

Viewing Youth Ministry through the Lens of James E. Loder's

The Transforming Moment

Applied to Resilient Discipleship of Adolescence

A Research Paper

Presented to Dr. Wes Crawford

Abilene Christian University

Graduate School of Theology

Abilene, Texas

As a Requirement in

BIBH670 Issues in Global Christianity

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August 14, 2020

Contents

Objectives.....	3
Objective Notes.....	5
Introduction to the Global Research Work Barna & World Vision Results on Resilient Discipleship.....	6
Introduction Notes.....	8
Ecclesiological Trends and Secular Challenges Opposing Resilient Discipleship Formation in Adolescence.....	9
Ecclesiological Trends Notes.....	13
James E. Loder’s Lens of the <i>Transforming Moment</i> , A Framework for Discerning the Critical Elements of Spiritual Formation.....	15
James E. Loder’s Notes.....	25
Application of Loder’s Lens to Ecclesiological Trends and Secular Challenges Opposing Resilient Discipleship Formation in Adolescence.....	28
Application of Loder’s Lens to Ecclesiological Trends Notes.....	31
Application of Loder’s Lens in Understanding Roles in Concentric Koinonia featuring Dr. Houston Heflin.....	32
Application of Loder’s Lens in Understanding Roles Notes.....	39
Best Practices in the Chicago Church of Christ and Midwest (ICOC) from the Vantage Point of Resilient Disciples that are Youth Ministers by Vocation.....	41
Best Practices Notes.....	46
Conclusion.....	47
Conclusion Notes.....	52
Appendix I.....	53
Appendix II.....	56
Bibliography.....	61

Objectives:

According to Kinnaman and Matlock in *Faith for Exiles*, only 10% of proclaiming Christians within the 18-35 year old demographic across all denominations in the US exemplifies the thriving state of being a *resilient disciple*.¹ Furthermore, few countries have any more impressive statistics than 10% in the category of resilient disciple.² One of the leading reasons for resilient discipleship is forming a resilient identity by experiencing intimacy with Jesus.³ (Best Practice 1 out of 5, discovered by Kinnaman and Matlock, is the focal point of this research paper). In the ministry context of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC), our retention factor is not on formal record for any age group after people disaffiliate with congregations. However, anecdotally the retention of our Millennials is estimated at 30-50% on average. The paper aims to illuminate the best practices for the spiritual formation of adolescents and influence resiliency as faithful disciples under tension in their respective cultures. The primary focus is on generational discipleship, which means those children raised in the church and baptized as teenagers. We will explore the ethos of held beliefs found in youth ministry scholarship. Primary interviews **discover** (word usage) the perspectives of youth ministers in the Chicago Church of Christ and the Midwest, resulting in resilient discipleship in their context.

The paper has two distinct objectives: First, establish James E. Loder's interdisciplinary theological and human development lens or paradigm for understanding and creating opportunities to develop *intimacy with Jesus through transformative moments* resulting in sustainable spiritual formation. The theological goal of resilient discipleship for adolescence is found in Pauline spirituality as reflected in 2 Corinthians 2:24:

But that does not mean we want to dominate you by telling you how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy, for it is *by your own faith that you stand firm*. [emphasis]⁴

Second, Loder's lens illuminates why the best practices in parenting and youth ministry, and the net effect of church koinonia—the Presence of our Triune God—are useful in the spiritual formation of adolescents, resulting in sustainable intimacy with Jesus as resilient disciples during their lifetime. Moreover, the primary researchers⁵ use a qualitative interview method of evaluation to uncover the best practices within a country's region witnessed by youth ministers. The findings from a microcosm of those interviewed who have been raised in the church and are today youth ministers—resilient disciples becoming youth ministers—gives a true insider's scoop on the matter. The scope of the research findings is limited to the essence of the resilient disciple microcosm in Chicago. The intention is to report the cumulative findings across all the Midwest interviews in a later Pathway Project. And eventually, expand the research using the prototype study in the Midwest in future coursework globally and ethnographically while at ACU.

Notes:

¹ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. (Ventura: Barna, 2019), 33. All study groups, as defined by Barna, are as follows:

Prodigals 22% (Ex-Christians): “Individuals who do not currently identify as Christian despite having attended Protestant or Catholic church or having considered themselves to be a Christian as a child or teen.”

Nomads 30% (Unchurched): “People who identify as Christian but have not attended church during the past month. The vast majority of nomads haven’t been involved with a church for six months or more.”

Habitual Churchgoers 38%: “Those who describe themselves as Christian and who have attended church at least once in the past month, yet do not meet foundational core beliefs or behaviors associated with being an intentional, engaged disciple.”

Resilient Disciples of Christ: These “are followers who (1) attend church at least monthly and engage with their church more than just attending worship services (for ICOC study adjusted to attend church *consistently*); (2) trust firmly in the authority of the Bible; (3) are committed to Jesus personally and affirm he was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death; and (4) express desire to transform the broader society as an outcome of their faith.”

² Ibid., Kinnaman and Matlock commentary concerning *Resilient disciples*: “Not only are the most engaged young Christians serious about personal faith and faithfulness, but they are also concerned for and thoughtful about how their faith in Christ intersects meaningfully and missionally with the world around them. In spite of the tensions they feel between church and everyday life, they keep showing up... That’s resilience. These are our ‘exemplars’—those who exemplify the kind of resilient discipleship we believe can flourish in digital Babylon.”

³ Ibid., 13. The 5 Ways or Best Practices according to Kinnaman and Matlock: 1) form a resilient identity and experience intimacy with Jesus; 2) in a complex and anxious age, develop the muscles of cultural discernment; 3) when isolation and mistrust are the norms, forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships; 4) to ground and motivate an ambitious generation and train for vocational discipleship; and 5) curb entitlement and self-centered tendencies by engaging in a countercultural mission.

⁴ Dudley Chancey has served as a professor of youth ministry at Oklahoma State since 1998 and echoes the Apostle Paul’s idea in 2 Corinthians in the context of generational faith: “Our primary job is not about creating perfection in our family dynamics. Our job is to develop children who love the Lord and are willing to follow God no matter where the Spirit leads, as they develop *owned faith*.” Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner, eds. *Owning Faith, Reimagining the Role of Church & Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers*. (Abilene: Abilene University Press, 2017), 29.

⁵ The primary researcher is the author of the paper, Matina Montes. Much is owed to Jaques Genis— a youth minister at the Johannesburg Church of Christ who has expertise in crafting research studies that mitigate experimenter bias— for the mentoring of Matina.

Introduction to the Global Research Work Barna & World Vision,
Results on Resilient Discipleship

Edgar Sandoval Sr., President, and Chief Executive Officer of World Vision U.S.,

describes his passion and reasoning for partnering with Barna to seek understanding of the faith of global Millennials in Christendom:

Millennials are one group that is often misunderstood and all too easy to judge—especially concerning their faith. Although cynicism toward this generation abounds, I do not share it. I believe Jesus is lighting fires in the hearts of young people, just as he has done with all generations since he walked this earth. World Vision wants to engage them in striving to realize God’s plan for the world, particularly in fragile places where even a small act can make a huge impact. ...[S]eparating fact from assumption [the study] enables World Vision and the Church at large, to help unleash young people’s passion for Jesus. We want to equip faith leaders to connect and collaborate with this generation. The good news is that these young adults have great potential to change the world.¹

The statistical reality of the shift of strength of the Global South in Christianity continues to ring true even in the joint study of Millennials and resilient discipleship as echoed in the readings of both Wesley Granberg-Michaelson in *Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church*² [Timbuktu is the contemporary center of Christianity] and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*.³ When applying the lens of the Global North and Global South to sort the statistics of the resilient disciples’ percentage among Millennials in regions of the world, the strength of the South continues to emerge—⁴

Global North	Global South
Australia 8%	Brazil 17%
Austria 1%	Chile 10%
Canada 9%	Columbia 13%
Germany 2%	Ghana 34%
New Zealand 9%	India 16%
Romania 3%	Indonesia 20%
Spain 4%	Kenya 33%
Switzerland 3%	Malaysia 24%
United Kingdom 4%	Mexico 6%
United States 10%	Nigeria 41%
Singapore 22%	Philippines 12%

South Korea 9%
Taiwan 2%

South Africa 20%

Resilient Disciples
Avg. 6.6%

Resilient Disciples
Avg. 20.5%

While these markers—a significant spread of 13.9 percentage points higher of resilient disciples reported in the South vs. the North—are not intended to be cited to paint an entire picture of spirituality among Millennials; they provide a starting point to direct further research within congregational contexts. The author plans to do research for practical theological purposes within the ICOC congregations, uncover wisdom in best practices among youth ministers in some of the countries of the Global South, and document ethnographic nuances compared to the Midwest context. Anecdotally, for example, within the ICOC congregations in Indonesia and Singapore, the retention and resilience of the children raised in those sister churches, and who are now young adults, are markedly higher than the rest of the Western churches.

Notes:

¹ *The Connected Generation: How Christian Leaders Around the World Can Strengthen Faith & Well Being Among 18–35-Year-Olds*, a Barna report produced in partnership with World Vision (Ventura: Barna, 2019), 5. For further context of the study and partnership, see World Vision Inc, 2020. Lauren Fischer. “Barna and World Vision Partner to Create the Largest Study of Kind, Offering New Insights into Millennials & Gen Z Worldwide.” World Vision. Accessed July 14, 2020. <https://www.worldvision.org/about-us/media-center/barna-world-vision-partner-to-create-largest-study-of-its-kind-offering-new-insights-into-millennials-gen-z-worldwide-2>

² “In 1910, 66 percent of all Christians in the world lived in Europe; in 2010, only 26 percent lived there. In 1910, only 2 percent of all Christians lived in Africa. Today, nearly one out of four Christians in the world is an African. Europe and North America—the Global North—contained 80 percent of all Christians in 1910, and only 40 percent a century later. Christianity’s statistical center by 2010 had moved to a point near *Timbuktu*, in Mali.” Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. *From Times Square to Timbuktu, The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 8.

³ Philip Jenkins. *The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 113. Jenkins cites in Table 5.2 that, by 2050, the largest Christian communities in millions (MM) will be as follows: the US, 350MM; Brazil, 234MM; the Philippines, 162MM; Ethiopia, 160MM; D.R. Congo, 150MM; Mexico, 130MM; Nigeria, 127MM; Uganda, 106MM; China, 85 MM; Russia, 70MM; and Germany, 52MM. Jenkins famously quotes Yancey, “As I travel, I observed a pattern, a strange historical phenomenon of God ‘moving’ geographically from the Middle East to Europe, to North America, to the developing world. My theory is this: God goes where He’s wanted” (1).

⁴ Barna & World Vision report, 102.; The sorting criteria for Global North vs. Global South was derived from this source: Wikimedia. https://meta.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_regional_classification. Accessed July 16, 2020.

Ecclesiological Trends and Secular Challenges Opposing Resilient Discipleship Formation in Adolescence

Before moving to Loder's lens in understanding the development of intimacy with Jesus leading to resilient discipleship, it is essential to highlight some critical cultural obstructions or tensions inside, and outside, of the church, recognized by youth ministry scholarship in hindering adolescents today.¹ Although this is not an exhaustive list of potential obstructions, they seem relevant to the theological ethnography in North America and potentially expanded to Westernized nations. There are three tensions to focus on Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), screen phenomenon, and adult abandonment. Bringing these areas into our periphery is critical as we labor in the love of parenting, youth ministry, and koinonia.² The awareness of these phenomena alerts us to Satan's schemes in our spiritual battle alongside our children. We strive under tension to mentor them towards a resilient faith and intimacy with Jesus.

First, Andrew Root points to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), “a concept that emerged out of the sociological work of Christian Smith and was popularized by practical theologian, Kenda Creasy Dean. Smith, in his extensive national study of youth and religion, said that the following terms could characterize the operative religious constitution of American youth—

Moralistic—God wants me to be a good person and not a jerk;
Therapeutic—God or religion should help me feel good;
Deism—God is a concept that decorates our lives, but He is not an active agent”³

Root warns against MTD since it presents Christian faith as a kind of individualized consumer spirituality.

Second, we work towards seeking to understand a new ontological reality, or it will become an obstruction to adolescent faith formation rather than leveraging for good—*Moth*

Myth vs. Phatic Communion. Andrew Zirschky, in his book, *Beyond the Screen, Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation*, explains the phenomenon of the Moth Myth as it applies to youth and their mobile devices:

The Moth Myth is a reasonable assumption considering the average American teenager owns 3.5 digital gadgets and daily engages in screen time equivalent to roughly two months of youth group attendance. Moths flit against light bulbs out of pure phototactic (light-loving) attraction, but teenagers search for something else—something beyond the screen.⁴

Furthermore, “increasingly empirical research suggests that teenage use of technology points beyond an adolescent’s hunger for gadgets toward longing for relationships of presence.

And social media primarily functions for teenagers as a means of ‘phatic communion.’⁵

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski coined the term *phatic communion*—with no intention of religious overtones—in the 1920’s reflecting that “phatic interactions depend little on the intellectual content of the communication.”⁶ Phatic communion describes the “ties of union” that can be created by exchanges that appear meaningless, such as teenage text messages.

Through repetitive cliché, or ritualistic words and phrases, we communicate in a phatic form all the time.⁷ Moreover, phatic exchanges create a sense of connectedness and personal availability.

They are “neither the result of intellectual reflection nor do they necessarily arouse reflection in the listener,” wrote Malinowski; instead, they do something far more critical—they bind people together.⁸ Adolescents are “seeking relationships of knowing and intimacy built through the sharing of ‘a million meaningless moments.’ They are looking for those who will be present in the little things of life: in picture comments, messages, and mundane chatter, whether offline or online. These make a presence in the moments of crisis and suffering meaningful and give entry into truly meaningful place-sharing.”⁹

Zirschky emphasizes, “Today the image of individuals being contained within bounded, hierarchically organized, discrete groups (tribes, churches, clubs, towns) as ‘one group at a time’ is mostly an image of the past and does not adequately describe what we find on the ground. According to sociologist Barry Wellman, a shift to networked individualism liberates people from the restrictions of tight-knit groups and freeing them to form personal networks that are large, loosely knit, and which give expanded opportunities for learning, problem-solving, and relational interaction.”¹⁰ Zirschky’s synthesis of adolescent ontological reality and even our own, support the Kinnaman and Matlock virtual global faith community construct in *Faith for Exiles* as “Digital Babylon.”¹¹

The third critical aspect to be cognizant of in cultural tensions and obstructions hindering adolescent spiritual formation and resilience, we begin to lean into the significance of James E. Loder’s work and his influence on the scholarship of youth ministry. Michael Langford, in his article, “Troubled Complexion: Adolescent Abandonment as Spiritual Facelessness in the Thought of James,” [as in James Loder] argues we are in a crisis of “adult abandonment of youth—so compelling a phenomenon that cuts across all the traditional demographics used in studying adolescence. Strangely, abandonment is rather an egalitarian affliction. Rich and poor, dominant and minority culture, boys and girls, younger and older—adolescents of many different ilks suffer from systemic abandonment.”¹²

Langford supports **Loder’s** argument with two notable qualitative studies on adolescent abandonment conducted by researchers who immersed themselves in the world of youth—Chap Clark’s *Hurt 2.0* (2011) and Patricia Hersch’s *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (1998). Each study illustrates the depth and breadth of this phenomenon. Furthermore, with piercing assertion Langford states:

The poorer kids are alone; in under-resourced homes that increasingly include a mother, the parent or parents work multiple jobs and juggle schedules, leaving the youth to fend for themselves. The richer kids are alone; [for parents] to maintain a cultural brand, youth are forced into a breakneck schedule that leaves little time with parents who themselves are often career-or brand-driven. Other possible forums for adult-youth interaction are commonly designed to maximize the youth/adult ratio leaving less possibility for meaningful adult-youth relationships. Often, lack of funding or community **will** schools, sports, after-school programs, and youth ministries feature many adolescents and few adults if more than one.”¹³

Notes:

¹Adolescence: In antiquity, generally, the Greeks and the Romans had a scale of adolescence that began on the day children grew facial hair and ended when they turned 30. During the trial of adulthood, young men were expected to display maturity and dependability before reentering society as a contributing member. The educational custom was to train young men to have a proficiency in math, arts, rhetoric, politics, and social studies, as well as serve a term in military service. Spartan Life. Accessed July 14, 2020 <http://www.ancientgreece.co.uk/staff/resources/background/bg1/home.html>; Mark Cartwright, "Ancient Greek Society." Ancient History Encyclopedia. March 15, 2018. Accessed July 14, 2020. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/483/ancient-greek-society/>; *Prolonged adolescence* is a phenomenon emerging at the end of the Modern era and beginning in Postmodernism. Amy Jacober explains in her book, *The Adolescent Journey, An Interdisciplinary Approach to Practical Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2011), 52, that Peter Blos cites the new characterization as being introduced by Siegfried Bernfeld as early as 1923; Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis. *Understanding Youth, Adolescent Development for Educators*. (Harvard Education Press Cambridge, 2010), 18–19. Moreover, it is important to understand adolescence in the context of human development theory as defined by Erik Erikson (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik_Erikson). Loder, an inter-disciplinarian between the psychology of human development and the theology of spiritual formation, respects and depends on Erikson for his paradigm and cites the following Erikson model for the eight stages of healthy human development, with an emphasis on the notion of identity formation and intimacy with Jesus capability during adolescence, and hinging the Barna first best practice of identity formation (stage 5):

1. Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust—the task in infancy of developing a sense of basic trust that one’s parents or primary caretakers will be adequately nurturing.
2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt—the toddler’s task of establishing first steps toward self-sufficiency and the sense of competence that accompanies it.
3. Initiative vs. Guilt—the early childhood task of building on one’s budding autonomy to initiate constructive activities and begin to take leadership roles within the family and friendship groups.
4. Industry vs. Inferiority—the middle to late childhood task of consolidating a sense of efficacy as a skilled contributor within school and family contexts.
5. *Identity vs. Role Confusion—building on the experiences of late childhood, the adolescent task of organizing skills, interests, and values into a core sense of self and applying it to present and future pursuits.*
6. *Intimacy vs. Isolation—the early adulthood task of bringing one’s sense of self into intimate relationships with others, typically for the purpose of building a lifelong partnership.*
7. Generativity vs. Stagnation—the middle adulthood task of utilizing one’s social and vocational/professional attributes to make a lasting contribution to one’s family and larger community.
8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair—the late adulthood task of accepting one’s lifelong contributions and moving toward death with a sense of integrity and peace.

²“It refers to the atmosphere of impersonal fellowship rather than personal friendship, of spiritual communion participation in which people can speak, hear, seem and think freely, a form of togetherness and amity that brings a pooling of resources.” Within the climate of democratic exchange in classical world of Greece, the word *Koinonia* was first coined—a word to be later used in the Acts of the Apostles (2.42; 4:32-35;5.12-16). Patrick de Mare, Robin Piper and Sheila Thompson. *Koinonia, From Hate, through Dialogue to Culture in the Large Group*. (New York: Karnac, 1991), 2.

³ Andrew Root. *Faith Formation in a Secular Age, Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), xvi.

⁴ Andrew Zirschky. *Beyond the Screen, Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation*. (Nashville: Youth Ministry Partners and Abingdon Press, 2015), 11–12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶ Bronislaw Malinowski. “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages” in CK. Ogden & I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1923), 296–336. Quoted by Zirschky, 155.

⁷ Zirschky, 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Ancient Babylon was the pagan-but-spiritual, hyper-stimulated, multicultural, imperial crossroad that became the unwilling home of Judean exiles, including the prophet Daniel, in the sixth century BCE. But digital Babylon is not a physical place. It is the pagan-but-spiritual, hyper-stimulated, multicultural, imperial crossroads that is the virtual home of every person with Wi-Fi or a data plan.” Kinnaman and Matlock, 20.

¹² Michael Langford. “Troubled Complexion: Adolescent Abandonment as Spiritual Facelessness in the Thought of James.” *The Journal of Youth Ministry*, no. 13 (1), (2014), 89.

¹³ *Ibid.*

James E. Loder's Lens of the *Transforming Moment*,
A Framework for Discerning the Critical Elements of Spiritual Formation

On the heels of Langford, we will proceed to elaborate on Loder's theological lens as a means to understand the effectiveness of the spiritual formation of resilient discipleship in adolescence, whether in the home, youth ministry, or the koinonia. James Loder is perhaps one of the most profound theologians in human development and academia, influencing scholars in youth ministry.¹ Loder taught at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1962 until he died in 2001. He was an inter-disciplinarian, although he was a professor of Christian Education. Loder had expertise in a wide range of fields from theology to sociology, from the intersection of science and spirituality, and from spirituality to psychology. The tapestry of his work exemplifies his agility to combine disciplines into meaningful insights that support the ministry's praxis in our contemporary age. His interdisciplinary work includes *The Transforming Moment*, 1989; *The Knights Move*, *The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science*, (co-authored, W. Jim Neidhardt) 1992; *The Logic of the Spirit, Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 1998; and *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*, 2018, published posthumous (ed. Dana Wright). In his profound and wide-ranging works, he weaves together the ideas of a diverse set of thinkers: Freud, Jung, Erikson, Barth, Kierkegaard, Buber, and Luther, to name a few. His goal was to simultaneously view human development from "below" with the social sciences and "above" with theology.²

The foundation of Loder's work that is most relevant for the discussion concerning adolescence, resilient faith development, and intimacy with Jesus is discussed thoroughly in his book, *The Transforming Moment*. If one understands Loder's paradigm language, it becomes a

great asset in helping not only adolescents transform in partnership with the Spirit, but also to build the faith of youth ministers and the adults those in leadership seek to guide towards God.

The next several pages intend to be a summary and guide to Loder's paradigm he called *Logic of Transformation*³ or *Convictional Knowing*⁴. Loder has an irresistible claim to his paradigm for those with a passion for youth ministry—disciples of Christ striving to become and form resilient disciples in themselves and others. The claim:

The essence of convictional knowing is the intimacy of self with its Source. The breakdown of the eternal distance between them, the establishment of the internal dialogue, the illumination of Christ, the shared joy of Christ, and the thrust into the people and culture of Christ, together constitute the shape of that intimacy. This is the form of the ongoing spiritual communion into which convictional experiences call the believer, not once but again and again throughout life.⁵

In his opening pages of *The Transforming Moment*, Loder explains two things about his paradigm. First, “the pattern characterizes—though does not exhaust—the nature of the human spirit, and in a very different but analogical way, it also characterizes the work of the Holy Spirit in human experience.”⁶ Second, he gives credit for the paradigm's inspiration in a more primal form, beginning in the mind of Søren Kierkegaard.⁷ Kierkegaard's poetic journaling reflects on a transformational moment with his father and, in turn, himself. Months before his father's passing, he and his father reconciled to each other and, in turn, with God. Loder writes about Kirkegaard's poetic journal entry, “On May 19th, 1838 at 10:30 am a licentious university student, age 25, whose life had been plagued with a family curse, an ethos of death, a father whose Christianity was austere and guilt-ridden, and the unremitting dialectical powers of his genius, recorded the following experience:”⁸

There is such a thing as indescribable joy which glows through us as unaccountability as the Apostle's outburst is unexpected: “Rejoice, and again I say, Rejoice!—not a joy over this or that, but full jubilation “with hearts, souls, and voices”: “I rejoice over my joy, of, in, by, at, on, through, with my joy”—a heavenly refrain which

cuts short, as it were, our ordinary song; a joy which cools and refreshes like a breeze, a gust of the trade wind which blows from the Grove of Mamre to the eternal mansion.⁹

Loder's thesis for *The Transforming Moment* is a poetic encapsulation and response to Kirkegaard's journal entry:

Essential to the spirit's nature is its wind-like quality; it often takes us by surprise and leads us where we would not otherwise go. However, its deeper characteristic is its integrity in driving toward meaning and wholeness in every complex and variegated context. Thus, an understanding of the spirit, continuity, and discontinuity must be combined in a patterned process that does justice both in the context of a single act or event. This study proposes to show how they are combined in what will be called the logic of transformation.¹⁰

To understand the language of Loder's pattern, it is helpful, to begin with a glossary of terms describing four dimensions of human existence, so to understand Convictional Knowing. The four dimensions are 1. Self, 2. Lived World, 3. Void, and 4. Holy. The concise glossary of terms is as follows:

Self

This inherently relational notion has three aspects: (1) *Reflective self-awareness* whereby, in reflection, one ascertains inwardly that agency which is the source of freedom, choice, and belief. (2) *Conscience* in the generic sense of knowing within and together with oneself. It stresses the self as an internal relationship in which the quality of the relationship is decisive; perhaps it is felt like the integrity of selfhood. (3) *Self as spirit*, in which the relationship of integrity is grounded transparently in the Spiritual Presence of Christ, "the power that posits the self," as a positive relationship (S. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*). It is argued here in agreement with Kierkegaard that the self's integrity is intrinsically impossible without such a transparent grounding.¹¹

Lived World

Derived from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, the phrase refers to the second primary dimension of human existence. It designates the universal human tendency to create and compose the external realities of one's existence—other-selves, social and institutional realities, symbolic constructions of culture, and physical order, including one's body—into a coherent, workable, and livable whole. Since these factors do spontaneously generate such a coherent, workable, and livable whole, since these factors do not spontaneously generate such a coherent whole, the Self—out of, and in interaction with, its physical psychological, social, and cultural resources—constructs and maintains a

world. In the absence or collapse of the horizon of one's world, pathological behavior may result.¹²

Void

Human existence destined for annihilation and the ultimate absence of being. This irrevocable drift toward utter emptiness and nothingness that accompanies human life from birth has many faces—such as loneliness, depression, despair, and death.¹³

Holy

The Hebrew word for Holy, *Kadosh*, implies the separateness of the Holy from all that is worldly, human, or profane. Rudolf Otto (*Idea of the Holy*) emphasizes the quality of the Holy to fascinate and draw at the same time that it terrifies and repels. Thus, he uses the phrase *mysterium tremendum fascinans* to refer to the Holy. In this study the Holy is capitalized, constituting the fourth dimension of existence which has the power of the Holy Spirit, the capacity to transform the other three dimensions.¹⁴ [See “prevenient” grace explanation and Arminian theology the Holy Spirit is able to transform the human spirit before indwelling of the Holy Spirit at baptism.]¹⁵

To illustrate the process of Transformational moments and Convictional Knowing in the four dimensions of human existence—Self, Lived World, Void, and Holy—the pericope on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-35, is used by Loder. Here he explains his thinking with a view on Biblical theology as the foundation:

Here I will use a biblical narrative to illustrate transformational logic transposed into four dimensions under the authorship and mediation of Jesus as the Christ. By this device, I will spell out the analogy that pertains between human and Holy Spirit in convictional knowing and finally say what the analogy implies for convictional experiences. The particular narrative will be Luke 24:13-35.

The text has been selected because, rather surprisingly, it embodies in one periscope all of the central turning points in the process of convictional knowing. Also, it appears historically that this text not only describes a particular episode but also the life of the early church as it sought to interpret its existence and nature in light of the transformation of Israel as mediated by and consummated in Christ. Moreover, it provides us with the opportunity to develop a position using a fairly pure specimen.¹⁶

According to Loder, “The steps, in their systematic interconnectedness, constitute the logic of transformation inherent in the human spirit. Here it is important to understand that transformation is not merely a synonym for positive change. Rather it occurs whenever, within a

given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to alter axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.”¹⁷ The intertwined steps with events of the chosen periscope–journey on the Emmaus road–are as follows and offer “the patterned process by which the Holy Spirit transforms all transformations of the human spirit–initiated, mediated, and concluded by Christ.”¹⁸

1. Conflict in Four Dimensions of Human Existence:
Lived World, Self, Void, Holy
Luke 24:13-24

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^(a) from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

Loder illumines the following in the first step (**of Self?**),

“Jesus’ death only begins to expose the conflict in which they were already unconsciously involved. Restoration seems to mean a reconstitution of political and economic reality in conformity with the vision of Israel’s religious destiny. All this is now threatened from without by the Roman occupation, but more important to the two men, it is threatened from within by ‘chief priests and rulers.’ A deep-running complex of oppositions is embedded in this struggle of nation against nation, but deeper and more intense is the apparent sense that the current leadership of Israel is in fundamental contradiction with the hope and destiny of Israel; their hope for Israel had always been too small because their inherited separation from the greatness of the Holy One of Israel made them too dependent on their cultural heritage in spite of their criticisms of their

leaders. Thus, the divine initiative whereby Jesus submits to crucifixion is not creating a conflict but is exposing, focusing, and intensifying a conflict they unconsciously brought into their original acquaintance with him. So, it is with the Spiritual Presence of Christ in contemporary experience as well.”¹⁹

2. Scanning and the Inner Teacher:

Luke 24:25-28

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.

In the second step, Loder explains,

“[B]oth Augustine and Calvin called the Holy Spirit ‘the inner teacher.’ The Teacher is not to be separated from the scriptures and the historical community being illumined; yet this Teacher transcends the community as these two men know it, because he is relating them to it in a new way. This is a relationship they themselves could never have invented, nor were they raised by their own community to interpret their tradition in the way this ‘Teacher’ instructs. It is this link with the historical community, and at the same time transcendence of it, that builds up in these two men the anticipation of transformation.”²⁰

3. Transforming Intuition of Christ:

Luke 24:29-31

²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So, he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

The following Loder commentary on the third step is too rich to ignore in its entirety, and in my opinion deserves to be understood in light of Jesus’s careful, intentional, and intimate connection formed through the Holy Spirit:

As the two [disciples] draw near to where they are going, they constrain the Teacher to stay with them. The resolution—often threatening—ultimately must be chosen. Because “arrival” takes the form of a decisive intuition by which the full range of elements in the conflict are transformed through negation and integration, the moment that brings the

elements of the conflict together is potentially threatening. Thus, some people prefer a familiar conflict to a new and unfamiliar resolution. Receptivity to convictional insight depends on a willingness to embrace the unexpected. Because of this and the inherent ambivalence toward the Holy, people may dismiss the resolutions to which they have led. These two [disciples] invite transformation.

“When he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight” (Luke 24:30-31). In these two verses are summarized transformation of the four dimensions of conflict. The broken bread is a spiritually charged symbol. It is, first Jesus’s body, broken on the cross. Jesus’s own symbol for his crucifixion, now held by his resurrected Presence, is given to them. It is second, their brokenness in four dimensions as taken into his body. Thus, in the broken bread, his brokenness is untied with theirs, and theirs is united with his as they are invited to take it into themselves. This, however, is not merely a union of brokenness, because the bread is embraced by his resurrected Presence. It is a union of brokenness embraced and upheld by his resurrected Presence, which is now theirs to incorporate. The crucifixion and resurrection are here drawn into the most powerful tension possible; in this tension its polarities interpret each other and so constitute in their tensive unity of the new reality by which void and Holy are to be combined without denial or absorption....The void is revealed by the Holy to be its shadow; the Holy is revealed by the void to be the Source and ground of its (the void’s) transformation. As the two men “take this in,” they are not only exposed in their brokenness they brought consciously to that room, but they are also exposed in the false hopes they brought into their relationship to Jesus in the first place. Israel is not to be merely restored, it is to be totally transformed, and out of meager broken hopes like theirs will come its transformation. Indeed, breaking down all false hopes for its restoration is a necessary condition of its transformation; such was the “cross” these two men had been bearing without realizing that it was a dark foreshadowing of the resurrected “Israel.” Thus, the broken body received from the risen Lord presents a whole new reality, a startling way of looking at things. In effect, and in fact, “their eyes were opened.” But he vanished! How is that when their eyes were opened, they could see less? This is of course a marvelous thing because the new Israel will not be external to them, bound to one place and time, one space and one person; it will be the new reality in which all persons can live. They have become able to compose the “world” as his World; that is, as it is promised to be composed for them—ahead of them, and from beyond them. They had been bound to an historically ingrown transcendence, no bigger than historic, Israelite enculturation; but the “new Israel” is to be a total transformation of all “worlds,” of the void and of all selves. The Holy is also transformed (for them) from one who would establish his rulership preeminently in the lived “world” of the cultic and political order of Israel, to the Holy who established his World in and through all the dimensions of human existence. Thus, as long as he remains an object as of their perception, he is a factor in their lived “world”; to that extent he conceals his nature as the Christ, the revelation of all being, including theirs. His vanishing as their eyes were opened means that his true nature is revealed; they now “see” the universal range, depth, and power of his Lordship, which also includes their particular existence. Of course, they can no longer see him “out there” after he has become the lenses through which they view all beings and even being-

itself. Faith as “seeing” always implies that his perceived physical presence—an object in the lived “world”—is to be transcended by the recognition that he is Lord of all that is.²¹

4. Release and Mundane Ecstasy
Luke 24:32

³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

In step four, Loder, describes a pivotal moment, the experience is visceral, includes an aha realization and leads to joy that transcends life’s situations:

Following Jesus’s disappearance, the two men experience a coalescence within and correlatively a power of new being reflected in their dialogue, “Were not our hearts burning ...” [T]he vitality released in the Emmaus couple is a result of their recognition that the broken parts of their lived world had suddenly been reorganized into a new configuration. To this extent their joy is an “aha!” experience. ... Thus, the release that is a consequence of instruction in the Spirit is not merely the psychological catharsis of tension reduction for a return to equilibrium and known patterns of adaptation. It is a suffusion of the personality with the joy of the “Teacher” at his having “made the point,” so to say. In biblical terms, he works “in us” for his “good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13) and “his Spirit testifies with our spirits” (Romans 8:16) Loder distinguishes mundane from an outward manifestation of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). In the ecstasy of Christian experience, one perceives the world of common experience in a new way; one becomes absorbent of almost more “mundaneness” than can be contained. One is beside oneself in the perception of particularity and the essential goodness of being itself. This is a direct reflection of one’s awakening to one’s own particularity and goodness as given by grace. This is to say, one comes into Christ’s World—his intended creation—out of those “worlds” that induce self-alienation.²²

5. Verification—New People
Luke 24:33-35

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

In the fifth step, Loder explains how the Holy Spirit works to connect the koinonia in common knowledge and transformation about Jesus and the complete Gospel story:

When the two men from Emmaus arrive at Jerusalem, they are confronted with the very proclamation they themselves had planned to bring to the Jerusalem disciples. “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon [Peter]! Then told was happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the “breaking of bread.” This surprising coincidence points to the unique character of confirmation and congruence in the four-dimensional patterning of transformation. In two-dimensional transformation, the final step is one of investing released energy in a test of the insight or intuition, both for its congruence with the conflict and for its correspondence with some “public” in the new situation.

What appears on the final phase of this narrative is confirmation of synchronistic reversal of expectations. The two [disciples] thought they would tell of Christ’s resurrection, but instead they are told. Thus, they are put into a “public” in a way that could only occur by Christ’s action independently of any verification process by an established body of experts. The creation of a “new people” is the confirmation of a shared intuition of Jesus as the Christ.²³

6. Verification–Expanded New Culture Koinonia

In the summary of the Transformational moment in Luke 24 and the Convictional Knowing process, Loder punctuates our experience in our own intimacy with God during our personal events that the Holy Spirit orchestrates for us, if we are willing to step into them like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, Simon and Cleopas, “[F]our-dimensional synchronistic pattern is enshrined in nearly every major theological symbol. That is, synchronistic events (such as the Emmaus story and its climax in Jerusalem) do in experience what theological symbols embody at the level of culture. Such events begin in a two-dimensional-context, but they negate every form of two-dimensional connectedness and point to a fourth dimension. Similarly, key theological symbols are based in two-dimensional experience (e.g., father); then, in a third dimension they are negated (e.g., not any ordinary human father); then, finally they are heightened or magnified so as to point toward a fourth dimension, (e.g., heavenly father). The same four-dimensionality is implicit in agape love, Kingdom of God, God’s grace, etc. Thus, theological symbols may capture and preserve the unique mode of four-dimensional relatedness that characterizes the koinonia in a cognitive pattern.”²⁴

Loder adds a caveat on symbols:

However, theological symbols are not best understood analytically—in terms of the modes of activity and relationship that give rise to them. Rather they are best understood as evoking an awareness of the four-dimensional reality that called them into being, the result of Abba in heaven emotive theme ... It is only when theological symbols are understood in terms of the higher reality which calls them forth that the synchronistic life behind the symbol is preserved. It is only then that the symbol has revelatory power to reveal the fashion in which the four dimensions of existence, and especially power to reveal the fashion in which the fourth dimension transforms the other three [Holy impacting lived world, self and void] Of course a supreme example of this is the Eucharistic moment in which Simon and Cleopas recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and are therein transformed.²⁵

Notes:

¹ “Placing youth ministry within practical theology left room for youth ministry educators to draw upon contemporary theologians as well as the Evangelical tradition for grounding their discipline. On the east coast of the United States, Kenda Creasy Dean at Princeton Theological Seminary engaged the work of James Loder and Richard Osmer to provide a way to free the youth ministry from the dominance of the social sciences. Concurrently on the west coast, Kara Powell, Cheryl Crawford, and Chap Clark built on the Practical Theology of Ray Anderson to bring the social sciences into the theological discussion of youth ministry.” Mark H. Senter III, “History of Youth Ministry Education.” *Journal of Youth Ministry*, no. 12 (2), (Spring 2014), 101; Amy Jacober in her book, *Adolescent Journey*, relied on the theology of Loder, 27–28, 66–70, 82.

However, Jacober points out in n63 of 67, the following contention of Loder by James Fowler, “It is important to note that there are criticisms of Loder’s approach. James Folwer, while not in complete disagreement, writes, ‘In Loder’s worthy effort to focus on process of development, rather than on overly reified stages, I think he falls into a misleading overstatement ... If we live more in transition than in stages, why speak of stages at all?’ James Loder and James Fowler. “Conversations of Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* and Loder’s *Transforming Moment*,” *Religious Education* 77, no. 2 (March–April 1982), 146. Loder answers this very question throughout his writing, particularly here: ‘It is generally assumed that the transformational process is in the service of and dependent on the stages of development. This is surely true where ego development and inherited structural potentials are concerned, but it is not fundamentally true. The transformational process is more fundamental in that it may (1) transcend stages, reversing arrested development and reinstating repressed structures; also, (2) it may leap ahead bypassing stages and establish an imaginative basis for development that incorporates but is not restricted to the so-called normal sequence. In effect, I am suggesting a figure-ground reversal with respect to stage and process. Whereas most studies of development are concerned with mapping the stages and leave the process to itself, this discussion is concerned primarily with the integrity of the process. I want to let the stages emerge in the context of a primary concern for process, first, because we actually spend more of our lives in transition than we do in equilibrium, and second, because stages, as we will see, must finally become a self-liquidating notion if the transformation of human life is to be consummated in Christ’” (Loder, *Transforming Moment*, 131). Additionally, Andrew Root wrote a foreword for Loder’s book, which was published posthumously in 2018, *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*.

² Senter, 101.

³ Langford, 90.

⁴ Ratcliff, Donald. “Qualitative Data Analysis and the Transforming Moment.” *Transformation*, no. 25.2 & 25.3 (2008), 116. Loder found, “a five-step pattern in the work of the human spirit that was relatively consistent across many aspects of life, including major scientific

advances, ancient Greek insights, psychotherapy, poetry and other forms of ‘knowing’ in the fine arts, social and cultural transformations, human development processes such as identity formation and personality transformation, and religious conversion, and other spiritual experiences.”

⁵ Ibid., 119. “While Loder does not clearly differentiate the transforming moment from convictional knowing, it seems clear that several distinctions are implicit from his description. First, convictional knowing is marked by the clear work of God and the Holy Spirit throughout the process, whereas the transforming moment depends upon the human spirit (though not necessarily apart from the Holy Spirit) and the transformation may or may not be spiritual in nature—scientific insights are also regularly described as the product of a transforming moment by Loder. Second, all four dimensions [1. Self, 2. Lived World, 3. Void, 4. Holy] are involved in convictional knowing, whereas only two dimensions are at work in the transforming moment (Loder apparently implies the first two dimensions, but does not explicate this detail.) Third, the ‘lived world’ and self or ‘I’ dimensions must themselves be transformed in convictional knowing, as one understands the world very differently, and lives in the world in a new fresh way. This is because the self has also been transformed, one is no longer the same personally.”

⁶ James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 122.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard. Accessed July 15, 2020.

⁹ Loder, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 228.

¹³ Ibid., 230.

¹⁴ Ibid., 230.

¹⁵ Ibid., 224.

¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz. *Theology for the Community of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200. “One of Calvin’s followers, James Arminius (1560–1609), softened the seemingly harsh view of Reformed theology. To do so, Arminius reasserted the semi-Pelagian position that Adam’s offspring do not share in the guilt of the sin of our first father. Arminius added a new dimension, however. He theorized that present to the individual is a special, ‘prevenient’ grace from God. Prevenient grace makes it possible for us to overcome our inherent depravity. The

Dutch thinker wrote: ‘It is this grace which operates on the mind, affections, and the will; which infuses good thoughts into the mind, inspires good desires into the affections, and bends the will to carry into execution good thoughts and good desires.’” James Arminius, “Letter to Hippolytus a Collibus 4,” in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall, three volumes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 2:472.] Above all prevenient grace commences salvation, promotes it, and perfects and consummates it; Wikipedia. Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism>.

¹⁷ Loder, 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97–102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 99–100

²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

²² *Ibid.*, 103.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108–109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

Application of Loder's Lens to Ecclesiological Trends and Secular Challenges Opposing Resilient Discipleship Formation in Adolescence

Adults aiding in spiritual formation of adolescents are in a pivotal *transforming moment*—a paradigm shift—in the postmodern era. Loder's lens applied to the modern-day challenges brought to bear at the beginning of the discussion. In review, we discussed Root's concept of MTD (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism) in the church; screens and their draw of phatic communion among adolescence; and adult abandonment in our society at large. How do we relate the four ontological dimensions Loder outlines: Self, Void, Lived World and Holy, and then the value of Loder's paradigm, transforming moments and convictional knowing?

First, MTD, in retrospect, may be considered a decoy for real intimacy with Jesus planted in hearts by the father of lies. (John 8:44) Replacing the goal of *koinonia* as God intended and explained by the Apostles, Paul and John (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 2:9; I John 1:3-7), defining the Gospel-type of spirituality is in contrast to the masquerading version plucked out by Root— an individualized consumer spirituality operating in only two of the four ontological dimensions, primarily Self and Lived World. Stepping into the transformational moment is not considered in the MTD New Lived World, as seen with Simon and Cleopas when accepting the invitation from Jesus in addressing the Void through the Holy.

Second, screens and their draw due to the ontological truth concerning phatic communion are primarily meeting a need of *longing for relationships of presence*. We can help be present by participating in social media; however, it does not displace the need to be fully present as a community of believers and as we assist in the Spirit-led formation of the next generations. (1

Cor. 3:6-7) The desire for phatic communion also implies that the mature adults in koinonia should not be distracted ourselves and consumed in screens, leading to moments of abandonment and non-presence in the Lived World of those around us, including adolescents. When considering Loder's lens as it applies to phatic communion, Self, Lived World, and Void are all involved. If pedagogically, The Holy is impressed on the conscious mind from a multimedia and immersive perspective to bring Jesus alive in our contemporary context for the adolescent, e.g., The Bible Project ¹ and spiritual music online, indeed contribute to a New Lived World. Yet, phatic communion accompanied with spiritually curated content streamed through devices may leave behind the primary mooring of the koinonia at large and will fail in ushering a lifetime of episodes to transforming moments and convictional knowing. (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Finally, when considering systemic abandonment in our American culture, as explained by Langford, we begin to directly see the correlation between Loder's model in combatting this particular VOID:

In light of this understanding of four-dimensional reality [Self, Lived World, Void, Holy], abandonment may be considered an instantiation of the Void. But, for the adolescent, abandonment is not merely one negative experience among others that the ego must manipulate in order to maintain a secure sense of self. Rather, abandonment, a particularly violent negation of relationality, strikes at the heart of what it means to be a human, namely, to exist in relationship with God and (therefore), others. And, since questions of identity and community take center stage in adolescence, abandonment strikes heavy blows in the consciousness of youth, against which the ego must put up covering arms of defense lest the Void show its face. To defend against despair the ego suppresses that which abandonment represents and indicates, and the adolescent is set within two-dimensional reality. Because of this, our cultural system of abandonment is structured to hinder adolescents from knowing God.²

Langford builds on the Void's primal significance, a gaping need for the adolescent, by drawing in the dimension of human development articulated by Loder as inter-disciplinary in *The Transforming Moment*:

The infant does not experience shame at staring, wide-eyed and searchingly, into the faces of all kinds of people of all ages. This shame-free look of the child is gradually abandoned during the first five years of life, but while it lasts is it often a powerful antidote to inner divisions and concealments of the adult mind. The longing for the face that will not go away seems to persist through life as we see how the hardened weary faces of the elderly people so readily warm to a child's innocent look. Something like the primal nostalgia may be behind our own response to the compelling account Martin Buber gives to the "I-Thou" relationship and to the "Thou-I" of Emil Brunner when he speaks of God's addressing us. Luther's powerful longing to look God in the Face was the desire not merely to be rid of guilt and shame but for a fundamental re-centering of his personality on a Face that would not go away.

It should be reiterated that the longing is not for the actual situation of the mother-child relationship of three to six months, but the impact of that experience in which one is given a place in the cosmos, confirmed as a self, and addressed by the presence of a loving other. To say this is "nothing but" regressive wishing is purely reductive; rather, the prototypical impact is set by the first encounter. The longing for a loving other to address the whole person (as before), including the differentiated ego with all its competencies, and to set that whole-differentiated person into the cosmos as self-affirmed and beloved.³

In essence, Langford and Loder connect the need for unconditional love, first in the home, then in the koinonia of believers to support the transition of ego identity fully transitioned to the Lordship of Jesus Christ at baptism. Until the adolescent is fully formed—the approximate age of 25— there is continued vulnerability to an adolescent's faith resiliency. Forms of hypocrisy, fear, control or abandonment can devastate positive effects and growth until faith and human development are fully formed together in adulthood leading to maturity and resilient discipleship. (Matth. 18:6; Eph. 6:4) However, this does not mean the discipling of teens and young adults should not include challenging their characters or faith. In the next section, the discussion continues on to Spirit-led roles in the community to help spiritually formation of resilient faith in adolescents.

Notes:

¹ Ibid.

² Bible Project, <https://bibleproject.com/>, Co-Founders Dr. Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, <https://bibleproject.com/tim-mackie/>. Accessed July 18, 2020.

³ Langford, 96.

Application of Loder's Lens in Understanding
Roles in Concentric Koinonia featuring Dr. Houston Heflin

The Holy koinonia in the Gospel, Acts, and the epistles are rooted and inspired by the persons of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In considering their unity and love for one another, a touchstone of perfect relationship is modeled. Stanley Grenz explains their economy and each person's intentionality:

[E]ach of the trinitarian persons has a specific role within one economy of the one God. The Father functions as the source or originator. As such, he sends the Son and the Spirit. The Son, in turn bears claim of the Father into the world, in order that the Spirit may be sent. The Spirit's role is that of completing the divine task, so that the eschatological community of the triune God may indeed come in its fullness.

The specific role of the Spirit within the economic Trinity—as completer of the divine design—arises from his fundamental identity within the immanent Trinity. To see this, we must remind ourselves that God's program in the world itself is an overflow of the dynamic within the eternity of the triune God.¹

Expanding out from the triune God as in concentric circles of koinonia within an adolescent's life, the first significant koinonia are the individual relationships with an adolescent's mother and father. Loder explained the idea of a newborn seeking the face of their mother and then, their father, and of course, that natural progression being affected by the tangible reflection of the triune God of koinonia in a healthy marriage, as Paul describes in the household codes of both Ephesians and Colossians. (Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-21) Beyond the concentric circles of the mother, father, and immediate family of koinonias are the relationships in the church, including peer friendships, mentoring adults, and the church.

Before moving to a youth ministry discussion, there are two noteworthy critical factors in the household for a healthy environment to begin the journey of resilient discipleship for an adolescent. First, parents demonstrating the character of God in the home as experienced in the

mutuality, respect, and love within the Trinity, will facilitate the koinonia environment for resilient discipleship to emerge. Perry W.H. Shaw explains, “the significance of parenting in reflecting God’s nature—a child’s search for God is colored by human relationships. As the parent-child dyad is the most direct and sustained relationship children experience in their early formative years of life, it should not be a surprise that this relationship profoundly impacts children's understandings of God.”²

Furthermore, according to G. Sabra, “God’s fatherhood is not simply a psychological extension of our experience of human fatherhood, but rather the scriptural portrayal of God’s fatherhood judges and corrects our understanding of human fatherhood and motherhood. The biblical witness to the character of God focuses not on domination and control but on love, care, grace, life, and goodness, leading to health and peace—not neurosis.”³

The second critical noteworthy factor related to the dynamic of God's economy is the intentionality of godly parenting. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9;20-25) Perry further likens our relationship with our children to that of Jesus and the Spirit's intentionality for maturation through spiritual formation:

Throughout the Gospel narrative, central themes emerge: Immanuel, incarnation, *paraklesis*. In Christ, God is with us in the flesh to come alongside his people and point the way. In Christ, God demonstrates his desire to enter into the world of his children as a means of directing his children to the good. Christian parenting that reflects God’s character involves comparable entering in the world of our own children to point them along the way. An essential element of this form of “parakletic” parenting is the recognition that children are (like us) on a pilgrimage; we should neither expect them to be anything other than children, nor should we expect from them a sinlessness that we ourselves do not live.⁴

To complement the trinitarian theological model found in the New Testament, Hanan Alexander provides a rabbinical model based on *A Jewish View of Human Learning* reflecting Deuteronomy 6:7, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk

along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Alexander explains the benefits of applying the rabbinical model for the spiritual and character formation of children:

Implicit in the rabbinic reading of the Hebrew Bible is a conception of human learning. Although in many circles it has become a source of stories for children, the [Hebrew] Bible mainly addresses adults. It does not speak of how children learn in particular but rather sets forth an approach to life-long study and spiritual growth. Childhood, as we understand it today, is a product of post-Enlightenment romanticism.⁵ The Bible, therefore, contains no clearly defined picture of the child. It does, however, offer a sophisticated picture of how people—young and old—can be initiated into a community of meaning and memory.

We can gain a glimpse of this conception and its concomitant pedagogy by considering the following pairs of concepts that are central to the rabbinic understanding of the biblical tradition:

ahavah (love) and *mitzvah* (commandment),
she-eilah (questioning) and *hagadah* (telling),
shemiah (hearing) and *asiah* (doing),
and *het* (sin) and *teshuvah* (repentance).⁶

According to Alexander, the aim of rabbinical teaching is not for learning information. Instead, “central to this pedagogy is the view that education is fundamentally an ethical activity whose purpose is to nurture and affirm the moral potential of each person through the internalization of divine teaching.”⁷ Moreover, in considering Jesus as a rabbi, blending the rabbinical Alexander learning construct with Loder's ontological construct in the spirit of Shaw—parenting that reflects godly character—brings together practical knowledge and teaching frameworks and posture for parents in the *koinonia* of the household. Loder's dimension of *Holy* among the four dimensions of ontological existence is reflected in Alexander's pairs of pedagogy that can lead to episodes of transformational moments and convictional knowing at the early ages of human development. Reflecting on Jesus as Rabbi and, for example, hearing his parables come to life give beautiful examples of the spiritual, moral, and ethical teaching outlined by Alexander. Consider three types of parables Jesus used similitude (the lost coin, Luke 15:8-10); more

extended than a similitude is a parable (the persistent widow Luke 18:1-8); and exemplary story (the good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-35).⁸

The research is now expanding further out from the concentric circles of influence starting with trinitarian koinonia, parental koinonia, and now leaning into the church and youth ministry's koinonia. Houston Heflin (Ed. D) is an accomplished scholar and professor at Abilene Christian University in spiritual formation and youth ministry. Heflin explains the critical posture parents need to express towards youth ministry and cautions away from the following temptation:

Hiring youth ministers has unanticipated consequences. For example, when churches hire a youth minister, it becomes easier for parents to slip into a perspective that assumes the hired professional has the job covered. Too often this creates a dangerous environment: parents have been tempted to back off intentional discipleship, the adult church family assumes young people are being mentored sufficiently, and the youth are not engaging with the people and opportunities they most need if they are to mature. This isn't always the case, but it's been happening more often than it should and mark a stark change from how faith communities operated in the past. For millions of people over thousands of years, it was clear that the members of a faith community all bore responsibility in teaching their young. Today, some faith communities aren't sure whose job it is. This is especially true for churches who have hired a youth minister.⁹

Furthermore, Heflin explains that the dynamic of youth and family ministry is a “relationship between professional youth ministers and families within churches [and] must be—if nothing else—a collaboration, as these two groups partner for the education and spiritual formation of youth and families.”¹⁰ Moreover, Heflin's mission of the partnerships is, in its essence:

Youth and family ministry is the Spirit-led discipleship process by which Christian adults lead teens and families into a relationship with God and Christlike maturity in the church's context.¹⁰

Heflin echoes the concern represented by the statistics of low resilient discipleship in churches globally found in Kinnaman and Matlock's research, *Faith for Exiles*, and reflects the negative results of Root's construct of MTD praxis:

In addition, churches must address the unpleasant reality of the vast number of youth who grow up in churches but reject Christian faith once they graduate from high school. There are simply too many who were active in youth and family ministry, but cease to be active in church once they leave home. It's possible that we are perpetuating this problem by allowing youth ministries to function divorced from the larger church body. The members of these organizations (the youth) feel loyal to the organization (the youth group), but not to the church. These youth ministry "organizations" have become surrogate caretakers of youth when the adult members of faith community should be fulfilling this role. For too many young people, participation in youth ministry insulates them from significant adult relationships. Youth ministries should be doing the exact opposite of this by facilitating mentoring relationships between adults and youth.¹²

Heflin posits a solution by reframing youth ministry's construct into specific roles required for the spiritual formation of adolescents. Heflin's model compliments Loder's model in the four ontological dimensions—Self, Lived World, Void, and Holy—in the roles of youth ministers. Ultimately the roles proposed by Heflin enable the opportunity for transforming moments, and convictional knowing through youth ministers and the new lived worlds they create in partnership with the Spirit. The support for the roles is grounded theologically throughout the scriptures and directly connects to the church's mission to proclaim the Gospel to the nations.

The support for the various roles of influence Heflin posits comes from the apostle

Paul, *becoming all things* in youth ministry (1 Corinthians 9:19-22):

Paul understood the need for relevance in specific contexts. While among the Jews he lived like a Jew. Among the Gentiles he was a Gentile. To the weak (persons of low social status) he became weak and to the strong he was strong. Paul's goal was always "to win as many as possible" (1 Corinthians 9:19) and to serve in such a way that "by all possible means [he] might save some" (9:22). Paul had to play many roles and alter his approach for each unique situation he encountered. Ministry today is no different. ... This ministry requires contextualization and adaptability. It demands that youth workers change and grow and lead in new environments and amid unpredictable conditions. This high calling must be accompanied by constant prayer and reflection.¹³

According to Heflin, "Based on the precedence set by God's servants in the Bible and the tasks beneficial to current-day youth ministry, I propose ten roles of professional and volunteer youth workers. These roles are—

1. Evangelistic missionary,
2. Discipling teacher,
3. Pastoral shepherd,
4. Organized administrator,
5. Bold prophet,
6. Compassionate priest,
7. Spiritual friend,
8. Equipping recruiter,
9. Visionary leader,
10. Faithful teammate.

I have grouped them into five framing identity dyads, each of which reflects a specific inclination of ministry.”¹⁴

Pair One—Educational:

Evangelistic Missionary (youth in the world) &
Discipling Teacher (youth in the church)

Pair Two—Time Allocation:

Pastoral Shepherd (presence in youth’s life) &
Organized Administrator (manage programs)

Pair Three—Advocacy:

Bold Prophet (God’s truth teller) &
Compassionate Priest (intercedes before God)

Pair Four—Relationship:

Spiritual Friend (earn trust as counselor and mentor) &
Equipping Recruiter (invest in parents and volunteers, fortify)

Pair Five—Division of Ministry Responsibility:

Visionary Leader (direct in youth lives) &
Faithful Teammate (to God the Father and in relation to parents, staff, volunteers)¹⁵

Heflin explains four essential reasons for his construct of youth ministry roles. First, “these roles have their origin in Scripture. They reflect the work of God’s servants who have embodied these identities. Jesus himself uniquely fulfilled each of these roles.”¹⁶ Second, the list of all ten ministry identities supports the mission: “Youth ministry is a Spirit-led discipleship process by which God works through Christian adults to lead teens into a relationship with God

and to Christlike maturity as part of the body of Christ, the church.”¹⁷ Third, “[L]iving out these roles gives youth examples of ways they can be in ministry. Furthermore, “it is nothing less than an imitation of God for God’s servants to play several roles: God is our Righteous Judge and Defender, our Merciful Father and Kinsman Redeemer, our Warrior and our Refuge. God’s Son is Prophet and Priest, King and Servant, Good Shepherd and Lamb. God’s Holy Spirit is Counselor and Convictor, Teacher and Interpreter.”¹⁸

Moreover, Heflin admits, “it is hardly feasible for any one person to become all things to all people all the time. Contextualization is key. When youth workers consider their identity in a specific context, they get a clearer picture of their mission and a renewed enthusiasm for work. Then they will bask in the blessings of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23) and, by God’s power, accomplish the audacious hope of youth ministry.”¹⁹

Notes:

¹ Loder, 165–166. Consider also scientific aspects of mother infant connection designed by God in our biochemistry, according to Barbara L. Fredrickson, “The clearest evidence that oxytocin [*often called the love hormone*] rises and falls in synchrony with people comes from studies of infants and their parents. When an infant and a parent—either mom or dad—interact, sometimes they are truly captivated by each other, and other times not. When an infant and parent do click, their coordinated motions and emotions show lots of mutual positive engagement. Picture moms or dads showering their baby with kisses, tickling their baby’s tiny fingers and toes, smiling at their baby, and speaking to him or her in that high-pitched, singsong tone that scientists call *motherese*. These parents are super attentive. As they tickle and coo they’re also closely tracking their baby’s face for signs that their delight is mutual. In step with their parent’s affectionate antics, these attentive babies babble, coo, smile, and giggle. Positivity resonates back and forth between them. Micro-moments of love blossom.” Barbara L. Fredrickson. *Love 2.0, Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection*, (New York: Penguin), 2013, 51–52.

² Grenz, 375; Genesis 1:1–2; John 15:26–27; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 2 Corinthians 3:17; 1 John 5:7–8; 1 Peter 1:1–2.

³ Perry W.H. Shaw. “Parenting that Reflects the Character of God.” *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (3), (2016), 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57. Reference Dr. George Sabra (2008, June.) *Our Father (and mother?) Who Art in Heaven*. Lecture presented at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon. Dr. Sabra is President, Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology. Accessed August 2, 2020 <http://www.theonest.edu.lb/en/About-NEST/Faculty-Staff>

⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶ Hanan A. Alexander. “A Jewish View of Human Learning.” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 4, no. 2, (1999): 155. Alexander quotes Phillippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Random House, 1962), 33–49

⁷ *Ibid.* Expounding on the four dyads: first, *ahavah* (love) and *mitzvah* (commandment), The words of Deuteronomy 6:4–5 were believed to be so essential to God’s teaching that they replaced the ten commandments as the centerpiece of the synagogue service and evolved during the first centuries of the common era. The liturgy introduces this passage as follows—Philip Birnbaum, trans. *Daily Prayer Book: Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1977), 75–76: “With a great love has thou loved us, Lord Our God; great and abundant mercy hast thou bestowed upon us ... (T)each us to understand, and discern, to perceive, learn and teach, to observe, do and fulfill gladly all the teachings of thy *Torah*. Enlighten our eyes in thy *Torah*; attach our heart to thy commandments; unite our heart to love and reverence thy name” (156); *she-eilah* (questioning) and *hagadah* (telling), the second dyad appeals to the pattern in scripture such as Deuteronomy 6:20, “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?’ Alexander explains, “[M]uch of the rabbinic corpus is built around a process

of raising and struggling with questions. This tradition of queries and responses is rooted in the biblical text itself” (157); *shemiah* (hearing) and *asiah* (doing), Alexander with the help of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, explains the third dyad this way, “What distinguishes mere learning from teaching, or dry law from enlivening commandment is what Buber called ‘inner power’, the willingness to accept that which is learned not merely as objective knowledge, but as a knowledge that has sufficient subjective meaning to drive one’s life-path” (160); and for the final dyad, *het* (sin) and *teshuvah* (repentance), Alexander sums up, “[T]he biblical conception of learning is a moral rather than a psychological category which presupposes that human beings are free to choose how they wish to live and capable of understanding—and taking responsibility for—the consequences of their choices. This freedom is expressed not by means of caprice or through fulfillment of momentary desires or spontaneous feelings, but rather a love of God disciplined through adherence to His instruction. This love is transmitted through familial and communal practices which give rise to natural curiosity and several sorts of questions: wise, rebellious, innocent, and unarticulated” (162).

⁸ Ibid., 155.

⁹ Madeleine Boucher, *The Parables*, Frontline from Jesus to Christ April 1998. Accessed August 2, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/parables.html>

¹⁰ Houston Heflin, 2017. “What is a Youth Minister’s job, Then?” *In Owning Faith, Reimagining the Role of Church & Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers*, edited by Dudley Chancey and Ron Brunner, (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2017), 62–63.

¹¹ Ibid., 65.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴ Houston Heflin. *Youth Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Youth Ministry*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 12.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14–15.

Best Practices in the Chicago Church of Christ and Midwest (ICOC)
from the Vantage Point of Resilient Disciples that are Youth Ministers by Vocation

Inspired by the book *Youth Ministry Across the Continents*—editor and contributor, Fraser Keay—the paper includes primary research applied to Midwest Youth and Campus Ministers of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) and their praxis on the impact of resilient discipleship as defined by Kinnaman and Matlock. A subset of Keay’s youth ministry qualitative categories were considered for interview questions crafted for the ICOC minister research.¹ The qualitative research method and questions are in Appendix I. The number of one-hour virtual interviews conducted was twenty. However, the researchers discovered a pattern among the interviewees. Nine out of the twenty had three unique qualities: 1. Millennials raised in the ICOC, 2. Resilient disciples, and 3. Are or have been youth or campus ministers professionally. For this paper’s context, the results of only the nine participants are reflected (See results Appendix II Summary of Theme Discovery). The findings in their entirety for all twenty interviews will be published later as a Pathway Project for ACU. As with any qualitative research, it is essential to note the conclusions are categorized into themes and are not cause and effect statements. As mentioned in the introduction, the prototype research ethnographically connects to a specific region in the United States. Further research may be required for other areas of the world to identify their relevant themes ethnographically.

The nine interviews’ cumulative results are valid—although not statistically significant as in a correlation coefficient found in quantitative research—from the perspective of “thin-slicing.” (Millennial Youth Minister’ Results found in Appendix II) Thin-slicing was developed by John Gottman and popularized by Malcolm Gladwell’s book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*:

[G]ottman it turns out, can teach us a great deal about a critical part of rapid cognition known as thin-slicing. “Thin-slicing” refers to the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on very narrow slices of experience. ... Thin-slicing is a part of what makes the unconscious so dazzling. But it’s also what we find problematic about rapid cognition. How is it possible to gather the necessary information for a sophisticated judgment in such a short period of time? ... What we are doing is an automated, accelerated unconscious version of what Gottman does with videotapes and equations [input experiences as data points to understand stimulus and effect.]²

The interviews covered three areas of inquiry: First, overarching most essential themes in the adolescent’s spiritual lived world to influence resilient discipleship; then, ministry and pastoral influence themes; and finally, parenting influence themes observed by the youth ministers. There were three overarching primary themes: resilient discipleship in the home; multiple significant Christian spiritual relationships; and healthy peers to create a counterculture environment compared to the secular world. Second, the ministry and pastoral care primary themes: ministers are Christlike teachers and mentors with vulnerable transparency; maintain rhythms of presence in an adolescent’s life, facilitate a healthy peer teaching environment, and deep teaching for intentional biblical literacy—no formula is unique to a group or individual. Finally, the minister’s observed useful parenting themes, whether from their own parents’ training or what they have witnessed in other family dynamics of the adolescents they have nurtured. The primary parenting themes are parents are authentic Christlike resilient disciples; parents maintain rhythms of spirituality for themselves and their children; the home is a spiritual sanctuary; and parents influence the identification of other spiritual mentors for their adolescents. One clear harmonized message among all the ministers is that there is no formula, and there are exceptions. There must be room for the mystery of God that gives us hope in all lived worlds of adolescence. (Find more detail in Appendix II)

Here are some examples of these overarching themes and practices among the youth ministers, and their observations of parental practices that influence resilient discipleship:

So, I would say family has a unique opportunity that nobody else really has, and it's because the teens see the parents all the time. The parents have the most unique opportunity to show that discipleship is real, whereas anybody else, I don't see their whole life I can have a mentor that meets with me a couple of hours a week, or I have these people at church that I see, but I don't know their whole lives. I do know my parent's lives, I can see so if they are genuine in their faith, and we see them repenting and we see them engaged, that goes a long way. And the opposite is true, if they're not, then it has the potential to discount all of it, because these are the people I know the most, these are the people that should really be this great example and they're not... I wonder who else is not real. So, I would say that example in that genuine faith, genuine conviction, willingness to repent, seeing all of that stuff at home on a consistent basis is huge, and if they don't see it, then that can color their whole perception on the church and discipleship. Maybe everybody else is kind of fake too.

Jeremy Lefler
Chicago Youth Minister & Congregational Teacher

I think they [adolescents] see duplicity really, really well; they see hypocrisy really, really well, because I think that's a pretty formative thing in their minds, so I would say, [parents] don't have to model perfection. Something my dad used to always tell me is: "As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be the best repenters." "We don't have everything figured out, but we know repentance better than anyone else."

The older I've gotten, the more profound those statements have become to me, It's not about having everything figured out, it's just about being really good at repenting, really good at turning back to Jesus when we see it or when someone presents to us and that involves humility and all these other characteristics. So, my parents would regularly apologize to us if they said something wrong, or they got in an argument or they were working through something, or they had a critical thought about something and they shared it out loud in a way they shouldn't have, they were not afraid to apologize to us, and share their repentance and they would also call us to repentance, if we needed to... And then my parents also modeled personal faith, my parents prayed on the front porch together, they've probably missed five days in their entire marriage, and we were always taught growing up that do not interrupt them during that time, if the phone rings, take a message, they'll call them back, but that was there every morning they would do that, and it was usually 30-45 minutes, sometimes an hour, it wasn't just a short little five-minute thing. And then, as we got older, it would be things like if one of our parents were out of town, he would ask one of the kids to come out and sit with them in the morning until I would take my dad's place and pray with my mom, if my dad was out doing something or whatever, so that was a huge thing for me was to see them... Yeah, it wasn't just a show. and it wasn't just words.

Tanner Versage
Evangelist & Chicago Campus Minister

I've recently had some conversations with my parents as well, because I have now children of my own. "When did you start [teaching and training] doing this?" I want to be [imitate them] because a lot of times as a child of Christians growing up in that home environment and children of leaders in the church, many times people will ask, "Didn't you feel so much pressure from your parents to become a Christian or to get baptized, or just to be in the Bible or whatever?" And my answer has always been, "No, I never felt a single drop of pressure, I experienced hope and urging, "Hey, this is going to help you do you want to _____? But if you don't, that's up to you" That was very clear to me. I understood that, that [my spirituality] was my choice. I'm sure behind closed doors, my parents were grieving and fearful for me. I know going off to college, my mom said she cried many tears because I was not a disciple ... that's a very scary feeling to launch your kid into the world and they have not chosen to be faithful. I remember I asked them, I said, "I don't remember any pressure. How did you create that environment as leaders in the church?" Because I know now being in the ministry—eight years only—that our job is full of problems. It's about 75 to 80% problems and issues and hard conversations, and not just the preaching ... "So how did you deal with the pain and stressors of the job at hand of the Kingdom and not bring that in the home?" And their answers were, "[The concerns] had nothing to do with you, it had nothing to do with our children. We're called by God to raise you in the way you should go, and so we want to build great memories, have great conversations, family devotionals, dinner times, and family time."

Jessica Versage
Chicago Women's & Campus Minister

And obviously what I'm doing isn't working. I'm not finding anything or any answers. And again, even though I'm familiar with the story of the cross, I'm familiar with Jesus dying for my sins. I think seeing it with fresh eyes and seeing it very personally, not like this was a story or that this is what God did for everybody and Jesus died for the whole world, but really personalizing my faith. I think even that connection of, he fully knows me. I'm fully known by God. I'm fully known by Jesus, and they still chose me. They still love me. They still want me, and that was something for me personally, I was really wrestling with because I didn't think anybody fully knew me because I would put on a different hat for different people, and so therefore I didn't feel loved because how could you—you don't fully know them. And so, I think I felt this really deep love and deep acceptance from God in those ways—that's even something for youth that grow up, even in church. I try to get them to see the Bible with fresh eyes. We can read about Jesus and we can go, "Oh yeah, and then he healed the blind, and then He raised Lazarus from the dead, and those are the most incredible, amazing things you've ever seen," and so I think we can get so familiar that that hinders our faith and our walk with God. And so, I think really trying to bring life to scriptures and stories that they've heard over and over and

over again, to help them see really truly how amazing God is, how amazing Jesus is, and then how personal God and Jesus are, and that they care about what's going on in my heart—Jesus was tempted in every way as we are. He felt all emotions and all the feelings we and especially as adolescents in your emotions and everything are constantly all over the place. You're figuring out who you are. You're figuring out so many things. I think it's one of Satan's greatest things to make us feel very alone in that time. I think really helping people to see, "No, Jesus can understand even _____." And that's a big teen thing, "Nobody can understand me, my parents can't understand me." But even if we can feel that way, kind of finding that truth of that Jesus understands. He's been through these things and you can trust in him because he's been through these things. He knows how to pull you through them.

Christie Larr
Chicago Women's Minister

[What's] interesting [about] kids who grew up in the church—one thing I learned—I just stumbled on it and found it to be effective was with teens who grew up in the church or spend a large part of their life in the church—they could go through the motions. They knew how to talk, the talk, but we would have a Bible study where I would say, "We're going to learn how to pray." And ideally if weather allowed we would go to a park and be outside. We'd sit on a bench or picnic table or something and look at a few passages [of scripture]. I would then say, "But when we pray here, we're just going to... pour our hearts out to God. I don't want you to have any filter necessarily [—be real]." [And they would respond], Are you for real?" And I would emphasize, "Hey, no filter, no filter. But whatever is on your heart, God wants to hear it. And as you pray, I want you to really try to connect with the fact that God is in our presence. And he's hearing what you're saying." Then I would pray first, and I would try to practice what I preach, and so emulate it and then have them pray. You could always expect it, the first couple of minutes was awkward. And then they just started opening up. And then by the end of it, they'd be like, "Oh, that was amazing!" [I shared with them] that's what it's like to pray to God, or that's what it's like to walk with God. And expressed, "Yeah, yeah, you can have this any time you want that's what a walk with God is like."

Clint Larr
Chicago Evangelist

Notes:

- 1.) Ibid., 15.
- 2.) Fraser Keay, ed., *Youth Ministry Across the Continents, Eleven Youth Pastors from Ten Countries on the Key Building Blocks for Effective Youth Work Leadership in the Local Church*. (United Kingdom: First Half Leadership, 2016), 1–3.

Conclusion

Application of Loder's Lens and Other Scholars in Understanding *Why?* Best Practices of Youth Ministers in the Chicago Church of Christ and Midwest (ICOC) from the Vantage Point that Resilient Disciples Are Effective

Two parallel paths have been explored to find answers for what influences resilient discipleship of Jesus by adolescents. First, mining scholarship for the critical voices and paradigms of forming an intimacy with Jesus—one of the foundational reasons discovered by Kinnaman and Matlock—contributing to resilient discipleship. Second, conduct primary qualitative research among youth ministers within a specific ethnography with some socioeconomic and racial variances within a region in the United States. The congruence and intersections of both paths' findings offer alignment and discernment of why praxis of youth ministers influence the long-term sustainability of an adolescent's faith. (See Appendix III Alignment of Theological Pedagogical Ethos of the ICOC Interview Themes with the Voices of Scholarship including Loder, Alexander, Shaw, and Heflin enhancing *Transformative Moments* and with consideration to Current Lived World challenges of Adolescence from Root (MTD), Zirschky (Phatic Communion) and Langford (Systemic Abandonment)). There are distinct connections between the youth ministers' practices and observations of parental best practices and the ethos of scholarship.

The exercise applied in Appendix III of blending theory and practice may be considered a fundamental switch in the research from understanding best practices and elevating them to praxis. According to Duncan Forrester, there is a distinction between practice and praxis:

When the term “praxis” is preferred to “practice,” the emphasis is on the reflective or meaning content of behavior, the integral interaction between theory and practice. Praxis usually refers to transformative practice.¹

Furthermore, Amy Jacober explains, “Praxis is more than practice. It recognizes that no action is value-free but rather requires an analytical critique, including examining one’s own presuppositions and biases. It is a hermeneutical dialogue between practice to theory and back to practice (or vice versa).”²

In Appendix III, the following summaries for each category of inquiry and the intersection with a scholarship are as follows—from theory to practice to praxis resulting in resilient discipleship of adolescents:

Overarching Themes

Primary and secondary themes align and reflect Loder’s 4-Dimensional Convictional Knowing—The Lived World, Self, Void, and Holy to result in a New Lived experience—The resurrected Life in the Koinonia. Also, the emphasis of Shaw’s “parenting that reflects godly character.” And, Alexander’s Rabbinical model of teaching also reflected in the home and shepherded in general by the parents, “*ahavah* (love) and *mitzvah* (commandment), *she-eilah* (questioning) and *hagadah* (telling), *shemiah* (hearing) and *asiah* (doing), and *het* (sin) and *teshuvah* (repentance). The implied underlying theme under “knowing the good you should do,” is to mitigate MTD, balance phatic communion, and eliminate systemic abandonment.

Youth & Campus Ministry Teaching & Pastoral Care Themes

Primary and secondary themes align and reflect the roles outlined by Heflin of youth ministers: Evangelistic missionary, Discipling teacher, Pastoral shepherd, Organized administrator, Bold prophet, Compassionate priest, Spiritual friend, Equipping recruiter, Visionary leader, and Faithful teammate. Youth ministers facilitate teaching to reflect Loder and Alexander models for transformative moments—bridging home, church, and significant transitions in community. Also, mitigating MTD, balance phatic communion, and alert to helping eliminate systemic abandonment.

Parenting Themes

All parental themes are intertwined and aligned with: Shaw (parenting that reflects godly character), Alexander (holistic Rabbinical-type moral teaching in the home), Loder

(mindful of the 4-dimensions of transformation), Root (mitigating MTD “playing church,” Zirschky (balance phatic communion on devices) and Langford (eliminate parental systemic abandonment.).

It is critical to note that most of the interviewees among the twenty youth ministers in their “thin-slicing” reflected a typical response. There is no formula. Allow for the mystery of God. By faith, there is always hope for the adult children of God—well beyond adolescence. Therefore, the conclusion becomes in the majority of cases: They witnessed that the praxis outlined resulted in resilient discipleship. However, with some exceptions, households with authentic, resilient disciple parents may have some children who do well spiritually and others who do not. On the other hand, families with spiritually single parents or severe marital dysfunction become thriving, resilient disciples.

The meta-theme for the research is influencing resilient discipleship. In closing, perhaps a tandem meta-theme to be considered for koinonias—parents, marriages, youth ministry, the church at large—to bear Christ’s witness to the children of God and the world is the notion of resilient koinonia. The closest word in Greek to resilience is in the word ὑπομονή (hupomone). The thirty-two occurrences in the New Testament are rich with meaning and inspiration. Multiple English words help describe the word’s literary purposes:

ὑπομονή def: the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance.³

Paul uses hupomone in 2 Corinthians 6:3-14. He is an excellent example of the notion of an hupomone disciple trying to influence hupomone koinonia in a *resistant* church:

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great *endurance* [for emphasis]; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

The heart of Paul and Jesus reflected in Amy Jacober's concept of *shalom justice* also supports the notion of hupomone koinonia—an otherness type of Lived Resurrected World:

Shalom justice clears the path to the righteousness of God without compromising his holiness and fully recognizing our brokenness. It removes the focus from the individual and replaces it with a focus on God.

By his very life, teachings and passion, Christ transforms the lives of the people around him and the relationships between them. Jesus, teaching to a crowd on the mountain, reverses the *lex talionis*. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Matthew 5:38-41

Jesus teaches shalom as the ultimate goal, God's intent for the community or society. It is in community that the weak are to be strengthened by the strong. It is in community where those who lack are provided for by those with plenty. Restoration to right relationship with God is the ultimate community. His justice takes a communal approach to each individual with eternal significance. The transformation of the individual within the community occurs within the shift from justice as determined by distribution to justice as determined by the end result of shalom. This is not only a viable approach for youth ministry but allows for authentic and distinct ministry, not simply another youth organization.⁴

As the extended hupomone koinonia—beginning with the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit—parents, youth ministers, and mentors, are here to offer the most freeing and life-giving solution to adolescence—the whole lived Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their lived world speaks the truth about their existence without God. It has no resolution for adolescence as expressed by Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff, pop-culture authors and influencers:

When has anyone in this world defended thirteen-year-olds? They are the absolute worst, and everyone agrees. They are rude and sullen and no fun. They think they know everything, but they actually don't know anything at all, which is very embarrassing and painful to be near. But, this age is the hardest because of all the chemicals and hormones raging through your body at the same time. It's like you are being drugged and then woken up with speed on a daily basis. Plus, your skin and hair and privates are all changing, and you start to smell, and you're suddenly aware of every pore on your face. Meanwhile, all social structure implodes and resets in a totally unfamiliar way. You are simultaneously the oldest version of a child and the youngest version of an adult. So, you don't belong anywhere and the only people who truly understand you are going through the same thing. As much as they empathize, they can't connect with you because they are dealing with the same horror you're going through, plus whatever curveballs adolescence might be throwing at them. So, it's very lonely. You're not cute anymore. Everyone criticizes you. You don't get babied, and you don't get respect.⁵

Jesus's and Paul's countercultural teaching within the church—hupomone koinonia—bears fruit that will last as found in Philippi. The passage still resonates with the church today nearly 2000 years later and furthermore offers great hope to adolescents, their parents, and youth ministers:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then, you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

Philippians 2:14-16

Notes:

¹ Malcom Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 23.

² Duncan Forrester. *Theological Fragments: Explorations in Unsystematic Theology*. (New York: T& T Clark, 2005), 7.

³ Amy Jacober. *The Adolescent Journey, An Interdisciplinary Approach*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 32–33.

⁴ ὑπομονῆ definition Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1039.

⁵ Jacober, 138.

⁶ Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff. *Stay Sexy and Don't Get Murdered: The Definitive How-To Guide*. (New York: Macmillan, 2019).

Appendix I Research Youth Minister Interview in Chicago (ICOC), Global Prototype

Collaboration: Mentored by Jaques Genis, Youth Minister Johannesburg Church of Christ, formally trained in research methodology in Industrial Psychology. The process was peer-reviewed by Steve Staten, MA Conflict Management and Teacher, Chicago Church of Christ.

Purpose

A prototype discovery process among youth ministers in the Chicago Church of Christ intended to document experience, insights, and wisdom on the best practices in ministry and parenting influencing the long-term trajectory of spiritual formation that is sustainable through an intimate relationship with Jesus, resulting in resilient discipleship.

Methodology

Virtual interviews with couples in the full-time ministry—youth and family or campus—will be conducted for 30-minute intervals separately—men and women—to understand their unique perspectives. The interviews transcribed through AI. (Scrible.com) The qualitative data will be reviewed for patterns of insights among the group collaboratively. If time allows, a focus group will facilitate confirmation of cultural consensus of best practices in Chicago.

Interviewee Roster

Document demographic information of each participant including first name, last name, gender, a maiden name for women, current role in the ministry, number of years in adolescent ministry service, and if beyond one, the number of generations of disciples in the family both mother and father reported separately.

Assumptions

Findings of a recent study published by Barna in *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). The distilled findings identified the underlying reasons why the 18-34-year-olds professing Christians across Christendom are exemplifying devoted faith they call "resilient disciples." Barna's critical findings on cause and effect are as follows (Kinnaman & Matlock, 13):

Practice 1

To form a resilient identity,
experience intimacy with Jesus

Practice 2

In a complex and anxious age,
develop the muscles of cultural discernment

Practice 3

When isolation and mistrust are the norms,
Forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships

Practice 4

To ground and motivate an ambitious generation,
train for vocational discipleship

Practice 5

Curb entitlement and self-centered tendencies
by engaging in countercultural mission

For our purpose, the interview questions will narrow the scope of interest to Practice 1. We can all assume and in agreement with Kinnaman and Matlock that to form a resilient identity is dependent on intimacy with Jesus (implying Father, Son, and Spirit.) We will also assume the theological premise and for common language of their definition of *a resilient disciple*:

Christ followers who (1) attend church at least monthly [adapted for ICOC purposes change to “consistently attend” replaces “attend church at least monthly,” Hebrews 10:26] and engage with their church more than just attending worship services; (2) trust firmly in the authority of the Bible; (3) are committed to Jesus personally and affirm he was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death; and (4) express desire to transform the broader society as an outcome of their faith.

Interview Question Series: Overarching Principles, Teaching Approach & Methods, Parenting

Overarching Principles

In your experience, what are the top 3 essential factors that influence helping an adolescent become (and remain) a "resilient disciple"? Do you have examples of adolescents influenced by the 3 factors? How do you see resilient discipleship exemplified in their lives? Keep these examples in mind as we continue with the rest of the interview.

Teaching Approach & Methods

In your experience, what are the most effective ways to teach the gospel to adolescents that help them develop intimacy with Jesus? Suggestions speak to the following categories: content, e.g., particular bible stories and lessons; context, e.g., one-on-one or public; and form, e.g., multimedia, oral teaching, private reading, other types of activities.

In your experience, what are some of the best practices concerning shepherding or pastoral care in nurturing adolescents to become resilient disciples of Jesus?

In your experience, what are the best practices concerning communicating with adolescents in teaching them intimacy with Jesus and training them to become resilient disciples? Suggestions

speak to the following categories: content, e.g., tone, messaging, principles, context, e.g., one-on-one or public; and form, e.g., in-person face-to-face, virtual voice-to-voice or face-to-face, or texting.

What role do you think healthy peer relationships play to help an adolescent develop intimacy with Jesus?

Parenting Practices

How do the immediate family environment influence and make conducive an adolescent's ability and desire to develop intimacy with Jesus?

In your experience, what are the best practices you witnessed in parents that influenced adolescent's intimate personal relationship with Jesus and forged character that supported resilient discipleship?

What in your opinion is the retention rate of a baptized teen disciple through maturation into adulthood?

The interviews were conducted during the period of June 8, 2020-July 15, 2020. Depending on time and scope of data findings, the depth of analysis will be reported based on time allotment before the final paper is due. Initially, a total of sixteen interviews will be conducted, both male and female youth ministers across the ministry centers of the Chicago Church of Christ and the Midwest sister churches. **(You may want to include that you ended up conducting 20-21 interviews?)**

Appendix II Qualitative Interview Theme Discovery
for Resilient Discipleship of Adolescence
International Church of Christ (ICOC)

Midwest Youth & Campus Ministers 9 of 20 Interviews aka *Kingdom Kids*

–a subset of interviewees that processed three qualities:

1. Millennials raised in ICOC
2. Resilient disciples
3. Professional ministers

Overarching Themes

Primary

- Resilient authentic discipleship in the home.
- Multiple significant Christian spiritual relationships.
- Healthy peers to create counterculture environment compared to *Secular World*.

Secondary

- Nurturing the feeling of this is *my* church.
- Relationships call and empower to serve.
- Teens in addition to being challenged need to be accepted and respected.

Caveat

- There is no formula.

Youth & Campus Ministry Teaching & Pastoral Care Themes

Primary

- Minister Christlike teacher and mentor with vulnerable transparency.
- Maintain rhythms and cycles of presence in adolescent's life.
- Facilitate healthy peer teaching environment.
 - Normalize God's kingdom/church living.
 - Encourages resilient discipleship.
 - Place to wrestle through counterculture topics.
 - Contrast pure fun in the kingdom/church vs. the world.
 - Make sense of romantic interests for trajectory of spiritual life.
- Deep teaching for intentional biblical literacy
 - no formula unique to group and individual.
 - Identify with relevant characters in biblical narrative.
 - Understand there is a unique place for each of us in God's meta-story.
 - Teach self-awareness, critical thinking and communication skills.
 - Connect heart with spiritual disciplines and habits.
 - Understand the full nature of God including justice and honor, and reverence of His holiness.
 - Train the next generation of leaders.

Secondary

- Engage parents in teaching models as primary mentor.
- Blended model teaching & mentoring venues, e.g., group, one-on-one, virtual communication, zoom, text, social media.
- Special care and planning during transition from teen to college ministry.
- Campus ministry balanced with call to mission and presence of pastoral care.

Parenting Themes

Primary

- Parents are authentic Christlike resilient disciples.
Model repentance not perfection;
priority of spiritual being and activities.
Teach the importance of spiritual being and activities.
- Maintain rhythms of spirituality for themselves and their children.
- Home is a spiritual sanctuary—
from the world and its tensions.
from behind the scenes tensions in adult Christian relationships.
a place where free-will can be exercised.
a non-judgmental environment.
a place of fun and memory making.
a place of character-building and challenging spiritual talks.
a place of spiritual rhythms, parental presence and mentoring.
- Parents influence identifying other spiritual mentors for their adolescents.

Secondary

- Getting advice on parenting.
- Consider and change parental mentoring with each new stage of adolescence.
- Intentionality in planning for high school to college transition—not only future vocational needs, but more importantly spiritual needs.

Caveats

- There is no human formula—allow room for the mystery of God.
- Households with the presence of authentic resilient disciples may have some children that do well spiritually and others that do not.
- Households with spiritually single parents or other severe marital dysfunction become thriving resilient disciples.

Appendix III Alignment of Theological Pedagogical Ethos of the
ICOC Interview Themes with the Voices of Scholarship
including Loder, Alexander, Shaw and Heflin
enhancing *Transformative Moments* and with consideration
to Current Lived World challenges of Adolescence from
Root (MTD), Zirschky (Phatic Communion) and Langford (Systemic Abandonment).

Overarching Themes

Primary and secondary themes align and reflect Loder's 4-Dimensional Convictional Knowing—The Lived World, Self, Void, and Holy to result in a New Lived experience—The resurrected Life in the Koinonia. Also, the emphasis of Shaw's "parenting that reflects godly character." And, Alexander's Rabbinical model of teaching also reflected in the home and shepherded in general by the parents, "*ahavah* (love) and *mitzvah* (commandment), *she-eilah* (questioning) and *hagadah* (telling), *shemiah* (hearing) and *asiah* (doing), and *het* (sin) and *teshuvah* (repentance). The implied underlying theme under "knowing the good you should do," is to mitigate MTD, balance phatic communion and eliminate systemic abandonment.

Primary

- Resilient authentic discipleship in the home.
- Multiple significant Christian spiritual relationships.
- Healthy peers to create counterculture environment compared to *Secular World*.

Secondary

- Nurturing the feeling of this is *my* church.
- Relationships call and empower to serve.
- Teens in addition to being challenged need to be accepted and respected.

Caveat

- There is no formula.

Youth & Campus Ministry Teaching & Pastoral Care Themes

Primary and secondary themes align and reflect the roles outlined by Heflin of youth ministers, Evangelistic missionary, Discipling teacher, Pastoral shepherd, Organized administrator, Bold prophet, Compassionate priest, Spiritual friend, Equipping recruiter, Visionary leader, and Faithful teammate. Youth ministers facilitate teaching to reflect Loder and Alexander models for transformative moments—bridging home, church, and major transitions in community. Also, mitigating MTD, balance phatic communion, and alert to helping eliminate systemic abandonment.

Primary

- Minister Christlike teacher and mentor with vulnerable transparency.
- Maintain rhythms and cycles of presence in adolescent's life.
- Facilitate healthy peer teaching environment.

Normalize God's kingdom/church living.
 Encourages resilient discipleship.
 Place to wrestle through counterculture topics.
 Contrast pure fun in the kingdom/church vs. the world.
 Make sense of romantic interests for trajectory of spiritual life.

- Deep teaching for intentional biblical literacy
 –no formula unique to group and individual.
 Identify with relevant characters in biblical narrative.
 Understand there is a unique place for each of us in
 God's meta-story.
 Teach self-awareness, critical thinking and communication skills.
 Connect heart with spiritual disciplines and habits.
 Understand the full nature of God including justice and honor, and
 reverence of His holiness.
 Train the next generation of leaders.

Secondary

- Engage parents in teaching models as primary mentor.
- Blended model teaching & mentoring venues, e.g., group, one-on-one, virtual communication, zoom, text, social media.
- Special care and planning during transition from teen to college ministry.
- Campus ministry balanced with call to mission and presence of pastoral care.

Parenting Themes

All parental themes are intertwined and aligned with Shaw (parenting that reflects godly character), Alexander (holistic Rabbinical moral teaching in the home), Loder (mindful of the 4-dimensions of transformation), Root (mitigating MTD “playing church”, Zirschky (balance phatic communion on devices) and Langford (eliminate parental systemic abandonment.).

Primary

- Parents are authentic Christlike resilient disciples.
 Model repentance not perfection;
 priority of spiritual being and activities.
 Teach the importance of spiritual being and activities.
- Maintain rhythms of spirituality for themselves and their children.
- Home is a spiritual sanctuary–
 from the world and its tensions.
 from behind the scenes and tensions in adult Christian relationships.
 a place where free-will can be exercised.
 a non-judgmental environment.
 a place of fun and memory making.
 a place of character-building and challenging spiritual talks.
 a place of spiritual rhythms, parental presence, and mentoring.

- Parents influence identifying other spiritual mentors for their adolescents.

Secondary

- Getting advice on parenting.
- Consider and change parental mentoring with each new stage of adolescence.
- Intentionality in planning for high school to college transition—not only future vocational needs, but more importantly spiritual needs.

Caveats

- There is no human formula—allow room for the mystery of God.
- Households with the presence of authentic resilient disciples may have some children that do well spiritually and others that do not.
- Households with spiritually single parents or other severe marital dysfunction become thriving resilient disciples.

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