spiritual adults). While not a complete parallel, there are copious amounts of implications and applications from this text of Scripture coinciding with the emerging adult populace. Specifically, the following verses give a prescription of behaviors and actions that are becoming of a mature and responsibly committed Christian believer.

The Christian adage is one that is worth repeating here: “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” Paul asserts that one’s cultural origins, socioeconomic status, or even past religious tendencies and practices, Christ is the source and equalizer of who we are in God’s eyes. As Clark explains, “Social distinctions are unimportant and Christ is absolute in every respect.”¹⁷ Harris summarizes well Paul’s assertion here: “In the new Humanity [putting on of the new man], just as old practices were abandoned, so too traditional distinctions are obliterated, whether they be racial, ceremonial, cultural, or

¹⁵Murray Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 149.

¹⁶Gordon Clark, *Colossians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1979), 115.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 118.

social.”¹⁸ Further, Wall inserts an implication at this point by stating, “The gospel claimed that the poor and powerless were the equal of the ruling-class rich; the love of God gave value to society’s marginal members within a world whose greed and indifference victimized them.”¹⁹ The power of Christ brings not only a transformation within an individual, but the home and community in which the gospel permeates.

The author of Colossians then proceeds to provide the characteristic behaviors resulting from Christ being the source and fountainhead of the new man that has been newly clothed. Paul utilizes five virtues over against the five vices/sins discussed in the previous verses to reveal the behavior and lifestyle transformation of a maturing Christian believer. These virtues/character traits are compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. As Wall summarizes, “The moral result of salvation in the life of God’s people is holiness. According to his [Paul’s] gospel, such a moral reversal is the ‘fruit’ of conversion.”²⁰ These virtues are a description of God’s saving activity made possible by his son, Jesus Christ.

Verses 13 and 14 then give the logical progression of how the virtues listed in verse twelve are realized and fleshed out in the lives of Christian believers. Since believers are no longer bound by their vices and sometimes evil intent toward others, they are liberated in Christ to be able to genuinely offer forgiveness to others who wrong them in any way. As Harris aptly puts it, “The Lord readily forgave you; so you, for your part, ought to follow his example and readily forgive.”²¹ Further, the bond, or glue, that holds all of these virtues together is love. Rather than simply an additional virtue, Paul is expressing the motivation and foundation for the virtues being on display in the life of the

¹⁸Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 154.

¹⁹Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 144.

²⁰Ibid., 146.

²¹Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 172.

Christian believer. As Clark argues, “If love is simply one more virtue in addition to the others, it could hardly be a bond that united them. It [love] is the systematic unity of all the virtues. Love means being compassionate, generous, forgiving, truthful, and observing all other divine laws.”²²

It is in these verses (Col 3:8-14) that Paul beautifully gives one a true contrast of the world’s way of living to the way of living that should be the very fabric of the maturation process of every believer in Jesus Christ. As social beings, who are often not in isolation but in many and varying relationships, this passage in Colossians relays well, both negatively and positively, the level of commitment and responsibility that one should have as a maturing adult in society. As Tim Elmore considers marks of maturity, much of what he purports involves others and, at some level, integrates these virtues Paul asserts in the book of Colossians. Elmore states that “a mature person possesses a spirit of humility, expresses gratitude consistently, is able to keep long-term commitments, and knows how to prioritize others before themselves.”²³ Being able to successfully navigate the complexities of relationships with the characteristics of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and compassion is truly a solid package of evidence of growth and maturity for the emerging adult.

Second Peter 1 and maturity/commitment. The apostle Peter begins his second letter, in particular verses three through eight of chapter one, with a marvelous discourse that results in the reader having a fuller understanding of the progression in maturation as a Christian believer. He begins with the foundation, namely salvation in Christ Jesus and logically progresses to God’s promises, and then to the supplemental

²²Clark, *Colossians*, 119.

²³Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 68.

virtues all Christian believers should aspire to grasp in their day-to-day living. The passage found in 2 Peter 1:3-8 reads as follows:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The beginning of this portion of Scripture holds a critical component of properly understanding this pericope. Peter asserts that God has given us, and continues to give us, everything we need to live our lives according to his standards and direction (verse 3). As Kistemaker explicates,

He [God] wants us to live in harmony with his Word by honoring, loving, and serving him. Eternal life is not an ideal that becomes reality when we depart from this earthly scene. On the contrary, we possess eternal life through our daily exercise of love for God and our fellow man. By obeying God's will in our lives we practice godliness and experience the possession of eternal life.²⁴

In other words, the apostle Peter is elucidating the truth that as God's own, Christian believers have been granted to live, grow, and mature in such a way that pleases God and, as a result, bask in the enjoyment of His pleasures and promises.

Furthermore, Peter points out that as Christian believers, through God's marvelous promises, we participate in the divine nature. Kistemaker provides insight when discussing the divine nature by purporting, "He [Peter] says that we participate in God's nature, not in God's being. He has chosen the term nature because it indicates growth, development, and character."²⁵ The purpose of participating in the divine nature, as John Calvin explains, is "To render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may

²⁴Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 246.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 248.

so speak, to deify us.”²⁶ Understanding the concept of nature in this context brings obvious implications and application, particularly as to what follows, in terms of the emerging adult and maturation, responsible commitment.

In verses 5 through 7, Peter lists the seven qualities, or virtues, that are to supplement a Christian’s faith in Christ. The author begins by asserting, “Make every effort,” as to emphasize the weight of responsibility falling on that of the Christian believer. In other words, the Christian believer is to put forth every effort to following Christ in application of the commands and admonishments found in God’s Word. The apostle Paul summarizes well, both God’s initiative in saving a person and man’s responsibility, in Philippians 2:12-13 when he writes, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

The root of these seven virtues is faith, the reliance of the believer in Jesus Christ. It is also worth noting that the last virtue Peter discusses is love, as is highlighted as the “bonding agent” of the virtues Paul propounds in the previous discussed passage of Colossians 3. In the middle of these two book ends, come virtues/traits called for in the growing and maturing of the Christian believer and are a progressive list: goodness, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, and brotherly affection. The author lists these as the building blocks of faith that require daily and intentional effort.

In other words, these virtues do not come naturally to the Christian believer, but come as a result of work in the Word of God and prayer that God’s grace would enable one to possess and regularly display a way of living that is pleasing to Christ. Peter then reveals the purpose and consequences of taking serious the Christian way of

²⁶John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles: The Second Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 369.

life in verse 8 when he proclaims, “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The purpose is to grow and mature, becoming responsibly committed to a way of living that brings productive and effective benefits to the one who practices such virtues, as well as to those who are in close contact with the same. As Kistemaker asserts, “If we possess these virtues, says Peter, and if they continue to increase, we are reaping an abundant harvest. The consequence of this development is that we are not ineffective and unproductive in our spiritual lives.”²⁷

Once again, another passage from the Bible has given a clear and conspicuous portrait of the process of spiritual growth and maturation in the life of a Christian believer. At the same time, many of the same truths and principles offered in the above passage(s) are applicable to the expectations of growth and maturation of the emerging adult. It has been the intent of the research, in the preceding paragraphs, to carefully and thoughtfully articulate biblical truths that elucidate the expectations and commands that are spelled out in God’s Word regarding maturation and commitment. In so doing, the groundwork has been laid in order to perform biblical critical analysis regarding two of the major secular theories and research that has been put forth concerning the emerging adult, specifically as it relates to their maturity and responsible commitment.

Exposing, Debunking, and Reinterpreting

As explained in the beginning of this chapter, a Comprehensive Internal framework, or CompIn is being utilized for biblical analysis. CompIn is defined as a sociological framework that is theologically informed. David Powlison developed this framework which is undergirded and driven by three epistemological priorities in order to biblically analyze what secular society has offered as explanation for and solutions

²⁷Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, 253.

toward a construct, phenomenon, etc.²⁸ The first epistemological priority of “articulating biblical truth” has been utilized and now the focus will be on the second priority of this framework, namely “exposing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models.”²⁹

In most instances, ungodliness is not unusually vile. As a matter of fact, it becomes quite an ease to conform to the ebb and flow of the cultural and secular moorings of society. The Bible then must be the standard for exposing sin and error. As Powlison explains, “Theories systematize and rationalize the unbelief of those who create and embrace those theories. The Bible always conducts a secondary polemic in order to defend and clarify the truth and to protect people from plausible falsehoods.”³⁰ The underlying assumption is the Bible stands as the basis and foundation by which we judge and evaluate one’s way of thinking, behavior patterns, human development, even the ideas, beliefs and theories of the maturation process of the emerging adult. Rather than looking within to find one’s direction, a biblical perspective and worldview looks without, to the Bible. In the coming paragraphs, theories and research, much of which are discussed in the previous chapter, related to maturing and responsible commitment are to be exposed and evaluated by the Bible in order to debunk, if necessary, and realign beliefs and theories to biblical truth concerning this recognized stage of human development (emerging adulthood).

As Powlison asserts, “The writers of the Bible intend to provide eyeglasses that enable all seeing.”³¹ Although the Bible does not purport to be an exhaustive resource for all things, understanding the principles and truths found within its pages gives one a theological gaze that then cultivates a wide-ranging knowledge. Again, Powlison explains,

²⁸Powlison, “Cure of Souls,” 277-79.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 278.

³¹Ibid., 281.

Our doctrine must control our study, and our study must flesh out our doctrine. We best study human psychology [and/or human development] not by submitting ourselves to the world's deviant psychologies but by looking at the world through the gaze of our own systematic biblical understanding.³²

By following the second epistemological priority of Powlison's model, as explicated above, one can properly decipher and filter the useful portions of human development constructs and theories concerning emerging adults while debunking areas of concern that are not biblically salvageable.

A biblical view of the Perry Scheme and Arnett's Socialization Theory. In general, many developmental theories are based upon presuppositions that are humanistic and typically devoid of biblical guidance and perspective, including the Perry Scheme and Jeffrey Arnett's work regarding broad socialization among emerging adults. At the same time, theories do have driving underpinnings, whether considered good or bad, moving the constructs toward positive growth and a purposeful end. As John David Trentham points out,

The Perry Scheme is inherently values-laden as it proposes a progressive journey toward a more desirable state of epistemological identity. From a biblical perspective—which defines truth according to God's explicit revelation in Scripture—one must carefully assess and interact with developmental theories in light of how their guiding presuppositions compare with biblical precedents.³³

In a similar vein, Arnett and his theory of socialization among emerging adults sees a primary goal of the process of development during this period as cultivating identity and sources of meaning, what is to be valued, and what is to be lived for.³⁴ Therefore, viewing developmental theories require a theological lens to properly assess and thus utilize the redeemable qualities and insights of such findings, etc.

³²Powlison, "Cure of Souls," 280.

³³John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 122.

³⁴Jeffrey Arnett, "Broad and Narrow Socialization: The Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57, no. 3 (August 1995): 618-19.

It is worth noting at this point, either of these significant developmental theories is based in, or even suggestive of, fallacy. Much of the research is useful and accurate in observing phenomenon occurring in the life span, particularly during the years of emerging adulthood (18-29). The inherent flaw comes from the beginning point and underlying assumptions of the theorists and researchers of said theories and constructs. Specifically, from beginning to end, an anthropocentric view is understood with most all secular theorists and their research, including Perry and Arnett. Whereas, a biblical worldview has from beginning to end, a theocentric view underpinning the work and perspective of its adherents and their research.

The irony of individualism. At the heart of many human development theories, particularly the Perry Scheme and Arnett's socialization theory, is that of individualism. The individual is placed at the center of the process of development, and even though community and social interactions are critical components, self-identity and actualization are primal.³⁵ Arnett purports individualism to be "the most important and influential source of broad socialization, because it forms the ideological foundation for socialization."³⁶ Therefore, this ideology of individualism allows young people, specifically emerging adults, to have a broad range of freedom toward significant life choices such as marriage, parenthood, and long-term work which are some of the very hallmarks of adulthood.

However, individualism, particularly during the emerging adult years, often

³⁵John David Trentham, in his dissertation, notes the signification of the primary assumption of individualism, positively and negatively, found in many human development theories as well as others such as Brett Webb-Mitchell in the article "Leaving Development Behind and Beginning Our Pilgrimage," in *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). Many of the notions and significance concerning individualism within human development theory stem from the seminal work of Abraham Maslow and his construct of a hierarchy of needs.

³⁶Arnett, "Broad and Narrow Socialization," 619-25.

results in an elusive and even a delay in the purpose and goals of socialization itself.³⁷ According to Setran and Kiesling, “individualization³⁸ of identity development tends to lead to one of two possible extremes: anxiety or apathy.”³⁹ In other words, the perceived freedom of the years of emerging adulthood bring with it an ironic backlash of serious roles and responsibilities not heretofore undertaken and, therefore, tends to lead to becoming overwhelmed the majority of the time or the development of a pervasive attitude of “I don’t care.” Further, sociologist James Cote would argue that the most haunting emotion plaguing today’s emerging adults is not guilt but anxiety. When the ideal of freedom is peeled back, what becomes apparent is the lack of guiding social norms and structures. This setting tends to make life more difficult due to less intentionality placed toward meaningful and lasting choices. These choices become burdensome for many young people, particularly those from an impoverished background and with psychiatric challenges, etc.⁴⁰ As Schwartz explains, the concept and underlying construct of individualization tends to be fraught with a “tyranny of freedom and choice.”⁴¹

Not only is anxiety a frequent and flooding emotive response resulting from this individualization that comes with emerging adulthood, but an attitude of apathy as well. Cote calls such an attitude: “default individualization.” He contends that young emerging adults typically select “a number of default options now available in youth

³⁷Jeffrey Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood,” in *Handbook of Socialization*, eds. Grusec and Hastings (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 227. The three goals of socialization, as promoted by Arnett, are outlined in chap. 3 of this work, pp. 49ff.

³⁸Note that the terms “individualism” and “individualization” are used interchangeably in this section as they are synonymous and conceptually have the same meaning.

³⁹David Setran and Chris Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 59.

⁴⁰James Cote, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 58.

⁴¹B. Schwartz, “Self Determination: The Tyranny of Freedom,” *American Psychologist* 55, no.1 (January 2000): 80.

culture, by which they follow paths of least resistance and effort, as in the imitation of the latest fashion and music trends.”⁴² Ultimately, the concern of such latitude in broad socialization/individualization among emerging adulthood is the creation of a narcissistic culture that has little concern for community flourishing.

So, what are the logical results from a majority of emerging adults who appear to reflect attitudes and dispositions of either anxiety or apathy? How does one sum up the context of broad socialization and individualism among emerging adults? Sociological researcher Christian Smith gives a poignant answer to these questions:

Emerging adulthood is at heart about postponing settling down into real adulthood. It is about possibilities, options, and openness. In its pure form it is about spending a long period unmarried, without children, and not settled into a real career or residence. Emerging adulthood as a social fact means not making commitments, not putting down roots, not setting a definite course for the long term. Emerging adulthood entails few significant obligations, [and] relatively little accountability to others.⁴³

That is not to say that emerging adulthood is all negative in its cultural features. It is to say that American individualism that offers a freedom from immediate family and social constraints that had been previously realized is also freighted with the burdens of individual responsibility for which the majority of emerging adults are ill-prepared.

Placing a theological lens on individualism. As biblical truth has been articulated in the preceding pages, the passage in Colossians 3 comes to mind as it relates to combatting this notion and human tendency toward self-centered individualism. In particular, the five virtues the author calls upon the people at Colossae, as well as present day Christian believers, to embrace and practice: *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*. What is unique about this list is the sociological and

⁴²James Cote, “Emerging Adulthood as Institutionalized Moratorium,” in *Handbook of Socialization*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Paul D. Hastings (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 92.

⁴³Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 215.

community focus these virtues have. As Peter O'Brien observes, "Each of the five graces [virtues] with which God's [people] are to be clothed shows how Christians should behave in their dealing with others."⁴⁴ In other words, these biblical virtues train and promote how one focuses on the good of others and how a community flourishes by maintaining relationships with others and reconciling relationships as is necessary. Individualism, on the other hand, affords little time for focus on others and the responsibilities that come with a commitment to another person's well-being.

The implications for intentionally displaying these, particularly in the life of an emerging adult, are many. As Robert Wall aptly points out,

The virtues listed in Colossians include words that carry a profound emotional content referring to how one feels when responding to another in need. Luke uses the word compassion to characterize the Good Samaritan's sympathetic response to his needy neighbor (Luke 10:33) and again for the forgiving father's happy reaction to his prodigal son's return home (Luke 15:20). [These virtues] pertain to public occasions when the community can express its status as God's people through concrete responses to those who are last, least, lost, and lame among us.⁴⁵

A biblical viewpoint, with a focus on one's Creator and fellow man, is one avenue of bringing positive maturation along with a grasp of the necessity of responsible commitment, not for the purpose of the individual only, but for others in one's life. While individualism among the emerging adult populace is certainly not the only element that is due critical analysis, it is, in many ways, the impetus for other issues such as parenting, personal responsibility, and manhood/womanhood. Therefore, in order to provide solid and viable solutions to the problem concerning the lack of appropriate maturation among the emerging adult populace, particularly the elusiveness of responsible commitment, it is of critical significance to utilize a biblical perspective and worldview as fleshed out in this chapter. This biblical foundation will serve as the basis of the proposed avenues of attaining and maintaining responsible commitment by the

⁴⁴Peter O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 201.

⁴⁵Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 146-47.

emerging adult who is serious about the proper transition to mature adulthood.

CHAPTER 5

A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMITMENT: INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING

While the area of responsible commitment appears elusive during the emerging adult years, a biblical critical analysis has revealed God’s design of maturity and responsible commitment. If the Creator has designed these attributes and qualities as such, they are attainable. This chapter offers viable options and pathways to solutions of building in, and imparting responsible commitment to the emerging adult. More than this, chapter 5 reveals how the emerging adult matures in a timely fashion. Rather than a winding road to adulthood, as Arnett purports, this chapter further seeks to straighten some of the curves in that road to offer more of a “straight path” to maturity and responsible commitment as an adult.¹

CompIn’s Third Priority

The third priority utilized from the CompIn framework is “learning what we can from other models [and research].”² As discussed earlier, grounding one’s thinking in the Bible and developing a biblical worldview concerning maturity and responsible commitment is not concluding or purporting the Bible to be exhaustive in these matters. Rather, the conclusion is that the Bible is sufficient in these matters and provides a clear guide and barometer for the surrounding cultural mores of the day. As Powlison asserts,

The Bible freely co-opts surrounding cultures as one aspect of God’s redemptive,

¹As discussed in previous chapters, Jeffrey Arnett gives a descriptive of the emerging adult’s journey to adulthood as a winding road, giving the picture of a slow and laborious process to maturity and responsible commitment that so marks adulthood.

²David Powlison, “Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies,” in appendix 4 of *The Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007), 279.

transformative working. Redemption works with what is at hand, the ‘human documents,’ both individual and social, and the cultural products. [Therefore,] extrabiblical knowledge—of ourselves and our world—is always the grist with which biblical truth works continually to extend the range and depth of understanding. We learn, critique, reinterpret, convert, apply.³

Specifically, in the area of human development, one is able to cogently filter and synthesize the related research and models of psycho-social constructs available concerning emerging adulthood and responsible commitment, and employ them through a theological framework with a clear-eyed grasp of God’s truth.

Primarily, the scholarly research in this thesis concerning emerging adulthood has been focused on Perry’s work concerning intellectual development during the college years and Arnett’s work concerning socialization of the emerging adult. From a biblical worldview, this research has numerous redeemable elements. For example, Perry’s work involves a maturation process that leads to some level of commitment by the maturing young person. Perry is right to observe and articulate the necessity for responsible commitment in the forward movement toward adulthood. However, as Trentham rightly notes,

The end goal prescribed by the Perry scheme is “commitment in relativism,” an epistemological position in which one maintains commitment to his vetted structure of belief and lives his life accordingly—all the while remaining open to reforming his belief system, given his awareness that knowledge and values are not objective and never certain. As such, Perry’s assumptions provide for the possibility of interaction with certain biblical tenets, including the progressive nature of development, and the rejection of logical positivism. It must be realized, however that Perry’s pre-suppositions identify the ultimate goal of human development as necessarily self-focused and centered in [the here and now].⁴

As a result, there must be a departure from the overall end goal Perry has in mind, namely a view of a man-centered world grasping at all he or she sees as worthy, yet temporal pursuits over against a God-centered world reaching for all that is God-pleasing,

³Powlison, “Cure of Souls,” 279.

⁴John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 127.

eternal pursuits.

In the same way, Arnett's work involving the aspects of socialization during the emerging adult years has a plethora of astute and pragmatic offerings, providing perspective and direction in navigating the often tumultuous waters of this period of human development. Arnett concludes, from well over a decade of research, that emerging adults view becoming self-sufficient, independent persons as the true marker for reaching the milestone of adulthood.⁵ He further notes that the three criteria for this marker are, "taking responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent."⁶

What is more, according to Arnett, is the journey to full adulthood is set in the context of broad socialization. Arnett explains *broad*, "in the sense that this is when people have the most freedom to decide for themselves how to live and what to do and when to do it."⁷ At the heart of this freedom is the glorification of the individual, and thus individualism. Therefore, Arnett observes, "Socialization is something that is done by the individual rather than imposed by outside social or institutional forces."⁸

Yet, to Arnett's own admission, the freedom and supposed autonomy that come with broad socialization during the emerging adult years is often fraught with lonely responsibility. Arnett concedes "socialization can become so broad that it provides inadequate support and guidance, so that the goals of socialization [such as self-sufficiency] may remain elusive."⁹ Furthermore, Arnett realizes the research, and the

⁵Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 209.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Jeffrey Arnett, "Socialization in Emerging Adulthood," in *Handbook of Socialization*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Paul D. Hastings (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 213.

⁸Ibid., 214.

⁹Ibid., 227.

implications thereto, are sparse and much is still largely unknown concerning the effects of broad socialization during emerging adulthood. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will focus on viable ways forward for maturity, particularly responsible commitment, in the emerging adult from the aforementioned research and applicable related research from a biblical and theological framework.

Commitment Re-Visited

Commitment is defined in several ways. Commitment could be defined as the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, or as an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action.¹⁰ This definition fits well with Perry's perspective of commitment and relativism. According to psychologist James Marcia, "Commitment refers to the development of settled conviction about one's beliefs and ways of living."¹¹ Commitment is often seen as restrictive, in a negative sense, particularly by the emerging adult. As a result, significant decisions that are laden with commitment, such as vocation, marriage, parenthood, and living independently are often delayed, and even avoided, during the emerging adult years (18-29). Further, the elusiveness of commitment among emerging adults is an unfortunate by-product of the broad socialization/individualization during this stage in the life course. To provide some insight to this critical, yet slow-reached, ingredient of adulthood, brief examples of the prevailing notions of commitment are offered below.

An Existentialist View of Commitment

Much in the same vein as Perry and Fowler, professor and psychologist Sharon Parks gives an intriguing and existentialistic view of commitment among the emerging

¹⁰James Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," in *Human Development*, 3rd ed., ed. Rhett Diessner (Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill, 2008), 184.

¹¹Ibid.

adult populace of which she summarily calls “commitment within relativism.” In particular, Parks’ view of commitment during emerging adulthood is described in two stages: probing commitment and tested commitment.¹² Particularly, Parks purports,

[In this first stage] of probing commitment, one explores possible forms of truth and their fittingness to one’s experience of self and world. Both the content of commitment and one’s personal style of address to commitment are sorted out only over time. [The second era, termed] tested commitment, the self is not only ‘self-aware’ but also more profoundly ‘self-reflective’ and has the quality of centeredness—in marked contrast to the ambivalence or dividedness of the earlier period.¹³

In other words, Parks views commitment as a slow process that begins with exploration of what an emerging adult views as true, relatively speaking, and, over a period of time and experiential encounters, begins to settle into a commitment in which he or she can live within the structure of this meaning-making construct.

To gain further insight into Parks’ understanding of commitment is to note the perspective given concerning authority. Parks, along with other scholars and socio-scientific researchers, purport the shift of authority in the emerging adult goes from without to within. As Parks explains, “When the locus of authority shifts from ‘assumed authority’ outside the self to inner authority, it does so by means of an authority that is external, still ‘out there,’ but that I now choose, because this authority makes sense to me in terms of my observations and lived experience.”¹⁴ While authority is viewed and respected in its proper place, a forging of responsible commitment must ultimately come from within, according to Parks.

The sense of meaning making, as it were, is critical, from an existentialist’s perspective, on the path to responsible commitment and adulthood. While communal expectations and tensions have significance, it is decisively the emerging adult who

¹²Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith and Commitment* (San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1991), 84.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 86.

chooses how and when to “grow up.” As Parks notes the emerging adult “accepts testing, struggle, and tentativeness as a ‘place to stand’ over-against and apart from previously held patterns of meaning and affiliation.”¹⁵ Finally, Parks concludes on these thoughts with what sounds appropriate and even inspiring. She states, “The fragile young adult must stand over-against the world to observe it, to critique it, to test it, and to save it.”¹⁶

From a biblical worldview, perspectives such as Parks are found wanting in the fact that authority is objective and final completely outside of one’s self, namely with God. There is this natural tendency to push against authority *extra nos*, or outside of ourselves. The issue with Parks’ and other social science researchers who take a full or partial existentialistic approach is that, as discussed previously, it is anthropocentric. This perspective encourages one to look within for authority, strength, and the right direction. From a biblical perspective, this advice is not completely conducive to responsible commitment and maturity in the emerging adult. Pointing out the right and wrong pathways for growing toward an adult who is committed and a person of integrity must come from an objective standard outside of the realm of our own meaning-making. An alternative perspective concerning commitment and maturity is now offered in brief.

An Evangelical Perspective of Commitment

The winding road of emerging adulthood, as Arnett and others put it, is often seen and implied as a time of allowable and understood exploration for those in their twenties. Not that this time is always deemed appropriate and commendable, but a sort of resignation to the fact that this period, if it be an unproductive, even inconclusive meandering towards adulthood, that is okay. However, Setran and Kiesling explain, “The problem with the idea that the twenties are a time to get youthful passions worked out of

¹⁵Parks, *The Critical Years*, 94.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

their systems is that engagement in these passions tends to do the exact opposite—it works these things into their systems in ways that will be challenging to extricate later on.”¹⁷ That is to say, pursuits and passions regularly engaged in as a young emerging adult, become habits, patterns, and routines that are ingrained within the mind and daily living of a mature adult. Therefore, it is wise for the emerging adult to choose, and build into their lives, pursuits and passions that will lead to fruitful and productive habits and routines toward responsible commitment as an adult.

According to Jeffrey Satinover, habitual patterns produce real physiological and psycho-sociological changes in the emerging adult. He notes in his research,

Over time the choices we make fall into ever more predictable patterns because the pattern of choices tends to be self-reinforcing. As we practice certain behaviors, they become easier and easier, and we become ‘better and better’ at them. The more we choose them, the more deeply embedded they become, and so on. What starts out as relatively free becomes ever less so as time goes on.¹⁸

From an evangelical’s perspective, this observation falls under the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. As Galatians 6:7 states, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” In other words, one’s choices and patterns of behaviors will have evidenced consequences. However, the most difficult truth of this principle to grasp is the time span between the sowing and the reaping. As Setran and Kiesling explain, “Emerging adults have simply not lived enough of life to see the ways in which [choices and patterns of behaviors] often bears gradual fruit [consequences] over the course of years and decades.”¹⁹

From a biblical viewpoint, making proper choices and exhibiting appropriate behaviors presume a divine intervention. In other words, the emerging adult, or any

¹⁷David Setran and Chris Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 42.

¹⁸Jeffrey Satinover, *Feathers of the Skylark: Compulsion, Sin and Our Need for a Messiah* (Westport, CT: Hamewith Books, 1996), 4, 8.

¹⁹Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 42.

person for that matter, cannot, by himself, transform his life, but needs God's intervening.

To clearly illustrate this necessity, Titus 3:3-7 declares,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

It is God, through Christ who saves a person, regenerating and renewing them by the lavish work of the Holy Spirit. This work of salvation is what puts someone, in this case the emerging adult, on the pathway to proper decision-making and right living.

Therefore, from an evangelical perspective, it becomes important during the emerging adulthood years to wed the grace and mercy of God in saving and sanctifying a person with developing patterns of choices and behaviors that properly engrave the emerging adult's character in ways that are conducive to becoming a responsibly committed adult. As Setran and Kiesling further note, "Emerging adults must begin to understand the power of every mundane moment in shaping their future destinies."²⁰

A Way Forward: Proposed Pathways to Aptly Reach Adulthood

The question looming in the undercurrent of the scholarly research is: "What are some viable solutions and pathways to a timely development of a responsibly committed, young adult?" Much of the research concerning the emerging adult is primarily descriptive in nature. While some researchers and practitioners have offered proposed pathways to reach adulthood in a timely way, the overwhelming majority of psychologists and sociologists found and cited in my research have only observed, noted, and described the developmental period of emerging adulthood. They have done so quite

²⁰Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 43.

well, however. Although most of these same researchers would admit that it should not take as long as it is taking for many in this populace to reach the destination of full adulthood, most offer little proposals regarding how to engage in the pursuit of reaching this destination in a more timely fashion. Therefore, I will suggest a more prescriptive approach for emerging adults in order to aid them in becoming a responsibly committed adult.

Intentionality

In order to navigate the new waters of freedom, intentionality becomes a critical ingredient in the life of an emerging adult. For most, intentionality does not come naturally. Facing each day, week, month and year with effective purpose and commitment takes an intentional approach from the emerging adult. The Bible provides an accurate view and advice as to how to combat anxiety with intentionality. The New Living Translation of Ephesians 5:15-17 says, “So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.”

Living with intentionality, as the above passage instructs, allows the emerging adult to focus on at least two significant factors for living. The first admonition is to be careful how you live, not as a fool but as a wise person. Simply living daily with the mindset of making thoughtful decisions toward other people and what it is that needs to be accomplished for that particular day. Having intentionality toward these things tends to minimize the seeming randomness of many young emerging adults. Secondly, Dunn and Sundene note, “Intentionality teaches us to make the most of every opportunity.”²¹ Capitalizing on the opportunities presented brings satisfaction in knowing you have taken advantage of what is placed before you. Not only satisfaction, but at the same time,

²¹Richard Dunn and Jana Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 91.

seizing opportunities presented brings a minimizing of anxiety due to squelching the factors of indecisiveness and opportunities lost.

Mentoring and Community

These years between adolescence and adulthood represent a pivot point for the emerging adult. Further, Setran and Kiesling assert, “Without question, emerging adulthood acts as a ‘hinge’ moment in many individuals’ lives.”²² Further, Dunn and Sundene add, “The nature of emerging adulthood, more than any other life stage, provides great capacity to make bold moves in response to a rethinking of convictions and commitments. A plethora of yet-to-be-determined major life decisions and commitments lie directly ahead.”²³ For these reasons and those stated previously, the concept and practice of mentoring is one of the most significant aspects and forms of enhancing development during these liminal years. Sharon Parks gives a cogent and concise summation of the significance of community and mentoring as she explains,

For the [emerging] adult, the mentoring era finds its most powerful form in a mentoring community. Young adulthood is nurtured into being most powerfully by the availability of a community that poses an alternative to an earlier assumed knowing, vividly embodies the potential of the emerging self, and offers the promise of a new network of belonging. The young adult most thrives when there is access to a network of belonging anchored in the strength of worthy and grounding meanings that provide a sense of distance both from the conventions of the young adult’s past and from the larger society with which the young adult must still negotiate terms of entry.²⁴

This shift from adolescence to emerging adulthood offers a unique, once in a lifetime, opportunity for mentoring and community to make decades’ worth of impact in a reasonably short period of time.

Moreover, the emerging adult years mark the beginning of a time in which

²²Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 205.

²³Dunn and Sundene, *Shaping the Journey*, 46-47.

²⁴Parks, *The Critical Years*, 89-90.

they move beyond a passive receiving of others' commitments and begin to forge their own beliefs, convictions and patterns of behavior. As Setran and Kiesling accurately explain, "There is no sense in which this [period of time] marks a complete independence. Guidance is still desperately needed, but it is guidance that is dialogical and mutual rather than unidirectional."²⁵ Emerging adults need someone who can faithfully mentor them by facilitating and nurturing the convictions, development, and even correction in relation to their religious, relationship, and vocational commitments.²⁶

For many young people during this stage of development, the various venues such as religious, academic, athletic and the like are now gone, leaving them lacking in a sense of place. Emerging adults often feel a lack of rootedness. They do not have a sense of "place" as it were and, as a result, have no deep-seated connection with no one person, place, or group in particular. As Dunn and Sundene observe,

This next generation travels the world making friends and uses the World Wide Web to cultivate those friendships. They live diffused—cultivating global relational lives alongside their local relational lives. The emerging generation has a kind of third-culture experience. Some authors have called them 'Mosaics'—that also gives a sense that they really are not of one place.²⁷

In other words, many emerging adults have no true and deep connection with whom to live life alongside and to be held accountable to the type of responsible commitments indicative of an adult.

A Revealing Disconnect

In the research efforts of Christian Smith, he noted the striking disconnect between emerging adults and older adults. He states, "Most of the meaningful, routine relationships that most emerging adults have are with other emerging adults."²⁸

²⁵Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 206.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Dunn and Sundene, *Shaping the Journey*, 244.

²⁸Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.

Primarily, those with whom emerging adults work, go to school, engage in recreational activities, have romantic relationships, etc. are most always other emerging adults. While it is true that their bosses or teachers are older, their relationships are formal, distant and often purposefully restrictive. The relationships with older adults are typically only functional in nature, meaning that any significance of the relationship dissipates once work or class is finished.²⁹ What is more, Smith notes,

This means most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by their peers—people of the same age and in the same boat—who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do. It is sociologically a very odd way to help young people come of age, to learn how to be responsible, capable, mature adults.³⁰

Further to the point is the waning significance of the relationships between emerging adults and family members, even parents. From the time of adolescence, parents seem to willingly abdicate their role as mentor, and see their children's peers supplanting their significance. Parents take cues from the adolescent that they want to be left alone, and acquiesce to their request, convincing themselves of having little to no influence during this stage in their children's lives. Setran and Kiesling further point out, "Once emerging adults leave home, such a mentality is embraced all the more."³¹ While parental relationships often remain positive and active during the emerging adult years, they are usually renegotiated in such a manner as to maintain distance and restricted in order to keep parents in the dark about certain facets of their lives. As Parks points out,

On the one hand, the young adult has struggled, as we have seen, to push away from the safe but constraining harbor of inherited family, conventional knowing, in order to achieve some sense of a capable and distinctive self. On the other hand, the young adult is not yet engaged in the full range of adult commitments.³²

Emerging adults have very few, if any, older adults that are a significant part of their

²⁹Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 234.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 208.

³²Parks, *The Critical Years*, 96.

lives, who are guiding, giving wisdom, modeling, sharing insights concerning what it is to be a responsible, mature adult.

Emerging adults are looking, as it were, through a narrow window of advice, often receiving suggestions, perspectives, and wisdom of those who are around the same age and maturity level as they. Smith gives an accurate and succinct view of what is lacking when emerging adults are subverting significant relationships with older adults:

This relative social isolation ... has major potential consequences, many of them negative. It constrains exposure to potential older adult role models, mentors, and friends. It facilitates a narrow view of reality seen through the perspective of the emerging adult social position, validated and reinforced by the dominant others in the constrained social network. It obstructs a more natural process of integration into the social circles and practices of the fully adult world.³³

Therefore, the need among the emerging adult populace for community, specifically an intergenerational community, is great. More specifically, a structural framework for mentoring and guidance must be a critical component of the emerging adult's timely journey to full adulthood. Setran and Kiesling aptly assert, "It may take older mentors both to exemplify and to encourage emerging adults that the path [to a timely maturity] is worthwhile."³⁴

Intergenerational Mentoring: A Biblical Platform

As discussed at length earlier, Scripture is totally sufficient for all one needs to live life to its fullest, including a timely journey to becoming a responsibly committed adult. This journey, in my estimation, is traveled best within a community of intergenerational followers of Christ. As pastor and author John MacArthur contends, "The family [of God and by further extension the mentor and mentee relationship] is the divinely-given institution for formation of restrained sinners, who by multigenerational

³³Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 234.

³⁴Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 42.

morality and wisdom with instruction and discipline in love develop into good citizens who benefit others, enjoy God's creation, and are thankful to Him."³⁵ The Bible is inundated with examples and models of intergenerational mentoring. The apostle Paul's letter to Titus, a young pastor on the island of Crete during the first century, provides a superb intergenerational mentoring platform that gives prescriptive measures for timely growth, maturity, and responsible commitment for the emerging adult.

Specifically, the Scripture passage in Titus 2:1-8, provides the basis for a proposed model of intergenerational mentoring. The apostle Paul writes,

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Step by step, point by point, this passage of Scripture delivers the character of the mentors and mentees as well as the content of teaching and guidance that should be regularly transferred in the crucible of mentoring. In particular, this passage of Scripture points to older men and older women paralleled in relationship to younger men and younger women respectively. What is more, the Bible is emphasizing the significance of intergenerational relationships in passing on appropriate social and moral values conducive to the maturation process. Therefore, the passage above will be explored and expounded as an introduction to such a platform for mentoring for the purpose of maturation as an emerging adult.

Moreover, it is necessary to note at the outset that two underlying presuppositions regarding intergenerational mentoring must be revealed. First is that the

³⁵John MacArthur, "How God Restrains Evil in Society" (sermon preached at Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA February 22, 2015), transcript, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://gty.org>.

tenets of Christianity are the foundational underpinnings of this mentoring model, and second, the assumed willingness of both parties to be in such a relationship. In other words, the mentor and mentee must be in full agreement to be in relationship with one another in this manner or the process and purpose of mentoring will be ineffective, possibly even harmful.

Biblical Portrait of a Mentor

The apostle Paul begins by describing the attributes or virtues befitting of older godly men. The word older or elderly is understood in the original language to refer to a man in his fifties, an interpretation in part attributed to Hippocrates as he indicates the stages of life during that time period.³⁶ Paul sets forth six characteristics of these older men in two triads. The first triad focuses on the social aspect of their behavior and the second triad hones in on the Christian and moral aspect of their lives.

This first triad of social virtues includes sober-mindedness, being dignified and self-controlled. Sober-minded or temperate literally means the modest use of wine. As Zehr explains, “Metaphorically, it has the meaning of clearheadedness, sober in judgment, and self-controlled.”³⁷ Dignified could be translated as “well-respected,” having a seriousness of purpose. Finally, the idea of self-control is one of sanity and sensibility. Gloer concludes, “Ultimately, it is the practical sense of knowing what to do and what not to do. This term is used for the health of the soul, the virtue that makes one’s thinking sane.”³⁸ These qualities are highly esteemed and, furthermore, essential for the godly man who desires to mentor.

³⁶W. Hulitt Gloer, *1 and 2 Timothy-Titus*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2010), 52. The age of the older man is worth noting due to the entire construct of the significance of the intergenerational aspect of the proposed mentoring model.

³⁷Paul Zehr, *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 264.

³⁸Gloer, *1 and 2 Timothy-Titus*, 54.

The remaining virtues appear as a classic Pauline description of the Christian life: faith, love, and steadfastness. It is worth noting that the descriptor *sound* is utilized preceding these virtues. Paul uses this same word earlier in relation to doctrine. As Guthrie explains, “Both heart and mind for the Christian must function in a healthy manner.”³⁹ Further, steadfastness appears in this triad in place of hope that is typically found in Pauline writings. Zehr notes, “The term endurance [or steadfastness] instead of ‘hope’ suggests that patience results in endurance and is a quality of hope. Endurance or steadfastness has within it the quality of constancy and perseverance, which enables older persons to live out their faith and love [particularly as mentors].”⁴⁰

Paul now turns his attention to the older women (fifty-somethings) and the virtues/attributes they are to possess. Specifically, four characteristics are discussed: reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to much wine and teach what is good. These virtues are similar in concept to those expected of the older men in terms of righteous living, honest speech, and soberness, but, at one point, Paul is more specific in the area of teaching the younger women. According to Guthrie, this compound expression regarding teaching what is good, “cannot refer to public teaching, which was in any case mainly the responsibility of elders, but must refer to ministry in the home.”⁴¹ In the context of mentoring, this definition makes perfect sense in that it reveals a teaching that is more intimate and close knit; a private instruction over against public exhortation. What is more, Zehr purports, “A major goal of this teaching is to prevent younger women from flighty, careless living. Older women are to teach younger women upright living so that no opponent can find reason for discrediting the word of God.”⁴²

³⁹Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1957), 192.

⁴⁰Zehr, *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, 264.

⁴¹Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 193.

⁴²Zehr, *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, 265.

The apostle's instructions concerning ethical standards and living are to be passed on and adhered to primarily through the enterprise of intergenerational mentoring.

The Biblical Posture and Instruction Concerning Mentees

In Titus 2:4-8, Paul turns his attention to younger women and men respectively. Again, the interpretation of the age of younger women and men is worth noting. The original language of Scripture depicts these young people in their twenties, the age of emerging adults. This age range proves significant regarding this construct of mentoring targeting older, mature adults coupled with younger, emerging adults.

Regarding younger women, the context is specifically related to the older women teaching these young ladies what is good. There are seven qualities/virtues to be taught and instilled in these emerging adult women as they seek to mature and become responsibly committed adults. To begin, the assumptions are that the young women are married and have children, which in today's culture may not be the case. At any rate, many of these virtues are applicable to both single and married young ladies. The first pair of virtues taught is for the young women to love their husbands and children. While these exhortations may seem obvious, the priority of the home and family needs revisited often to remind emerging adult women what is more significant. Today, it becomes quite easy to place career, education, and other valid endeavors above home and family. These admonitions remind young women the proper ranking of their priorities.

After these, Paul puts forth the attributes of self-control, purity, being good managers of the home, kindness, and submissiveness to be taught to younger women. In other words, these virtues or attributes do not come naturally with being a young emerging adult. It is necessary to be taught, for example, how to be self-disciplined and maintain fidelity in one's marriage. Further, to be efficient and effective in caring for her household while possibly juggling a career and other matters outside the home is a quality not naturally acquired; it must be taught. The argument here is that one of the

most effective ways to transfer godly, sensible, and productive virtues for maturing young ladies is that, at regular intervals, teaching would take place from the older to the younger women; or what I call intergenerational mentoring. Concluding this portion of Scripture, Zehr notes, “Paul’s instruction for younger women ends by pointing to the missionary purpose in younger women following the teaching of older women. *So that the word of God may not be discredited* indicates the ‘why’ [behind the ‘what’].”⁴³ The glory of God and the fulfilling of his kingdom are at the heart of what is at stake in the growth and maturation of the people of God.

Now, in Titus 2:6-8, a description of the virtues to be taught to and sought by the younger men is explained.⁴⁴ It is by extension from the context of the previous verses that the older men, including Titus as pastor of the church, are to teach the younger men. The central virtue focal point for the young man is that of self-control. As Guthrie asserts, “Titus is to exhort and urge the younger men to control themselves, thus emphasizing the need for constant moral reminders.”⁴⁵ Regular and intentional admonitions for younger men to act with discretion are critical parts of the mentoring process between older men and younger men. As Gloer explains, “They should exhibit a kind of wisdom that enables them to know what to do and what not to do.”⁴⁶

Moreover, notice Paul uses the noun *model* for Titus concerning his living and his teaching. As Zehr explains, “Teaching for young men is expanded by Titus’s behavior, which models how young Christian men are to live. The term *model* refers to a moral example or pattern of a determinative nature.”⁴⁷ As older men live a life of

⁴³Zehr, *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, 266.

⁴⁴Again, it is worth the reminder that the understood age deriving from the phrase “younger men” is one in his twenties, which is directly inclusive of emerging adult men.

⁴⁵Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 194.

⁴⁶Gloer, *1 and 2 Timothy-Titus*, 57.

⁴⁷Zehr, *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, 266-67.

integrity and one that displays and propels faithfulness, productivity, and soundness, particularly in the context of mentoring, the transfer is bound to be quite effective among young emerging adult men. As a leader/mentor, Titus' teaching, as well as other leaders/mentors, is to be marked by integrity, dignity and sound speech. Teaching of this caliber is to be transparent, honest, clear, worthy of respect, and thus, above reproach. If a mentor displays an example of living and teaching in this manner to young men, the producing of proper and timely maturation, both spiritually, socially, and otherwise, has its best chance of occurring within an environment of intergenerational mentoring.

Contexts and Implications of Intergenerational Mentoring toward Maturation and Responsible Commitment of the Emerging Adult

Now that the biblical foundation, or platform for intergenerational mentoring has been laid, what is to follow concerns the various contexts and resulting implications that are possible from an intentional commitment between older, mature adults mentoring younger emerging adults. There is the sense that because God has designed a pattern in Scripture that reveals a model of intergenerational mentoring, in particular from Titus 2 that by following this pattern of intergenerational mentoring emerging adults will discover one of the most determinative pathways to mature, responsibly committed, adulthood.

In the paragraphs and pages to follow, I will provide the structural components of intergenerational mentoring and various loci of life for which intergenerational mentoring can and should be implemented. As Sharon Parks asserts, "Restoring mentoring as a cultural force could significantly revitalize our institutions and provide the intergenerational glue to address some of our deepest and most pervasive concerns."⁴⁸ In particular, the launch pad of intergenerational mentoring, a brief overview of how to

⁴⁸Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 12.

begin the mentor/mentee relationship, and the workings of the mentoring relationship within the areas of education, vocation, and spiritual formation will be explored and promoted. Further, the focus of this discussion will target the emerging adult populace and the area of responsible commitment/maturation.

Intergenerational Mentoring: Structural Components

The launching point for a biblical model of intergenerational mentoring is within the local church. While this seems obvious for such activity, it is often a rare sighting in the majority of churches to note intergenerational mentoring occurring on a scale of any significant magnitude. God has designed and put in motion a construct known as the church whereby groups of individuals, typically of all different ages, regularly gather to worship. In nearly every local body of believers there are healthy numbers of both wise, mature, older godly people (mentors) as well as younger, less wise emerging adults (mentees). What better place to begin to engage in mentoring and intentionally walk through spiritual, social and psychological growth and development? And yet, the church appears to be an underutilized setting for the cause of intergenerational mentoring, specifically mentoring emerging adults.

Identify and train. A significant step in the beginnings of creating and implementing an intergenerational mentoring program in the church is having a clear and complete perspective of the biblical standards of the mentor and mentee, and the relationship they will develop. In the previous pages, a biblical model and portrait of a mentor and the posture of a mentee have been presented; therefore the next logical step in the process is for the church to coordinate intergenerational mentoring. To begin, potential mentors must be identified, those who would be both willing and effective in giving of their time, wisdom, counsel, etc. to emerging adult mentees. Once identified, mentors can be trained and prepared for effective mentoring relationships. To illustrate, a

concise summary from Tim Elmore provides a helpful and useful profile of an effective mentor. He utilizes the acronym PROVIDER.⁴⁹ Elmore explains:

An effective mentor must be a PROVIDER. They must be *purposeful* in connecting with a mentee to help them grow. A mentor must be a *relational* and approachable people person. *Objective* must be the mentor to accurately see strengths and weaknesses of the mentee and themselves. An effective mentor must be *vulnerable* and model transparency. Further, he must be *incarnational*, modeling the truths he teaches. The mentor must be *dependable*, someone the mentee can count on and trust. He also needs to be *empowering*, developing the mentee with confidence and competence. Finally, an effective mentor must be *resourceful*, harnessing any and all resources and tools to pass on to the mentee.⁵⁰

These beginning steps must be taken in order to launch effective, biblically-based intergenerational mentorships. There are many models of effectively engaging and training mentors as well as mentoring in general that churches can find easily accessible and implementable.

Intentional availability. Once mentors are identified and training is well underway, the church should make a concerted effort, along with the mentors themselves, to reach out to potential emerging adult mentees. It is often the case that young people, emerging adults in particular, are often overlooked in the overall dynamics of a church and its care for the congregants. As Thomas Bergler points out,

There is often a rush to offer specialized ministries for children and youth. Church people tend to think it is important to make young people into good Christians, even if exactly what that looks like might be left a bit vague. But clear and well-implemented plans for moving the adult members of the church toward spiritual maturity are rarer.⁵¹

Simply making an intentional and persistent advertised availability of godly mentors willing to begin a mentorship with emerging adults is a significant step in the direction of having effective intergenerational mentorships occurring within a local body of believers.

⁴⁹Tim Elmore, *Intentional Influence: Investing Your Life through Mentoring* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2003), 39.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Thomas Bergler, *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 56.

The local church, as well as the godly mentors within it, must make a commitment to display a genuine concern and care for emerging adults by openly inviting them to participate in such a vital process during this critical period of development in their lives.

Create and implement a strategy. To move forward in development of an intergenerational mentoring program in the local church, a strategy must be formed and put into motion. Rather than prescribing a specific methodology, it is my intention to prescribe an appropriately broad methodology for developing and implementing an effective strategy for intergenerational mentoring in the church. It is not necessarily the method that is most critical, but rather the content that drives the method churches choose.

To begin, churches must identify and embrace a core body of biblical teaching concerning growth toward maturity and help as many people as possible understand and internalize it. Furthermore, as Bergler explains, “We must also help them [older mentors and emerging adults] embrace those truths and apply them to their lives. That is where having a working model of how people grow and how that growth can be encouraged becomes crucial.”⁵² An appropriate strategy would require particular elements in order to produce a successful endeavor toward intergenerational mentorships. Again, Thomas Bergler provides perhaps the clearest and broadest approach to an effective strategy for moving emerging adults toward maturity. Bergler lists the necessary elements as follows:

1. *Profile*: Provide a perspicuous profile of what a spiritually mature adult looks like
2. *Process*: A model that clearly explains how adults can grow into that profile
3. *Plan*: A plan for properly implementing the process
4. *Practices*: Best and appropriate practices within the context of Christian

⁵²Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 56.

communities⁵³

These elements provide a simple, clear, and pragmatic approach to effectively creating and implementing a sound strategy towards development of an intergenerational mentoring system that will work, launching from the local church.

Moreover, what makes this strategic approach effective and user-friendly is that many models for growth and maturity that leads to responsible commitment could be utilized, even specifically for emerging adults and their older mentor counterparts. Utilizing this four-step strategy, church leaders need to therefore identify and teach a robust model for helping emerging adults mature. Once adopted, the model should be made operational in regular church practices.⁵⁴

A skeletal example. As churches seek to take action and engage in an intergenerational mentoring program, a specific plan of action is offered here simply as an example of what churches and congregations could utilize and implement as a way of leading emerging adults toward maturity and responsible commitment. Tim Elmore provides a clear and conspicuous action plan for mentoring emerging adults. His plan of action is presented in short here. The list of action points is as follows:

1. Let them [emerging adults] be different from previous generations
2. Work with them to develop strong personal values
3. Help them learn to make and keep short-term commitments
4. Work with them to simplify their lives and deal with stress
5. Communicate that there is meaning even in the small, mundane tasks
6. Help them to focus
7. Work with them to appreciate strength in others

⁵³Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 57.

⁵⁴Ibid.

8. Create opportunities for face-to-face interaction so they can learn how to interact in the non-virtual world
9. Provide opportunities for kids to participate in a cause that is bigger than they are
10. Enable them to take control of their lives, to boss their calendars
11. Resource them with your network
12. Challenge them to take their place in history⁵⁵

While not exhaustive, or even the action plan a church may choose, this list provides clear and appropriate directions for the active participation of older mentors with emerging adult mentees. Elmore's action plan is pragmatic and adaptable. Each action step is flexible and not predicated upon the one before it. These steps can also be fleshed out in a manner that meets the unique needs of each local church that would implement the plan. With mentors identified and trained, availability of said mentors intentionally and regularly advertised, a strategy in place, and a plan of action to put wheels on the vehicle of intergenerational mentoring, churches and congregants may feel confident that an avenue for growth and maturity toward responsibly committed adulthood is paved for the emerging adult populace.

A specific example. A family-based ministry model is a broader construct that the local church could utilize to begin moving toward intergenerational mentoring. Mark DeVries, a pioneer of this ministry model, sees a crisis in the youth ministries of our churches.⁵⁶ DeVries simply asserts, "The crisis is that we are not leading teenagers to mature Christian adulthood."⁵⁷ Therefore, this model begins to address the issues of emerging adulthood during the adolescent years.

⁵⁵Elmore, *Intentional Influence*, 42.

⁵⁶Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 25.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 26.

DeVries offers two key priorities in order to properly develop a family-based ministry model within the church. The first priority involves the church's intentional efforts to encourage and develop parents to be more involved in the discipleship process of their children.⁵⁸ Second, the church family should be equipped to disciple the younger generation and intentionally build intergenerational relationships.⁵⁹ With these priorities put in place, intentional focus and guidance is given in nearly every area of ministry to partner with families and mentors in order to foster and develop the discipleship process.

The family-based ministry model maintains age-segmented ministries while regularly creating opportunities to involve parents and mentors within these ministries.⁶⁰ Flexibility and balance are the two core values undergirding this philosophy of ministry.⁶¹ What is typically implemented within the church to bolster this ministry model is the adding of activities and events in order that parents and older adults receive regular and meaningful interaction with youth, thereby creating a context for growth in love and respect for one another.⁶² The family-based ministry model is one that could provide a strong foundation for intergenerational mentoring relationships, not only for adolescents, but supply solid footing for these relationships to flourish during the emerging adult years.

Three Areas of Focus for Intergenerational Mentoring: Implications and Applications Regarding Commitment

Churches and congregations could begin intergenerational mentoring by

⁵⁸Devries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 172.

⁵⁹Ibid., 174.

⁶⁰Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, eds., *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 25-26.

⁶¹Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 98.

⁶²Ibid.

focusing on three critical areas in the life of an emerging adult that must be met with maturity and responsible commitment. These areas are educational endeavors, vocational pursuits, and spiritual formation. Each of these important areas can and should be areas of focus within the construct of intergenerational mentoring from the church. Typically, there are those within a local body of believers who are leaders in the areas of academia, the business world and the spiritual leaders of the church. An overview of intergenerational mentoring's significance in these three arenas are discussed in brief below.

Since the onset of the emerging adult years comes with a strong sense of urgency and immediacy of either education or vocation, it is of great significance that these young people receive wise guidance and a steady hand, particularly from an older, godly mentor. For the emerging adult, an effective mentor provides a great wealth of wisdom, direction, and advice of one who has already been down the road that the young adult is just beginning to travel. As Laurent Daloz notes,

Effective mentors inspire a sense of worthy purpose. Mentors do this [mentorship] not merely by helping them [the emerging adult] gain critical purchase on the headlong rush of the culture, but more, by helping them form a moral center, a basis for commitment grounded in recognition of our shared interdependence with all of life.⁶³

A mentor, focusing on the area of academics, simply committing to partner with an emerging adult mentee for the process of the post-secondary experience can pay huge dividends for the young adult. Dividends such as aiding in clear thinking concerning the right path to take for career readiness, completing college in a timely fashion, and host of other critical issues during the college years are the payoffs intergenerational mentoring produces. As the mentor comes alongside the emerging adult to lend guidance and wisdom as they need it through their four years or so as a

⁶³Laurent Daloz, *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 244-45.

college student, this process lends significant contribution to the emerging adult's life.

What occurs in an intergenerational mentoring relationship with an emerging adult in the realm of educational pursuits can have a powerful, enduring, and profound impact. As Lois Zachary explains, "The process of facilitating effective learning relationships through mentoring challenges [emerging adults] to think about what they might become."⁶⁴ These early years of the emerging adult are foundational academically in that they often place them on a trajectory that they will be on for the rest of their lives. Therefore, it is critical that churches have in place, not only an intergenerational mentoring program, but one that has part of its aim to mentor emerging adults through their post-secondary experience, beginning to end.

Another critically important area of focus for mentoring the emerging adult is that of vocation. Older, more mature adults who have been in their vocation for a number of years have a treasure trove of wisdom and advice. For example, how to prayerfully choose a career that is a work, an enjoyable setting in which to be, and what not to pursue vocationally, and why. Vocation comes from the root vocal, meaning a calling. In other words, an emerging adult's first impression concerning his career should be that it is more than a job. As Elmore further explains, "When we enable [emerging adults] to discover their vocation, that is when they will become people of influence, true life-giving leaders. We [must] call them out and challenge them to seize opportunities and make a significant contribution."⁶⁵

An emerging adult having a mentor with a focus vocationally offers many obvious advantages. As Ted Engstrom explains,

You [the emerging adult] get to do most things faster if you have a mentor who will

⁶⁴Lois Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 165.

⁶⁵Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 158.

tell you where to go to find a certain resource or show you how to do something. You also have available a network of the mentor. One of the greatest roles a mentor can play is to introduce a mentee to the right people at the right time.⁶⁶

Churches and its congregants can, with little difficulty, couple mentors with emerging adult mentees who can proficiently direct them through the often tumultuous waters of seeking a career path that fits who they are and what they are made to do. Beginning early in the emerging adult years and remaining committed and consistent in the mentoring process is almost assured to produce a more focused and committed emerging adult to his or her calling and work.

Perhaps the most significant area of focus during intergenerational mentoring is that of spiritual formation. Taking the spiritual hand, as it were, of an emerging adult, a mentor can gently and carefully teach, model and guide their way toward spiritual maturity and commitment. Intergenerational mentoring launched from local congregations of Christian believers, provides a steady, stable, and reliable platform by which the core of who we are, our spiritual self, can find refuge and direction. Specifically, the direction toward living Christ-like lives as well as the wisdom and know-how to move in a timely fashion down the pathway toward spiritual maturity.

Dunn and Sundene summarize the mentor's task in effectively cultivating spiritual formation in the life of an emerging adult mentee. It is not enough to merely point the way in the right direction by offering poignant Scripture passages, good books, and some good advice. Instead Dunn and Sundene argue,

Effective spiritual guides for emerging adults spend time building spiritual friendships and discerning appropriate direction and then move in caring, responsive, intentional ways to help others navigate the uncharted waters of their faith journey. They come alongside others in suffering, celebration and all that lies between, helping to identify the work of the Holy Spirit in the ups and downs of everyday circumstances and decisions. Effective disciplinators [mentors] also purposefully explore the deep truth of the faith with emerging adults rather than parallel to them. Finally, an effective spiritual caregiver takes time to reflect and

⁶⁶Ted Engstrom, *The Fine Art of Mentoring* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers, 1989), 103.

reevaluate as the path unwinds.⁶⁷

Therefore, the rhythms of discernment, intentionality, and reflection are significant in positively affecting proper spiritual formation in the emerging adult, and do so in shaping the overall rhythm of life more effectively within the context of intergenerational mentoring. Mentors help mentees to apply the truth to their life. A fruitful mentoring relationship facilitates spiritual growth, even measurable life change.⁶⁸

Perceived Challenges to Intergenerational Mentoring

Since the emerging adult years typically generate a number of new stressors, there can be many obstacles or challenges to an effective mentoring relationship between mentor and emerging adult mentee. Of the number of obstinate challenges that are faced, specifically for the emerging adult, two significant hurdles involve relationships and the value of wisdom. Since churches are to be the origin of these mentorships, congregations must hone in on re-focusing their efforts toward overcoming these obstacles.

Setran and Kiesling argue, “Perhaps the most significant barrier to mentoring is the structural separation of emerging adults from the older adults around them.”⁶⁹ When emerging adults leave home heading off to higher education, they often find themselves isolated from older adults, surrounded by a mono-generational culture. Even the faculty and staff of most colleges and universities have a sort of tangential relationship with the students on campus. In fact, David Kinnaman reports, “Many young people feel that older adults do not understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; in fact a majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents.”⁷⁰ Therefore,

⁶⁷Dunn and Sundene, *Shaping the Journey*, 77.

⁶⁸ Elmore, *Intentional Influence*, 70.

⁶⁹Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 207.

⁷⁰David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 29.

it is critical that churches be intentional in fostering meaningful intergenerational relationships that begin at an early age for the younger side of those relationships, even before high school.

Furthermore, to exacerbate the relationship gap between older adults and emerging adults, society has placed a line, as it were, of autonomy in the sand when the high school graduate begins to enter either college or the workforce. As Kadison and DiGeronimo put it, “When kids go off to college, society expects that their identity will shift from being dependent children to being responsible adults. The societal pressure to become more autonomous and independent comes at a time when college students are entering a new world where they need extra support and guidance.”⁷¹ While societal pressure to grow up is not always a bad thing, it is ironically viewed by the emerging adult as a sign of the need to be completely independent, often refusing much needed help from older, wiser adults who have already walked this pathway toward full adulthood. Rather than shrugging off mentoring and viewing it as a barrier to responsible commitment and maturity, the emerging adult needs encouragement and guidance from mentors more than ever.

Another challenge of intergenerational mentoring is in helping emerging adults realize and learn the value of wisdom over information. This generation undoubtedly has more access to knowledge and information than any other generation in history. Even the consumption of such information is unprecedented in this generation of young people. David Kinnaman boldly explains, “Young adults are digital natives immersed in a glossy pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over wholeness, and opinion over truth.”⁷² As such, many emerging adults lack discernment for how to make application of that

⁷¹Richard Kadison and Theresa DiGeronimo, *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do about It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004), 12.

⁷²Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 30.

knowledge in their lives and the world around them.⁷³

Emerging adults often begin to understand as they enter this new arena of development, normally away from parents and with a fair amount of freedom, that they need more than just information to successfully navigate the pathway to adulthood. However, simply having a solid grasp of what wisdom actually is, regularly escapes these young people. Kinnaman aptly defines wisdom as, “The idea of skillful living that entails the spiritual, mental, and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others, and to our culture. Wisdom is rooted in knowing and revering the God who has revealed himself in Christ through the Scriptures.”⁷⁴

Yet, knowing how wisdom is defined does not make one wise. Becoming wise does not happen overnight. Wisdom is a lifetime process, and is learned best in rich community with other Christian believers. If the opportunity of intergenerational mentoring is lost or is rejected, crucial access to the valuable wisdom and experience of older adults is not realized. As Setran and Kiesling rightly note, “They [emerging adults] miss out on tangible role models of exemplary adult living, lacking settings in which to see clear pictures of faithful adult practice. Their views of the world are then shaped primarily by those in the same stage of life, and they are rarely challenged by alternative points of view.”⁷⁵ It is therefore incumbent upon churches to intentionally develop and promote intergenerational mentoring and the value of the wisdom it brings within the fabric of their congregations. These efforts would go a long way to overcome the ignorance and devaluing of wisdom that is desperately needed in the life of an emerging adult reaching toward responsible commitment that is so critical within the framework of full adulthood.

⁷³Kadison and Theresa DiGeronimo, *College of the Overwhelmed*, 30.

⁷⁴Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 31.

⁷⁵Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 212.

Conclusions

As this research has clearly revealed, the time of emerging adulthood is one of the most critical periods of human development. The decisions and pathways taken during this decade will result in consequences that last and shape an individual for the rest of his life. While in many ways, the emerging adult is heavily interested in reaching full, mature adulthood, they are often confused and disillusioned as to how best reach this seemingly elusive destination of becoming a responsibly committed adult.

While wading through and then synthesizing the pertinent and relevant research, many significant factors that have potential influence for positive impact in aiding emerging adults to reach mature adulthood becomes apparent. However, what becomes glaringly obvious as a most significant factor in this journey to adulthood is that which is unexpectedly absent in the lives of many emerging adults, namely responsible commitment. Therefore, my research illustrates, within the lives of emerging adults, the overwhelming need of responsible commitment in every facet of their living. Whether it be the timeliness of completing an education, finding a job and building a career, connecting with a lifelong partner in marriage, or making long-term, forward moving strides in spiritual formation, commitment proves to be a critical ingredient common to the success of any and all such endeavors that tend to mark the onset of mature adulthood.

Moreover, what is also interesting and worth noting from much of the research concerning emerging adults is its descriptive nature. That is not to say there are no prescriptive measures found in the present corpus of literature; rather it is often the case the research is primarily descriptive. Therefore, based on a critical biblical analysis of the elusiveness of responsible commitment among emerging adults, as well as providing a Scriptural portrait of maturity, this research is able to offer prescriptive measures and proposed solutions toward building viable and sustainable commitment within the lives of emerging adults.

As a result of this research, as well as others' research within a similar vein, it is my conviction that intergenerational mentoring, operating from the platform of a local body of believers, or the church, involving older adults and emerging adults offers one of the most comprehensive approaches to model, teach, and reinforce a life of responsible commitment. One cannot overstate the significance of mentoring. Sharon Parks frames the significance of mentoring in this way: "To varying degrees and in differing forms, mentors worthy of the name embody and inspire the possibility of committed and meaningful adulthood."⁷⁶ Thus, this research has offered a detailed approach by which to initiate, develop, and implement an intergenerational mentoring program in the local church.

This approach has been purported by my research primarily due to there being very few, if any, comprehensive intergenerational mentoring programs that have as their aim, emerging adults and their source platform, the church. Yet, churches and congregations offer a near perfect medium by which this type of mentoring can flourish. Mentoring has such a significant influence, and yet research reveals it to be, by and large, a gaping hole in the lives of emerging adults. Therefore, this research concludes that responsible commitment, leading to adult maturity, can be best built in the lives of emerging adults by and through intergenerational mentoring from the source and within the context of the church.

Avenues for Future Research

A number of areas could be further researched in the arena of emerging adults and commitment. Primarily, having now realized the paramount need of intergenerational mentoring in the lives of emerging adults through the context of congregations and churches, future research should begin with an exploration of

⁷⁶Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 131.

discovering whether such mentoring occurs in the church and/or seeking to initiate implementation of such an intergenerational mentoring program as has been promoted in the preceding paragraphs and pages.

One direction may involve a study of exemplar churches who are intentionally and productively implementing an intergenerational mentoring program for emerging adults. Common patterns of what these churches are doing well and some of the pitfalls they have encountered could be the primary focus of the study. The study may then lead to proposing an intergenerational mentoring program for churches that has been gleaned from the conglomeration of pertinent data and best practices from the exemplar churches studied.

Another avenue of research could begin by way of survey, inquiring a number of churches in an attempt to discover whether there is an intentional and comprehensive intergenerational mentoring program in place focusing on coupling older adults with young emerging adults. If there is not a large enough sample for statistical validity, churches could be sought by the researcher who would be willing to initiate and implement such a mentoring program as described above.

Once these churches were established a longitudinal comparative study of sorts could be conducted utilizing churches that have an intergenerational mentoring program focused on emerging adults and a statistically valid number of churches who do not. A critical aim would be measuring responsible commitment in the lives of these emerging adults from both sets of churches. In the context of the proposed study, an instrument measuring commitment would be developed honing in on normative areas of growth and maturity toward adulthood such as matriculation, settling on a career, marriage, and parenting, to name a few. A comparison could be made and conclusions drawn from noting the onset of these life events as well as the longevity of said maturity markers between the two sets of emerging adults from churches as described in this paragraph. As a result, a number of proposals and guiding wisdom could come from such a study for

emerging adults and the area of timely maturity and an embracing of real and responsible commitment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alwin, Duane F. "From Obedience to Autonomy: Changes in Traits Desired in Children, 1924-1978." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 33-52.
- Arnett, Jeffrey. "Broad and Narrow Socialization: The Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57, no. 3 (August 1995): 617-628.
- _____. "Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood among Emerging Adults in American Ethnic Groups." *New Directions For Child and Adolescent Development* no. 100 (Summer 2003): 63-75.
- _____. "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties." *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (May 2000): 469-80.
- _____. "Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age." In *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, edited by Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Tanner, 3-19. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.
- _____. "Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?" *Society For Research in Child Development* 1, no. 2 (2007): 68-73.
- _____. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- _____. "Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context." *Human Development* 41, nos. 5-6 (Fall 1998): 295-315.
- _____. "Socialization in Emerging Adulthood." In *Handbook of Socialization*, edited by Grusec and Hastings, 208-31. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.
- Arnett, Jeffrey, and Elizabeth Fishel. *When Will My Grown-Up Kid Grow Up? Loving and Understanding Your Emerging Adult*. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 2013.
- Arnett, Jeffrey, and Nancy L. Galambos, eds. *Exploring Cultural Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood*. San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals, 2003.

- Arnett, Jeffrey, and Lene Arnett Jensen. "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, no. 5 (September 2002): 451-67.
- Arnett, Jeffrey, and Joseph Schwab. *The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults*. Worcester, MA: Clark University, 2012.
- Arnett, Jeffrey, and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds. *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.
- Badger, Sarah, Larry J. Nelson, and Carolyn M. Barry. "Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood among Chinese and American Emerging Adults." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30, no. 1 (January 2006): 84-93.
- Bannon, Shele, Kelly Ford, and Linda Meltzer. "Understanding Millennials in the Workplace." *The CPA Journal* 81, no. 11 (November 2011): 61-65.
- Basuil, Dynah A., and Wendy J. Casper. "Work-Family Planning Attitudes among Emerging Adults." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 80, no. 3 (June 2012): 629-37.
- Baucum, Tory K. *Evangelical Hospitality: Catechetical Evangelism in the Early Church and Its Recovery for Today*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008.
- Benefer, Emily, and Colleen Shanahan. "Educating The Invincibles: Strategies for Teaching the Millennial Generation in Law School." *Clinical Law Review* 20, no. 301 (Fall 2013): 1-37.
- Bergler, Thomas E. *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.
- Beutler, Ivan F. "Connections to Economic Prosperity: Money Aspirations from Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood." *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning* 23, no. 1 (2012): 17-32.
- Bocknek, Gene. *The Young Adult: Development After Adolescence*. New York: Gardner Press, 1986.
- Brown, Kelly W. *Adulting: How to Become a Grown-Up in 468 Easy Steps*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2013.
- Cabral, Jaclyn. "Is Generation Y Addicted to Social Media?" *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 5-14.
- Calvin, John, and John Owen. *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles: The Second Epistle of Peter*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1948.

- Campbell, W. Keith, and Jean M. Twenge. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Atria Books, 2009.
- Clark, Chap, and Kara E. Powell. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2011.
- Clark, Gordon. *Colossians*. Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1979.
- Cote, James E. *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity in the Late Modern World*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Cote, James E., and Anton L. Allahar. *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Daloz, Laurent. *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.
- Dean, Kendra Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Decter, Midge. *Liberal Parents Radical Children*. Toronto: Longman Canada, 1975.
- DeVries, Mark. *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Diessner, Rhett, ed. *Human Development*. 3rd ed. Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill, 2008.
- Donald, Merlin. *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Dunn, Richard, and Jana L. Sundene. *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Ellison, Timothy K., Yu Kyoum Kim, and Marshall J. Magnusen. "The Work Attitudes of Millennials in Collegiate Recreational Sports." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 31, no.1 (Spring 2013): 78-97.
- Elmore, Tim. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*. Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010.
- _____. *Intentional Influence: Investing Your Life through Mentoring*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2003.
- Engstrom, Ted. *The Fine Art of Mentoring*. Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers, 1989.

- Engstrom, Ted W., and Ron Jenson. *The Making of a Mentor: 9 Essential Characteristics of Influential Christian Leaders*. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005.
- Estep, James Riley, Jonathan H. Kim, Timothy P. Jones, and Michael Sanford Wilder. *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010.
- Fadjukoff, Paivi, Katja Kokko, and Lea Pulkkinen. "Implications of Timing of Entering Adulthood for Identity Achievement." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 22, no. 5 (September 2007): 504-30.
- Friedman, Stacey, and Carol Weissbrod. "Work and Family Commitment and Decision-Making Status Among Emerging Adults." *Sex Roles* 53, nos. 5-6 (September 2005): 317-25.
- Fulcher, Megan, and Emily F. Coyle. "Breadwinner and Caregiver: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Children's and Emerging Adults' Visions of Their Future Family Roles." *British Journal of Development Psychology* 29, no. 2 (June 2011): 330-46.
- Gallicano, Tiffany, Patricia Curtin, and Kelli Matthews. "I Love What I Do, But...A Relationship Management Survey of Millennial Generation Public Relations Agency Employees." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 24, no. 3 (June 2012): 222-42.
- Gloer, W. Hulitt. *1 and 2 Timothy-Titus*. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2010.
- Gould, Roger L. *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.
- Grusec, Joan E., and Paul D. Hastings, eds. *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2007.
- Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1957.
- Hadad, Talia, and Elli Schachter. "'Religious-lite': A Phenomenon and Its Relevance to the Debate on Identity Development and Emerging Adulthood." *Journal of Youth Studies* 14, no. 8 (Fall 2011): 853-69.
- Harris, Murray. *Colossians and Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991.
- Hassler, Christine. *20 Something Manifesto: Quarter-Lifers Speak Out about Who They Are, What They Want, and How to Get It*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008.
- Hendry, Leo B., and Marion Kloep. "How Universal is Emerging Adulthood? An Empirical Example." *Journal of Youth Studies* 13, no. 2 (April 2010): 169-79.

- Henig, Robin M., and Samantha Henig. *Twentysomething: Why Do Young Adults Seem Stuck?* New York: Hudson Street Press, 2012.
- Jamison, Tyler, and Christine Proulx. "Stayovers in Emerging Adulthood: Who Stays Over and Why?" *Personal Relationships* 20, no. 1 (March 2013): 155-69.
- Jay, Meg. *The Defining Decade: Why your Twenties Matter—And How to Make the Most of Them Now.* New York: Hatchette Book Group, 2013.
- Johnson, Helen, and Christine Schelhas-Miller. *Don't Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years* 2nd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011.
- Jones, Timothy Paul, ed. *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views.* Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Jong, Arthur De. *Making It to Adulthood: The Emerging Self.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972.
- Kadison, Richard, and Theresa DiGeronimo. *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do about It.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004.
- Keating, Daniel. "Cognitive and Brain Development." In *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, 2nd ed., edited by Lerner and Steinberg, 211-46. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004.
- Kerig, Patricia K., Marc S. Schulz, and Stuart T. Hauser, eds. *Adolescence and Beyond: Family Processes and Development.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Kidner, Derek. *Proverbs.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2008.
- Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.
- Kistemaker, Simon. *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews.* New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Kloep, Marion, and Leo B. Hendry. "Letting Go or Holding On? Parents' Perceptions of Their Relationships with Their Children During Emerging Adulthood." *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 28, no. 4 (November 2010): 817-34.
- Koslow, Sally. *Slouching toward Adulthood: How to Let Go So Your Kids Can Grow Up.* New York: Penguin Group, 2013.

- Larson, Reed. "The Solitary Side of Life: An Examination of the Time People Spend Alone from Childhood to Old Age." *Developmental Review* 10, no. 2 (June 1990): 155-83.
- Lerner, Richard, and Laurence Steinberg. *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2004.
- Lerner, Richard M., Robert W. Roeser, and Erin Phelps. *Positive Youth Development & Spirituality: From Theory to Research*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008.
- Longman, Tremper, III. *Proverbs*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- MacArthur, John. "How God Restrains Evil in Society." Sermon preached at Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, February 22, 2015. Transcript. Accessed July 27, 2015. <http://gty.org>.
- Marcia, James. "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status." In *Human Development*, 3rd ed., edited by Rhett Diessner, 183-89. Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill, 2008.
- Masten, Ann S., Jelena Obradovic, and Keith B. Burt. "Resilience in Emerging Adulthood: Developmental Perspectives on Continuity and Transformation." In *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, 173-90. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.
- McAlister, Andrea. "Teaching the Millennial Generation." *American Music Teacher* (August 2009): 13-15.
- Nelson, Larry J., and Carolyn M. Barry. "Distinguishing Features of Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Self-Classification as an Adult." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, no. 2 (March 2005): 242-62.
- Nelson, Larry J., Carolyn M. Barry, and Jennifer L. Christofferson. "Asocial and Afraid: An Examination of Shyness and Anxiety in Emerging Adulthood." *Journal of Family Studies* 19, no. 1 (April 2013): 2-18.
- O'Brien, Peter. *Colossians and Philemon*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982.
- Owen, John. *Hebrews*. The Crossway Classic Commentaries. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 1998.
- Padilla-Walker, Laura M., Larry J. Nelson, and Jason S. Carroll. "Affording Emerging Adulthood: Parental Financial Assistance of Their College-Aged Children." *Journal of Adult Development* 19, no. 1 (March 2012): 50-58.

- Parks, Sharon. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- _____. *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986.
- Perry, William, Jr. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970.
- Poon, Cecilia Y. M., and Bob G. Knight. "Parental Emotional Support During Emerging Adulthood and Baby Boomers' Well-being in Midlife." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 37, no. 6 (November 2013): 498-504.
- Powlison, David. "Cure of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies." In appendix 4 of *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 269-302. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Jess Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Rambo, Lewis R. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Ritchie, Rachel, Alan Meca, Vanessa Madrazo, Seth Schwartz, Sam Hardy, Byron Zamboanga, Robert Weisskirch, Su Yeong Kim, Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Lindsay Ham, and Richard Lee. "Identity Dimensions and Related Processes in Emerging Adulthood: Helpful or Harmful?" *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 69, no. 4 (April 2013): 415-32.
- Roehling, Patricia. "Engaging the Millennial Generation in Class Discussions." *College Teaching* 59, no. 1 (2011): 1-6.
- Roisman, Glenn, Ann Masten, Douglas Coatsworth, and Auke Tellegen. "Salient and Emerging Developmental Tasks in the Transition to Adulthood." *Child Development* 75, no. 1 (January/February 2004): 123-33.
- Satinover, Jeffrey. *Feathers of the Skylark: Compulsion, Sin and Our Need for a Messiah*. Westport, CT: Hamewith Books, 1996.
- Schoeni, R., and K. Ross. "Material Assistance Received from Families during the Transition to Adulthood." In *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy*, edited by R. A. Settersten Jr., F. F. Furstenberg Jr., and R. G. Rumbaut, 396-416. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Setran, David P., and Chris A. Kiesling. *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2013.

- Shirai, Toshiaki, Tomoyasu Nakamura, and Kumiko Katsuma. "Time Orientation and Identity Formation: Long-term Longitudinal Dynamics in Emerging Adulthood." *Japanese Psychological Research* 54, no. 3 (September 2012): 274-84.
- Singleton-Jackson, Jill, Dennis Jackson, and Jeffrey Reinhardt. "Academic Entitlement: Exploring Definitions and Dimensions of Entitled Students." *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 5, no. 9 (November 2011): 229-36.
- Smith, Christian. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- _____. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- _____. *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults in, Out of, and Gone from The Church*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Smith, Christian, and Melinda L. Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Stein, Joel, and Josh Sanburn. "The New Greatest Generation." *Time*, May 9, 2013.
- Stinson, Randy, and Timothy Paul Jones, eds. *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011.
- Szasz, T. *The Second Sin*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973.
- Taylor, Paul, and Scott Keeter. *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010. Accessed October 12, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/millennials.
- Thompson, Charles, and Jane Gregory. "Managing Millennials: A Framework for Improving Attraction, Motivation, and Retention." *The Psychologist-Manager Journal* 15, no. 4 (November 2012): 237-46.
- Trentham, John David. "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012.
- Twenge, Jean. *Generation Me*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Twenge, Jean M., and W. Keith Campbell. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Atria Books, 2010.

- U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009, *American Community Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Urry, Shirene A., Larry J. Nelson, and Laura M. Padilla-Walker. "Mother Knows Best: Psychological Control, Child Disclosure, and Maternal Knowledge in Emerging Adulthood." *Journal of Family Studies* 17, no. 2 (August 2011): 157-73.
- Wall, Robert. *Colossians and Philemon*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993.
- West, Diana. *The Death of the Grown-Up*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Zachary, Lois. *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.
- Zehr, Paul. *1 and 2 Timothy Titus*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010.

ABSTRACT

EMERGING ADULTS AND THE ELUSIVENESS
OF COMMITMENT

Barry James Gibson, Ed.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
Chair: Dr. John David Trentham

This thesis highlights the lack of responsible commitment among emerging adults and proposes biblical analyses and direction toward fostering an authentic commitment in emerging adults in the context of mentoring and discipleship.

The thesis begins with an introduction of the emerging adult and how this social construct developed among young people ages 18 to 29. Further, generational trends and patterns are explored to illuminate the lack of responsible commitment and to direct attention towards the need for biblically based solutions of formidable commitment.

Specifically, David Powlison's Comprehensive Internal framework is discussed and utilized in order to provide a structure and lens for critical biblical analysis. Additional resources are employed in order to provide specific direction for Christian mentoring and discipleship for emerging adults in order to foster and develop responsible commitment to forge the proper path to full adulthood.

VITA

Barry James Gibson

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Union College, 1999

M.S., Union College, 2001

M.S., University of the Cumberlands, 2002

ACADEMIC

Research Assistant to the Senior Vice President for Academic Administration
and Provost, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014-

Adjunct Instructor, Boyce College, Louisville, Kentucky, 2015-

MINISTERIAL

Interim Pastor, Jenson Baptist Church, 2008

Senior Pastor, Mill Creek Baptist Church, 2009-2011