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## Helping Young Adults Discern Christian Self-actualization through the Wisdom of Those Who Have Gone Before

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BETHEL SEMINARY  
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HELPING YOUNG ADULTS DISCERN CHRISTIAN  
SELF-ACTUALIZATION THROUGH THE WISDOM  
OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

BY  
JEFF M. CHAPMAN III  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2016



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This thesis came about by the blending of my own thoughts with the helpful edits of my friend Andrew Gross. Andrew's insights and suggestions helped put my thoughts and research into clearer expression. He helped me craft them into a document that is easier to read and comprehend.

Mike McNeff, my advisor, helped me perfect the thesis process. He helped me to move this from vagary to precision.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	7
INTRODUCTION .....	10
CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT .....	13
Statement of the Problem.....	13
The Importance of the Project.....	16
The Research.....	19
CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	24
The Old Testament Exhortations .....	24
Old Testament Case Studies .....	29
The New Testament .....	34
CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	55
Self-Actualization .....	55
The Disconnection between the Generation .....	67
The Transfer of Life Wisdom from One Generation to the Next. ....	79
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN .....	91
Overview.....	91
Research Participants .....	92
Research Instruments .....	98
CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	105
Findings from the In-Depth Interviews.....	105
Findings from the Two Surveys.....	132

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION.....	154
Principles of Transferring Life Wisdom from One Generation to the Next..	154
Strengths and Weaknesses .....	167
CHAPTER SEVEN: REFELCTIONS.....	173
Personal Reflections.....	173
Further Research .....	181
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS WITH OLDER CHRISTIAN ADULTS .....	185
APPENDIX B: SURVEYS OF CHRISTIAN YOUNG ADULTS .....	187
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	191

## LIST OF GRAPHS

## Survey One

Total of Survey One.....	134
Statements One-Two.....	136
Statements Three-Four.....	137
Statement Five .....	138
Statements Six-Seven.....	139

## Survey Two

Statement One.....	140
Statement Two .....	141
Statement Three .....	142
Statements Four-Five .....	143
Statements Six-Seven.....	144
Statement Eight.....	145
Statement Nine.....	146
Total of Survey Two .....	147

## GLOSSARY

Christian worldview: a worldview is a set of lenses by which to interpret the world. By “Christian” worldview, the author assumes a traditionally Protestant, evangelical orthodox way of interpreting the world.

Life wisdom: The insight and understanding to navigate life’s challenges successfully according to a Christian worldview.

Self-actualization: A term popularized by secular psychologist Abraham Maslow, it refers to the highest level of personal development, in which a person achieves his or her full potential, “the drive people have to realize their potential and to find fulfillment.”<sup>1</sup>

Christian self-actualization: a term the researcher used to signify the marriage of Maslow’s concept of self-actualization with the pursuit of life’s meaning from the perspective of a classically Christian worldview. They can be married because Maslow’s pursuit of self-actualization has been identified with the Christian search for meaning, both of which have been described as motivated by a spiritual hunger. Furthermore, Maslow’s ideal self-actualized person is found in the person of Jesus Christ and Christian fruit is parallel to the Maslow’s fruit of self-actualization, which Jesus claims to be produced through faith in Him. The researcher develops this in integration in the first part of Chapter Three of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Colman, *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 772.



## ABSTRACT

The problem this thesis project addressed was the belief by many Christian young adults that the life wisdom advice of older Christian adults can be invalid. This assumption can make Christian young adults suffer unnecessarily because it can prevent them from benefiting from the experiences of older Christian adults who have successfully achieved Christian self-actualization in spiritual, relational and work-related challenges. To address this problem, the researcher (a) investigated Scripture as well as theological and biblical commentaries related to these themes; (b) reviewed relevant ancient and contemporary literature; (c) conducted qualitative and quantitative research that demonstrated the validity of advice from older Christians, and finally (d), created three transferable concepts to help young adult Christians achieve self-actualization.

The research was conducted in two stages. First, the researcher interviewed fourteen older Christian adults whom he deemed to have successfully achieved Christian self-actualization. These interviewees shared their life wisdom for navigating spiritual, relational and work-related challenges, areas in which each had a demonstrably long track record of success. This data was transcribed, analyzed and finally edited down into a booklet that the researcher entitled *Life Wisdom Collections*.

In the second stage of research, the researcher gathered 39 Christian young adults and surveyed their opinions toward the advice of older Christian adults. Then he asked

each to read a certain number of entries in the *Life Wisdom Collections*. The researcher again surveyed their opinions of the advice of older Christian adults. The researcher measured whether or not any of the young adults had changed their opinions after being exposed to the advice in the booklet.

The research demonstrated the validity and applicability of the experience of older Christian adults to Christian young adults. The results formed the basis for three transferable principles for achieving Christian self-actualization while still young.

I know not, however, whether the burden of purposes has ever weighed more heavily upon mankind than at the present time. An answer has to be found. For mere living, pure existence as such, is valueless; it must also have direction to a new way of living beyond cultural values leading into becoming rather than being; self-actualization. The core and ultimate value of life can only lie in a person's discovery of their purpose, value and their life's meaning.

Oswald Hanfling and Moriz Schlick  
*Life and Meaning*, 62.

## INTRODUCTION

People find success and contentment when they know the meaning of life. This is a journey often termed “self-actualization,” and is the conscious or unconscious aspiration of many people who long to understand why they exist. Yet too often, discovering self-actualization is just beyond the grasp of many Christian young people. Their lives become isolated and they feel confused and purposeless. To find satisfaction, they keep trying “new” thinking and behaviors. But this search only entrenches them in loneliness and depression because it cuts them off from what Meifen Wei and colleagues deem to be the three needs of young adults for achieving self-actualization: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.<sup>2</sup> Wei and colleagues argue that continued vacillations in these three need lead to loneliness and frustrations. The researcher contends that the vacillations additionally trap Christian young adults into wasting their early years in purposeless wandering from God’s will.

This researcher took up this project to provide Christian young people with the tools by which they can determine the meaning of life and achieve self-actualization while still young. Without such tools, life can feel like riding the roller coaster at Disneyland’s Paris theme park. Unlike a normal roller coaster, in which riders can see what is coming, Paris’s runs backwards so riders cannot see what is coming. Riders careen about without the ability to prepare for future challenges. But the researcher hopes

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<sup>2</sup>Meifen Wei, Philip A. Shaffer, Shannon K. Young, and Robyn A. Zakalik, “Adult Attachment, Shame, Depression, and Loneliness: The Mediation Role of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2005): 592, 598.

this project will provide Christian young adults with spiritual, relational, and work-related tools that allow them to engage with life's roller coaster face-forward.

Michael Steger writes that meaning provides people with “a sense that their lives matter.”<sup>3</sup> When life makes sense, he argues, then people know that time is not simply “the sum of seconds, days, months and years. Rather, the knowledge gives them a purpose to live.”<sup>4</sup> This project seeks to lead Christian young people to this sense of meaning by connecting them with Christians who have many more years of experience. This research has demonstrated that the advice of older Christian adults is valid for showing how young people can achieve self-actualization.

Unfortunately, young adults often would not think of finding wisdom and good advice from an older adult, at least not until they experience its benefit. But it is God's intent that younger people receive wisdom from older people, since, “Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding with the length of days” (Job 12:12).<sup>5</sup> God intends older people to be a repository of wisdom for young people. “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. . . . So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children” (Ps. 78:4-6).

Christian young people today frequently do not know how limited the insights of their friends are. They often do not understand how lacking in substance their friends'

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Steger, “Experiencing Meaning in Life: Optimal Functioning at the Nexus of Well-Being, Psychopathology, and Spirituality,” ed. Paul Wong, *The Human Quest For Meaning: Theories, Research and Applications* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 165.

<sup>4</sup> Steger, 165.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture used in this research is taken from the *New International Version* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1984).

advice is. It is the wisdom of the tried and true older adult that will save them from grief and lead them to understand the meaning of life so that they can find self-actualization. Older people are a means God intends for young adults to find their way. These are the older people whose experience translates into “The gray head is a crown of glory” (Prov. 16:31). For this reason, this project helps Christian young adults discover self-actualization by re-connecting them to the wisdom of older Christian adults.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem this thesis project addressed was the belief by many Christian young adults that the life wisdom advice of older Christian adults can be invalid. This assumption can make Christian young adults suffer unnecessarily because it can prevent them from benefiting from the experiences of older Christian adults who have successfully achieved Christian self-actualization in spiritual, relational and work-related challenges. The result can be a delay in or even the prevention of Christian self-actualization for these young people and a related increase in unnecessary suffering. To address this problem, the researcher (a) investigated Scripture as well as theological and biblical commentaries regarding Christian self-actualization through the transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next; (b) reviewed ancient and contemporary literature relevant to the topic; (c) conducted qualitative research that demonstrated the validity of advice from older Christians as a means for young adults to achieve Christian self-actualization in the face of spiritual, relational, and work-related challenges; and finally (d) created a list of three transferable concepts to help young adult Christians achieve self-actualization.

### *Delimitations of the Problem*

This project did not seek to add new knowledge to psychology's already well-defined and well-researched understanding of self-actualization. It was not an investigation into all the troubles faced by Christian young adults. It did not determine or

diagnose the emotional states, personality disorders or mental health concerns of young people. Nor did the researcher presume to contribute something entirely novel to the Christian faith's rich, 2,000-year history of transferring the meaning of life from one generation to the next, since young Christians can already access countless books and other materials about this theme. The research participants were all Caucasian, and so, even though the researcher would like to uncover the applicability of his findings to all racial and ethnic groups, he remains open to the possibility that generational dynamics are different based on culture and ethnic background. Finally, the findings and analysis of this project were not intended to replace professional therapy in the lives of those seeking self-actualization.

#### *Assumptions*

The researcher assumed a Christian worldview as he conducted this project. This means that he interprets the world according to traditional, Protestant evangelical orthodoxy. When specifically applied to this project, this means the researcher used Christian perspectives of terms like life wisdom, the meaning of life, and self-actualization, as described in the Glossary.

#### *Subproblems*

The first subproblem was to investigate secondary instruments of data collection from biblical sources. These instruments included scripture, scholarly theological works and biblical commentaries. The second subproblem was to discover contemporary research and other literature pertaining to this theme of transferring life wisdom from one generation to the next. This data was secured from classical works of literature, from various academic sources, and from professional peer-reviewed journal articles. The third



subproblem was to conduct structured, in-depth interviews with fourteen older adult Christians in order to create a collection of their life wisdom that could be easily read by younger Christian adults. The fourth subproblem was to expose Christian young adults directly to this life wisdom in order to discover if this exposure raised their low opinion of advice from older Christians. The fifth and final subproblem was to analyze all the data to produce seven principles that enable Christian young adults to achieve Christian self-actualization while still young.

### *The Setting of the Project*

This project was conducted in central California, in Stanislaus County, near the researcher's home in the town of Turlock. Turlock is town of around 70,000 people, located about fourteen miles south of Modesto and 106 miles east of San Francisco. Long dubbed "The Heart of the Valley" for its high agricultural output, Turlock also had the distinction for years of having the most churches per capita of any town in the United States.

Turlock is an ideal place to research the attitudes of young people toward the advice of older Christians. It is home to over 6,000 young adults who study at California State University, Stanislaus. Almost 2,000 additional graduate students study at CSU, Stanislaus, many of whom are also young people. This means that almost ten percent of the town population is below the age of 30, giving the researcher a large amount of exposure to the prevailing attitudes of young people toward older people.

Most of the research participants, young and old, are connected in one way or another to the researcher's church, Crossroads Chapel. Led by Senior Pastor Lee Towns, Crossroads Chapel has ministry programs for all ages. The researcher leads an Adult

Bible Fellowship course at this church, called “The Seekers,” that focuses specifically on ministry to retired people. Many of the older people involved in this study were drawn from this group. Many of the younger people involved in the study were drawn from the young adult ministry called “Generations.”

### **The Importance of the Project**

#### *The Importance of the Project to the Larger Church*

The importance of this project is that its findings will provide Christian young adults with the wisdom to make sense of life and to find its true meaning. In other words, it will direct young people to self-actualization while they are still young. Such an understanding will give young adults the means to resolve their pain, sense of loss and desire to give up. Wealthy or poor, experienced or just getting started, successful or struggling, strong or weak, confident or insecure, young people are better off when they know why they are alive and how to achieve self-actualization. They need to know how to make significant movements toward self-actualization. Moritz Schlick believed that the burden of finding life’s meaning weighs “more heavily upon mankind at this present time than at any other time.”<sup>1</sup> Young adults stand in the greatest need of a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Their lack of exposure to the wisdom of older Christian adults is one cause of much of their purposeless wandering.

Some churches exacerbate this problem rather than solve it. This happens when a local church fails to connect the generations in ways that are helpful for young adults. These congregations have too few Christians who live totally committed to Jesus Christ, too few who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and too few who make choices that reflect the

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<sup>1</sup> Moritz Schlick, “On the Meaning of Life,” in *Life and Meaning: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Oswald Hanfling (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 61-62.

fruit of Christ's presence within them. Young people are negatively impacted by these examples. When they participate in a church with such a mediocre faith atmosphere, their journey toward godly self-actualization is hampered.

This project will enable young people to discover the attitudes and behaviors that older Christian adults have successfully applied to achieve Christian self-actualization. The very structure of this research will cause young people to take a second look at the advice of the elderly. The applicable, transferable principles that come from the research will help young people to find Christian self-actualization more fully and more quickly, because it will expose them to wisdom that many have previously neglected. This in turn could potentially revolutionize individuals, family relationships, the depth of friendships, and the life or energy of entire churches. This is because self-actualized young adults are more able to encourage churches, families, friends and communities, leading more people to be set free from spiritual mediocrity and immaturity. More will be able to apply the truth found in 1 John 2:6: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

#### *The Importance of the Project to the Researcher*

The researcher cares about people. He strives to lead others to completeness in Christ. He longs for people to grow in Christian self-actualization. But too often people respond like a mountain hiker who climbs to a mountain ridge, sees the wonderful scene of the secret mountain valley below, but then simply walks away before entering it. Such a person finds it to be too much work to hike down into the valley and enjoy its delights. In the same way, so many young people feel as though it is far too difficult and complicated to even begin the attempt of resolving life's issues.

It is for these people that the researcher's heart beats. Too often they do not find true contentment, fulfillment and satisfaction beyond what they can produce. Life's meaning comes merely from their performance. Adults who are not self-actualized are often insecure, unhappy and ineffective. In their rare quiet moments of reflection, self-absorbed people who do not know the meaning of life feel dissatisfied and despairing. This breaks the researcher's heart. These people seem much like Juan Ponce de Leon, the conquistador who searched for the fountain of youth but never found it.

In contrast, self-actualized people are satisfied and maintain a life that gives them joy. The researcher's years as a pastor, a businessman and a member of various boards of directors have given him ample opportunity to observe this phenomenon. His viewpoint has been reinforced over the years through his reading of various publications, his participation with city committees, membership on business boards, participation with nonprofit organizations, interactions with other Christians, ministry in the local church and interactions with the public at large. His experiences with adults of all ages confirm that most people struggle to make sense of life.

Young adults are at a distinct disadvantage in this struggle due to their lack of experience and their disconnectedness from older generations. Even when many are able to achieve worldly success through high grades in school and promising careers after college, they still suffer from this disadvantage. This is because so few understand that success at the university is not just acquiring knowledge and information. Fewer still understand that life success is not identical to having a career with an apparently bright future. Rather, achieving success's pinnacle means finding life's meaning. It means discovering the path to Christian self-actualization.

The researcher has concluded that young people are in great need of wisdom from those who have already travelled the path to self-actualization. He desires to put this wisdom within their grasp, curtailing their purposeless wandering, through this project. The researcher feels God has called him to reconnect the generations through this project. It is his hope that the project's findings will result in a book targeted at young people. He further hopes it will form the basis of an undergraduate curriculum that can be used by Christian colleges and universities in their spiritual formation efforts with young people. This book and curriculum will be a guide for them to find the meaning of life through spiritual self-actualization.

## **The Research**

### *Overview*

This project employed qualitative research techniques to construct a pathway for young people to achieve self-actualization. The primary data came from two sources. The first source was the responses of fourteen older Christian adults. These were collected in structured, in-depth interviews and then analyzed and edited into a booklet called *Life Wisdom Collection*. The second source came from two surveys of 40 young adults, most of whom were professing Christians. They were surveyed twice about their opinions of advice from older Christians. The first survey was administered prior to their reading of the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet. The second survey was administered after their exposure to this booklet. The researcher measured any changes of opinion that occurred due to their reading.

The secondary data came from investigating Scripture, scholarly biblical commentary, and relevant thought and research, both ancient and contemporary. After

collecting, analyzing and synthesizing data from these instruments, the final step of this project was the formation of three transferable life wisdom principles that can guide young people in the pathway of self-actualization. These principles were based on the researcher's analysis and synthesis of all the data sources.

### *The Research Participants*

The researcher recruited two main groups of people to collect data for the research. The first group was comprised of fourteen older Christians, ranging in ages from early 70s to late 80s at the time of research. All these seasoned adult participants worshiped at Crossroads Church in Turlock, California. Several of them are members of an Adult Bible Fellowship that the researcher has led for many years. These were all people who the researcher deemed to have successfully navigated life's journey. The researcher was able to evaluate the suitability of these participants because he had become intimately familiar with the life stories of these individuals over years of acquaintance and friendship. They were chosen, as William Meyer suggests, because they were "aware" of life's issues, were "typical of their age," were "savvy," had "a general knowledge of the subject," had "skills in problem solving" and were part of "a broad demography and reputation."<sup>2</sup> Additionally, these older adults were eager to share their wisdom with others so that new generations of Christian young people could achieve self-actualization. This eagerness confirmed the participants' suitability for this project in the eyes of the researcher.

The second group of research participants was comprised of 40 young adults. These young adults were attendees of the same church, Crossroad's Church, in Turlock,

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<sup>2</sup> William R. Meyer, *Research in Ministry, A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago: Exploring Press, 2000), 48.

California. They participate in the Church's "Generations" ministry to young adults. Some were undergraduates, others were graduate students, and still young others were young married adults. All were professing Christians. Their youthful status and their involvement in the Christian faith were the only qualifications for participation, since the researcher was attempting to gather a generic sense of Christian young adult attitudes toward the elderly.

### *Research Steps*

The first step of research addressed the first subproblem. It was to investigate and collect data from biblical sources. Instruments for this collection included Scripture, scholarly theological works and biblical commentaries. The researcher studied them to know God's plan for transferring life wisdom from older generations to younger ones so that purposeless young people might discover self-actualized. The researcher considered resource material to be useful if it related to self-actualization through the transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next. He also considered sources useful that closely adhered to traditional, Protestant evangelical orthodox Christian teaching.

The second step addressed the second subproblem. It was to discover contemporary research and other literature pertaining to this theme of transferring life wisdom from one generation to the next. This data was secured from classical works of literature, from various academic sources, and from professional peer-reviewed journal articles. It was considered useful if it shed light on the young adults moving from potential hopelessness and frustration to self-actualization through the transfer of life-wisdom from older generations.

The third step addressed the third subproblem. It was to conduct structured, in-depth interviews with fourteen older adult Christians. This qualitative research sought to discover the insights and wisdom that older adults have acquired through their life experiences that contributed to their Christian self-actualization. From his long acquaintance with most of these participants, the researcher deemed each of these participants to have lived a successful Christian life in the three areas of relationships, work and school, and spirituality. He deemed that their successful experiences would provide young people with understanding of Christian self-actualization in these three areas. These participants were mostly members of the adult Sunday School class at Crossroads Chapel in the town of Turlock, which the researcher teaches at his church. The researcher edited the interview transcripts into a little easy-to-read booklet entitled *Life Wisdom Collections*.

The fourth subproblem was to test the validity of this life wisdom advice by exposing young adults directly to it. The researcher has asserted that young people can tend to prevent their own Christian self-actualization because they neglect the life wisdom advice of older adult Christians. He hypothesized that if he could expose a number of young people to this wisdom and measure any change in their opinion toward it, then he could demonstrate that the life wisdom of the elderly can indeed help young people better discover the pathway to Christian self-actualization. In other words, if the researcher could secure confessions from Christian young adults that they had gained more favorable opinions of the advice of the elderly through the exposure, then the researcher could conclude that life wisdom advice was indeed relevant and valid for attaining Christian self-actualization. The researcher measured the change of opinion by



surveying these 40 young adults both before and after they read interview entries, found in the *Life Wisdom Collections*, which he had obtained in the previous research step.

The resulting data provided a wealth of insights into the validity of life wisdom advice of the elderly for helping young Christian adults discover Christian self-actualization. By analyzing and synthesizing all the data, the researcher concluded his fifth and final step, and addressed the final subproblem: to form three transferable principles that will help young people discern the pathway to self-actualization.

## CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE TRANSFER OF LIFE WISDOM FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT

The Scriptures support the researcher's assertion that the life wisdom advice from older Christian adults is valid for younger believers so they achieve spiritual self-actualization.

### **Old Testament Exhortations**

#### *The Pentateuch*

The Pentateuch declared that children are to receive life-wisdom from their parents and grandparents. Moses said to the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deut. 4:9). Moses repeats himself in the very next verse, telling Israelites to assemble in order to create the opportunity for parents to "teach them [God's words] to their children." The transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next was an obligation, not a luxury, for the Israelites.

Moses was emphatic that parents were to "impress them [the commandments] 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" (Deut. 6:7, repeated in Deut. 11:19). Parents

were to take every opportunity to imprint God's commands upon their children. Furthermore, parents were to have their children's future obedience in mind when they themselves exerted effort to obey God, as Moses made clear near the end of Deuteronomy: "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law" (Deut. 32:46). Parents were to be the primary instrument of ensuring that their children would also keep the law. Spiritual self-actualization through the inter-generational transfer begins at home.

Moses made his logic for transferring life wisdom from one generation to the next abundantly clear: The success of future generations of Israelites was dependent upon the transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next. Moses said again and again that the obedience of Israelites, and the obedience that they inculcated in their children, was "so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time" (Deut. 4:40, repeated or paraphrased in 5:29, 6:2, 11:21, 12:25, 12:28, 30:19). Their success was to flow out of their obedience. In the same way, today's adults with proven wisdom can help growing adults find their way to the Lord and His meaning for their lives.

It was especially important that parents and grandparents transfer this life-wisdom on to the next generation because "Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (Deut. 31:13). In other words, according to Moses, the younger generation was unfamiliar with the law and therefore unprepared to live in a way that pleased God. Moses explained:

Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the Lord your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the Lord brought lasting ruin on them. It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the wilderness until you arrived at this place, and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them (Deut. 11:2-6).

Because the children had not been eyewitnesses to the events of the Israelite exodus and the years of wandering in the wilderness, they stood in greater danger of forgetting to love God with all their hearts and souls (Deut. 11:13 and verse 27) and thereby bringing disaster upon God's people (11:28). Therefore, Moses exhorted the adults to "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (11:19).

Moses not only told the Israelite parents to transfer life wisdom to children. He also expected grandparents to transfer it their grandchildren, as was made clear with Moses' phrase "and to their children after them" in Deuteronomy 4:9. The aged were highly valued by Moses, as is clear from his exhortation to younger generations: "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:32).

All of this establishes that life wisdom was intended by God to be transferred from one generation to the next. While many Christian youth and young adults today believe that their parents and grandparents' advice is inapplicable or invalid, Scripture makes clear that the advice of the elderly was meant to be passed on. Moses' definition of

success (“that it may go well with you”) foreshadows the researcher’s definition of Christian self-actualization.

### *Wisdom Literature*

The wisdom literature depicts elderly people for whom advanced age is an asset instead of a liability. “People in older age will bear fruit, they will stay fresh and vibrant” (Psalm 92:14). Proverbs 16:31 says, “The gray head is a crown of glory.” Job claimed, “Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding with the length of days” (Job 12:12). This high value that wisdom literature places on the elderly means Scripture supports the idea that they have valid and applicable advice for younger people.

### **Psalms**

The psalmist exhorts the reader to “Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation” (Ps. 48:12-13). The psalmist concluded the poem with this exhortation to survey the might of Zion and to pass it on the next generation because in doing so the younger generation could recall God’s historical faithfulness to Jerusalem (“God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress,” vs. 3) and could depend upon His future faithfulness (“For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.” vs. 14).

In another Psalm, the psalmist begs God not to take his life until he has had a chance to “declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come” (71:18). The reason for this transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next, according the psalmist in yet another Psalm was “so the next generation would know them [God’s commands], even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would

tell their children” (78:6). So the psalmist envisioned that his own efforts to pass down life wisdom would spur its recipients to pass it down to the following generation, and so on. The end result of this would be future generations that trusted and obeyed God: “Then they would put their trust in God ~~and would not forget his deeds~~ commands” (vs. 7).

The Psalms entrust this transfer of life wisdom to older adults because of the high value placed upon older people in those Scriptures: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming ‘The Lord is upright; he is my rock’” (Ps. 92:13-14). The focus of transferring life wisdom from one generation to another is to help the protégé become free from the calamity of sin.

### **Proverbs**

The entire Book of Proverbs was written to transfer life wisdom from one generation to the next: “for giving ... knowledge and discretion to the young” (Prov. 1:4). The Book is written from the perspective of a father and a mother imparting wisdom to their child and exhorting that child to embrace this wisdom: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction ~~and do not~~ mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Prov. 1:8-9).

The first nine chapters of the Book are structured to paint this picture of life wisdom being transferred from one generation to the next, with the phrase “Listen, my son” repeated 13 times in those first nine chapters alone, all followed with an exhortation to embrace God’s life wisdom (1:10, 1:15, 2:1, 3:1, 3:11, 3:21, 4:3, 4:10, 4:20, 5:1, 5:20,

5:1, 7:1). Later in the Book, the father addresses his son with six more exhortations to wisdom (19:27, 23:19, 23:26, 24:21, 27:11, 31:2). The Book promised great benefits for sons who would embrace God's wisdom:

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed (Prov. 3:13-18).

Here the author employs numerous metaphors to make advice from older, more experienced people appear alluring. The life of those who listen to such advice is depicted as superior in every way to the life of those who ignore it. The pictures the Book paints of a successful life are in many ways parallel to the author's definition of Christian self-actualization. In this way the Book of Proverbs supports the idea that the life wisdom of older Christian adults is valid for Christian young adults to achieve self-actualization.

### **Old Testament Case Studies**

Scripture provides several case studies of the importance of passing life wisdom down from one generation to the next. The researcher has highlighted two such Old Testament studies from the stories of Jethro, Moses and Joshua, as well as from the story of King Rehoboam.

#### *Positive Examples from Moses' Life*

##### **Jethro**

Moses' relationship with Jethro his father-in-law shows the need for wisdom to be passed down from one generational to the next even when one has received the best training in the world and the most powerful anointing in the world.

Moses' story begins with a life of privilege, which he fully enjoyed in his early

life: “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and he was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). Egyptian education was highly regarded in the ancient world as the best. The Greek philosopher Philo conjectured that Moses was taught:

Arithmetic, geometry, poetry, every aspect of music, medicine, and the knowledge of astrology, the interpretation of dreams, the Assyrian language, the Chaldean knowledge of the heavens, mathematics, sacred science and the traditional doctrines about religion, which were concealed chiefly under their hieroglyphics.<sup>1</sup>

Moses’ privileged upbringing gave him access to the greatest learning of anyone in the ancient world. But it still left a deficit that could only be filled later when he listened to Jethro’s advice.

Even with God’s powerful anointing and equipping, Moses required Jethro’s advice to help change his approach to guiding the Israelites and to become a more effective leader. Jethro heard what God was accomplishing in the lives of the Hebrews and how He brought them out of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Jethro made a trip to visit his daughter and son-in-law. He observed Moses’ authoritative leadership style and challenged him to select godly men to oversee thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They were to judge the people’s problems, with only the very difficult cases to be given to Moses. Moses listened and responded immediately to his father-in-law’s experience (Exod.18: 1-27) and took his advice. The quality of life improved for Moses and for the entire Israelite nation that day. In this way, Moses gives an excellent example of a person who understood the validity of advice from those with more experience.

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1983), 446.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, 188.



## **Joshua**

Moses not only received advice from an elder, he offered it. Joshua had served as his first lieutenant during the entire 40 years in the wilderness. This whole time, Joshua had spent much time with Moses. Joshua had observed him, conversed with him, and was often the first to hear God's revelation to the people through Moses. After all these years of direct mentoring, God deemed Joshua ready to take up the mantle of leading all the Israelites across the Jordan River to conquer the Promised Land (Deut. 31:7-8, 14, 23, 34:9). Joshua was ready because he knew the value of listening closely to the guidance of an older, wiser, more experienced person. The relationship between Moses and Joshua demonstrates the validity and applicability of an elder's life-wisdom to a younger person's success.

### *King Rehoboam's Negative Example*

King Rehoboam's life demonstrates the folly of rejecting the wisdom of an older generation. His father, King Solomon, had provided his Book of Proverbs as a roadmap for all his sons, Rehoboam among them, to discover the path of life wisdom while still young, as testified to by the frequently repeated exhortation: "Listen, my son." The detail and care with which the Book of Proverbs was written testify to Solomon's hope that his sons would choose to follow the Lord's wisdom (14:35, 16:10, 20:8, 20:28, 22:11, 29:4, 29:14). Certainly Rehoboam was instructed in this advice from an early age.

However, if Solomon's instructions from the Book of Proverbs had been helpful in Rehoboam's early childhood, they appear to have been completely ignored when he became king. Evidence for this conclusion can be found from the way in which, as the

new leader of Israel, Rehoboam poorly resolved a terribly sticky situation (1 Kings 12:1-4).

The Israelite elders explained to the king that the people desired him to reduce Solomon's heavy tax burden. Seeking a solution, Rehoboam first consulted the elders who had advised his father. Their guidance was, "If you will be a servant to the people and serve them and give them a favorable answer they will always be your servants" (2 Chron. 10:7). Richard Nelson comments on this passage that this story borrows from the ancient Gilgamesh text the "motif of wise versus foolish advisors"<sup>3</sup> as a cautionary tale.

Rehoboam asks how he should reply to the people's request to lower their taxes. He receives a general opinion in the form of an aphorism. The old men give typically sage advice: "Be a servant today they will be your servants forever." Their point was that the loyalty of a people stems from a king's willingness to act as a public servant. Their choice of words reflects balanced rationality. But then when he talked with his young friends he asked not "how" but "what should I say?" The young men mock the people's petition by tuning it into a rhyming doggerel.<sup>4</sup>

Nelson explains that this cautionary tale, typical of ancient literature, was intended to warn its readers to avoid the dire consequences of ignoring the wisdom of the elders.

Rehoboam did not like the wisdom of his elders, so he consulted with his childhood friends. Perhaps this seemed like a wise choice in the moment to Rehoboam. But these friends made what Walvoord and Zuck called a "deliberate choice"<sup>5</sup> to spurn the elders' wisdom:

The young men who had grown up with Rehoam replied, "Tell the people who have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke

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<sup>3</sup> Richard D Nelson, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, First and Second Kings* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, 77-79.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985, 511.

lighter’—tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my fathers waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions’” (2 Chron. 10:10-11).

This response provoked the people to rebel and ten of the twelve tribes broke away from Rehoboam’s rule. The climax of this rejection comes in 2 Chronicles 10:16. Israel’s parting shot against their king is “What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son?” They elected Jeroboam as their king. Rehoboam was left with only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 12:1-20). Rehoboam’s reliance on his friends’ advice cost him the nation Israel. He was no longer king of the entire nation. This king’s reliance on unproven advice led him to an immature decision, which led him and the nation to terrible consequences. The lesson from this story is still true today. When maturing adults depend on unproven advice from friends, a similar destructive result often occurs.

Young people need to be challenged from Rehoboam’s failure so they do not experience a similar anguish. By relying only his friends, he received advice that destroyed his kingdom and himself. When students only look exclusively to their friends or to other young people for direction, they will make mistakes because the advice is not tested. But Mark McMinn explains that, as with Rehoboam, “there is a natural limit to autonomy and that limit is defined by pain.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, many young adults fall into the trap of ignorance described by Netta Weinstein and colleagues, in which many unknowingly miss the pursuit, development and maintenance of a sense of life’s meaning.<sup>7</sup> According to Wong, research has shown that meaning in life is positively

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<sup>6</sup> Mark R. McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and the Spiritual Life in Christian Counseling* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 42.

<sup>7</sup>Netta Weinstein, Richard Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Motivation, Meaning and Wellness: A Self-Determination Perspective on the Creation and Internalization of Personal Meanings and Life Goals,” in *The Human Quest For Meanings*, 91.

related to spiritual satisfaction among older adults. It is these experienced adults who can show the way to spiritual well being and show young people the importance of spiritual growth in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

King Rehoboam did not listen to the sages that could have saved him and his kingdom. He lost his realm and he lost the relationship he needed with God. His life is a tragic warning for young readers.

### **The New Testament**

The life of the Lord and the writings of Paul are especially applicable to the researcher's assertion that the advice of older, wiser Christians is valid for leading the Christian young person to Christian self-actualization.

#### *Jesus*

Jesus modeled self-actualization. He also commanded His disciples to transfer it from one generation to the next. But He did more than model it and command its promulgation. He reveals that He Himself is the means to achieve it. This argues for the researcher's assertion that the advice of older, wiser Christians is valid for leading the Christian young person to Christian self-actualization.

#### **Jesus the Self-Actualized One**

Jesus, the Son of God, the divine God Himself, is the model of self-actualization. He is the One who is fully self-actualized. No one else provides a better example of a fully self-actualized individual than Jesus. Jesus Christ is the model *par excellence* of someone who knew life's meaning and His own purpose. He was the quintessentially self-actualized person. He showed this in how He reacted to resistance, and in His

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<sup>8</sup> Steger, "Experiencing Meaning," 175.

humility for the sake of others.

*When others resisted Jesus.* One clear way Scripture reveals Jesus' self-actualization is the way it portrays His ability to remain firm and secure in His purpose in the very teeth of resistance. For instance, one time the Lord explained His purpose to the listening crowd in Mark 2:17: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." Their understanding of the coming Messiah did not include forgiveness of sins. Thus, they interpreted Jesus statement as a "pretentious affront to God's power and authority, blasphemy against God, and a serious offense punishable by death by stoning (Lev. 24:15-16)."<sup>9</sup> Jesus' response demonstrated His high level of self-actualization:

Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven or to say get up take your mat and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ... He said to the paralytic, I tell you get up, take your mat and go home" (Mark 2:8-11).

The Lord knew the meaning of His life and how He would achieve His purpose.

Joel Green explains that this passage is the first use of the phrase Son of Man: "Jesus used this term to refer to Himself, and that it was recognized and reproduced by the evangelists as his distinctive self-designation."<sup>10</sup> Jesus could remain firm in His self-knowledge when others doubted His identity. In this way, Jesus was the quintessential, self-actualized person. His certainty about His identity and life purpose in the face of opposition demonstrates this.

*Jesus was humble.* It was from His comfort and confidence in His nature and

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<sup>9</sup> Walvoord and Zuck, 112.

<sup>10</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 127.

purpose that Jesus boldly chose to exemplify one of the most essential characteristics of self-actualized people: humility on behalf of others' welfare. Jesus' intimacy with the Father freed Him to lower Himself to the level of a poor, insignificant human, leading ultimately to His own self-sacrifice on behalf of humanity.

Paul Feinberg explains how Jesus, "made himself of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7, KJV) by writing "The central focus [of the Gospels] is on Christ's condescension and humiliation while in the flesh."<sup>11</sup> Jesus "made himself of no reputation" for the sake of others is the essence of humility and one of the main demonstrations of His self-actualization.

Lewis Sperry Chaffer describes Jesus' humiliation as the part of His incarnation when He went "from the form of God to the form of a servant or bond slave."<sup>12</sup> Jesus chose to give up His divine form and take on a lowly human form, in order to come into a world inhabited by people living in darkness. This was to bring God's light that would lead them out of their darkness. David William's calls Jesus' humiliation a "voluntary self-limitation."<sup>13</sup> This "voluntary self-limitation" is the ultimate sign that a person has achieved spiritual self-actualization.

Alva McClain paints a picture of how drastic Jesus' self-humiliation was.

The free obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ raises above all human comparison. He was indeed obedient unto death, but more than that, *even* unto the death of the cross. After all the death of my friend was only a joyful "loosing away upward" to be with the Christ whose he was and whom he served. There were no pangs, no

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<sup>11</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, "The Kenosis and Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Analysis Philippians 2:6-11," *Trinity Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1980): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Sperry Chaffer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 374-375.

<sup>13</sup> David T. Williams, "Kenosis and the Nature of the Persons in the Trinity, Department of Historical and Contextual Theology," *University of Fort Hare* vol. 69, no. 4 (2004): 623-640.

sting, in death for him. How different was the death of the cross! That was a “death of unimaginable pain and utmost shame, a death, which to the Jew was a symbol of the curse of God, and to the Roman was a horror of degradation.” Nor was this all. It was a death in which all the pent up wrath of the law against human sin would fall upon the blessed head of Jehovah’s Servant, a death in which He must plumb the depths of “a soul that’s lost.” None of this was hid from His eyes. Having counted the cost, for our sakes “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”(Emphasis in original)<sup>14</sup>

The scriptural phrase that McClain dwells on, “even death on a cross,” shows the extreme nature of God’s self-humiliation: He was willing to leave His high, exalted status and assume the most degraded, humiliating position possible.

Jesus explained His attitude of humility this way: “for even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45). Leon Morris’ says about the Matthew 20:28 passage that Jesus’ behavior shows the opposite of self-aggrandizement:

This is the very antithesis of what the sons of Zebedee wanted. They viewed themselves as the kind of people who would be right at the top of the kingdom. Jesus is saying that He sought no such place for Himself. He sought the path of lowly service.<sup>15</sup>

Morris analyzes the word “ransom” used by Jesus, saying “The word ransom took its origin from the practices of warfare, which was the price paid to bring a prisoner of war out of his captivity.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus’ willingness to become the payment for prisoners of war reveals the extreme degree to which He is willing to lower Himself.

Jesus exemplified humility throughout His whole earthly ministry, which might have been appropriately summed up in His own words, “I am among you as one who

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<sup>14</sup> Alva J. McClain, “Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8,” *Grace Journal* vol. 8. No. 2, (Spring, 1967): 11.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 512.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, 512.

serves” (Luke 22:27). Jesus gave His followers a palpable example of humility the night that He washed His disciples’ feet. The passage begins by acknowledging that “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (John 13:3). But from this confident, self-actualized place, Jesus did not assert His rule over followers. Instead, “he got up from the meal ... and began to wash his disciples feet” (vs. 5).

Norval Geldenhuys comments on this passage that Jesus was directly contrasting His style of leading with the style of important leaders of His day.

The rulers and leading men of earthly kingdoms act with outward power and make their inferiors realize very thoroughly that they are their rulers. The Lord is teaching [that] leadership should not be regarded as a means of enjoying special privileges over others, but as a specifically responsible form of service to be rendered in deep humility before God. In the ordinary condition of affairs the person seated at the table is regarded as the important personage and the one who attends upon such a person is looked upon as the inferior. Jesus, however, is the recognized leader among His disciples and yet His whole life along with them was a life of service—once more proved in a striking manner by the washing of feet.<sup>17</sup>

For Geldenhuys, Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet sent a clear message of how He led differently than leaders of that day. Jesus lowered Himself and served others rather than puffing Himself up and lording it over His inferiors. Jesus’ conclusion to washing His disciples’ feet was that “you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (vs. 14-15).

Paul interpreted the Lord’s service to others this way:

Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the vary nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

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<sup>17</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *The International Commentary on The New Testament, The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 562.



(Philippians 2:5-8).

Paul wrote this about Jesus' humiliation because he intended it to spur on the Philippians to their own humility (Phil. 2:2-5).

Scripture is clear that Jesus and Paul wanted all Christians to achieve this same level of Christian self-actualization so that they too could humble themselves. Like Jesus, self-actualized Christians can be so confident of their status with God that they can confidently relinquish that status and spend it on the behalf of others, entrusting their welfare to the God's kindness.

God's design has always been for each of His children to pass through a personal process of voluntary self-limitation and humility. It is a disciple's choice to empty him or herself of intellectual prestige, ambitions, desires, hopes, dreams, attitudes and emotions. He or she will learn to make him or herself "number two," like Jesus did, all for the benefit of others. The great ethical end of humility is servant-hood. When Christians follow Christ's example, they lower themselves on behalf of others as an indication that they are moving toward Christian self-actualization.

An interesting lesson about voluntary self-limitation can be learned from observing the disciple Peter before he underwent his own humiliation. Peter did not understand the application of Jesus' explanation that He was to die and rise again (Mark 8). Therefore, Peter challenged Jesus. As William Lane points out, "Mark describes Peter's impetuous action in sharp terms, employing the same strong vocabulary used throughout the Gospel in connection with the silencing of demons: 'he rebuked Jesus' (Mark 1:25 and 3:12)."<sup>18</sup> The Lord's response to Peter's objection to His death for sins

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<sup>18</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 303.

was, “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, carry his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:33-34).

Jesus expected His disciples to no longer have in mind the things of humankind, but to think like God, putting their own desires to death and following Him.

The Lord surrendered himself for the greater good of humanity. Would-be followers of Jesus today must surrender themselves and die to themselves in order to find Christian self-actualization and life’s meaning. R. T. France explains that this call to die to oneself is,

Not an exhortation to merely endure hardship patiently. In the context Jesus is calling disciples to the loss of their lives not just discomfort. ... Jesus Christ calls disciples to a radical abandonment of one’s own identity and self-determination, and a call to join the march to the pale of execution. Such “self-denial: is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for lent. It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of the self itself.<sup>19</sup>

Chaffer confirms this idea that humility is not merely patient endurance or sacrifice. He says it “is far removed from self-depreciation or an inferiority complex.”<sup>20</sup> Instead, it is identical to when people seek “not only their own interest but solely God’s interest in time and eternity.”<sup>21</sup>

Jesus’ life shows that the confidently self-actualized person who enjoys secure intimacy with God can selflessly sacrifice him or herself in humility and can boldly go on God’s mission into the world for its redemption.

### **Jesus, the One Who Transferred Life Wisdom**

Jesus not only exemplified self-actualization; He exemplified how life wisdom

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<sup>19</sup> R. T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 340.

<sup>20</sup> Chaffer, Vol. 7, 190.

<sup>21</sup> Chaffer, Vol. 7, 190.

was to be transferred, and He commanded that it be transferred from one generation to the next.

*Jesus exemplified the transfer.* Jesus showed the importance of transferring life wisdom to others so that they can achieve Christian self-actualization. The effort Jesus put into His own unique and effective teaching style demonstrated how critical it is to transfer life wisdom.

Jesus taught with a style that arrested and impacted His listeners. Mark writes that the people “were amazed at this teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:21-22). William Lane has found Mark’s primary emphasis to be on the authority of Jesus’ teaching and the response of the people, whose astonishment conveys the real impression of real alarm.<sup>22</sup> Lane explained this, saying that Jesus taught “with the spiritual force of a tremendous personality.”<sup>23</sup> This was bound to shock his contemporaries who “adhered to older interpretations of Torah as well as older methods of communicating it,” according to Joshua Starr, who described the “Pharisaic method of teaching”<sup>24</sup> based on Judaic sources. Jesus’ style stood out in sharp relief to this older style.

Jesus’ style expressed the importance that He placed on transferring life wisdom to His followers. The extra lengths to which Jesus went to ensure that His life wisdom was instilled in His disciples demonstrates how critical it is for new disciples to listen

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<sup>22</sup> Lane, William L., *The Gospel of Mark*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Cambridge UK, 1974, 72.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Lane, *The International Commentary on the New Testament, The Gospel of Mark*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1974, 69-71.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua Starr, “The Meaning of ‘Authority’ in Mark 1:22,” *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 23, no. 4, (October 1930): 302-305.

carefully to and receive what is being passed down to them. Today, through His church, Jesus is still intent on passing down His life wisdom to every new generation of believers. It follows that Jesus wants young Christians today to listen carefully to older, more experienced Christians who have more fully absorbed His life wisdom. If these older Christians are faithfully passing down the life wisdom of Jesus, then their wisdom is still valid and still applies to the lives of young Christians who are seeking Christian self-actualization.

*Jesus commanded it.* Jesus made the transfer of life wisdom His disciples' most important job by telling them to do it in His final command to them. He expected His disciples to transfer His life wisdom on to their own disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of age" (Matt. 28:18-20). This call to make disciples and to teach them to obey Jesus' commands represents God's will for the church for all time: older, experienced Christians who have already embraced God's will are to transfer this life wisdom to younger, newer and less experienced Christians.

Jesus made clear that making disciples was to be the main preoccupation of the church. Morris concludes,

The disciples taught because Jesus commanded them to teach, and there was no way to diminish the importance of this activity that owes its origin to the command of our Lord himself. Jesus was concerned with a way of life. As seen throughout the Gospel, he continually urges his followers to live in a manner pleasing to God. They should not miss the significance of each and all things, the whole of what he taught them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris *The Gospel of Matthew*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, 748-749.

In other words, it is clear that the transfer of life wisdom from one generation to the next through teaching was important to Jesus because He made it His final command while on earth.

The Lord mentored His disciples so they could mentor others. For instance, His plan had always been for Peter to preach to the crowd on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), so He prepared Peter ahead of time. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (2:1-13) was not his first. Even though Peter's effectiveness as a preacher that day depended on being baptized with the Holy Spirit (2:41), he had already had practice preaching when Jesus had sent him out years earlier to proclaim "that people should repent" (Mark 6:12) and that "the kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9). Jesus had already transferred life wisdom to Peter to prepare him for the day of Pentecost.

Darrell Bock writes about this message of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching. He says that the disciples were expected to carry on Jesus' message to others: "The mention in this passage of God's kingdom is central, because these disciples reflect the approach of the new era Jesus brings. God's ruling power in deliverance is coming. Jesus' activity is not just approaching; it has come upon you."<sup>26</sup> In other words, Jesus was preparing the disciples to live with the reality that the kingdom was already among them.

The Lord had coached all His disciples so they would teach and thus transfer spiritual wisdom to people. Luke writes, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went"(Acts 8:4). Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ there. Then, "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous

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<sup>26</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary, Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), 292-293.

signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6). This transfer of life wisdom has always been God’s way of introducing new generations to achieve Christian self-actualization.

### **Jesus Accomplishes Our Self-Actualization**

Jesus is not only the example of Christian self-actualization. He commanded its achievement through mentoring and discipling. He is the means by which it happens. Jesus enables His followers to achieve Christian self-actualization in two ways: He purchases it for them with His blood, and He establishes a relationship with them so that through intimacy with Him, they might discover it.

*Jesus purchased it.* Jesus’ death and resurrection pays the price to rescue people from the consequences their sin deserves. The Lord heals people who are sick of the consequences of their choices, who are lost from wandering in their darkness and who are feeling alone from their self-absorption of narcissism. He pays the price to redeem people today from this bondage to sin. Through Jesus, people can escape from their dark lives. Jesus’ redemption gives searching people Christian self-actualization because through Him people might come to know the meaning of their existence. According to Chaffer,

Redemption is an act of God by which He Himself pays as a ransom the price of human sin, which the outraged holiness and government of God requires. Redemption undertakes the solution of the problem of sin. A slave set free by his or her master, was wholly free; but he could voluntarily remain as the slave of the master whom he loved. The master piercing the ear of the slave with an awl sealed the new voluntary relationship. The Christian is set free from sin but is privileged to yield himself wholly to the One who redeemed him.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, Jesus is the One who achieves Christian self-actualization for His people, through His own redemption.

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<sup>27</sup> Chaffer, Vol. 3, 88-90.

*Jesus establishes a relationship.* Jesus Christ gives His people Christian self-actualization by giving them Himself. It is in relationship with Him that one achieves it. He came into this world to offer people the light of redemption. He comes into people's lives today to lead them out of their darkness, their wondering, their searching, their stumbling and their narcissism. He leads them into the light of Christian self-actualization. He gives them the meaning of their lives: "Through him all things were made without him nothing was made. In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:3-5). John points the way to the light, which is Jesus Himself: "This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). When people respond to Jesus' light they are redeemed.

An example of this is the story of unredeemable Zacchaeus. Jesus showed Him the way to Christian self-actualization by giving him a relationship with Himself. Jesus brought His light to a successful man living within his own darkness. His lifestyle is not all that different from contemporary people's cravings for success. "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy" (Luke 19:1-2). Often, these Jewish Roman curators collected much more tax money than Rome demanded. Jesus Christ brought His light into such a success-driven man's life. The Lord walked through Jericho and saw Zacchaeus sitting in a tree. The Lord looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus' invitation, even though the people distained his doing this: The people muttered, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

Joel Green comments that Jesus had to endure heavy criticism for inviting Himself to Zacchaeus home: “He was indicted for having table fellowship with those toll collectors and sinners who had responded positively to his message; there, he insisted that his table practices were consonant with God’s response to the recovery of the lost.”<sup>28</sup> After all, Zacchaeus is a sinner (Luke 19:6-7). In his community, Zacchaeus cannot be redeemed, even though the religious leaders of his day said Israel was to be redeemed. They might quote: “O Israel put your hope in the Lord for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins” (Ps.130: 7-8). But tax collectors could not be redeemed, according to the views of the day. Matthew, another tax collector, had dinner with many tax collectors and Jesus. The self-righteous religious leaders’ response was, “Why does your teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matthew 9:11). Their assessment was that Zacchaeus was unredeemable.

When Zacchaeus understood the light of Jesus’ words, he was redeemed. His life was changed. “But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’” (Luke 19:8). Zacchaeus’ understanding of life’s meaning was so changed by the Lord’s words that he knew he must live in Jesus’ light. He had gained a new life of walking in Jesus’ light. Jesus’ affirmation of his life was, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost”(Luke 19:9-10).

Alfred Edersheim writes that in this moment of meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus saw his

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<sup>28</sup> Green, 673.



whole life flash before him: “what his past has been, what his present was, what his future must be.”<sup>29</sup> Edersheim explains this momentary insight:

Standing forth, not so much before the crowd as before the Lord, and not ashamed, nay, scarcely conscious of him, his confession is implied—so much is the sorrow of the past in true repentance swallowed up by the joy of the present—Zacchaeus vowed fourfold restoration as by a thief of what had become his through false accusation as well as the half of all his foods to the poor. And so the whole current of his life had been turned, in those few moments, through his joyous reception of Christ, the Savior of sinners, and Zacchaeus the public robber, the rich Chief of Publicans had become an almsgiver.<sup>30</sup>

Zacchaeus was redeemed, and was thus willing to make the most extravagant and generous offers.

Chaffer writes that Zacchaeus found that he “was purchased out of the bond slave market and set free from sin with that liberty which is the rightful portion of the sons of God (Gal. 5:1). He experienced forgiveness of sins because of the riches of God’s grace toward him (Eph. 1:7).”<sup>31</sup> The darkness of his life without God profited him but left him alone, isolated, rejected and searching. Jesus’ words about a new life so changed his thinking that Zacchaeus did the unthinkable for a wealthy man. He paid his debts.

Zacchaeus discovered Christian self-actualization through his encounter with Jesus. By encountering Jesus, Zacchaeus came to embrace Jesus and His will. This is one of many stories that illustrate how Jesus is the One who accomplishes human self-actualization. So Jesus is not only the example of Christian self-actualization, and He not only commanded its achievement through mentoring and discipling, but He is the means by which it happens.

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing Company), 354.

<sup>30</sup> Edersheim, 354.

<sup>31</sup> Chaffer, Vol. 3, 237.

David Brenner writes that each Christian can come closer to this Christian self-actualization through a spiritual transformation that is distinct from mere self-knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Rather, Brenner says it comes from intimate knowledge of divine love. The result is the ability embrace God and His will: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).

The nature of discipleship that Jesus envisioned revolved around a whole new relationship in which people gives up their rights and adapt themselves to God’s will. Following this relinquishment of rights, a disciple’s perception changes and he or she becomes tutored by God’s Spirit to forgive the guilty (John 8, Matt. 18:21). Disciples begin to love each and every person, and not just those who to whom they are similar (Matt. 5:43-48).

Internally, disciples begin to understand how to avoid striving and worry over their needs and instead how to drop control of their lives and trust God to meet their needs (Luke 10:22-31). The Holy Spirit will change Christians so that the worldview in which they are immersed counters their personal striving to be first. Instead, their new worldview trains them to live as children who obey their heavenly Father (Mark 10:13-16, Luke 14:7-14).

These changes in Jesus’ disciples occur when they grasp how Jesus set aside His divinity to meet their need. They begin to realize that they must also set aside their way of life on behalf of others. Jesus emptied Himself for them, and disciples are to empty themselves for Jesus and for others. This is when disciples begin to know Jesus’ voice (John 10:3) and begin to live trusting, dependent lives that abide in Christ (John 15:1-17).

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<sup>32</sup> David G. Brenner, *The Gift of Being Yourself* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 35, 72.

This leads to a more ready acceptance of God's life purpose for them. In this way, the Christian self-actualization that God desires for every believer flows out of relationship with the One who is life wisdom and self-actualization itself.

Another way to explain this is to say that Christians find self-actualization by confidently living in unity with God. Jesus had told His disciples that love for others, the fruit He expected from them (John 15:16), came from abiding in the love of Jesus and of the Father (John 15:5). A disciple's life changes in this process—his or her behaviors will bear the fruit of unity with Christ and the Father. The disciples were warned that if they did not abide in Jesus they could do nothing. They were simultaneously encouraged that if they abided in Him their lives would bear fruit. Keener explains this:

The condition of fruit bearing, hence for perseverance, is abiding in Jesus. Glasson thinks that “abide,” reflects the Deuteronomic emphasis on “cleaving” to the Lord but in a greater sense of union. In connection with the vine, the image connotes complete continued dependence for the Christian on the indwelling Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

In other words, Keener is saying that Jesus' image of being a vine reinforces His exhortation to abide. As a branch must stay connect to its vine, so too must a disciple stay connected to Jesus. As Christians read the word of God, pray and meditate, the Holy Spirit works in their minds to consider His calling, to consider their lifestyles, and to surrender to Him the control of their lives. The one who sets him or herself to live this way in God's presence will experience self-actualization through relationship with Jesus.

In summary, Jesus modeled self-actualization. He also commanded His disciples to be the means of transferring it from one generation to the next. But He did more than model it and command its promulgation. He reveals that He Himself is the means to

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<sup>33</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 998-999.

achieve it. All this supports the researcher's assertion that the advice of older, wiser Christians is valid for leading the Christian young person to Christian self-actualization.

### *Paul*

Perhaps more vividly and thoroughly than anyone else in the New Testament besides Jesus, Paul's life and teaching demonstrate the need for and validity of transferring life wisdom for Christian self-actualization from one generation to the next. After his conversion, Paul spent the rest of his life transferring the life wisdom of Christian self-actualization to young Christians, mentoring them into becoming faithful followers of Christ. Paul intentionally pursued and raised up youth like Timothy, Titus and John Mark for ministry.

### **Paul's Example**

Paul gives all older Christians an outstanding pattern for transferring life wisdom. Roy L. Laurin explained that Paul understood he was a steward entrusted with a great obligation to share God's mystery with people of no faith (1 Cor. 4:1-2).<sup>34</sup> He knew he was the possessor of truth, which in earlier ages people had not known, but now God had revealed (Eph. 3:5). This belief of being entrusted by God with a great responsibility left Paul with the sense that he was compelled to share the Gospel and to raise people up to live it out fully. Paul had taken to heart Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:16) to transfer life wisdom from one generation to the next.

Paul's confidence in transferring life wisdom to the next generation came from his own high level of self-actualization. Colleen Shantz wondered how Paul could have been happy and how he could have found life's purpose, given how much suffering he

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<sup>34</sup> Roy L. Laurin, *Philippians* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kemper Press, 1954), 87.

underwent for the gospel (2 Cor. 1:8-10). Paul was even willing to “boast” in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Shantz theorizes that in order to achieve self-actualization, Paul had to forgo the kind of happiness that comes from pleasure. He also had to relinquish the kind of happiness that comes from a delightful life. In their place, Paul found the kind of happiness that comes from a meaningful life.<sup>35</sup> Paul learned the hard way that by turning his pain into faithfulness, he might achieve self-actualization. He had come to understand pain to be what Steven Sandage terms a “reorientation of happiness.”<sup>36</sup> For this reason, Paul is an excellent example to those who would pass on to the next generation their life wisdom for self-actualization.

### **Paul’s Teaching**

Just as Paul saw himself as a steward entrusted with the “mysteries of God,” he expected his followers would assume the mentality of stewardship to transfer life wisdom to those after them. For example, he made clear to Titus that church leaders were to see themselves as stewards (Tit. 1:7). Paul prepared Titus to ensure that Christian self-actualization would be passed down through the generations: “Teach older men to be temperate, worthy or respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance” (Tit. 2:2). These older men along with Titus were to encourage younger men to live self-controlled lives (Titus 2:6). After describing male mentoring, Paul described female mentoring:

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted too much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can

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<sup>35</sup> Colleen Shantz, “I Have Learned to Be Content,” ed. Brent Strawn, *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 164.

<sup>36</sup> Steven J. Sandage, *The Transformation of Happiness: A Response From Counseling Psychology*, ed. Brent Strawn, *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244.

train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God (Tit. 2:3-5).

A. Duane Litfin explains this passage and the disciple-making structure that Paul expected Titus to build.

Titus was to teach men and women to manifest the characteristics of maturity. Older men are to be temperate (*nephalious*, cf. 1 Timothy 3:2), worthy of respect (*semnous*) and self-controlled (*sophronan*, cf. 1 Timothy 3:2). These marks of maturity should be complemented by marks of godliness, the three central Christian virtues of faith, love and endurance. The women were to behave reverently, in a way suitable to sound doctrine. They were not to be slanders (cf. 1 Timothy 3:11) or addicted too much wine (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8). Both were real possibilities for women whose families were grown and who may have had too much idle time on their hands (cf. 1 Timothy 5:13-14). Titus was to encourage these older women to develop a ministry of teaching younger women what is good. Younger women with children were to keep their primary focus at home, but the older women would do well to reach outside their homes and share what they had learned with those who would profit from it most.<sup>37</sup>

Paul writes that Titus's role was to mentor people so they would mentor those less firm in the ways of God. Thus, he urged older women to mentor younger women. He was to set an example for each group of adults, showing them a life of godly behavior, with teaching backed by integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech so no one could condemn his ministry and so he would not be ashamed by pagan lies (Tit. 2:6-8). Titus was to be a living demonstration of the saying "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to live at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). In this letter, Paul envisioned churches in which life wisdom continued to be passed down with each new generation.

In another example, Paul wrote to Timothy, impressing upon him the need to pass the faith on to those who would in turn pass it on the subsequent generations (2 Tim. 2:2).

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<sup>37</sup> Duane Litfin, in Walvoord and Zuck, 763-764.

As with Titus, Paul gave Timothy specific instructions for doing this, reminding him that his own faith was the result of Christian life wisdom being transferred from the older generations of his grandmother and mother (2 Tim. 1:5).

Paul guided Timothy and Titus's preaching and discipleship to focus future generations on knowing what Christ had done and on why He had done it. He wanted these young pastors to raise up the kind of Christians that Litfin described: those who "truly love Christ and look forward to His return, and are thus willing to pay any price to bring their lives into conformity with their beloved Lord's will, lest they disappoint Him at His return."<sup>38</sup> In this way, Paul gave himself to generations of young people so they in turn could give themselves to future generations of young people.

### **Conclusion**

The Pentateuch, biblical wisdom literature, and the historical books of the Bible showed that God's method of imparting life wisdom to new generations is for older generations to pass it down intentionally. The case study of Moses' relationships with Jethro and Joshua reveal the positive impact when life wisdom is correctly transferred according to God's method. The case study of King Rehoboam revealed the negative impact when younger generations find the advice of older generations to be invalid. The life of Jesus unveils the model of a fully self-actualized person. He also commanded His disciples to transfer life wisdom for Christian self-actualization from one generation to the next. Most importantly, Jesus shows that He Himself is the means to achieve it. Paul's example and teaching reiterate those of Jesus.

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<sup>38</sup> Walvoord and Zuck, 765.

The problem this thesis project addressed was the belief held by many Christian young adults that their Christian self-actualization could be accomplished without guidance from older Christian adults who have already found life's meaning. This chapter demonstrated that God intends life wisdom to be transferred from one generation to the next so that Christian young adults can achieve Christian self-actualization.



### CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem this thesis project addressed was the belief by Christian young adults that the life wisdom advice of older Christian adults is invalid for the achievement of Christian self-actualization, a belief that results in unnecessary suffering. In this chapter's review of literature, the researcher first defined Christian self-actualization more carefully. Then he examined the disconnection between the generations, with its causes and results. Finally, the researcher investigated the validity of transferring life wisdom from one generation to the next so that the younger generation could achieve Christian self-actualization.

#### **Self-Actualization**

The first part of this literature review defines Christian self-actualization more carefully. This is a necessary step in the researcher's argument that the advice of older Christians is valid for achieving self-actualization. If their advice is to be considered valid, then the researcher must first show that Christianity is compatible with a traditionally secular concept.

The term "self-actualization" comes from the tradition of secular-humanist psychological theory, but the researcher has chosen it because of its compatibility with the Christian understanding of the meaning of life. To understand how and why the researcher has joined these two ideas, he first explains the secular definition and history

of the term, followed by an explanation of how he integrated it with a Christian worldview.

### *Secular Self-Actualization*

*The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* defines self-actualization as “the drive people have to realize their potential and to find fulfillment. Self-actualization encompasses the human need for challenge, responsibility, creativity, and variety at work.”<sup>1</sup> It has often been summarized as the process of becoming all that one was meant to be. Kurt Goldstein coined the term in the mid-twentieth century, but it was the famous humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow who most fully developed the concept throughout his career from the 1940s through 1970s. Professional psychology has been borrowing its understanding of self-actualization from him ever since.

For Maslow, the theory of self-actualization is inextricably linked with his theory of the “Hierarchy of Need.”<sup>2</sup> In simple terms this is the theory that all human behavior is motivated by a desire to fulfill certain needs in an ascending, or hierarchical, order. Thus, human needs begin with the most basic: food and shelter. All humans seek to fulfill these simple physical needs before they can think about pursuing other “higher” needs, like the need for security. Above this are needs for a sense of belonging and love. On the next level of need is that of self-esteem. Finally, at the very top of the order is the need for self-actualization, which Maslow described as a need to express one’s full creative potential and to understand life’s meaning. These levels are often represented as a tiered

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Colman, *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 772.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Olsen, “The Theory of Self-Actualization,” *Psychology Today*, last updated August 13, 2013, accessed on September 3, 2014 [http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/theory-and-  
psychopathology/201308/the-theory-self-actualization](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/theory-and-psychopathology/201308/the-theory-self-actualization), 1.

pyramid, with the basic physical needs as the lowest and broadest tier, and with self-actualization as the pyramid's summit.<sup>3</sup>

For Maslow, self-actualization is the highest personal attainment for a person. It is the greatest level of maturity, wisdom and capacity that a person can achieve. Maslow described self-actualized people as qualitatively more perceptive, accepting, spontaneous, mission-oriented (instead of self-oriented), able to be happy while alone, more autonomous, appreciative, mystical, empathetic, ethical, humble and creative than the average person.<sup>4</sup>

Maslow's approach of seeing human motivation according to this hierarchy of need is called "positive psychology" because it came in response to what he deemed to be an overly negative focus in psychology prior to him: "Contemporary psychology has mostly studied not-having rather than having, striving rather than fulfillment, frustration rather than gratification, seeking for joy rather than having attained joy, trying to get there rather than being there."<sup>5</sup> In other words, according to Maslow, few had studied the positive effects of discovering life's meaning and had instead been infatuated with the negative effects of not having discovered it. American psychology had focused on peoples' lack of fulfillment rather than on their having found fulfillment. According to Maslow, this negative focus often spurred on the pursuit of satisfying selfish, ego-centered desires rather than spurring on the pursuit of a transformed life. The negative

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<sup>3</sup> W. Huitt, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," *Educational Psychology Interactive* (2007). Accessed December 11, 2014 <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/conation/maslow.html>

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Patterson, *The Therapeutic Relationship* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1985), accessed December 11, 2014, <http://personcentered.com/selfact.html>

<sup>5</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward A Psychology of Being* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 83-85.

focus discouraged people from seeking to become the exceptional person they were created to become. Maslow wished to reverse this trend.

It is true that Maslow believed self-actualization was usually reached later in life, after much experience and only after fulfilling the other needs lower in the hierarchy. But his understanding of creativity allowed for the possibility that younger people might be able to glimpse moments of self-actualization in occasional “peak experiences,” and even enter into some of its benefits while still young. More recent researchers, like Ruth Richards and Ann Reitan, developed Maslow’s focus on the creativity of self-actualized people. Richards argued that creativity could be a pathway to self-actualization.<sup>6</sup> She explained that because creativity is fundamental to human survival, people, “adeptly use flexibility,” and “we improvise and we try different options. We are motivated to actualize our potentials and talents toward fuller knowledge of and acceptance of our own intrinsic nature.”<sup>7</sup> This means that young adults, through their creativity, can move toward achieving self-actualization while still young. Reitan reinforced Richards’s research by postulating that creativity, including the creativity of the young, is the primary contributor to self-actualization.<sup>8</sup> Maslow himself agreed that the creativity of younger adults allowed them to ponder new concepts and realities and therefore to find life’s meaning.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ruth Richards, *Everyday Creativity and New Views of Human Nature* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2009), 25-27.

<sup>7</sup> Richards, 25-27.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Reitan, “Maslow’s Theory of Self-Actualization, More or Less Actualized,” *Neurology Times* (Jan 8, 2013): 20, accessed March, 2016, <http://brainblogger.com/2013/01/08/maslows-theory-of-self-actualization-more-or-less-actualized/>

<sup>9</sup> Maslow, 84.

Since Maslow's first offered his Hierarchy of Need to the psychological community in 1954, his theory has faced no end of criticism. For instance, many have challenged its lack of scientific rigor and others have opposed its failure to integrate its conceptual structure with other theories. Some have cited its lack of evidence from supporting research, and others have challenged the very validity of its concepts.<sup>10</sup> Many have found that it does not take into account either the complexity of the twenty-first century society, or the complexity of mental illness.<sup>1112</sup>

But despite all this criticism, the theory has more or less survived to the present, albeit with some evolution. Numerous fields, like education and management, have found its basic goal of self-actualization to be theoretically sound and applicable to life.<sup>13</sup> Most critics have called for revisions rather than outright abandonment of the theory.<sup>14</sup> Probably the most significant way that it has evolved has been the proposal by key researchers and theorists to change the overly simplistic triangle in favor of a model that takes into account more of the complexity of life and society.<sup>15</sup> Zekeriya Ozsoy, for instance, argues that because the theory defines self-actualization as an unending process, it ought not to have a closed triangle tip to symbolize it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Joan M. Kiel, "Reshaping Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to Reflect Today's Educational and Managerial Philosophies," *Journal of Instructional Psychology* (1999), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Theodoros Millon and Melvin J. Lerner, *Personality and Social Psychology, Handbook of Psychology, Vol. 5* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Kiel, 1.

<sup>13</sup> C. H. Patterson, *The Therapeutic Relationship* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1985), accessed December 11, 2014, <http://personcentered.com/selfact.html>

<sup>14</sup> Zekeriya Ozsoy, "A True Understanding of Self for Self-Actualization," *Psychology*, no. 74 (March - April 2010), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ozsoy, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ozsoy, 2.

Another of Ozsoy's most important proposals for revising the theory is to be more inclusive of spirituality as a key part of self-actualization.<sup>17</sup> This point is especially relevant to this discussion, and introduces the researcher's next piece of his argument, that Maslow's concept of self-actualization can be legitimately integrated with the Christian search for meaning.

### *Christian Self-Actualization*

The researcher has not borrowed the secular definition of self-actualization wholesale. Instead, he has integrated it with the Christian belief about the meaning of life. The researcher first explains this Christian belief, and then he shows how he has integrated it with the concept of self-actualization.

#### **The Christian Belief about the Meaning of Life**

The researcher asserts the traditional Christian view that the meaning of life can be summarized as beginning with a relationship with God. C.S. Lewis expressed this classically orthodox view in the following manner:

God made us: invented us as man invents an engine. ... God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. ... God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, human happiness and fulfillment can only be had in knowing God, the source and sustenance of every person's very existence. God gives fulfillment and a sense of the meaning of life to a person only insofar as that person is related to Him. One of Lewis's biographers and commentators, Armond Nicholi, explains it this way:

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<sup>17</sup> Ozsoy, 2.

<sup>18</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 54.

The reason for our existence on this planet—is to establish a relationship with the Person, which placed us here. Until that relationship is established, all of our attempts to attain happiness—our quest for recognition, for money, for power, for the perfect marriage or the ideal friendship, for all that we spend our lives seeking—will always fall short, will never quite satisfy the longing, fill the void, quell the restlessness or make us happy.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, apart from a relationship with God, life is empty and purposeless. This encapsulates the 2,000 year-old Christian belief about life's meaning.

Leo Tolstoy expressed how a person finds satisfaction only by discovering the Christian meaning of life: “The blessings of life are not found in personal happiness, as people generally suppose, but in service to God and man. Therefore, the whole positive teaching of Christ is expressed in this one thing: Love God and your neighbor as you love yourself.”<sup>20</sup> According to Tolstoy, the Christian ethic to love God and love one's neighbor is the way to personal happiness. In a manner similar to Lewis, Tolstoy goes on to explain that the way to discover this personal happiness is through Christ:

Christ shows the man the road, and at the same time indicates the paths leading from the right road. But only one direction showing the road is given, for there can be but one straight line showing a certain direction. Believers on that path are, in Christ's simile, like an abundant spring of living water.<sup>21</sup>

Tolstoy argued that the satisfaction for which young people today yearn, or the “abundant spring of living water,” can only be found in the Christian understanding of the meaning of life.

The researcher based his understanding of Christian self-actualization on this classically orthodox belief that humanity discovers the meaning of life by knowing God

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<sup>19</sup> Armond M. Nicholi, *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 104.

<sup>20</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Essays and Letters* (Guildford, UK: Billing and Sons Limited, 1903), 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Tolstoy, 9-10.

and walking in His ways. He argues that the Christian version of life's meaning offers the best hope of giving satisfaction to people who seek self-actualization. Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich warned, "Unless we find this personal, transforming meaning in its fullest sense, the struggle for wholeness will remain unresolved."<sup>22</sup> In other words, without the full explanation of life's meaning given by the Christian tradition, the person who seeks self-actualization is bound to encounter dissatisfying dead ends. The Christian meaning can spur one on to the kind of growth and noble effort that can only be imagined by non-Christian definitions of meaning.

### **The Integration of Christianity with Self-Actualization**

Having established Maslow's understanding of self-actualization as well as having summarized the Christian understanding of the meaning of life, the researcher now demonstrates how the two may be integrated.

*Self-actualization and the meaning of life.* The first point in this integration effort is to assert that the pursuit of self-actualization is identical to the pursuit of the purpose and meaning of life. Many thinkers have made this same identification. J. J. Ayer talked about the goal of the search for meaning in terms identical to those used to describe self-actualization: "An apparently simple answer to the question of the purpose of life is a man or woman is free to live at their maximum potential when they can do what they choose."<sup>23</sup> This living at one's potential with a resulting freedom of choice concurs with the classic definition of achieving self-actualization. According to Olsen, Maslow himself

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<sup>13</sup> Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ayer, 137.



understood the search for life's meaning to be a part of the process of self-actualization.<sup>24</sup> Laura King and her research associates have shown that individuals who are able to find meaning after a negative life event are better able to return to positive levels of functioning.<sup>25</sup> This corresponds strongly with Maslow's belief that self-actualized people can more buoyantly come back from hardships than can those who have not reached self-actualization. Steger writes about how previous research has shown that meaning in life is positively related to spiritual satisfaction among the older people, as well as about how spiritual well-being is related to the importance of spirituality among college students.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, to seek self-actualization is to seek the meaning of life. When a person wants to achieve self-actualization, he or she is in reality seeking a sense of fulfillment in which one apprehends life's meaning. The reverse is also true. When a person desires fulfillment from knowing life's meaning, he or she is hoping for self-actualization.

*To seek self-actualization is to be spiritually hungry.* The second point of integration is that the hunger for self-actualization is in reality a spiritual hunger. Robert Quinn, in reference to a process parallel to that of self-actualization, wrote: "Ultimately, personal deep change is a spiritual process. The problem is not out there but inside each of us."<sup>27</sup> Steger asserts that much research has shown the search for life's spiritual meaning to be strongly linked to self-actualization.<sup>28</sup> He pointed out that much of how

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<sup>24</sup> Olsen, accessed September 3, 2014

<sup>25</sup> Laura King, Joshua A. Hicks, Jennifer L. Krull and Amber K. Del Gaiso, "Positive Affect and The Experience of Meaning in Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* vol. 90, no. 1 (2006), 180.

<sup>26</sup> Steger, 167.

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 78 and 101.

<sup>28</sup> Steger, 167.

psychologists describe self-actualization is nearly synonymous with how theologians and ministers describe spirituality. Both profess to assist people to resolve many of the same issues and concerns: “meaning in life could help people, students, foster well-being; resolve, as well as develop future resilience to, psychological distress; cultivate a sense of spiritual connection with something larger than their momentary experiences.” Steger writes that the discovery of spiritual meaning can resolve these issues because “previous research has shown that meaning in life is positively related to spiritual satisfaction and spiritual well-being and the importance of spirituality among colleges students.”<sup>29</sup>

In his article, “Faith, Self-Actualization, and Reflection,” Martin Denys writes: “Achieving self-actualization begins and finishes in a faith relationship.”<sup>30</sup> He makes this claim because, “Spirituality exists to transform an individual’s inner existence.” In other words, spirituality is precisely the transformation process that self-actualization seeks to achieve. Denys explains this by saying that the “process and future victory of attaining transformation, self-reorientation and self-actualization” comes from “a person’s total trust in God who then leads them to take the steps to become the person God created them to be; fully alive, fully human and fully the best.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the state of self-actualization that Maslow sought is really the same process of inner transformation promoted in the Christian tradition.

The researcher asserts that this connection between the search for spiritual meaning and self-actualization is an affirmation of the truth from the Book of

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<sup>29</sup> Steger, 167.

<sup>30</sup> Martin J. Denys, “Faith, Self-actualization, and Reflection,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol. 51 (2002): 105

<sup>31</sup> Denys, 105.

Ecclesiastes that describes God as having “put eternity in their hearts” (Eccles. 3:11). This means that a person can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits because he or she is created in the image of God. People have a spiritual thirst and nothing but the eternal God can truly satisfy that thirst. God has built into people a restless yearning for the kind of perfect world that can only be found in His perfect rule. The acknowledgment of the need for God opens the door for a person to discover self-actualization.

*Maslow’s ideal is the Christian ideal.* The third point of integration is that the ideal self-actualized personality described by Maslow is best found in the Christian ideal. Maslow conducted many case studies of people he deemed to have all the qualities and characteristics of the ideal self-actualized person. What Maslow did not know was that his ideal was already best exhibited in Jesus Christ, whom Christianity has upheld for 2,000 years as the perfect person.

Maslow had described self-actualized people as qualitatively more perceptive, accepting, spontaneous, mission-oriented (instead of self-oriented), able to be happy while alone, more autonomous, appreciative, mystical, empathetic, ethical, humble and creative than the average person.<sup>32</sup> Jesus Christ fits this description better than any other person. For example, Maslow wrote that, as a part of the “peak experiences” of self-actualized people, they demonstrate “humility and surrender,”<sup>33</sup> and are able to behave “benevolently” toward others,<sup>34</sup> as has been confirmed by many subsequent theorists of

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<sup>32</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 94

<sup>33</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 98, 124-125.

<sup>34</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 94.

positive psychology.<sup>35</sup> Jesus, as described in the previous chapter, fits this model and its contours perfectly. Jesus was so secure in His identity and sense of mission that He could freely empty Himself on behalf of others. Furthermore, He could do this to an extent far beyond what anyone else has ever been able to do. It is legitimate to describe Jesus as a person who had perfectly reached the full potential for a human being. In this way, Jesus was the quintessentially self-actualized person. Thus, when pointing people toward self-actualization, no one models it better than Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the researcher argues that it is valid to integrate the Christian worldview with secular self-actualization. Since Jesus Christ demonstrated all the qualities of self-actualization, it follows that by seeking to imitate Him, as He required (Matt. 16:24, John 13:14-16, 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 2:5) one seeks self-actualization.

*Christian fruit is the fruit of self-actualization.* The next point of integration is that self-actualization is closely parallel to the classical Christian understanding of bearing fruit through Christ. Paul talks of a person who “walk[s] by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16), described as one who exhibits “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). As Jesus can be described as one who had reached His full potential, so can a Christian exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit be described as one who is growing toward his or her full potential. In this way, maturing Christians who walk by the Spirit tangibly live out Maslow’s very definition of self-actualized people.

*Christ is the means to self-actualization.* Finally, if Christian fruit is parallel to the fruit of self-actualization, then Jesus’ logic comes to bear on how one produces this fruit.

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<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Cranford, “Self-Actualizing: Reflection,” February 9, 2012, [thebeccranford.wordpress.com](http://thebeccranford.wordpress.com), 1, accessed February, 2016.

Jesus said: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Jesus claimed that one produces the fruit mentioned above by “abiding” in Him, which He had defined earlier in the Gospel of John as coming to Him and believing in Him (John 6:35 with verse 56). In this way, Jesus identifies Himself as the means of bearing fruit, or of becoming self-actualized.

In summary, self-actualization can be identified with the human search for meaning; that search can be described as a spiritual hunger; Maslow’s ideal self-actualized person is found in the person of Jesus; Christian fruit is parallel to the fruit of self-actualization, which Jesus claims to be produced through faith in Him. All of these points argue for the validity of integrating self-actualization with the Christian worldview and the validity of using the term “Christian self-actualization.” Throughout this thesis, the researcher has frequently used the phrase “Christian self-actualization” to mean this integration. Occasionally, unless otherwise indicated, he meant this longer phrase when simply writing the shorter term “self-actualization” or the less specific term “spiritual self-actualization.”

### **The Disconnection between the Generations**

Having established the integration of self-actualization and the Christian understanding of the meaning of life, the researcher must next establish that the older and younger generations of Christians are disconnected from one another, with disastrous consequences.

#### *The Cause of the Disconnection*

The researcher contends that Christian young adults suffer unnecessarily due to

their belief that the advice of older Christian adults is invalid or inapplicable to their situation. This belief has several sources, including differing generational attitudes toward life, the ever-growing problem of age discrimination, and certain practices and perspectives of higher education.

### **Different Attitudes toward Life**

Different generations consistently display different attitudes toward life. Jean M. Twenge, along with W. Keith Campbell and Elise C. Freeman, compared three generations (Baby-Boomers, GenX and Millennials) over their life goals, their concern for others, and their attitudes toward civic involvement.<sup>36</sup> They found that younger adult interests are essentially self-centered in comparison with older adults. Young adults generally demonstrated a high concern for success and for recognition. They reported a high level of preoccupation with attitudes like “becoming an authority in my field,” “successful in my work,” “successful in my own business,” “having lots of money,” “recognized for contributions in my field,” “becoming a community leader,” “administrative work responsibilities” and being “well off financially.” Their lowest score was “helping others in need.” Any topic that called for these young adults to accomplish something without a reward had very negative results.<sup>37</sup>

Twenge and her colleagues further discovered that younger generations showed less concern for themes related to self-actualization. For instance, they reported: “some of the largest declines [in attitudes toward life goals] appeared in ‘developing a meaningful

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<sup>36</sup> Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell and Elise C. Freeman, “Generational Differences in Young Adults’ Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966-2009.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 102, no. 5, May, 2012, 1045-1062.

<sup>37</sup> Twenge et al., 1051-1055.

philosophy of life’ and ‘finding meaning and purpose in my life.’”<sup>38</sup> Twenge and her colleagues found that younger adults generally held what they called “extrinsic values,” while older generations generally held to more “intrinsic values.”<sup>39</sup> This means that younger generations tended to value things that could be measured and counted, while older ones tended to value indefinable and hard-to-measure qualities.

Ursula Staudinger’s research affirmed this conclusion when it indicated that older adult wisdom has advantages over younger adults because elders generally act more reflectively, thoughtfully and creatively about life’s dilemmas.<sup>40</sup>

Phyllis Korkki, in her similarly titled *New York Times* article, “The Science of Older and Wiser,” studied the disregard of self-actualizing themes by young adults. She attributed it to their indifference toward the importance of wisdom.<sup>41</sup> She writes: “most psychologists agree that if you define wisdom as maintaining positive well-being and kindness in the face of challenges, it is one of the most important qualities one can attain.”<sup>42</sup> Older generations tend to find wisdom itself valuable, while younger generations tend to find it less valuable, unless it enables them to make progress in achieving their extrinsic goals.

The researcher asserts that these differences in life attitude between generations are some of the leading causes of the belief that advice from older Christians is invalid in the eyes of younger Christians. If younger adults hold essentially different attitudes and

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<sup>38</sup> Twenge et al., 1051.

<sup>39</sup> Twenge et al., 1051

<sup>40</sup> Ursula M. Staudinger, “Older and Wiser? Integrating Results on the Relationship between Age and Wisdom-Related Performance,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (1999): 658-659.

<sup>41</sup> Phyllis Korkki, “The Science of Older and Wiser,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2014, 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> Korkki, 1.

values about life, they have little reason to see those of older generations to be applicable to their own situations.

### **Age-Related Bias**

Another strong source of the belief that advice from older people is invalid and inapplicable is age-related bias, also known as “ageism.” The Oxford Dictionary defines ageism as “prejudice or discrimination on the basis of a person’s age.”<sup>43</sup> Several studies have validated that ageism exerts a powerful influence in today’s culture. Ellen Alcorn writes: “Age in the workplace. It’s one of the fastest-growing categories of complaints received by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In fiscal year 2011, the EEOC received 23,465 age-discrimination claims.”<sup>44</sup> She explains that ageism is responsible for a negative view of older people by younger people, saying that “It doesn't matter how good you are at your job or how much experience you’ve acquired over the years.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, ageism holds sway over the perceptions of young people, regardless of the level of an older person’s competence. Alcorn quotes Tom Osborne, an AARP attorney, who claimed “We have a youth culture in this country, where younger is better than older.”<sup>46</sup> This belief that “younger is better” is the source of much of the indifference that Christian young adults have toward the advice of older Christians.

Carole Slotterback and David Saarnio did a rigorous comparative study of young adult perceptions of older adults. They concluded, “significantly more negative traits

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<sup>43</sup> “Ageism,” *Oxforddictionaries.com*, accessed December 10, 2014, [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/ageism](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/ageism)

<sup>44</sup> Ellen Alcorn, “Avoid Age Bias in The Workplace,” *Monster*. Accessed December 1, 2014 <http://career-advice.monster.com/in-the-office/workplace-issues/avoid-age-bias-in-the-workplace/article.aspx>

<sup>45</sup> Alcorn.

<sup>46</sup> Alcorn.



were recalled for the old than for the young referent, and more positive traits were recalled for the young than for the old target.”<sup>47</sup> This study found a significant bias against older adults by younger adults. But the bias was not against all older adults. Rather, it was against elderly adults in their 60s and older. They found that younger adults tended to idolize middle-aged adults rather than belittle them: “Middle-aged adults appear to have what young adults are striving toward. These adults are accomplishing the things young adults want. Thus, it may be that middle age is viewed as a high point in the life span.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the bias appears to be against those with the most life-experience.

Paul Stevens wrote that both older and younger generations use unfair generalizations in their attitude toward one another.<sup>49</sup> He writes: “An indictment of the younger generation is older adults have no value,”<sup>50</sup> a clear example of ageism. But on the other hand, Stevens points out that many older adults exacerbate this problem with their disparaging view of younger generations: “For many members of the older generation the development of the younger generation for many years is anything but exciting. In fact the values of the younger generations are a catastrophic loss.”<sup>51</sup> The prevalence of such attitudes leaves little surprise that ageism is alive and well.

Mary Kite and colleagues, in their article “Attitudes Toward Younger and Older Adults,” looked at how, for fifty years gerontologists have puzzled over the North

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<sup>47</sup> Carole S. Slotterback and David A. Saarnio, “Attitudes Toward Older Adults Reported by Young Adults: Variation Based on Attitudinal Task and Attribute Categories,” *Western Psychological Association Convention*, 1992, 564-568.

<sup>48</sup> Slotterback and Saarnio, 564-568.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Stevens, “Pretending to Be Real,” *New Literary History* vol. 33, no. 3 (2002): 493.

<sup>50</sup> Stevens, 493.

<sup>51</sup> Stevens, 493.

American fascination with youth and their reluctance to accept aging gracefully.<sup>52</sup> They found that people were more negative toward older than toward younger people.

Becca Levy, O. Ashman and Itiel Dror first presented college students with pictures of their contemporaries.<sup>53</sup> Then they presented these students pictures of older adults. They found that the younger adults viewed senior adults to have less value and to live in an “out group.”

Katherine Reynolds and Nylar Branscombe gathered data about how metaphorical messaging influences the attitudes of young adults toward older adults.<sup>54</sup> Metaphorical messaging conditions people to compare abstract words, phrases and images to a more concrete, but superficially unrelated concept. In other words, it is the tacit associations made without formal instructions. It pervades cultural communication in magazines, journal articles, media and political speeches. One metaphorical message can create a cascade of associations not intended by the original abstract words. They found that younger adults may not have a clear grasp of older adults’ values, but they will listen to messages that devalue older adults and accepting these messages as concrete truths. So, metaphorical messaging can portray senior citizens with less value than younger adults, all without making an explicit verbal connection.

Ageism devalues individuals with proven leadership, attained successes and established wisdom. Thus, young adults marginalize adults whose life wisdom was

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<sup>52</sup> Mary E. Kite, Gary D. Stockdale, Bernard E. Whitley, Jr. and T. Blair Johnson, “Attitudes Toward Younger and Older Adults,” *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 61, no. 2, (2001): 241-242.

<sup>53</sup> Becca Levy, O. Ashman and Itiel Dror, “To Be or Not to Be: The Effects of Aging Stereotypes on the Will to Live,” *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* vol. 40, no. 3 (1999-2000): 413.

<sup>54</sup> Katherine J. Reynolds and Nylar R. Branscombe, eds., *Psychology of Change, Life Contexts, Experiences and Identities*, (East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, 2015), 198.

gained over seventy plus years.

### **Academic Practices and Perspectives**

In addition to these broader attitudes held by younger adults towards older adults, certain practices and perspectives within the academic tradition can serve to exacerbate the belief that life wisdom advice from older Christian adults is invalid.

One academic practice that casts doubt onto the adequacy of advice from older people is the Socratic method. Fourth century BCE Socrates taught his famous pupil Plato to investigate life and it's meaning by questioning it. While in many cases and for many disciplines, the Socratic method is an excellent means of examining knowledge, it has sometimes been applied to any wisdom that is received from a prior generation. Edgar Foster points out that "Plato's questioning of life's purpose often is the process seekers use today to find why they are alive."<sup>55</sup> This has introduced into Western academic thinking the method of calling into question all existing interpretations of meaning, regardless of their past effectiveness in leading people toward successful living.

Many young people in today's institutions of higher learning are taught the Socratic method as the starting point for the search for meaning. Although it is not impossible to arrive at life's meaning through this approach, the Socratic method carries with it great risk, especially for impressionable young people. This is the risk that a young adult will remain forever questioning life's meaning. He or she may never settle down to trusting in the reality of Christ and begin living for Him if life is supposed to be a long string of questions with no answers.

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<sup>55</sup> Edgar G. Foster, *Investigating Life's Meaning, A Philosophical, Theological and Historical Introduction, place?* (Charlotte, S.C.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 32-34, 41, 45-46, 59.

Undergraduate students are also introduced to certain perspectives about the meaning of life that can tend to militate against learning about life from one's elders. Philosophical systems like existentialism, nihilism, materialism, and postmodernism, especially when combined with the Socratic method, can leave young adults with the impression that the meaning of life and the pathway to self-actualization must be discovered afresh with each new generation. Many young people encounter these systems in their undergraduate years.

*Existentialism and Nihilism.* One of the most famous existentialist thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre, believed that natural feelings of alienation could best be dealt with by assuming that life is without meaning.<sup>56</sup> He thought that by first recognizing this as a fundamental truth about the universe, people would then more easily muster the courage to face a devastatingly purposeless existence. According to Dennis Ford, existentialism is really a form of nihilism, which argues life has no objective meaning, purpose or intrinsic value. He writes, "The myth of a meaningless universe is itself a way of infusing meaning into the experience of meaninglessness."<sup>57</sup> In other words, existentialism and nihilism contrive an alternative meaning of life. It is a meaning that draws attention away from the Christian meaning that is most often promulgated person to person by older Christians.

*Materialism.* Materialism is the belief that nothing exists other than physical matter and energy. This worldview emerged slowly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as scientists and philosophers progressively limited God's involvement in the

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<sup>56</sup> William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (New York City: Doubleday, 1962), 49.

<sup>57</sup> Ford, Dennis, *The Search for Meaning* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 50.

natural world to the point that the very concept of God became utterly obsolete.

Paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson summed up the connection between purposelessness and materialism: “The ‘meaning of evolution’—that is to say, the guiding premise of the branch of natural science that studies the history of life—is that ‘man’ is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”<sup>58</sup>

In other words, humankind exists accidentally as an unplanned result of the forces of evolution, rather than as the result of some grand design. Again, this assumption about the universe can lead easily to the conclusion that any life wisdom that asserts differently, Christian self-actualization for instance, is invalid and inapplicable for life today. If older Christians espouse such an understanding of life, then it follows that their advice is invalid as well.

*Postmodernism.* Postmodernism challenges the certainties of all other worldviews, including the certainty of materialism. However, underlying this critique is postmodernism’s premise that there are no absolute truths that transcends all other realities and interpretations. This view of reality, currently popular in higher education, was anticipated many years before its ascendancy when a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Frederick Moore Vinson (1890-1953), said “Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes.”<sup>59</sup> If life has no meaning, it follows that the advice given by older Christians about the meaning of life is irrelevant and can be disregarded.

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<sup>58</sup> Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in The Balance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 49.

The main way that these secular and humanist philosophies cast the advice of older people into disrepute was well described by William Schweiker: “any humanistic position insists that the domain of value includes the distinctiveness of human beings to fashion their own lives.”<sup>60</sup> Schweiker is saying that these philosophies tend to promote the idea that one can determine his or her own life, its goals and values, apart from any life-wisdom that has been handed down. In other words, humanism promotes self-determination at the expense of guidance from others. Thus, in the same way that the Socratic method can potentially undermine self-actualizing life wisdom passed down from a more experienced generation, these philosophies can tend to undermine advice that does not promote self-determination. In this way, certain academic practices and perspectives can serve to drive a wedge between the generations, encouraging young people to conclude that the advice of their elders is invalid.

Academic practices and perspectives that discourage younger people from looking to the advice of older people is especially troubling when considering the fact that young adult college attendees are very open to spiritual guidance. Robert Nash and Michele Murray, authors of *Helping College Students Find Purpose*, write that the “college years are a critical time in the lifespan for examining, testing and re-creating the stories we live by.”<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Chopp, in her lectures *Hidden Wholeness: Students Search for Meaning in College*, observed that students are asking the big questions again,

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<sup>60</sup> William Schweiker, “Theological Ethics and the Question of Humanism,” *The Journal of Religion*, 2003, 544.

<sup>61</sup> Robert J. Nash and Michele C. Murray, *Helping College Students Find Purpose* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), viii.

“seeking meaning, purpose and wholeness.”<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Wilson, who studied the results of Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) surveys, argued that this should not be surprising, since “undergraduates come to campus searching for meaning and identity. ... Many expect their college experience to help them with the search.”<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, the way that many institutions are helping with this search is to promote practices and perspectives that direct young people away from the life wisdom advice of older Christians, and thus away from Christian self-actualization.

### *The Results of the Disconnection*

Numerous negative outcomes follow this disconnection between the generations. Malgorzata Sobol-Kwapinska found that young adult acceptance of popular philosophies and worldviews have led them to low levels of well-being, high anxiety, risky behaviors, problems with interpersonal relationships and low efficiency at work.<sup>64</sup>

Twenge and her partners speculated that the disconnection could demonstrate why younger adults struggle more with certain challenges: “These findings may provide a partial explanation for the generational increase in anxiety, depressive symptoms, and poor mental health found in other studies.”<sup>65</sup>

Many others, such as George Kleftaras and Evangelia Psarra, have found depression strongly correlated to the young adult age: “Our findings concur with other

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<sup>62</sup> Rebecca Chopp, “Hidden Wholeness: Students Search for Meaning in College,” a lecture given to the 2006 Institute on College Student Values, accessed July, 2014, [www.swarthmore.edu/presidents-office/hidden-wholeness-students-search-for-meaning-in-college.xml](http://www.swarthmore.edu/presidents-office/hidden-wholeness-students-search-for-meaning-in-college.xml), 2, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Wilson, *Gospel Virtues: Practicing Faith, Hope and Love in Uncertain Times* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>64</sup> Malgorzata Sobol-Kwapinska, “Hedonism, Fatalism and ‘Carpe Diem’: Profiles of Attitudes Towards the Present Time,” *Catholic University of Lubin, Poland* (2014): 373 and 378.

<sup>65</sup> Twenge et al., 1051.

studies that constantly indicate that young people belong to the population with the highest risk for developing depressive symptomatology.”<sup>66</sup> Krysia Mossakowski explains that the onset of this kind of existential depression is highly associated with young adulthood and is often due to young peoples’ unreasonable expectations of life that come from their lack of exposure to those who have experienced life.<sup>67</sup>

Twenge points out that this depression and other symptoms stem from the way in which younger people tend to embrace extrinsic values over intrinsic ones. “An emphasis on extrinsic values over intrinsic values was correlated with distress and decreased psychological well-being.”<sup>68</sup> They reason that this relationship may exist because, by “focusing on extrinsic values young adults’ hopes are contingent on outside forces that may be uncontrollable, whereas intrinsic values are more under the control of the self.”<sup>69</sup> They write that following an intrinsic value “satisfies inherent human needs for connection and meaning,” but that following extrinsic value, such as financial gain, “might not be satisfactory.”<sup>70</sup>

Gail Sheehy’s research confirms the assertion by Twenge and others, that there is an increase in certain negative phenomenon in each passing generation. In reference to people who were young adults in the 1980s and are currently middle-aged, she wrote: “It is younger people who are most alone, bored, restless, and easily tripped up by their

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<sup>66</sup> George Kleftaras and Evangelia Psarra, “Meaning in Life, Psychological Well-Being and Depressive Symptomatology: A Comparative Study,” *Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2012): 337-345.

<sup>67</sup> Krysia N. Mossakowski, “Unfulfilled Expectations and Symptoms of Depression Among Young Adults,” *Social Science and Medicine* no. 73 (2011): 729.

<sup>68</sup> Twenge et al., 1051.

<sup>69</sup> Twenge et al., 1051.

<sup>70</sup> Twenge et al., 1051.



fears.”<sup>71</sup> She goes on to explain that “the most troubled age group [is] late adolescence,”<sup>72</sup> the very group that is currently young and young middle-aged adults.

There are so many young adults who need to be led to the meaning of life. Some people seem to drift aimlessly through life, headed in no specific direction. Without clearly defined objectives, it is not surprising that many adopt a lifestyle that lacks what Charles Swindoll calls “definition and purpose.”<sup>73</sup>

### **The Transfer of Life Wisdom from One Generation to the Next**

The researcher has thus far demonstrated how he has integrated secular self-actualization with the Christian belief about the meaning of life, pointing to Christian self-actualization as the solution to the unnecessary struggles faced by Christian young adults. He has further established that one cause of these sufferings by Christian young adults is their belief that the advice of older Christians is invalid for their lives. Now the researcher turns to the final piece of his argument: that life wisdom advice about Christian self-actualization from older Christian adults is valid for young adult Christians.

#### *Older People Are Best Suited to Pass Along Life-Wisdom*

Abundant literature demonstrates that older people are well suited to pass along advice that will enable younger people to achieve self-actualization. Carl Jung was well known for refusing to do psychotherapy with people under the age of 40. Chalke analyzed this practice of Jung’s and justified it by pointing out the reasoning behind it:

Jung, ... Believed that the second half of life gives us a new opportunity for spiritual development. It is the period of life when the “external” quest for

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<sup>71</sup> Gail Sheehy, *Pathfinders*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981. 18.

<sup>72</sup> Sheehy, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988), 248.

prosperity and status begins to be superseded by the “internal” search for meaning and fulfillment as we learn to reflect more deeply on the purpose of life.<sup>74</sup>

The fact that older people reflect “more deeply on the purpose of life” more naturally than younger generations makes them superior reservoirs of life wisdom for younger people.

Sheehy writes that older people are the best suited to pass the wisdom of spiritual self-actualization down to young people. After researching the issue of passing on generational contentment, she concluded, “Broadly speaking, older is more contented than younger. This contentment is what best positions older people to share their wisdom about attaining self-actualization. A clear message in the results of my research was that the people who enjoy highest well-being are likely to be the older ones.”<sup>75</sup> This satisfaction with life among older generations testifies strongly to the validity of their advice for self-actualization, and its applicability to younger generations, who, as cited above, are notably dissatisfied with life.

The organization Generations United summarized brain research that sought to counter common stereotypes about aging. They concluded, “The brains of older people are not slower but rather wiser than young brains, which allows older adults to achieve an equivalent level of performance.”<sup>76</sup> The article goes on to elaborate this point:

When it comes to certain tasks, the brains of older adults can achieve very close to the same performance as those of younger ones. We now have neurobiological evidence showing that with age comes wisdom and that as the brain gets older, it learns to better allocate its resources. The young brain is more reactive to negative

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<sup>74</sup> Steve Chalke, *Apprentice: Walking the Way of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 39.

<sup>75</sup> Sheehy, 18.

<sup>76</sup> “Fact Sheet: the Benefits of Intergenerational Programs,” *Generations United*, (2007) accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.gu.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=71wHEwUd0KA%3D&tabid=157&mid=606>.

reinforcement than the older one. When the young participants made a mistake and had to plan and execute a new strategy to get the right answer, various parts of their brains were recruited even before the next task began. However, when the older participants learned that they had made a mistake, these regions were only recruited at the beginning of the next trial, indicating that with age, we decide to make adjustments only when absolutely necessary.<sup>77</sup>

This “better allocation” of the brain’s resources in the elderly demonstrates an improved ability to efficiently handle stress and challenge among older people. Therefore, the elderly brain is not only equal to the young brain at problem solving; it can do it more efficiently than the young brain. Thus, in contrast to cultural suppositions that discriminate against the elderly due to their age, a person’s advanced chronology is an asset that can positively influence a young person’s values and behaviors.

Caroline Basset, founder, director and researcher of The Wisdom Institute, concurred with the brain research just described and argued that life wisdom from what she calls elders is valid for young people because of what she described as their often superior wisdom.<sup>78</sup> Though she acknowledged that plenty of elders are not wise, she makes the case that on the whole, elders are often more likely than “youngers” to possess wisdom. She builds this case on her definition of wisdom: “having sufficient awareness in a context or situation to behave in a manner most likely to produce outcomes that are satisfactory for all involved, including the biosphere.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, wisdom means having a consciousness that leads to actions that are beneficial to all interested parties. Bassett argued that elders are most likely to possess this kind of wisdom. She supports this argument by citing how older adults combine deep care for others with a detached

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<sup>77</sup> “The Benefits of Intergenerational Programs,” accessed December 12, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Caroline Bassett, “Elder Wisdom,” *The Wisdom Institute* (2009), 2, accessed December 10, 2014, [http://www.secondjourney.org/itin/09\\_Fall/Bassett\\_09Fall.htm](http://www.secondjourney.org/itin/09_Fall/Bassett_09Fall.htm).

<sup>79</sup> Bassett, 2, accessed December 10, 2014

clarity, or “the ability to see clearly and unemotionally what’s going on.” She says that elders are best at this detached clarity because they have more “life experience and seeing how things play out. . . . Elders are good at this because we have more data than younger to go on from having seen plenty of events occur or decisions made, followed by the aftermath, for better or for worse.”<sup>80</sup> She writes that this larger experience enables an older person “to see the whole of a thing and not merely the parts so that you can understand more about what is going on. You can see not only consequences but also patterns.”<sup>81</sup> This ability to see the big picture is what makes the life-wisdom of the elderly particularly valid for younger people who, due to their lack of experience, cannot have such a large perspective.

Bassett goes on to name several characteristics that give older people “an edge on younger.”<sup>82</sup> She says that elders have better “emotional resiliency,” and better abilities to “control emotions” and to “cope with adversity.” She says they are better at “forgiving,” “not holding grudges” and “not feeling superior.”<sup>83</sup> Bassett names four kinds of wisdom and argues that older people tend to be better at all four. The four are “prudence,” or everyday common sense; “predicting consequences,” or knowing how certain things will play out; “the good thing,” or being able to discern the future benefits of certain behaviors done in the present; and “standing on a mountain,” or the perspective that is able to take in the whole of a situation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bassett, 2, accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Bassett, 2, accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Bassett, 2, accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Bassett, 3, accessed December 10, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Bassett, 3, accessed December 10, 2014.

Michelle Carlson and her colleagues defined wisdom as a kind of knowledge that knows how to live life. They write:

Wisdom is ... expert level knowledge and judgment in the fundamental pragmatics of life, including factual knowledge, procedural knowledge, knowledge of life's contexts, relativism and uncertainty an informed detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself.<sup>85</sup>

According to this definition, wisdom is very practical and is helpful in enabling younger adults to live life more fully and productively. They explain that wisdom from older adults can be used to help younger adults find “a balance between confidence in knowledge and understanding that knowledge is fallible.”<sup>86</sup> This is because more experienced adults have an understanding of the connection between their own personal growth and the kind of knowledge that helps one become a more fulfilled and successful person. The authors explain that the wisdom of older people “involves seeking out difficult or complex problems, [and] applying their experience with prior knowledge to make sound and applicable judgments.”<sup>87</sup> This is the kind of wisdom that can lead younger adults to a meaningful path of self-fulfillment. The authors write that it “may allow young adults to move towards becoming the person they dream and finding contentment.”<sup>88</sup>

Sally Newman and Alan Hatton-Yeo studied how older people contribute to intergenerational learning. They concluded that young adults “will find life advantages if they follow skillful, experienced personalities to shape their values and mature

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<sup>85</sup> Michelle C. Carlson, Linda P. Fried, Jeanine M. Parisi, Rachel L. Piferi, George W. Rebok, Teresa E. Seeman, Erwin J. Tan and Elizabeth K. Tanner, “Can the Wisdom of Aging be Activated and Make a Difference Societally?” *National Institute of Health* (2011): 867-879.

<sup>86</sup> Carlson et al., 867-879.

<sup>87</sup> Carlson et al., 867-879.

<sup>88</sup> Carlson et al., 867-879.

behaviors.”<sup>89</sup> This means that young people will benefit greatly from the life wisdom of older adults. They determined that younger generations gained “increased self-esteem and self-confidence, and a deeper understanding of older adults”<sup>90</sup> from intergenerational learning. They also found that both generations gained a “feeling of being valued,” and felt more “accepted and respected,” in addition to gaining “enhanced knowledge and skills, and the creation of a meaningful, trusting intergenerational relationship.”<sup>91</sup>

Newman and Hatton-Yeo also looked at how intergenerational learning worked in conjunction with Empowerment Theory. Empowerment Theory, a concept developed in the social work discipline during the 1970s and 80s,<sup>92</sup> seeks the empowerment of people as the most important strategy for aiding them.<sup>93</sup> These researchers found that intergenerational relationships empowered undergraduate students in three dimensions of the empowerment theory: interpersonal, interactional and behavioral. The students learned more about leadership, about working with authority, about group interaction, and general empowerment skills. Elders also became role models who “enhanced self-esteem by using survival skills.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, young peoples’ self-esteem grew because they learned more about surviving in the world through the life wisdom of those

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<sup>89</sup> Sally Newman and Alan Hatton-Yeo, *Intergenerational Learning and the Contributions of Older People*, *Ageing Horizons* no. 8 (2008): 33-34.

<sup>90</sup> Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 33

<sup>91</sup> Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 33

<sup>92</sup> Elisheva Sadan, trans, *Empowerment and Community Development: Theory and Practice of People-Focused Social Solutions*. trans. Richard Flantz (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishers, 2004), 73-74. Accessed December 16, 2014, [http://www.mpow.org/elisheva\\_sadan\\_empowerment\\_chapter2.pdf](http://www.mpow.org/elisheva_sadan_empowerment_chapter2.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> Sadan, 74.

<sup>94</sup> Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 36

older than themselves.

Jane Peterson did an anthropological study of how life wisdom is passed down from older Christians to younger ones in her article “Age of Wisdom: Elderly Black Women in Family and Church.”<sup>95</sup> She found that experience is the primary criterion to be considered wise in the Black community, and that aging connotes lived experience. Wise older women are considered to be among the most important members of Black churches due to the benefits they contribute to the community. Thus, like the previously cited literature, experience translates in wisdom, which in turn translates into benefits for others. Peterson writes about the connection between age and wisdom in Black churches: “the older brain is more impervious to criticism and more confident than the young brain.”<sup>96</sup> This gives the elderly in Black churches the ability to endure the burdens of leadership better than younger people. She then names several of the benefits that these older women bring to younger generations, including “creating relationships,” “teaching values” and “convening the family on certain occasions,” being “religious role models,” “establish[ing] a system of support for women and children,” and “mediat[ing] between the secular and sacred worlds when necessary.”<sup>97</sup> All these benefits that Peterson discovered that older women bring to the community support the researcher’s argument that the life wisdom of the older Christians is valid for younger Christian adults. The kind of benefits that these older women were found to provide for their church communities are the kind of influences that can help young people achieve self-actualization.

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<sup>95</sup> Jane W. Peterson, “Age of Wisdom: Elderly Black Women in Family and Church,” 13-14, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://faculty.usfsp.edu/jsokolov/webbook/peterson.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Peterson, accessed December 12, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Peterson, accessed December 12, 2014.

*Need to Listen to Life Wisdom While Young*

Another kind of evidence strongly argues in favor of young people listening closely to the wisdom of wiser, more experienced people in order to achieve self-actualization. This is the discovery by Monika Ardeltf, in her research “Wisdom and Life Satisfaction in Old Age,” that developmental influences across the life course are stronger predictors of subjective well being in old age than objective circumstances.<sup>98</sup> In other words, developmental influences over an entire lifetime can predict whether or not a person will achieve well-being. This means that a young person who hopes to be satisfied and fulfilled must pay more attention to developmental influences than to circumstantial influences. This is another way of saying that young people must listen more carefully to the life wisdom of older people who have already achieved self-actualization.

Ardeltf realized that “some elderly persons achieve a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in their later years. While others turn bitter and bewail the decline of their abilities.”<sup>99</sup> This fact that some older people achieve self-actualization while other do not spurred Ardeltf to ask “why the difference?” Her conclusion was “that satisfaction in old age does not depend primarily on the objective situation of the elderly but on psychosocial development across the life course, such as a person’s degree of wisdom.”<sup>100</sup> She argues that a person’s degree of wisdom has a direct impact on his or her later achievement of self-actualization. She explains her use of the word “wisdom”:

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<sup>98</sup> Monika Ardeltf, “Wisdom and Life Satisfaction in Old Age,” *Journal of Gerontology* vol. 52B, no. 1, 1997, 24.

<sup>99</sup> Ardeltf, 15.

<sup>100</sup> Ardeltf, 15.



In descriptive knowledge one knows facts; in interpretative knowledge one knows the significance of the descriptively known facts. Wise people do not necessarily know more facts than other individuals, but they comprehend the deeper meaning of the generally known facts for themselves and others.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, wisdom is the ability to interpret the meaning behind events. This kind of interpretive knowledge gives people the ability to make sense out of tragedies and to see deeper meaning in life's circumstances, no matter how difficult. According to Ardelt, it is critical to gain this sort of wisdom while still young, since happiness later in life depends on it. This strongly argues for young people to gain life wisdom while still young, a wisdom that is primarily possessed by older people who have already experienced much of life.

#### *Mentoring Literature*

Finally, literature on mentoring provides a strong support for the researcher's argument that young people should find the life wisdom advice of the elderly to be valid for self-actualization. Although this thesis does not concern itself directly with mentoring, research into the subject does argue that young people need to be connected with the wisdom of wiser, more experienced people if they hope to thrive.

Robert Greenleaf, the father of the "servant leadership" concept, recommended mentoring relationships between older, wiser adults and younger adults. He says they are beneficial for several reasons. First, "A relationship between a seasoned adult and a protégé offers a *healing* relationship. This relationship is a powerful force for the transformation of any follower (emphasis in original)."<sup>102</sup> These relationships can be so healing and powerful because a wise, serving, older adult can lead younger adults "to

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<sup>101</sup> Ardelt, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *On Becoming a Servant Leader* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 4.

conceptualize their futures. This provides younger adults with an opportunity to see who they are today and who they can become.”<sup>103</sup> It is this insight that a seasoned adult brings to a young person: a clearer vision for the future that can so powerfully help the protégé along toward self-actualization.

Justin Irving reinforced Greenleaf’s emphasis on the importance of older people mentoring young people. In one study he assessed how leaders use purpose in their leadership practices. He found that older leaders play a critical role in the formation of meaning in young people: “Older leaders help in the definition of meaning for younger adults”<sup>104</sup> Because older adults have more tested experience in defining meaning, they are the perfect guide for the young people for whom life meaning appears so elusive. Irving recognized how necessary it is for older people to impart their wisdom to younger people, especially in the area of meaning making, a topic directly related to self-actualization.

Terry Walling, a renowned expert in Christian mentoring, explained the benefits that Christian mentors can provide to their mentees. Mentors lead their protégés to finish well, inspiring and challenging them. Walling argued that instead of retiring, older Christians should invest in relationship with younger protégés.

Retirement is a cultural phenomenon more than a biblical mandate. The end should be one’s greatest contribution. But many older Christ followers retire to lives of self-indulgent leisure and allow the younger generations to do the work. Others fail to groom mentors and pass them the baton. Older Christ followers can still have influence if they can make this shift in their paradigm. The most important thing is not the position that they hold, but the relationships they are willing to forge. If older people are willing to enter into the world of the younger

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<sup>103</sup> Greenleaf, 7-8.

<sup>104</sup> Justin A. Irving, “Assessing Leaders’ Goal-Oriented, Follower-Focus, and Purpose-In-Leadership: Development and Initial Testing of the Purpose-in-Leadership Inventory,” Paper presented at ASBBS Annual Conference, Las Vegas, 2013, 85-86.

people, they will be able to build relationships of influence. It is about depositing life lessons into a few, not many.<sup>105</sup>

All these benefits argue for the validity of self-actualizing life-wisdom of older people in the lives of younger people. According to Walling, the mentoring of an older adult can be crucial to the success of a young person.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher first demonstrated how he has integrated secular self-actualization with the Christian belief about the meaning of life. Because self-actualization can be identified with the human search for meaning and that search can be described as a spiritual hunger, it follows that Maslow's ideal self-actualized person is found in the person of Jesus and that Christian fruit is parallel to the fruit of self-actualization. Since Jesus claimed all good fruit is produced through faith in Him, these points argue for the validity of integrating self-actualization with the Christian worldview and the validity of using the term "Christian self-actualization."

The researcher has further established that one cause of unnecessary suffering by Christian young adults is their belief that the advice of older Christians is invalid for their lives. Different generational attitudes about life, age-related discrimination, and certain practices and perspectives promoted by higher education have all conspired together to make the life wisdom advice of older Christians appear invalid. This has resulted in a separation between the generations that some researchers have blamed for the embrace by younger generations of extrinsic values over intrinsic values, which has caused greater levels of depression, anxiety and certain self-destructive behaviors.

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<sup>105</sup> Terry B. Walling, *Stuck, Navigating The Transitions of Life and Leadership* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart, 2008), 88-89.

Finally, the researcher has established that life wisdom advice about Christian self-actualization from older Christian adults is valid for young adult Christians. Abundant literature shows that older adults are more likely to possess the kind of life wisdom that young adults need for success. Older adults have an “edge” on younger adults when it comes to this kind of self-actualizing wisdom. Ardelt concluded that it is best if young adults acquire this wisdom while still young, since their later satisfaction with life depends on its early acquisition. Mentoring literature supports the researcher’s claim for a reconnection between the generations by which older people can show younger people the pathway to self-actualization. For all these reasons, the life wisdom of older Christian adults is valid for Christian young adults to achieve Christian self-actualization.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

### Overview

The problem this thesis project addressed was the belief of Christian young adults that the life wisdom advice of older Christian adults is invalid. This belief makes Christian young adults suffer unnecessarily because it prevents them from benefiting from the experiences of older Christian adults who have successfully achieved Christian self-actualization in spiritual, relational and work-related challenges. This project demonstrated the validity of the advice of older Christians as a means for younger Christians to discover Christian self-actualization. The researcher hypothesized that when younger Christian adults interact with, are exposed to, and are mentored by older, more experienced and life-savvy Christian adults, then their search for the purpose of life and self-actualization is enriched.

As mentioned in Chapter One, this researcher's intent was to provide undergraduate students and other young people the tools by which they can determine the meaning of life and achieve Christian self-actualization. This is often a young person's desire, although he or she may be unable to acknowledge it consciously as an aspiration. Nevertheless, young people want to know, "Why am I alive?" When they connect with this desire, they are moved from an attitude of carelessly neglecting self-actualization to an aggressive pursuit of it. Undergraduate students and other young people will find success in life and contentment when they know the meaning of life and progress in the journey of self-actualization. Viktor Frankl, went so far as to propose that seeking

meaning is the core motivation for human beings and is crucial not only for well-being but for survival.

In order to pursue his hypothesis, the researcher designed a qualitative research project involving two major steps. The first step was to gather advice from fourteen older Christian adults. This was collected through structured, in-depth interviews (Appendix A) and then analyzed and edited into a little booklet called *Life Wisdom Collection*. The second source came from surveys (Appendix B) of 40 young adults, most of whom were professing Christians. They were surveyed twice about their opinions of advice from older Christians. The first survey was administered prior to their reading of the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet. The second survey was administered after their exposure to this booklet. The researcher measured any changes of opinion that occurred due to their reading.

### **Research Participants**

The researcher invited two distinct groups to participate in this research project. The first was a group of fourteen older Christian adults. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with these participants. The second was a group of 40 Christian young adults. The researcher administered two surveys to this group, one before and one after they read selections from his interviews with the first group.

#### *The Older Christian Adults*

The first group of participants was comprised of fourteen older Christian adults. The researcher conducted in-depth, structured interviews with all fourteen of these participants. These interviewees ranged in ages from their early seventies to late eighties at the time of research. All these seasoned adult participants worshiped at Crossroads

Church in Turlock, California. Twelve out of fourteen are members of an Adult Bible Fellowship that the researcher has led for many years at Crossroads Church.

The interviewees represented a broad demographic with a wide range of life experiences. Some of them had volunteered heavily in the community. Others were housewives. Some were mothers and fathers. One had enjoyed serving students and faculty as a high school principal. Another was an oil company executive, and still another a nuclear engineer. Their professions, personalities and experiences were diverse in several respects. In other respects, the interviewees were somewhat homogenous. Socio-economically, all were middle class. No one was rich, but none were poor, even though several spoke of being economically pressed. One person lived in her own home. Two lived in mobile homes. Eleven lived in retirement communities and had sold their homes. Most of these had sufficient means to purchase or rent services at assisted living facilities. All were Caucasian.

To be selected for the interviews, the potential interviewees needed to demonstrate several traits that the researcher deemed to be indicative of a high level of Christian self-actualization. The first trait was a long track record of success in a relational setting. Success in a relational setting meant that the individual had shown a long-term pattern of relating positively and fruitfully with others, such as with spouses, children, co-workers, neighbors and others. "Positive and fruitful" meant that the individual had contributed significantly to the happiness and welfare of others. For instance, a person with a spat of failed marriages, estranged children, resentful colleagues and embittered neighbors in his or her wake was not considered to be a highly self-actualized individual, since self-actualization ought to translate into positive

relationships, according to Maslow, in something he called “B-love,” or unselfish, un-needing love for another’s welfare.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, John the Apostle uses positive relationships as a sign of Christian self-actualization, in 1 John 3:11-15.

Another trait that the researcher deemed indicative of a high level of self-actualization was a proven history of perseverance through trials. Both the apostles Paul (Rom. 5:3-5) and James (1:3-12) describe perseverance as a trait of mature Christians, and therefore a trait of Christian self-actualization, according to the researcher’s definition. The researcher already had enough knowledge of the lives of the potential interviewees to know who had persevered successfully through many difficult trials in life. Thus, he was able to pre-screen who was an appropriate candidate based on this criteria. The researcher’s reason for using this trait as a criterion was that perseverance exposes the inner reality of Christian self-actualization. In other words, if Christian self-actualization is authentic, it will appear through a person’s ability to persevere. Perseverance through trials is a test, of sorts, of Christian self-actualization.

A third trait that the researcher considered to be indicative of a high level of self-actualization was an eagerness to help those at a lower level of self-actualized. According to Maslow, a magnanimous spirit is a sign of a highly self-actualized person. Self-actualized people are “more eager to help the other toward self-actualization. ... [They are] more altruistic, generous and fostering.”<sup>2</sup> These participants were eager to share their wisdom with others so that new generations of Christian young people could achieve self-actualization. Each one said he or she was looking for more meaningful, challenging

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<sup>1</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Wiley, 1962), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 48.



ways to spend retirement years, and they saw these interviews as a way to do just that. This eagerness confirmed the potential participants' suitability for this project in the eyes of the researcher.

The interviewees each displayed values, judgments, decision-making processes, and a grasp of the meaning of life that the researcher deemed to be helpful for young adults. The researcher regarded all this as representative of their achievement of Christian self-actualization. Their pool of wisdom, successes, failures and achievements provided younger adults with wisdom to create life patterns for living the meaning of life. Thus, the participants were chosen, as William Meyer suggests, because they were "aware" of life's issues, were "typical of their age," were "savvy," had "a general knowledge of the subject," had "skills in problem solving" and were part of "a broad demography and reputation."<sup>3</sup>

The researcher was able to observe these traits over many years, and this enabled him to determine which candidates were the most suited to demonstrate high levels of Christian self-actualization. His long-term, and in several cases intimate, relationship with each of these participants facilitated his observations. The researcher obtained confirmation about the appropriateness of these research subjects in consultation with his wife, who had also observed them at close range and over a long period of time. Her familiarity with the participants' life stories was used either to verify or refute the researcher's original decision to include or exclude the various candidates in the project.

Therefore, the researcher's long experience with most of these participants helped him determine who had lived successful Christian lives in the three areas: relationships,

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<sup>3</sup> William R. Meyer, *Research in Ministry, A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago: Exploring Press, 2000), 48.

work and school, and spirituality. This led him to conclude that those he selected were all highly self-actualized individuals, according to his definition of Christian self-actualization developed in Chapters Two and Three.

William Myers reminds researchers of the importance of finding the right number of interviewees as well as those with the right qualifications.<sup>4</sup> The researcher determined that fourteen interviews were sufficient. Prior to beginning the interview process, he had hoped to conduct more interviews. However, as he began, the surprising quality and depth of each persuaded him that fewer interviewees would be more appropriate because the lower number would give the researcher the opportunity to spend more time with each one.

#### *The Christian Young Adults*

The researcher gathered the 40 young adults to take two surveys, one before exposure to the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet, and one after the exposure. These 40 young adults were a mixture of undergraduate students, graduate students, and young married couples. They all attended the researcher's church, Crossroads Church in Turlock, California. All are a part of this church's ministry called "Generations," that works with young adults. He received 39 pairs of surveys in return.

To qualify to take the two surveys, participants needed to be anywhere from college age to their early thirties. The researcher hoped to isolate the attitudes of Christian young adults, versus young adults in general, so he chose attendees of his church. Attendance and participation in Crossroad's Generations ministry did not guarantee that the participants were Christian. But the researcher conjectured it was more

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<sup>4</sup> William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2000), 8.

likely that participants would be Christian, at least in profession, if he focused more narrowly on a Christian ministry.

The researcher did not have any other pre-qualifying standards for participation in the survey because he wanted to gain an understanding of the attitudes of a broad cross-section of Christian young adults.

At first, the researcher had hoped to include roughly 50 additional participants. These prospective participants were young adults who attended another Christian church in Turlock. However, the ministry leader he engaged to help him distribute and administer the surveys at this church misunderstood the directions and forgot to conduct the surveys while the young adults were present with him at their weekly worship service. Instead, this person told the students to take the survey on their own time and to bring them back later. Needless to say, the researcher only received one of these surveys back. Though discouraged at first, the researcher did not feel that having a smaller-than-hoped-for number of survey participants was a hindrance. He was trying to measure changes in attitudes between the first and second survey, and the findings did not depend on the number of participants. He found that the 40 participants at his own church proved to be enough.

### **Research Instruments**

In order to demonstrate that the advice of older, successfully self-actualized Christian adults is valid for showing younger Christian adults the pathway to Christian self-actualization, the researcher collected primary data through two instruments, interviews and surveys.

### *Interviews*

The first instrument (Appendix A) was an in-depth interview with fourteen older Christian adults. The interviews were conducted in July of 2014. The setting was each interviewee's home. Whenever the interviewees were married, he conducted their interviews together, even though he sought specific answers from each spouse. He allowed for open-ended responses because he thought this combination of structure and open-endedness would best gain as many possible insights into the topic of self-actualization. It would allow for the kind of follow-up conversations in which interviewees opened their hearts and shared in great depth. Some interviews led to lengthy discussions that permitted the researcher to gain even more insights into the self-actualization process of older adults.

This qualitative research sought to discover the insights and wisdom that older adults have acquired through their life experiences and that have contributed to their self-actualization. The researcher hoped to demonstrate through the interviewees' narratives that their experience and therefore their advice was valid, applicable and relevant to the self-actualizing process of younger Christian adults.

The researcher divided his interview questions into three categories that remain as applicable to today's young people as they were to older generations. These three categories were relationship struggles, work and school struggles, and spiritual struggles. The researcher believed that these three categories were broad enough to be universal across generations. So, just as the interviewees struggled through issues related to these three categories fifty and sixty years ago, so young people today struggle with issues related to these categories. The researcher believed that the successful navigation through

these categories by the interviewees would provide young people with understanding of self-actualization in these three areas.

The researcher edited the interview transcripts into a little, easy-to-read booklet entitled *Life Wisdom Collections*. The booklet was divided into three main sections. The first was entitled “Relationship Struggles,” the second, “The Influence of Work and School on Your Life,” and the third section was called, “Spiritual Struggles, When the Church is Disappointing.” Each section contained between seven and eleven entries, taken directly from the transcripts of the fourteen interviews. Each entry varied in length, between three lines and twenty. Each was headed with a statement like “When relationships aren’t fulfilling,” or, “When you’re not sure how to find God.” The heading was followed by select quotations from the interview transcripts, quotations that, in the researcher’s estimation, addressed the heading statement. The researcher changed all the names of the interviewees for the booklet, so that readers would not recognize the people quoted. He did this in order to protect the privacy of the interviewees, who might feel overly exposed by their transparent sharing.

### *The Surveys*

The second instrument was comprised of two surveys (Appendix B). The researcher administered the surveys to the 40 Christian young adults who participated in the study. He received 39 completed pairs of surveys back.

The researcher conjectured that these surveys would be most revealing if someone with whom the participants were familiar administered them. He believed that participants would be tempted to answer less honestly if the surveys were administered by the researcher himself, with whom they were less familiar. So, the researcher engaged

the leader of the young adult “Generations” ministry at Crossroads Church to distribute, explain, and administer the surveys.

On two separate occasions, October 14 and October 23, the leader of the Generations ministry gathered groups of the young adults together and distributed the surveys. He read from a script, provided by the researcher, which informed the participants of the reason for the surveys. After obtaining their consent, the participants took the first survey. It was a Likert Scale survey that asked them to “agree,” “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree” to seven different statements about the validity, applicability and relevance of the advice and life wisdom of older Christian adults. The point of the survey was to discover attitudes of Christian young adults toward the advice of the elderly prior to being exposed directly to such advice.

Once the young adults completed Survey One, the survey administrator asked them to read the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet. They were asked to pick three to five entries in each of the major three sections, so that each participant was exposed to some life wisdom about relationships, some about work and school, and some about spirituality. The researcher did not ask them to read every entry in the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet because doing so would be unnecessary to catch the messages in the booklet. Many of the entries were somewhat repetitive, and the researcher did not want length to be an obstacle for the young adults.

After the young adults completed reading the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet, they were asked to take the second survey (Appendix B). Survey Two was comprised of nine different statements regarding the attitudes of the participants toward the advice of older people. The first four statements were identical to the first four in Survey One. The

next five statements were similar but not identical to the statements in the first survey. As in the first survey, the participants were asked to “agree,” “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree” on a Likert Scale. The extra two questions were added in the hope of gaining more thoroughly considered responses from the participants. The second survey was printed on differently colored paper so as to avoid any confusion between the surveys. The point of this second survey was to discover whether the young adults had experienced any change in their opinions toward the advice of older Christian adults from reading the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet.

The researcher analyzed the differences in the two surveys. He reported the findings in Chapter Five.

### *Analysis*

#### **Analysis of the Interviews**

The researcher analyzed the findings of the interviews by sifting through all the transcripts and looking for common themes. Much of this sifting was already accomplished by the mere fact that the researcher had previously organized his questions into three main categories, “Spiritual Attitudes and Practices,” “Relationship Attitudes and Practices,” and “Work Attitudes and Practices.”

So much complex material was generated by the responses that four distinct themes emerged from the three categories of questions. Three of them directly reflect the three categories of questions: “Spirituality and Struggle,” “Relationships,” and “Work Attitudes and Practices.” The fourth theme, “Faith and Fulfillment,” emerged because, in all three categories, each of the interviewees referenced their faith in God and the fulfillment that they gained from it as the means of thriving through work and

relationship challenges. Thus, in Chapter Five, the researcher presented findings in four distinct themes. The theme “Faith and Fulfillment” expressed sentiments from all the categories.

The researcher further analyzed the interview findings by later condensing the four themes into a simpler, easier-to-read format for the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet. He did this by reverting to three main categories. He called the first “Relationship Struggles,” the second “Work and School Struggles,” and the third “Spiritual Struggles.” He hoped the word “struggle” would help the young adult readers feel more of a connection with older adult Christians. It implies that older Christians have been through the same sort of challenges as the younger adults, thus providing a connecting point between the two generations. Because the theme “Faith and Fulfillment” touches all the categories, he felt it was appropriate to spread out its insights into all the categories of the booklet. Dividing the booklet into only three categories made it simpler to read and understand than if he had divided the booklet into the four themes. He also hoped to show that faith is applicable to every area of life.

This process of analysis, of parsing out four distinct themes from the interview transcripts, and then repackaging them back into three categories again, helped the researcher better understand his data.

### **Analysis of the Surveys**

The researcher analyzed the findings of the surveys by breaking down the responses question by question to find the percentage of young people who responded which way on the Likert scale. For instance, he determined for each question what



percentage of respondents “agreed,” what percentage “somewhat agreed,” what percentage “somewhat disagreed,” and what percentage “disagreed.”

The researcher did this for each question in both surveys, and then he compared the differences between the surveys, if there were any. He was hoping to find if the exposure to the *Life Wisdom* booklet had persuaded any of the young people to alter their judgments about the applicability of older adult life wisdom. He wanted to trace whether or not the exposure had changed anyone’s opinion. The researcher wanted to know what exact percentages changed. Did the survey respondents increase or decrease their favorability toward the advice of older adults, and if so, by how much? Chapter Five lays out these changes.

Based on this analysis of the surveys, the researcher drew his final three principles, or recommendations. The data analysis enabled him to look carefully at and even quantify the impact of exposing young adults to the wisdom of older Christian adults.

### **Summary**

The goal of this process of interviews and surveys was to test the validity of life wisdom advice from older Christians for helping Christian young adults achieve self-actualization. By exposing young adults directly to such advice, the researcher hoped to measure any change in attitude toward the advice. The researcher has asserted that young people prevent or delay their own Christian self-actualization because they neglect the life wisdom advice of older adult Christians. He hypothesized that if he could expose a number of young people to this wisdom and measure any change in their opinion toward it, then he could demonstrate that the life wisdom of the elderly can indeed help young

people better discover the pathway to Christian self-actualization. In other words, if the researcher could secure confessions from Christian young adults that they had gained more favorable opinions of the advice of older adults through the exposure, then the researcher could conclude that their life wisdom advice was indeed relevant and valid for attaining Christian self-actualization.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The researcher hypothesized that when younger Christian adults interact with, are exposed to, and are mentored by older, more experienced and life-savvy Christian adults, then their search for Christian self-actualization is enriched. This project demonstrated the validity of the advice of older Christians as a means to this end by gathering and analyzing data in two major steps.

The first step was to gather advice from fourteen older Christian adults. This was collected through structured, in-depth interviews (Appendix A) and then analyzed and edited into a little booklet called *Life Wisdom Collection*. The second source came from surveys (Appendix B) of 39 young adults, most of whom were professing Christians. They were surveyed twice about their opinions of advice from older Christians. The first survey was administered prior to their reading of the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet. The second survey was administered after their exposure to this booklet. The researcher measured any changes of opinion that occurred due to their reading. This chapter describes the findings and the researcher's analysis of them.

### **Findings from the In-Depth Interviews**

The researcher conducted structured, in-depth interviews with 14 older adult Christians and used their responses as the basis of the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet, a core ingredient of the second stage of the research.

Overall, each of the interviewees answered each question with a very confident

and calm demeanor. This is an important observation, because, according to Benner, such a demeanor is the result of knowing God and knowing oneself, essential elements of Christian self-actualization. He explains,

An understanding of the interdependence of knowing self and God has held a lasting and respected place in Christian theology. Thomas à Kempis argued that “self-knowledge is a surer way to God than a search after deeper learning.” Augustine’s prayer was “Grant Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee.”<sup>1</sup>

The interviewees again and again demonstrated and discussed their practice of knowing the Lord so that they could know themselves. Each exhibited the conviction that no matter how educated and accomplished one’s lives might be, a person is in need of a supernatural partnership with God. According to the researcher’s definition of Christian self-actualization, this sense of dependence on God combined with self-understanding confirmed that his interviewees were highly self-actualized. The researcher was personally amazed at the responses he received during the interviews, as listening and interacting with these older adults challenged his own faith and spiritual maturity.

The researcher organized the responses to the interviews into four major themes, based on the kinds of questions that were asked and on the kinds of responses received. The four themes are “spirituality and struggle,” “faith and fulfillment,” “relationships” and “work attitudes and practices.” Although the following includes some direct quotations, it is not a collection of transcripts from the interviews. Rather, it is a series of summaries and paraphrases, along with the author’s analysis of the responses. The researcher chose to summarize and paraphrase to make the presentation of his findings in Chapter Five more concise and readable.

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<sup>1</sup> Benner, 20.

*Theme One: Spirituality and Struggle*

The first theme was how the interviewees engaged with their spirituality in the face of struggles. So many of the interviewees reported learning how to look to God because of the struggles they encountered in life. Many learned through their struggles that their experiences mirrored Job's experience of wrestling with God and with pain and doubt.<sup>2</sup> Thus, many talked about their relationship with God in terms of how they dealt with life's hardships.

For example, one couple faced a crisis in the family. They struggled with the rejection of a close family member. One of their sons told these parents that he and his family wanted nothing to do with them. They were not to contact them and they could not see the grandchildren. This couple struggled to know what their son really meant and to understand how they had created this situation.

Another woman reflected, almost with tears, on the pain she felt and still feels recalling a time when her husband was "so sick." The doctors applied their wisdom and skills but he was drifting toward eternity. She found that no matter how strongly she believed her faith to be, she could only handle so much frustration, confusion and lack of direction before she lost hope. "I was so hurt, angry and despairing I could not do anything." A different woman's loss was her most difficult challenge. The death of her mother was very painful. They had lived together many years. Her mother had been her best friend.

In each of these challenges, the spiritual practices of each person led to God giving them restoration. For example, the woman whose best friend and mother had

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Patterson, *Waiting, Finding Hope When God Seems Silent* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 1989), 19-21.

passed found her faith again and received comfort from knowing that she would see her mother again. This gave her confidence to carry on. The wife who lost hope because of her husband's illness was given hope. Friends from their fellowship loved them and prayed for this husband's healing. They prayed for this husband's healing and he was restored.

In the failures and successes of life's struggles, the interviewees all talked about how they learned to know and follow Jesus Christ and let Him lead them through the dark times into the light of spiritual self-actualization. There were consistent responses explaining how in the midst of turmoil, the interviewees turned to God and achieved a relationship with Him. They found that God gives His children their life map to follow in the good and "not so good" times. They explained to the researcher that, as they read God's Word, they have found His essence, the core of His being. Then they came to understand how God wanted them to live.

For example, a retired nuclear engineer stated he did not know everything about life. Rather, he saw that he needed help. He needed God. He did not know "how to live life" and he needed God's wisdom. He smiled when he said, "God changed my life." Another respondent exclaimed,

Living in my younger years I learned that ultimately I needed help for just living. I did not know why I was alive and I was frustrated. Storms came into my life and after a whole lot of frustration trying to resolve these with my abilities, I found God was in the storm with me. He saw me through it and he changed me.

In light of this revelation, this person learned in his younger years to turn to God as life's resource. Another woman explained, "My experiences have taught me when life crumbles around me I am not alone as so many people feel today. I know God is so close to me, holding me and I feel His presence healing me." In this very painful journey she

found God so close to her. So, she surrendered to Him. The result was that He rescued her and liberated her from herself according to her words.

A retired engineer reflected on how he believed he knew who he was and where he was going in life. But he felt alone, isolated and empty. He knew he needed help. He said, “When I turned to God he changed my life. It was then I began to learn.”

Several of the interviewees shared that they have struggled with depression, just like younger adults do today. Yet in their experience of anxiety and fear, most expressed that it was their faith in God that gave them release from depression. They released the problem to God and trusted Him to lead and heal them. For these interviewees, prayer was not an escape but a way to confront the depression. Peck writes:

What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one. Problems often evoke in us frustration or grief or sadness or loneliness or guilt or regret or anger or grief or anxiety or despair. It is for this reason that wise people learn not to dread but actually to welcome problems and actually to welcome the pain of problems.<sup>3</sup>

In one way or another, many of these interviewees echoed Peck and recommended that people learn to welcome the pain of problems rather than hide from it. To welcome the pain means to acknowledge, challenge and resolve it. Several interviewees said in one way or another, they learned to live with pain by “walking with a limp.”

A consistent response concerning the spiritual life was the realization by several interviewees that it is best to live aware of life’s challenges and to accept them. Most spoke of their memories from fifty years ago. They recalled thinking years ago that they could calm life’s storms. Then, as they struggled with the crucibles of life and listened to others struggling with their emergencies, an awareness dawned. The kind of help they

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<sup>3</sup>Peck, 15-16.

needed was supernatural. They needed God. That's when many turned to God first for his help. Many began to accept Him as Lord. This was when they began to understand that life's tornados dismember everyone. They began to sense that God does calm His children's storms, but that He also has a gift for them in the storm. They learned in their disasters what they did not expect. It was in their very predicaments that they found God to be so close to them and discovered His love in a new tender way.

One person said:

In my twenties and thirties I really believed I had life figured out. But life's unexpected turns led me to feel undone, as if I did not know where I was going. My experience is when my life was crumbling I felt I was "done." I knew God could be close to me. I knew He could calm my crisis. It was not until I surrendered in tears that I found the wonder. It was in my crushed heart I found God so close to me.

Another interviewee shared a spiritual metaphor that helped bring her encouragement during dark times:

Storms came into my life. These seemed to catch me in the outdoors with no umbrella. The downpours would soak me. My frustration kept increasing until a person told me that God's love is like an umbrella. He doesn't take away the storm, but he keeps us dry as we walk through life's squalls.

These experiences of the interviewees reflect what Pohl writes about in regard to gratitude and hardship, which is that gratitude is most striking when it is lived out in difficult circumstances.<sup>4</sup> It is more striking because grateful people know they are being held by a loving God. They learn to share this love with others no matter what sorrow is encountered along the way.<sup>5</sup> The interviewees had learned that Christian depth comes from appreciation of God in hardships. Many professed to learn with time how to

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<sup>4</sup> Pohl, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Pohl, 26.



appreciate God as they came to know Him through reading the Bible and following its guidance.

The interviewees' stories expressed again and again the realization that it was God blowing the winds of their gales and that it was Him who turned their tempests into breezes. Many found their own self-actualization from these refreshing breezes that had been storms. The Apostle James explains this phenomenon when he writes: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4, NIV).

Several of these interviewees learned to believe that God uses life's upheavals to change them. The reason for the pain is to induce a person to release control of his or life to Him. As they trusted Him, many reported that God grafts into their attitudes a growing capacity to trust Him even more. He worked in them a stronger ability to not be moved from a place of strong faith and spiritual self-actualization, a place in which they become "complete not lacking anything."

Each interviewee mentioned that he or she found direction, hope and confidence in the midst of struggles by combining prayer with following God's Word. For many, the practice of prayer expressed their effort to submit their wills to God. The researcher found this struggle to submit to be reflective of the observations of James Houston in his book *The Transforming Power of Prayer*. Houston observes, "there is growing awareness today that modern life neglects community values, replacing them with a strong streak of selfishness and narcissism."<sup>6</sup> He argues that this selfishness is based on the belief of

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<sup>6</sup> James Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Company, 1996), 25-26.

recent generations that life is all about wish fulfillment, in which “everything is permitted” to achieve those wishes.<sup>7</sup> Houston explains that the antidote to this mentality is to pray “Thy will be done,” because prayer is ultimately a battle of the will. The battle makes people choose what in the end they really want.<sup>8</sup> Each interviewee expressed this perspective on prayer in one way or another. They knew everything was not permitted. They understood that prayer was not about asking “can I get everything I want?” Rather, they understood that the real question was “can I give God what He wants?” This was another way of expressing “Thy will be done in my life.”

When the interviewees discovered this kind of prayer as a spiritual resource for facing life’s struggles, many reported advancement toward achieving Christian self-actualization.

As the researcher began to know the research participants better, he realized more and more the breadth of their faith and character. Many of them were living examples of what Benner described as Christian maturity: “God’s intent is to move his children’s attention from themselves so they will gaze into His eyes and follow His will.”<sup>9</sup> God often uses adversity to step into a person’s life more deeply so that that person realizes he or she needs God more than ever. At this point of need, a maturing Christian learns to surrender to Him. All of these interviewees displayed this breadth of maturity, this level of Christian self-actualization.

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<sup>7</sup> Houston, 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> Houston, 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Benner, 15.

*Theme Two: Faith and Fulfillment*

The second major theme was that of “faith and fulfillment.” Throughout all the categories of the questionnaire, many interviewees talked about finding life’s meaning by trusting in God. Whether the topic was family, work, friendships or other issues, interviewees continued to raise the theme of finding fulfillment through faith in God. Apparently, consciousness about the connection between faith fulfillment is closely related to Christian self-actualization.

Many interviewees explained how aging had led them to stop living for their own desires and to live instead for God’s passion for their lives. In other words, they had discovered that faith in God was connected to finding life’s meaning. This became a source of fulfillment. Several talked about how they accepted God’s love for them and accepted His Son’s death and resurrection, repenting from how they had lived as their own gods in order to find fulfillment. Many frequently explained that reading the Scriptures, fellowshiping with other Christians and prayer were the means they used to reach out to and touch God. The gift God gave them in return was a new heart that loved to follow Him. This was how several described fulfillment.

One interviewee explained, “I found years ago in my successes I had confusion and struggles. But when I prayed and asked God to help me, He protected me and guided me and met my needs.” Most of the interviewees said that they pray in the morning or evening, while others expressed that they pray throughout each day. One man summarized this clearly. “Life can be so complicated that I don’t just pray in the morning or evening. I pray throughout the day.” Overall, these interviewees had lived long enough

to know that their faith in God was the only thing that satisfied them and gave them purpose.

At one point or another throughout each interview, every participant told the researcher his or her conviction that the result of resolving life's challenges can be fulfillment. Almost all of them expressed the frustrations they felt when they were young and trying to make sense of life. Many expressed the frustrations they felt not finding life's answers as younger adults. This resulted in their struggling with pain, dissatisfaction, confusion, a lack of contentment and the sense that life was crumbling around them. They felt hopeless. Aging taught these research participants how to find and live with a God who is very personal and loves to resolve their issues.

These responses all revealed the interviewees' beliefs that the dark, or "naturalistic" life, is removed by God's light. Many expressed that as they lived from day to day, they began to realize they could not control the circumstances in which they lived. They needed something more. In this process they found something very sweet and priceless. They found that, as God rescued them from various crises, they felt very close to Him. This intimacy shaped their values, life purposes, callings and mission. Their focus shifted from surviving to achieving spiritual self-actualization, which lead them to find meaning they now wanted to share.

Several said that to find true meaning, individuals must come to know the essence of their being. To uncover one's essence involves wrestling with one's values. The concept of personal valuing implies that one's values are well integrated with one's essence. This integration forms the basis for autonomous action. In reflecting on Frankl, Weinstein and colleagues emphasized that individuals do not have control over many of

the things that happen to them. Life's meaning is reflected in the freedom they show when choosing how to respond to life's uncontrollable events.<sup>10</sup> They point out how Frankl argued that people create meaning by making distinctive and personally valued choices.<sup>11</sup>

All the interviewees expressed that they had to begin by first discovering their values and then living them out. As they talked, their stories showed how coming to live their values gave each a purpose for living, a life purpose. For some interviewees, the emergence of their values-controlling behavior led them to God's calling and then to His mission for their lives.

As in the previous theme, this sense of life purpose often emerged out of God leading the interviewees through what some described as hurricane-like trials. Much of the interviewees' descriptions of finding fulfillment in life's trials reflected Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich's book, *The Critical Journey, Stages in the Life of Faith*. Hagberg and Guelich explain that in the midst of trials, which they term the "wall," people can make a choice that enables them to move on toward a better life.<sup>12</sup>

Seniors have a desire to stand with and help younger adults find the Lord and spiritual self-actualization. Seniors are better at choosing not to react to life and its challenges, and instead choosing to find fulfillment in spiritual self-actualization. "The mystery of the wall [i.e. 'why am I suffering?'] often remains a mystery."<sup>13</sup> There is not a total explanation for the pain. But older, self-actualized adults know that as a person

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<sup>10</sup> Weinstein, et al., 92.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hagberg and Guelich, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

grows through the pain, one's journey gains much more clarity. One begins to understand that God uses the frustration to draw people into His presence, where they find the assurance that comes from Christian self-actualization. Older adults know that each individual can find a new life when he or she gets up from the base of the wall of suffering and walks away. Each person can experience new faith responses to pain that move them through the wall experiences. Even when one feels like God is absent, one can choose the transformation that comes with Christian self-actualization.<sup>14</sup>

Several interviewees reported the conviction that it was often at these times of stress, fatigue and the unknown when God felt very close to them. They learned His values, His purpose, His calling and His mission for their lives during these times of trial. The interviewees all affirmed that their spiritual lives and skills have led them to find fulfillment and meaning.

This discovery of fulfillment sometimes came amidst lackluster experiences with church and Christian community. Some reported that too often, they faced the frustration of attending a worship service in which the minister told them what to believe but not how to put those beliefs into practice. But instead of responding to this dull interpretation of the faith, these interviewees reported seeking fulfillment in personally following Christ.

This journey of personally discovering meaning and self-actualization, even when Christian community proves to be a desert experience, is well expressed in by Sittser, who writes that those who "drink from a deep well" live in a way that reveals that they

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<sup>14</sup> Hagberg and Guelich, 114-121.

know God.<sup>15</sup> Such people are confident that Jesus came to rescue the world. They live “in the work the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in their lives.” They learn to serve Christ today.<sup>16</sup> All this gives such people what Sittser calls “drinking water, living water, from [the] Jesus well.”<sup>17</sup> This is their source of strength and encouragement. It stems from the conviction that “There is so much more. So much more.”<sup>18</sup> The researcher found through the interviews that these older adults practice these principles described by Sittser. It enables them to see life clearly and to live in order to please God. Each expressed a confidence and calm that came from their priorities and clear vision of life’s meaning. The confidence and calm came from God’s work of bringing them to Christian self-actualization.

Many respondents explained that their spiritual life is their focus for living and their life purpose. It is their spiritual life that has given them faith to overcome and live, often at a peak of blessing. The experiences and lessons they have learned in this process are skills that are applicable to the Christian self-actualization of young adults.

Many interviewees reported that their relationship with Christ and His living within them have stopped them from searching for what they had considered “the good life.” The connection with Christ has turned them toward living a meaningful, self-actualized life. Frankl explains that this turning away from the apparent “good life” is a sign that a person’s primary motivation has become the search for the meaning of life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sittser, 282.

<sup>16</sup> Sittser, 294.

<sup>17</sup> Sittser, 282.

<sup>18</sup> Sittser, 294.

<sup>19</sup> Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 105.

Such a person recognized that life, in its normal ebb and flow, is all about finding meaning rather than simply gratifying impulses and desires. The interviewees recognized that God only can fulfill this search. They know that only then does their life achieve a significance, which will satisfy their own will, yearnings and needs. One interviewee explained,

When I look back on my life I see when I knew I could not accomplish the impossible. When I was a young adult I believed I would accomplish the impossible. I learned from my experience I needed help. I needed God. I began to pray and ask God to meet my needs.

This was a common thread of response, whether the respondent had been a stay-at-home mother or a Stanford University PhD scholar. Each knew ultimately that he or she needed help to achieve excellence. Most were highly gifted but realized there were limits to their expertise and that only God could fill their need. Again, this realization often came or was nurtured in the storms of life. They found God responded to their prayers by leading them through what seemed to be the impossible so that they consistently lived in the possible.

This community of older adults has been so inspirational for the researcher when compared to the conversations he overhears in his other worlds of civic, business and board of directors leadership.

### *Theme Three: Relationships*

The third theme was the importance of community for achieving Christian self-actualization. Wong has written that experiencing community is important for promoting peoples' discovery of life's meaning.<sup>20</sup> Many interviewees reported discovering the

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<sup>20</sup> Weinstein, et al. 92-94.



power of relationships to bring healing, comfort, and guidance toward meaning and fulfillment.

### **Christian Relationships**

The interviewees talked a lot about how relationships with other Christians were important parts of thriving in the midst of trials and moving toward self-actualization. For example, one mother recalled that when her children left home to become the very persons she had trained them to become, she fell into depression. But a woman in her church who had gone through the same anguish reached out to her and helped her regain composure.

Another woman faced a challenge that she said she had never dreamed possible to face. She was left caring for your husband's daily needs while he was gravely ill. This suffering went on daily. This woman needed more than trite, veneer answers from the church pulpit. She needed relationships to help her through this. So, friends from their fellowship loved them and prayed for this husband's healing. The love she experienced from these relationships led her back to the faith. This renewed faith of the wife and of her church fellowship eventually released her husband from oppression. Her husband was wonderfully restored to health. It was in her church relationships, as many others had found, that this wife gained hope. She was open, asked for their help, and she received both the help and the hope.

A couple's daughter-in-law experienced a brain aneurism. The result was months of hospital care and then a slow recovery for years in her home. They reported that even though they admired their son's loving care for his wife, even today they are really trying to understand why this happened. Things seemed hopeless for a very long time. However,

their friends loved them and prayed with them for their pain to ease. Friends proved crucial for surviving the challenge.

One interviewee shared something that was especially difficult: “My biggest challenge was trying to overcome the pain my family inflicted on me. I was told I was a mistake and would never make anything of my life. I thought I was the worst person on the planet.” But God led her down a trail into a beautiful meadow for healing. First, she went to people she knew she had hurt and asked them to forgive her. She did this even though she wished her parents would have asked her to forgive them first. Instead, this woman humbled herself as her first step toward healing. By slowly repairing these relationships, she began to discover God’s healing of her sense of rejection. What enabled this woman to find healing was her submission to God’s will that she bring healing into her relationships.

Many of the interviewees said that they knew living in the superficial culture of North America does not prepare people to stand in life’s storms. What they reported needing was real relationships. It was these that moved them closer to Christian self-actualization. When faced with life’s challenges and pain, all the interviewees found that it took a combination of God’s love, love from significant friends and love from God’s healing power to deliver them.

Most participants affirmed their need for a community of faith. Most expressed their beliefs about attaining strong relationships, along with the attitudes and practices that cultivate those relationships. Most expressed the significant ways in which other people’s faith experiences had led them to finding the meaning that God had for their

lives. Several people said that it was Christian relationships that provided them with contentment, fulfillment and meaning.

One person talked about corporate faith by saying, “My communities of faith were vibrant. There was no gossip, slander or cutting remarks. Selfishness and the worship of pride disseminated. It is people like these that make life fulfilling.” Another person made a comment that was echoed by many of the others in one way or another:

People make my life fulfilling. At this stage of life it is people more than anything else that makes life and satisfying. We help each other. We face struggles together because we love each other. When I was young I felt I had to live up to people’s standards for my life’s meaning. I aged to understand it is God’s leading in my life that gives me meaning as well as my relationships with wonderful people.

A common sentiment among the interviewees was that were “pilgrims” learning to live in relationships and to love each other. Many supported the idea that it is within Christian relationships that life becomes more fulfilling. As Jean Vanier wrote: “When the members of a faith community are living in communion they make the Kingdom of God a living, vibrant experience. It is their lives that become a sign of the presence of God.”<sup>21</sup>

The vibrancy of these relationships was a reminder to all people and to the researcher of the rewards of mature, loving relationships.

### **Family Relationships**

During the interviews, the researcher sought to tease out this theme of relationships by asking several pointed questions about the role of family in the self-actualization of the interviewees. The researcher had surmised that families play a crucial role enabling a person to achieve self-actualization. Additionally, he believed that how

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<sup>21</sup>Vanier, 3 and 59.

adults raise their families is a reflection of a person's level of self-actualization as well as a means to achieving it. So, some of his follow up questions were specifically about family connections.

Most of the responses applauded their families for giving them a path for life so they could find fulfillment rather than frustrations. Previously in this chapter the researcher mentioned a woman's tragic childhood memories of family that had rejected her. This same person remarked, "In my home I was not loved. I cried and hurt all the time. Then, my husband loved me and taught me what love means and how to love. This helped me give love to our four sons." She had moved from family relationships that frustrated her to relationships with her husband and sons that fulfilled her. Her candid reflections express the frustrations a person can feel from childhood into the adult years. Thankfully, the majority of responses expressed the fulfillment family life provides for people.

A life devoted to Christ's leadership leads families into loving relationships of spiritual self-actualization. For example, two couples responded with the wonder of how the love they learned in their home is still blessing them today. They feel so fulfilled because their children have infused into their grandchildren the love modeled in the parents' homes. Now parents can feel as though the love they shared with their children is being returned. One mother explained, "Our children are giving us the love we gave them." These older adults find fulfillment in their children's love.

One interviewee recalled that Grandpa was different but loving and fun. All the seventy and eighty year old participants often told stories of the cohesion within their

families. Their positive experiences were still making themselves felt by encouraging the interviewees to keep seeking meaning in life.

The researcher found these responses about family to be wonderfully heartening, especially given his own tragic childhood and teen years.

### **Relationship Skills**

The researcher narrowed down some of his questions about relationships to discover what relationship skills these interviewees felt were needed by young adults to become fulfilled people. One person told a story of how he had to make life and relational changes:

My wife and I had to learn new relationship skills with people the hard way. We had to not only associate with people who think like we think. We found we had to become more open to other people's points of view. It was difficult, but we had to accept the fact relationships are about accepting another person rather than gaining a benefit from a person.

This couple discussed how imperative this shift in valuing others is for younger adults as they strive to find life's meaning but also to find secure, fulfilling relationships.

Another couple confirmed the need for this same life skill. They explained that success in relationships begins by accepting people for who they are rather than trying to make them who one would want them to become.

One of the other couples interviewed responded by saying that relationships are initiated and grown when a person talks less and listens more. This is the opposite of how most people practice relationships, since most like to talk about themselves more than hearing another person's stories. This couple believed that if they could instill this into the life of a protégé, his or her friendships would be enhanced. A different couple shared a confirming point of view. They had discovered that if they only listened to other people,

then these others to whom they listened would believe this couple was thinking mostly about the person speaking. The couple's attention would not be on anything else but the speaker. They smiled and said this helped them make a lot of friends.

Another insight from an interviewee was that relationships can be opened and cultivated by using humor. This interviewee found that humor relaxes people. His experience has been that when he uses humor, people at gatherings feel relaxed talking with him and just enjoy his company. His advice for growing adults is to consider limited humor as a way to relax people and draw them into a conversation.

A couple smiled and related their experience: "We found as people depended on our honesty, we developed relationships and people were attracted to us." In a related piece of advice, an interviewee said that younger adults must live transparently if they hope to cultivate relationships. Their peers and friends will be attracted to knowing them and being able to depend on them.

Another interviewee said that an important relationship skill was not to judge people. This interviewee learned over the years that it was possible to evaluate a person's behavior but not know the reason for the person's choices. One's friends and relations will feel secure with the person who does not judge, gossip, slander or ridicule people.

One interviewee admitted that he found the skills needed to develop relationships to be harder than he had thought. He knew he could tend to be a loner, given his introverted nature, but he chose to ask God to give him a heart to love people. Over time, relating with other people became part of his life. He would love to pass this experience on to another introverted younger adult. In a related comment, one woman said, "I needed to learn how to be comfortable around people." As she learned these skills she

began developing relationships. She explained that a person of any age can easily have this same inhibition. But if that person interacts with a wise, experienced mentor, he or she should find ways to develop loving friendships.

One of the interviewees struggled with the developmental issue of Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's is an "autism spectrum disorder that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication."<sup>22</sup> This woman specified that these symptoms inhibited her social skills. She struggled to relate with people. Too often she wanted to take control of a conversation. She knows there are adults fifty years younger than her who struggle with different developmental issues that affect their ability to relate to people. She wants them to know that God loves them and will work within their perspectives so they will not only hope to be able to love others, but will in reality love others.

A consistent bit of advice by the interviewees was that friendships are nurtured best between people with the same values. Young adults should carefully select their friends so that the relationships fulfill their lives rather than give them more tension and trouble.

Several interviewees advised young adults to know that they will face adversity, pain and disorientation in relationships. Furthermore, it is a very real but at times concealed truth that people do not often sense the people around them who are hurting. A number of the research participants reflected on this truth. They urged younger adults to consider responding to hurting people. A kind response can lift a person's pain and build a relationship.

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<sup>22</sup> "Asperger's Syndrome," Memidex, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://www.memidex.com/asperger-syndrome>

*Theme Four: Work Attitudes and Practices*

The fourth theme was related to work attitudes and practices. The interviewees were asked how their life's work, whether job, a career, or volunteering, contribute to their life's fulfillment and satisfaction? The overwhelming consensus of the replies was summarized by this one reply: "Give one hundred percent to your work. Do the very best you can. A younger employee should ask for help and give excellence to one's efforts." Many of these interviewees advised younger adults who wanted to succeed in their work to avoid taking a position for the income. Instead, young adults should secure a post because they love the work, love the challenge and believe their presence in the company will make a difference.

As an example of this line of thinking, one man suggested from his experience that young people should find work that they enjoy. This person said that enjoyable work sets up a person for thriving. This explained why he was proficient and capable in a variety of jobs, and had many years of work experience. This helped him understand that success in work comes from a person's vision and passion to accomplish it. Young adults should develop a vision and passion for the profession or trade they intend to pursue.

A few contributors said that success is easier to achieve if a person is flexible when facing difficult company choices and expectations. For instance, one interviewee who had been a high school principal learned that he had to be flexible when balancing demands from students, parents and teachers. His days were filled with unpredictable yet exciting aspects of leadership. But success and fulfillment came when this man was flexible and when he gave his staff and teachers recognition for their excellence.



One interviewee advised young adults to get as much help and mentoring from older adults as possible. She remembered her tension as a seventeen-year-old high school graduate. She did not know what she would do or become. She was not certain she should pursue more education. Then, in her words,

One day I met a local attorney. He convinced me to go to work for him. He trained me to become a legal secretary before I was twenty. I worked at this law firm for fifty-five years. The contributions lawyers and customers had on me are priceless. I was honored over and over again for my work. This made my vocation very fulfilling and satisfying.

The attorney mentored this woman from a seventeen year old searching for guidance. He provided exceptional training for her growth as a woman and a professional. This spirit-filled attorney helped this woman become a spiritually self-actualized person. This woman's experience was not too different from researcher's who was raised in desperate poverty. A man of integrity came to his home bringing bags of food for the family. Young adults should remain open to finding more than just professional growth in their work. They may also find faith training and mentoring.

One respondent gave a heartfelt warning about work. She explained a lesson she learned through a co-worker's suffering about the importance of being connected with work colleagues over and above merely accomplishing things.

I am embarrassed to say my career did not contribute to my fulfillment and satisfaction the way I believe God intended. The daily employment grind limited my success. I was so consumed with my frustrations. I did not realize how out of touch I was with my associates. Then a tragedy struck one of my associates. In my ineptness I found he needed me to listen to him and reach out to him. He taught me a lesson for a lifetime. And younger adults should face each day striving for success but also enjoying relationships and interactions with fellow employees. This man in his last days helped me see what matters is how we live, not how or what we accomplish.

This woman's warning reflects Darrell Johnson's application about "relationality" from his book *Experiencing the Trinity*. In it, Johnson reminds readers that God, as the Trinity, "has existed in community, in fellowship as Fellowship, in relationship as Relationship."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, humans are intended to reflect this relationality: "We human beings were brought into being to participate with God in His essence."<sup>24</sup> Thus, living for excellence at work is exemplary, but living in relationships that change lives is most important. Christian self-actualization brought these interviewees to these insights.

### **Work and Life Balance**

These interviewees were asked specifically if they found a balance between the time and effort they gave their employment and their families. One woman responded: "It was very fulfilling to know I was my husband's highest priority. He worked hard but he wanted to be with me when I needed him." Another couple found family and work balance by staying focused on their goals and dreams. This meant they had to say, "no" to a lot of things. The way this mother and father used their time showed the children that they were loved.

Another couple expressed that balancing work and family was very difficult:

When our children were young our home was filled with tension. We were loving our children but also taking care of our aged parents. We had to cope with children who were making poor choices and parents' illnesses. We were stressed out and to be honest we only survived by God's grace.

This couple would like to explain to young adults who are forming their work lives that a person cannot control life's events. They want young adults to understand that everyone needs to pursue one's work and do exceptionally well, but unexpected life events can

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<sup>23</sup>Darrell Johnson, *Experiencing The Trinity* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 73.

<sup>24</sup>Johnson, *Experiencing The Trinity*, 73.

create chaos. Balancing work and these situations can be challenging. This couple found one way to resolve the conflict was to take time to enjoy the children and have them participate with the care of their grandparents. The father reflected, “We prayed for grandma and grandpa, for the kids and for my work. Seems we were working at being balanced.”

Another couple confirmed this idea of working toward balance and investing in family. In talking about their younger parenting years, they said: “Our priority was family first. We cared for the children and attended all their sports and school events. This created a strong bond with the children.”

Another interviewee had the following insight about work and life balance:

When I was young I was always striving for more money. I put my family in jeopardy. I began to realize God would provide for our family’s needs. Then my stress and striving eased. I just took life one day at a time. It was this choice that ushered me into a life of balance and on a path to self-actualization.

This man found that by trusting in God’s provision he could relax and achieve the kind of balance and self-actualization necessary to be a good father to his children. Another couple observed that no matter how striving one’s personality is, and no matter how young or old a person is, everybody needs to relax and enjoy life in order to find balance.

Finally, one couple expressed that they had achieved their goals. They related that they live in balance, enjoying each other, traveling and friendships. They only wish they had lived with this kind of balance forty years ago.

### **Preparing Now for Work**

The researcher pressed for more insight into the theme of work by asking what a younger person could do now to prepare for a fulfilling work life. The interviewees all expressed their understanding that a student must perform exceptionally in his or her

studies now. This would not only qualify them for positions, but it would also give them a successful work ethic.

One couple explained that a young adult's work success is connected all the way back to his or her childhood. Their premise was that young adults will succeed if their parents have given them a philosophy for pursuing their profession and related relationships.

Another gentleman echoed this sentiment. He talked about how he had found a source of work fulfillment following his father's example.

My father found his answer for preparing for and accomplishing his work. He wrote a Bible verse on a card his mother had given to him. He kept the principle in mind and worked with this scripture's ethics and excellence. He immersed himself with one of God's life principles: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make all your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

This man then explained that this approach of his father's was a powerful aspect of his own work life. He said that when young adults learn to apply scripture to their work ethic and to their relationships, this will make them successful.

A retired executive warned that a person should not push so hard to get what one wants. Instead, he encouraged young adults to see work as "a spiritual adventure. Let God open and close doors for you. Perform with excellence so doors open for your achievements." He explained that he had to learn to appreciate the skills God had given him, and that he felt fortunate because God had helped him to value his colleagues. All these insights echoed advice from N. S. Fagley and Mitchel Adler about the right attitude for work, who wrote:

Appreciation is keenly connected to spirituality through a process of reciprocal causality, and both appear to be key factors in psychological and physical well-

being and successful performance in the workplace. Appreciation fosters well-being and success directly as well and indirectly.<sup>25</sup>

A husband and wife said that they have so much to be thankful for from their professional experiences. They had achieved recognition, but they had also developed relationships with their work colleagues. These people are still their friends today and they often speak with them on the telephone. They found both work and relational fulfillment. This couple has a conviction that churches do not provide enough ministry guidance for older adults to use their skills to help young adults as they emerge into life.

A final thought on this topic from one interviewee was that young adults ought to set realistic goals, and then accomplish them. If younger adults follow these wise pieces of advice, then they will find fulfilling work.

### **What Would You Pass On to Young Adults About Work**

In order to more finely extract wisdom for fulfilling work life from the interviewees, the researcher asked a final question: “What is the one thing about work you would pass on to a younger adult?” One woman paused in silence for a long time to ponder the question before answering. Finally, she said,

From my experience of succeeding and failing, and from my observations of others’ successes and failures, every person working must be dependable. Not [simply] to think they are dependable, but living a life at work that people sense is trustworthy and responsible. I found the people I supervised did not grasp the importance of this until they were passed over for a promotion.

She closed this thought with a final exhortation: “Your dream job will come. You must remember in your present job to be faithful to your supervisor or president and avoid all distractions.”

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<sup>25</sup> N. S. Fagler and Mitchel G. Adler, “A Spiritual Path to Finding Value and Meaning in The Workplace,” *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* vol. 9, no. 2 (June 2012): 183.

Another man learned when he was young that when he accomplished more than was expected of him, his work path was prosperous. He said he would enjoy telling a twenty-five year old this truth. A different interviewee said that based on his experience, younger people first need to learn the “ropes” of a position and then accomplish these requirements.

One interviewee said that his greatest piece of advice comes from mistakes he had made: “Adults entering the job market must, they must, live with integrity and keep their consciences clear. In my younger years I missed opportunities for advancement and a deep level of trust from supervisors and fellow workers.” In other words, young adults at the beginning of their careers must make their own integrity and honesty a priority.

Once the researcher had finished interviewing all 14 participants, he transcribed their interviews. Then he edited the interviews down into a little booklet entitled *Life Wisdom Collection*. For the sake of simplicity and readability, he organized it around three themes instead of four. The booklet was divided into three sections, each related to one of the three themes: “Relationship Struggles,” “The Influence of Work and School in Your Life,” and “Spiritual Struggles, When the Church is Disappointing.” The researcher chose these titles and selected the material to be included in them based on what he assumed would be appealing to young adults. He hoped that the young adults who read the booklet would be able to relate their own experiences to these titles and to the booklet’s contents.

### **Findings from the Two Surveys**

The second instrument was comprised of two surveys (Appendix B). The researcher administered the surveys to 40 Christian young adults who participated in the study. 39 surveys were completed and returned. The researcher engaged the leader of the

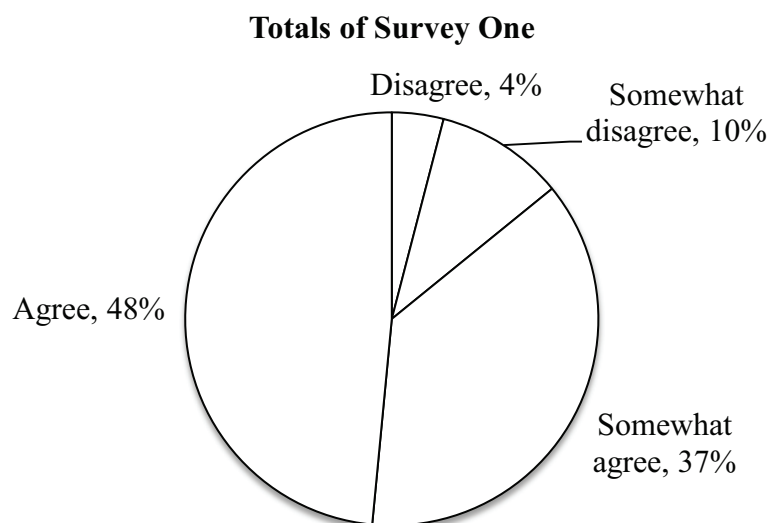
young adult “Generations” ministry at Crossroads Church to distribute, explain, and administer the surveys on two separate occasions, October 14 and October 23, 2015. Both surveys were Likert scales that asked them to “agree,” “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree” to different statements about the validity, applicability and relevance of the advice and life wisdom of older Christian adults. The first was taken before the participants read the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet that had been created in the previous research step. The second survey was taken after the exposure to the booklet. The researcher measured the difference between the responses of the two surveys to discover if the attitudes of Christian young adults toward the advice of the elderly changed in any way due to direct exposure to such advice.

#### *Survey One*

The researcher found from the responses to Survey One that younger adults place a higher value on older adult wisdom than he had expected.

#### **Totals**

In total, 48 percent of younger adults agreed that the experience and wisdom of older adults would benefit them, improving how they view life and how they live. 38 percent of the respondents somewhat agreed that senior community members could help them navigate life. So, this group of young adults placed high or somewhat high value on listening to, interacting with and learning from adults who have faced the issues they encounter, even before reading the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet. Surprisingly, only ten percent of participants “somewhat disagreed” with the idea that it was good to take the guidance or the advice of aged adults. Only four percent of those taking this first survey fully “disagreed” that adults over sixty-five had advice or input they would admire.



The researcher was surprised by the results of this first survey. He had surmised that a much larger number of young people would have had a lower initial regard for elder wisdom, prior to exposure to the booklet. He assumed that at most possibly fifty percent of younger adults would place any value on a mentoring relationship with an older adult, or on their advice in any form. This expectation was exceeded when a great majority (85 percent) of younger adults felt positive (“agree” or “somewhat agree”) about the value of seeking and obtaining advice from adults more experienced than themselves.

How should this be interpreted? First of all, this would appear to suggest that many young adults, even a large majority of them, do not live with the age bias in their perspective that the researcher had assumed. They may not know how to secure a relationship with a senior to guide them, but they still see them as valuable. This is shown from the higher percentage of positive responses and the very low percentage of “somewhat disagrees” and “disagree” responses.

It could also very well be that the researcher’s pool of respondents was less disposed toward age bias than the general population. Much of the literature that the



researcher had studied showed age bias to exist in a wide cross section of Western society. But the researcher drew on a pool of professing Christian young adults. These were all regular attenders of a large evangelical church in Turlock, California. Their regular attendance could be symptomatic of a prior commitment to biblical values that uphold elder wisdom as worthy of respect.

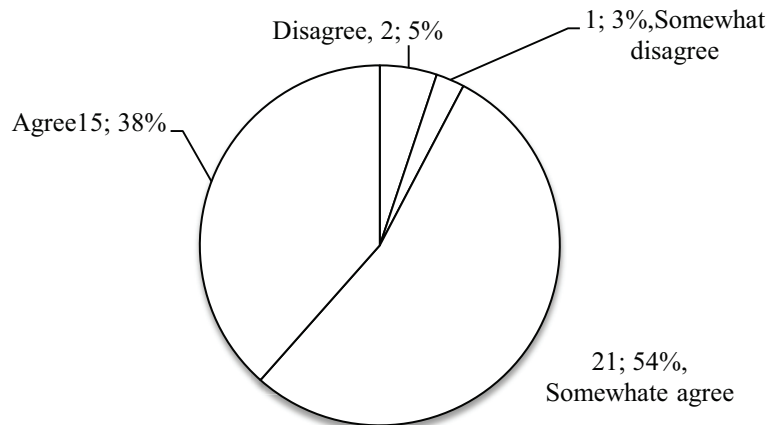
It is also possible that in this pool many of the respondents had come from families in which they had had positive interactions with grandparents and other elders. In other words, it is possible that this kind of young people, the kind who regularly attend evangelical churches, are also the kind of people whose rearing positively reinforced the idea that elder wisdom is to be appreciated and embraced. If many of them came from legacies of strong, stable, Christian families, then it is possible that this pool had exposure to positive elder role models to an extent greater than the wider population.

The researcher is still uncertain why this group of young people proved to have a higher regard for elder wisdom than the general population. The surprises grew when the researcher broke down the results according to their individual statements.

### **The Results to Individual Statements**

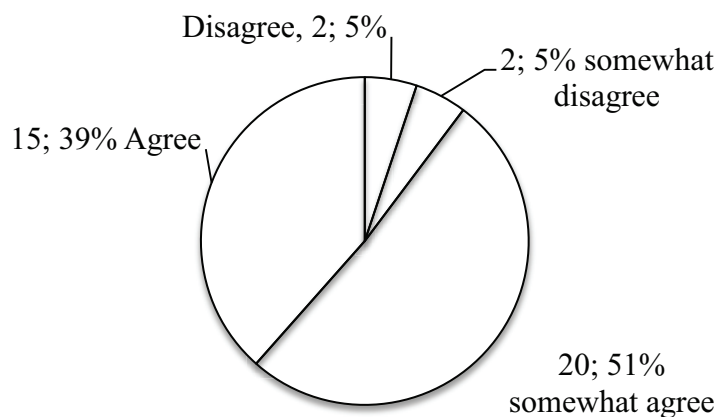
The results are all the more interesting when broken down statement by statement. The first statement was “The advice of senior adults is applicable to my relationship problems.” The researcher was surprised to discover that fifteen of the young adults, or 38 percent, agreed with this statement, and twenty-one young adults, or 54 percent, somewhat agreed.

**1. The advice of senior adults is applicable to my relationship problems.**



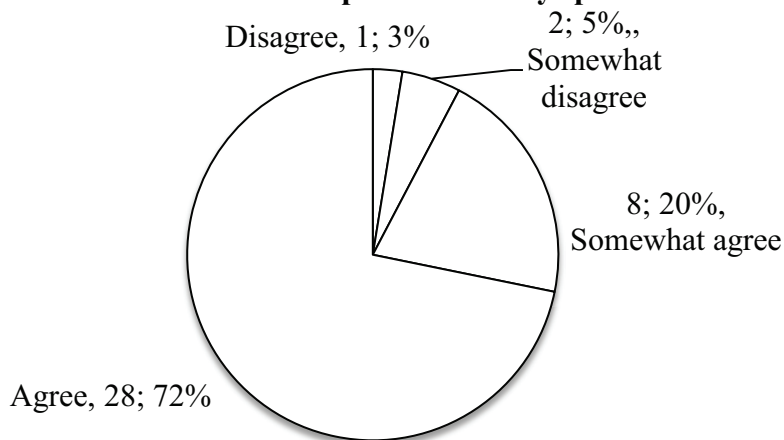
The second statement below was “The advice of senior adults is relevant to my work to my studies. The results were similar to those of the first statement, with 38 percent agreeing and 20 students, or 51 percent, somewhat agreeing. In comparison to the first survey, only one person switched his or her opinion from “somewhat agree” to “somewhat disagree.”

**2. The advice of senior adults is relevant to my work and to my studies.**



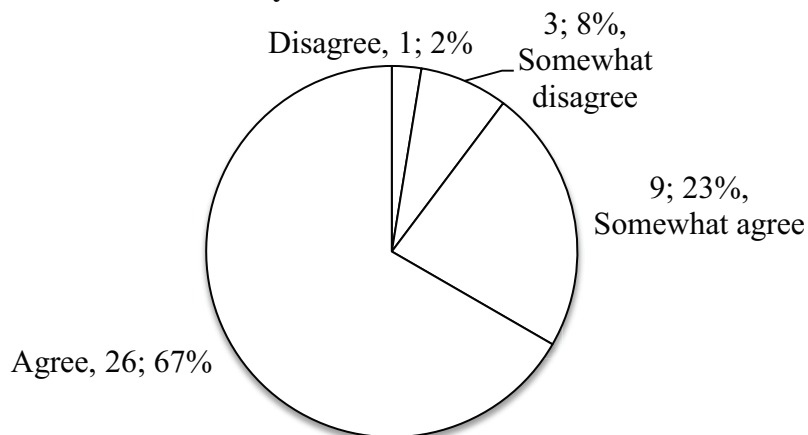
The researcher was overwhelmed by the dramatic leap up of “Agree” responses to the third statement, to 28 students, for 72 percent. Apparently, a large number of young adults already believe that they can benefit from the spiritual advice of older adults, far more than the researcher would have expected or what other research has shown.

### 3. Senior adult advice is pertinent to my spiritual life.



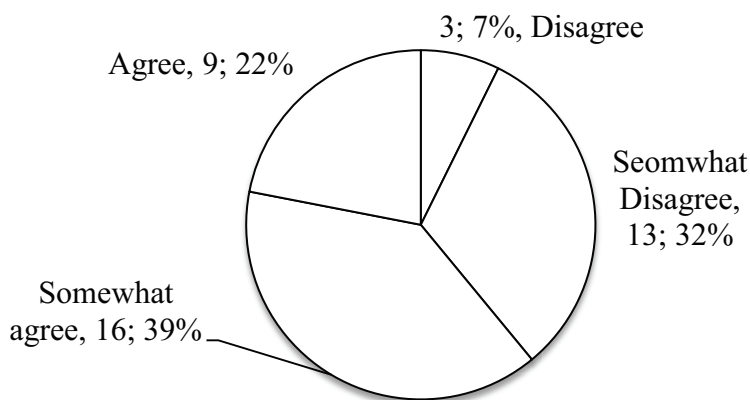
The fourth statement, “I benefit directly from the wisdom of senior adults,” was also surprising for its very high “agree” rate (67 percent).

### 4. I benefit directly from the wisdom of senior adults.



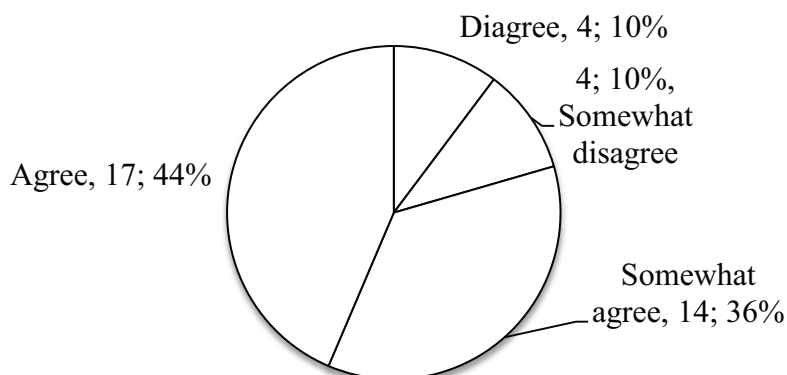
The responses to statements five and six were more in line with those of the first two statements, with a 39 percent and a 44 percent agreement rate, respectively.

**5. Senior adults have learned how to deal with what I am going through today.**



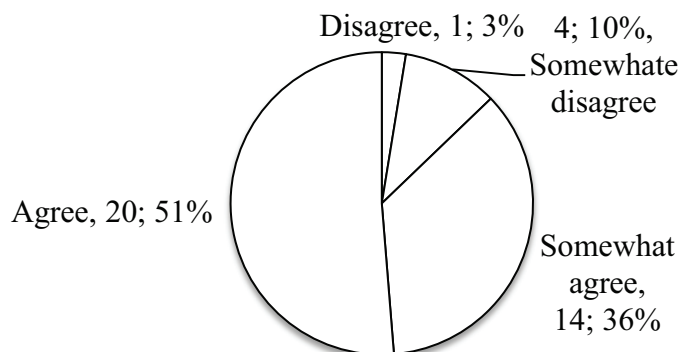
The fifth statement was "Senior adults have learned how to deal with what I am going through today," in an attempt to understand young adult attitudes about the relevancy of elder wisdom. The sixth statement, "I understand the meaning of life better because of my interaction with senior adults" was included to see if young people looked to older people for wisdom that might lead to self-actualization.

**6. I understand the meaning of life better because of my interaction with senior adults.**



The seventh and final statement on the survey tried to ask the same question but with different wording, in the hope of confirming the veracity of the sixth statement. The researcher was surprised to see that even though this statement essentially meant the same thing as statement six, three young adults migrated from “disagree” to “agree,” strongly boosting the number of students who looked favorably on the advice of elderly people for a pathway toward self-actualization.

**7. Senior adult advice helps me better understand what is important in life and what my pupose is here on earth.**



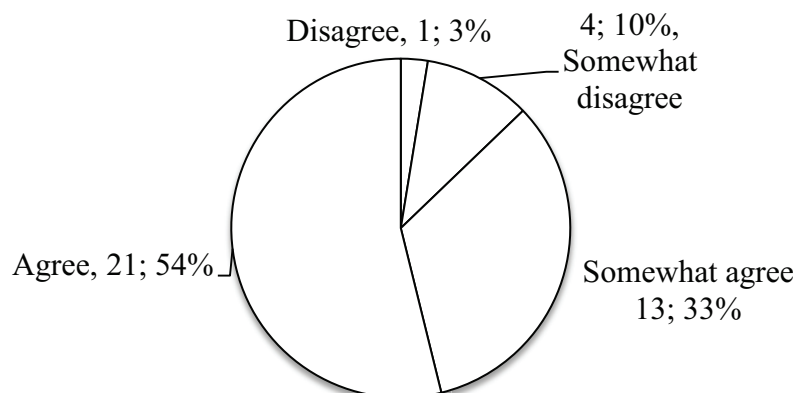
All of these results to Survey One showed a higher esteem of elder wisdom than the researcher had originally surmised prior to conducting the surveys.

### *Survey Two Responses*

#### **The Results to Individual Statements**

In the responses to Survey Two, every statement saw an increase in the number of people who either agreed or somewhat agreed with the statements about elder wisdom, as can be seen by the following breakdown of responses.

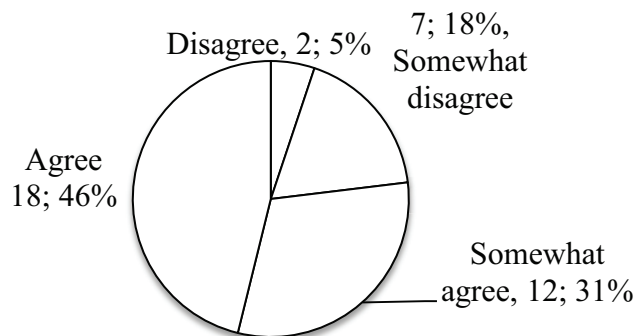
#### **1. The relational experiences of senior adults are applicable to my relationship problems.**



As can be seen in the graph above, the number of people who agreed to this statement rose by 6 people. Interestingly, there was also a one-person rise in disagreement, and a three person rise in “somewhat disagree.” The “somewhat agree” response shrank the most. This could mean several things, but it appears that the exposure to the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet pushed the young adults to one or the other end of the spectrum. Perhaps the reading clarified what the survey takers already believed. A few of the young people apparently found its contents to be less relevant than the generalized approval of elder wisdom they had held prior to the exposure. But the largest number seemed to have changed their opinion because of the exposure.

The second statement saw a similar change in numbers regarding the overall agreement that elder wisdom applies to work and school challenges. Agreement rose from 15 persons to 18. This means that at least three young people were persuaded to hold elder wisdom regarding work and school in higher esteem because of the exposure. But what was surprising about the change of opinion to this statement was the rise in people who somewhat disagreed (from two to seven). Clearly, the booklet moved five young people to conclude that elder wisdom was less relevant for work and school than they had originally believed. This increase of five people was borrowed from the “somewhat agree” category of the first survey, which again saw the most significant drop. So, like the previous question, the exposure to the booklet appears to have moved people away from lukewarm favor toward elder wisdom (“somewhat agree”) to stronger opinions one way or the other. No one was moved to outright “disagree” like they had been with the first statement, but the lukewarm favor nevertheless saw some shrinkage.

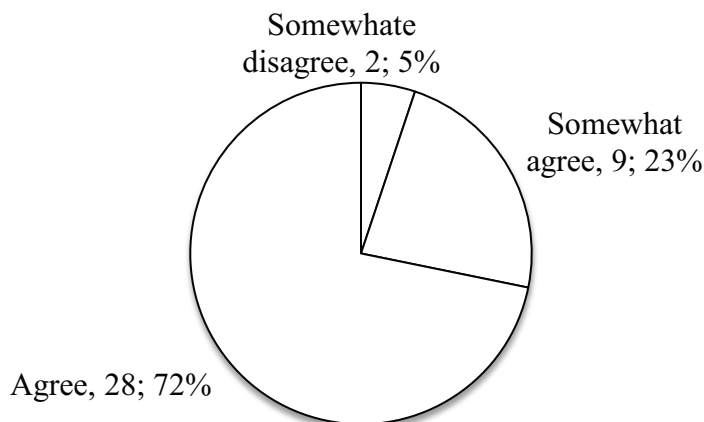
**2. The advice from seniors concerning work and studies will be relevant to my work and to my studies.**



The third statement about the relevance of elder wisdom for spiritual life saw no change in people who agreed, already a surprisingly high number. It also saw no change in the number of people who somewhat disagreed. What was startling to the researcher was the total disappearance of people who outright “disagreed.” The category completely

disappeared, and this one person apparently migrated to “somewhat agree.” Something about the booklet convinced this one person to at least look upon elder wisdom regarding spiritual matters to be of some value, however slight.

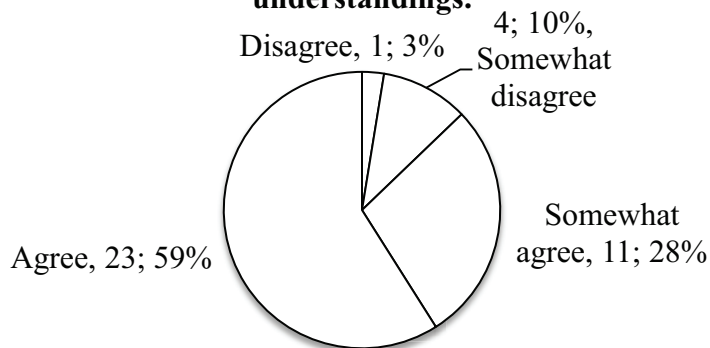
### 3. The advice of senior adults is pertinent to my spiritual life.



The fourth statement stood out from the others because it was the only one that did not see an increase in “agree,” but rather a decrease (from 26 to 23). There was an increase in “somewhat agree” (from nine to eleven young people). At least one person in this increase had moved from the “somewhat disagree.” But otherwise, the changes in opinion were negative. The researcher is uncertain why this statement saw increased negative opinion toward elder wisdom. One possibility is that it was a general statement rather than one specifically related to felt needs (like work, schooling, and relationships). Or perhaps the word “directly” made the question sound more concrete than the survey takers were willing to admit. Another possibility is that the slightly different wording between the surveys confused the respondents so that they did not realize that the two questions were being compared. The reason for the change remains a mystery.

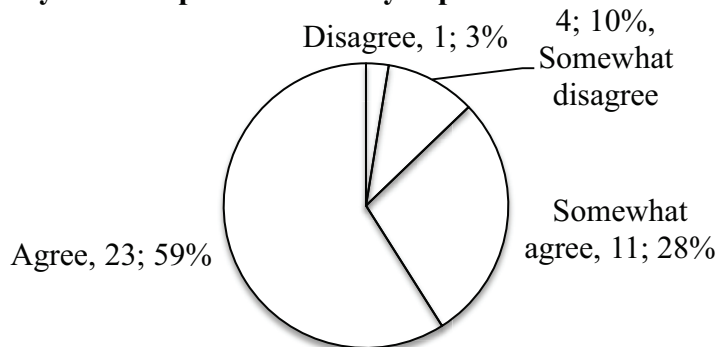


**4. I would benefit directly from the wisdom of a senior adult's understandings.**

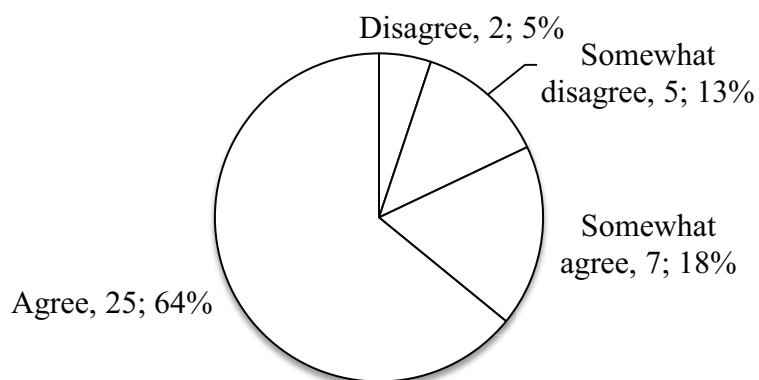


Despite Statement Four's negative change, all the other statements recorded an improvement in opinion toward elder wisdom after exposure to the booklet. Statements Five through Nine of Survey Two are not direct comparisons with the statements from Survey One, so they cannot be analyzed for precisely measurable changes of opinion in specific areas. But each one asked the respondents to reflect on elder wisdom in general, and each one showed more agreement than the lukewarm "somewhat agree" response of the first survey. Except for Statement Eight, all the "agree" statements rose from the teens into the twenties. This evidence mostly seems to support that the exposure to elder wisdom influenced young people to think more positively about it.

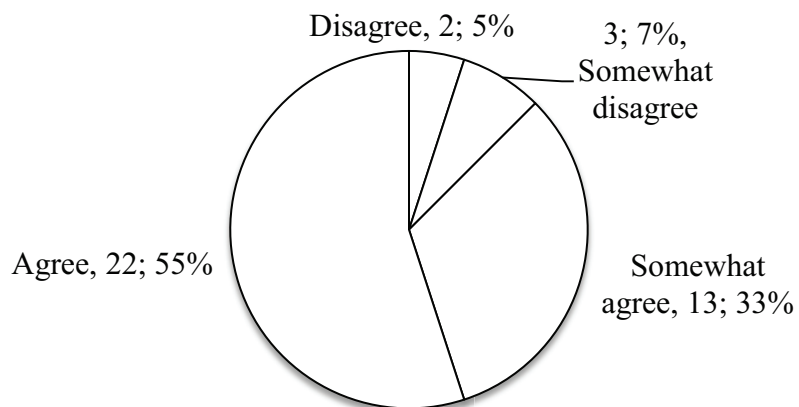
**5. My life is improved from my exposure to senior adults.**



**6. I understand the meaning of life better because of my interaction with senior adults who have lived life and have gained knowledge through experiences like mine.**

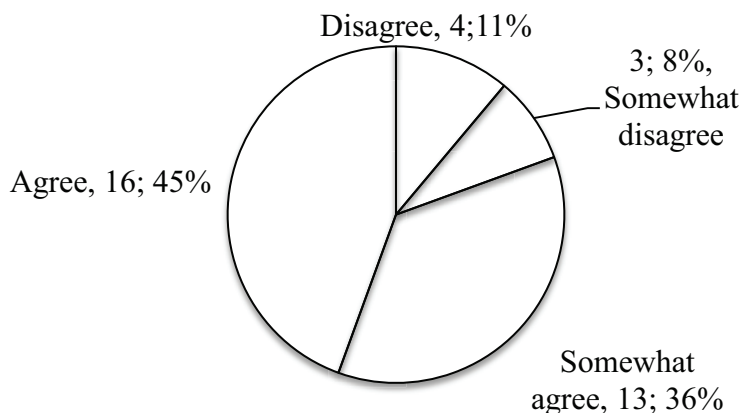


**7. The proven insights and understandings of the lives of senior adults will help me find my life's purpose.**



The response that gave the researcher the most over which to puzzle were to Statement Eight. It asked for reflection directly on the booklet. Four people outright disagreed that the booklet had influenced their opinion favorably, and only 16 people agreed. While “agree” was the highest number of responses, it was still lower than favorable opinion indicated by other responses, and less than the changes between Survey One and Two would indicate.

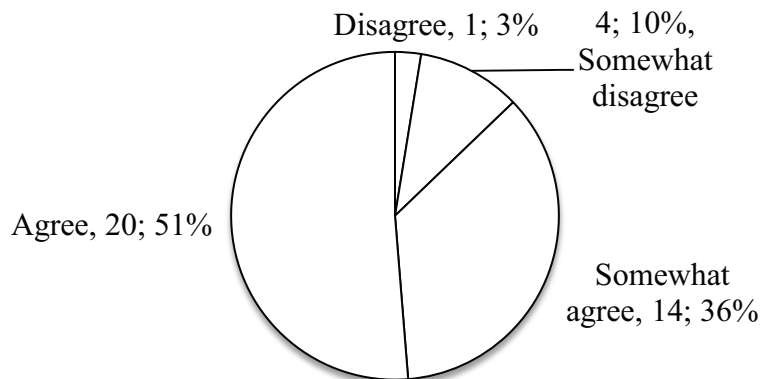
**8. After reading this collection of stories, I have more appreciation for the wisdom and life experience of senior adults.**



Finally, Statement Nine was the most revealing about the impact of the booklet in the researcher’s mind. It also asked the young people to reflect directly on their experience of the booklet. But unlike Statement Eight, Statement Nine asked if they would now be more inclined to take action in seeking out the advice of their elders. Only one person disagreed, while a full 20 persons agreed that, as a result of reading the

booklet, they would change their actions.

**9. After reading this collection of stories, I am more likely now to turn to senior adults because their experiences will give me the advice for my life's direction.**

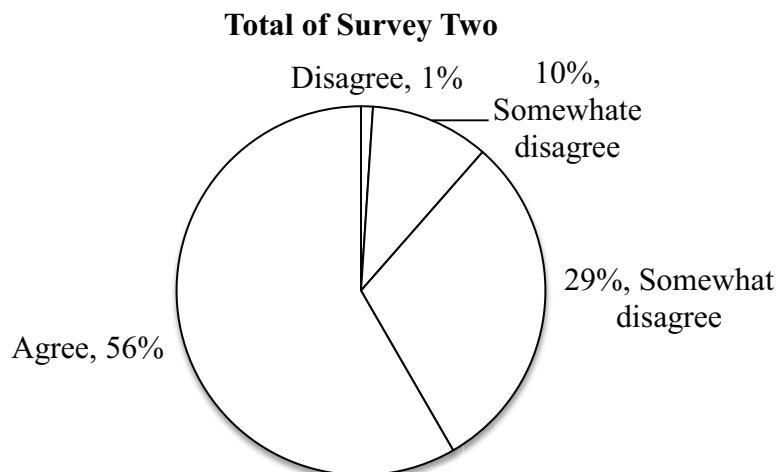


The researcher is unable fully to explain the difference between Statement's Eight and Nine, since they ask for very similar feedback. Perhaps they are different because Statement Eight asked only about "appreciation." Based on the findings of Survey One, general appreciation for elder wisdom was already high for this group of young people, at least higher than national studies would indicated. So this leads the researcher to wonder if perhaps the booklet did not change anyone's level of appreciation, and instead did the more important work of moving more young people to action, so that they would actually seek out advice from their elders.

**Totals**

The total change in opinion, when added up, is quite significant. Compared to 48 percent of survey takers who looked favorably at elder wisdom prior to reading *Life Wisdom Collections*, a full 56 percent looked favorably on it after reading it. This is a change of almost ten percent. Also, the number of people who disagreed dropped from

four percent to merely one percent.



The percentage of those who somewhat disagreed did not change, but the number of those who somewhat agreed dropped from 37 percent to 29 percent. This is significant because it means that several people moved away from a low level of enthusiasm for elder wisdom to a higher level of enthusiasm after reading the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet. This means that the exposure to the booklet did improve young peoples' opinions of elder wisdom. Some young people who had previously regarded elder wisdom with a lukewarm attitude stopped being so lukewarm.

The researcher knows that the people who moved away from a lukewarm response became more positive instead of negative because the overall percentages of people who "somewhat disagreed" and "disagreed" were identical between the surveys. This means no one's esteem of elder wisdom decreased after reading the booklet. This is significant because, with a drop from 37 to 29 percent of "somewhat agree," it would be natural to assume that those who moved away from this lukewarm response had moved toward a more negative response. The differences between Statements One of Survey

One and Two indicated that this was a real possibility. Instead, the only overall gain was in the “strongly agree” category.

The only exception to this trend toward positivity was in Statement Eight in Survey Two. But as discussed above, this may be due to focus in the statement on the word “appreciation.” The survey takers may have responded to the statement by indicating that the booklet had not changed their sense of appreciation. It possibly signals that their already high esteem of elder wisdom had not altered in terms of mere appreciation, even though it did alter in terms of taking action. Besides, Statement Eight did not prove to impact the overall totals

The researcher inferred from these results that in fact the exposure to the life wisdom of older Christians did indeed make a positive difference in the opinions of Christian young adults toward older people. The rise in “agree” opinions (from 48 to 56 percent) was a significant increase.

#### *General Analysis*

Even though the researcher is reasonably confident that this project has shown his original theory was correct, that exposure to the life wisdom of the elderly would improve the opinion of younger generations, he had still hoped for a stronger measure change.

One possibility for the response is the structure of the surveys themselves. Survey One had seven statements. Survey Two presented four of same statements, but the rest were additional. With the additions, the total percentages are not the same between the surveys. This means that they are not exactly comparable measurements, and the percentages do not paint a clear picture of before and after the exposure. With the benefit

of hindsight, the researcher would have made Surveys One and Two identical, so that their measurements would be more comparable.

Another possible cause of less-than-hoped-for change of opinion is the possibility that the young people who completed the surveys were not given enough experience with the senior interviewees to facilitate their learning. In other words, the survey participants did not receive enough exposure to the wisdom of the older adults surveyed to persuade them to think differently. Perhaps the *Life Wisdom* booklet that they read was too short a synopsis of the interviews which the researcher had conducted.

Respondents were asked to pick only three to five entries in each of the major three sections of the booklet. So, the young adults were only exposed to no more than 9 to 15 excerpts from the interviews. Each participant was exposed to a little life wisdom about relationships, a little about work and school, and a little about spirituality. The researcher did not ask them to read every entry in the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet because he thought doing so would be unnecessary in order to catch the messages in the booklet. Many of the entries were somewhat repetitive, and the researcher did not want length to be an obstacle for the young adults. But perhaps this was a mistake to make the exposure so small, resulting in a sometimes less than enthusiastic change in opinion.

The researcher bases this reasoning in part of the work of Ronald Hansen, who concluded that real learning (and thus change in behavior and attitude) begins with and hinges upon the experiences of the learner.<sup>26</sup> In other words, it is experience that makes learning effective, and the more experience one has, the greater the learning impact. This is likely why there was not as large an attitudinal change between Surveys One and Two

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald E. Hansen, "The Role of Experience in Learning: Giving Meaning and Authenticity to the Learning Process in Schools," *Journal of Technology Education*, vol. 11 no. 2 (2000): 23, 31.

as the researcher had hoped. Perhaps the learning and consequent change in opinion would have been more dramatic if the young people had been able to meet with the older adults face to face and develop relationships with them. The researcher concludes from this that, if these survey takers were to develop a protégé-mentor relationship with an older adult, they would find Hansen's research to be correct and their opinion would become highly favorable. They would find factual insights of course from these mentoring relationships, but more importantly, their increased experiences with older adults would more likely change their lives.

Another possible reason for the lack of change was the higher than expected regard for elder wisdom held by this particular pool of young people. The researcher had made an understandable supposition based on his own interactions with younger and older adults, based on cultural communiqués and based on reading the books and journal articles outlined in Chapter Three, that younger adults do not perceive the wisdom of older adults as advantageous in their quest to find the meaning of life and life values. The research of many others indicates a stigma toward older people to be within cultural norms. This stigma is that the thinking of older people is not necessarily better. This researcher assumed some of this bias controls peoples' thinking. Younger adults seemed especially vulnerable to this stereotype. Thus, he had assumed prior to conducting the surveys that a much larger number of young people surveyed would have had a low esteem of elder wisdom.

The researcher was challenged in this assumption by the higher-than-expected positive regard toward elder wisdom. These respondents had not yet been exposed to the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet, and there was still eighty five percent positive regard



for elder wisdom, even if much of it was lukewarm (“somewhat agree”). Above, the researcher has already analyzed the possible reasons for this difference. He mentions it now because it may well have been the reason of the less-than-expected rise in esteem of elder wisdom. In other words, if he had surveyed a wider cross section of Americans, it is possible he would have seen a steeper rise in esteem. The wider cross section may very well have begun at a lower level of “agree,” one more reflective of the larger population. This could have turned into a sharper rise than what was actually seen.

#### *Conclusion to the Surveys*

The young adult responses from Survey One show that they already highly favored receiving input from older adults. The differences between Surveys One and Two was an eight percent increase in favorable opinion toward elder wisdom, and a seven percent decrease in the lukewarm, “somewhat agree” favorable opinion. This comparison was both insightful and adverse for the researcher’s assumptions. The researcher’s reasoning had been that after the young adults read the life stories of older adults, their positive response rate would be much higher in Survey Two than in Survey One.

Yet, responses to Survey Two questions are valuable. It revealed that the small exposure to the *Life Wisdom Collection* booklet had indeed moved several respondents away from the lukewarm “somewhat agree.” It also showed that a small amount of exposure had a positive rather than a negative influence on opinions, moving several young adults to want to take action. Overall, this supports rather undermines the researcher’s premise.

## Conclusion

Typically, young adults believe they have life's tiger by the tail. However, they are often not aware that they will face severe catastrophes. These crises can extinguish the hope of young adults, causing them to respond with anger, bitterness, resentment, frustration and blame. C. S. Lewis expressed well the sentiments of many Christian young people who do not have a sense of perspective borrowed from older adults Christians: "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both."<sup>27</sup> Frustration at the unhappiness of life has led many Christian young people to abandon hope for self-actualization and spiritual self-actualization.

But one of the over-arching insights from all the interviewees was that one of God's most wonderful and powerful gifts is the gift of pain. Several interviewees expressed in one way or another that it is by facing pain that a person comes to realize that he or she is not the center of the universe. It is by facing pain that a person comes to realize that he or she needs God's help for everything.

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<sup>27</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 16 and 30.

However, appreciation for the gift of pain is rarely discovered on its own. It comes best through the wisdom of older Christians who have already gone down the path of life. These older Christians can look back and connect all the dots of life. They have the perspective to see how pain fits into God's plan. They have the experience to see how it is all leading toward Christian self-actualization.

What's more, according to the researcher's survey findings, Christian young adults themselves testify to the importance of elder wisdom for finding the path to self-actualization. The overall increase of agreement that elder wisdom is applicable to young adults, 48 percent in Survey One to 56 percent in Survey Two, shows that young people themselves, when exposed to a small amount of it are more willing to embrace it. This significantly supports the idea that life-wisdom advice of older Christians is clearly applicable and valid for moving young adults closer to Christian self-actualization while they are still young.

## CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis project was to establish that the life-wisdom of older Christian adults is valid for helping younger Christian adults achieve Christian self-actualization. The researcher, after studying this transfer in Scripture and in relevant literature, and after conducting and analyzing mixed qualitative and quantitative research about the attitudes of young Christian adults toward older Christian adults, has formulated three principles as well as recommendations for changes in ministry that arise from these principles.

### **Principles of Transferring Life Wisdom from One Generation to the Next**

The researcher has formulated three principles for how younger adults can benefit from the wisdom of older adults. These principles are (1) Christian young adults should embrace the wisdom of older Christians; (2) Christian Elders Should Embrace Young Adults; and (3) both generations should look to God for Christian self-actualization.

#### *Principle One: Christian Young Adults Should Embrace Elder Wisdom*

The first principle for transferring life-wisdom from one generation to the next is that Christian young adults should learn to embrace the wisdom of Christian elders. Many Christian young people believe that the advice of their elders is irrelevant, inapplicable, or invalid. As Chapter Three explained, differing generational attitudes toward life and the ever-growing problem of age discrimination has influenced younger adults devalue older adults. Certain practices and perspectives of higher education, such as

existentialism, nihilism, materialism, and postmodernism, especially when combined with the Socratic method, can leave young adults with the impression that life's meaning and the pathway to self-actualization must be discovered afresh with each new generation. But when young adults discover the benefits of older adult wisdom, they will begin to understand the frustration they have felt from only following the advice of their peers.

### **From Scripture**

From Scripture, Moses and Joshua both exemplified the benefits of embracing life-wisdom from their elders. The Book of Proverbs is structured around a father and mother's exhortation to their young son to listen carefully to life wisdom handed down to him. In other words, God's intent is for young people to actively listen to and accept wisdom transferred to them. The cautionary tale of King Rehoboam warns younger people against spurning the advice of their elders. Jesus' and Paul's disciples all placed value on embracing life-wisdom from more experienced and spiritually advanced people, as with Paul's specific instructions for how older adults are to contribute to the spiritual self-actualization of younger men and women.

### **From the Related Literature**

The literature related to this topic also argues that Christian self-actualization comes best through the life-wisdom of elders. Research indicates that young adults are searching for their meaning and purpose, and nearly half expect their education to have helped them.<sup>1</sup> Older people are generally better suited than educational systems to pass

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<sup>1</sup> Judy Rogers and Patrick Love. *Women in Higher Education, Supporting Students' Search for Meaning in Their Lives*. Los Angeles: Graduate School of Education Research Institute, University of California, 2013, 1-5

along life-wisdom, according to researchers like Steve Chalke,<sup>2</sup> Gail Sheehy<sup>3</sup> and Michelle Carlson and colleagues.<sup>4</sup> Research on the aging brain<sup>5</sup> reinforces this idea, as well as insights from Caroline Bassett, who explained that older people have greater capacity to possess the kind of wisdom that thinks first of the best solution for the most people.<sup>6</sup> Sally Newman and Alan Hatton-Yeo concluded that young adults will gain “increased self-esteem and self-confidence, and a deeper understanding of older adults. . . . If they follow skillful, experienced personalities to shape their values and mature behaviors.”<sup>7</sup> The benefit of an older person leading a protégé into spiritual self-actualization is evident in both secular and scriptural scholarship.

In addition to being better than the educational system, researchers like Monika Ardelt have found that younger people who wish to be successful and to achieve self-actualization later in life need to listen to the life-wisdom of the elderly while they are still young.<sup>8</sup> Finally, researchers and scholars Robert Greenleaf, Justin Irving and Terry Walling argue that the literature on mentoring provides a strong support for the idea that young people should find the life-wisdom advice of the elderly to be valid for self-actualization and spiritual self-actualization. Greenleaf recommended mentoring relationships between older, wiser adults and younger adults because they are “healing,”

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<sup>2</sup> Chalke, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Sheehy, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Carlson et al., 867-879.

<sup>5</sup> “Fact Sheet: the Benefits of Intergenerational Programs,” accessed December 12, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Bassett, accessed December 12, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Ardelt, 15.

and “a powerful force for the transformation of the follower.”<sup>9</sup> Irving found that older leaders play a critical role in the formation of meaning in young people.<sup>10</sup> Walling writes that mentors lead their protégés to finish well, inspiring and challenge them.<sup>11</sup>

### **From the Interviews**

Finally, the discoveries from the researcher’s project provide a qualitative comparison affirming the scriptural truths and related research literature. Both the interviews and the surveys support the researcher’s assertion that young people need to embrace elder wisdom.

The interviewee responses are a wealth of wisdom directly applicable to helping young adults achieve Christian self-actualization. “Spirituality and Struggle” and “Faith and Fulfillment” demonstrate methods for struggling young Christians to overcome and grow from trials through Christ. The interviewees’ admissions of faith and fulfillment and successes and failures that show young people a path toward a fulfilling life of faith. The interviewees’ responses to the third theme of “Relationships” revealed that there is nothing new under the sun regarding the challenges of relationships. But the way in which these older Christians have learned how to cultivate thriving relationships paves a clear path for young Christians who are bewildered by them. The responses to the fourth theme, “Work Attitudes and Behaviors,” shows that older Christians have encountered the same work-related issues that face young adults, and that the older Christians know how to successfully navigate them, giving younger adults entering the work market

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<sup>9</sup> Greenleaf, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Irving, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Walling, 88-89.

insights unimaginable on their own. These insights, if applied, can bring greater work contentment and help with work stress and avoiding mistakes.

The most persuasive argument in favor of Principle One is the interviewees themselves. It was a surprising discovery for the researcher that not one contributor wavered in his or her expression of conviction, confidence and calm. These men and woman lived solely to follow Jesus Christ, and this came through clearly in each of their answers to the questions. Their responses were very well thought out, mature, complete and profound. The focus of their conversations was on God's care, love and wonder. In short, each one was a model of Christian self-actualization, worthy of being imitated and closely heard by young adult Christians.

### **From the Surveys**

The results of the surveys of young adults indicated that they would benefit from developing a relationship with an older adult. Those who agreed and somewhat agreed with this idea indicated their lives have needs that are not being met. The unexpectedly high positive regard toward elder wisdom in Survey One showed an openness and a desire for elder wisdom already exists. The changes between Survey One and Survey Two, though smaller than the researcher had hoped, show that the exposure to older adult wisdom does indeed meet a need felt by young Christian adults. This should lead them to a mentor-protégé relationship with an older adult. Unfortunately, this more than likely will not happen without an intentionally organized format.

All the data sources argue powerfully for Principle One: young people should embrace the wisdom of the elderly if they hope to achieve self-actualization while still young.



*Principle Two:  
Christian Elders Should Embrace Young Adults*

Just as it is in the best interest of Christian young adults to embrace the life-wisdom of older Christian adults, the elderly should embrace young adults. The researcher's data from Scripture, from related literature, from his interviews and from the surveys demonstrate this principle.

**From Scripture**

In Scripture, the Pentateuch declared that children were to receive life-wisdom from their parents and grandparents. Moses commanded parents and grandparents, "Teach them [the requirements of the Law] to your children and to their children after them" (Deut. 4:9). God's intent is for younger men and women to be nurtured by experienced persons. The elderly are to carry out this mission because, "People in older age will bear fruit, and they will stay fresh and vibrant" (Psalm 92:14). God's wisdom in Proverbs 16:31 is, "The gray head is a crown of glory." Job claimed, "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding with the length of days" (Job 12:12). Jesus and Paul modeled discipleship so that future generations could achieve Christian self-actualization. Jesus in particular modeled that He was not here to have His needs met but to meet people's needs (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10, 22:27). He came not to be lauded, but to serve to meet humankind's need, and exhorts mature Christians to do the same for protégé's (Phil. 2:6). No matter how intelligent and gifted a young person may be, God knows he or she needs help from parents and the aged to discover life's meaning and purpose. Both Scripture and its scholars agree that elderly friends make critical contributions to the development of maturity and spiritual depth.

### **From Related Literature**

The related literature also supports the idea that the elderly are to invest in younger adults. Walling argued that instead of following the classic retirement model, a “cultural phenomenon more than a biblical mandate,”<sup>12</sup> older Christians should invest in relationship with younger protégés. Chalke,<sup>13</sup> Sheehy,<sup>14</sup> Bassett,<sup>15</sup> Carlson,<sup>16</sup> and Newman and Hatton-Yeo<sup>17</sup> all acknowledged the need for older adults to mentor young adults so that the younger adults would more accurately find their way because of the superior wisdom of older individuals.

### **From the Interviews**

Many interviewees acknowledged that in their young adult experiences that many of their failures could have been avoided and that their successes could have been enhanced through interactions with older adults. The conviction of most was that today’s developing adults have similar problems they had at the same age. Participants often commented that they came to understand the pathway to spiritual self-actualization from their experiences and from listening to older people in their lives.

Remembering their own need for mentoring, these seniors were discovering a sense of their potential contribution in the lives of younger adults. Many said they would like to add to the wellbeing of younger adult lives. These interviewees understood that

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<sup>12</sup> Walling, 88-89.

<sup>13</sup> Chalke, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Sheehy, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Bassett, 2, accessed Dec. 10, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson, 867-879.

<sup>17</sup> Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 33

this contribution would both benefit themselves and influence young people toward self-actualization. All of them had a sense of a responsibility to pass on their gifts and insights. Rather than focus their lives on having their needs met or “retire” and check out from life, each was eager to make a difference in another person’s life. Each wanted to set aside his or her planning and desires in order to meet another person’s need. Just as Jesus humiliated himself to meet humanity’s need, these interviewees subdued their personal quests in life in order to lead others on their journeys.

As the researcher conducted the interviews, his conviction grew that each of these older adults should be tutoring or mentoring or in some way leading a high school, college student, or other young adult. They should be guiding them through life’s challenges into a new life in Christ because each was such a fountain of wisdom and encouragement.

### **From the Surveys**

The surveys also confirmed that young adults are open to receiving life wisdom from older adults. Even before reading the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet, eighty-four percent of the survey respondents expressed some level of openness to this mentoring, even though for several, that openness was rather lukewarm. This means that mentoring by older adults is a felt need for many Christian young adults.

#### *Principle Three: Look to God for Self-Actualization*

The third principle is that both generations, the elderly and the younger one, should look to God for self-actualization.

### **From Scripture**

The researcher made the claim that Scripture portrays Jesus as the model *par excellence* of someone who knew life's meaning and His own purpose. He was the quintessentially self-actualized person. Jesus modeled both self-actualization itself and two important behaviors that follow from it: first, the humbling of oneself, and second, the transfer of life-wisdom from one generation to the next. Jesus' confidence in knowing His purpose and the meaning of life gave Him an internal foundation from which He could sacrifice Himself. For this reason, both generations ought to look to Jesus as their model for their own self-actualization.

### **Related Literature**

The related literature also supports the idea that both generations should look to God for Christian self-actualization. One reason for this claim is the way in which Jesus fulfills Maslow's ideal of a self-actualized person. No other person in Maslow's long list of self-actualized people exhibits the qualities of a self-actualized person as well as Jesus Christ. No other person than Jesus so fully and consistently demonstrated so many of Maslow's characteristics of a self-actualized person.

Beyond the way in which Jesus Himself perfectly models self-actualization, it is appropriate to look to God for self-actualization because it is so closely related to the meaning of life and is in essence a spiritual hunger. Furthermore, the fruit of self-actualization is closely related to the "fruit of the Spirit" that Christians are expected to bear in order to demonstrate their spiritual maturity. Above all, Christ claimed that He Himself is the means to this Christian maturity, fulfillment and self-actualization. All of

these points argue for the claim that Christians should look to God to achieve self-actualization.

### **The Interviews**

The interviews confirmed this principle that those seeking Christian self-actualization, along with those seeking to help them, ought to look to God for this. Both the themes “Spirituality and Struggle” and “Faith and Fulfillment” revealed that the interviewees achieved Christian self-actualization by turning to God. Whether it was through prayer, fellowship with other Christians, Scripture study, or by any of the other means of grace, the interviewees all had the experience of attaining self-actualization’s confidence, success and humility when they sought God and found Him.

The first set of questions in the interview focused on spiritual attitudes and practices. These adults had learned that their lives changed when they applied the teaching from God’s word rather than just read it or listen to it preached. A gentleman whose career was successful explained, “I found years ago in my successes I had confusion and struggles. But when I prayed and asked God to help me, He protected me, guided me and met my needs.” Each of their responses describing their spiritual lives was confident, self-assured and calm, symptoms of spiritual actualization. Their lives testified to Christian self-actualization through Christ.

The interviewees’ words also testified to this. “Look to God” was the consistent advice of all the interviewees for younger generations. Whatever the theme or topic, the interviewees again and again recommended turning back to God to achieve self-actualization. For example, even the theme of “Work Attitudes and Practices” was

saturated with spiritual significance for the interviews, all of whom expressed relying on God for guidance, strength and provision in their careers.

### **The Surveys**

The surveys implicitly support Principle Three, even though the researcher did not ask participants to explicitly draw a connection between elder wisdom and Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, the openness to elder wisdom that eighty-four percent of the respondents expressed shows and overall openness to looking beyond oneself and one's peers for fulfillment and direction. This could be symptomatic of a larger willingness to look to God for Christian self-actualization.

The data from the investigation into Scripture, related literature, the lives of fourteen older Christians and 39 young adults revealed three principles: Christian young adults should embrace elderly Christians, elderly Christians should embrace Christian young adults and that both should look to God to achieve spiritual self-actualization. These three principles are based on the researcher's discovery and assertion that the life-wisdom of older Christian adults contributes to helping younger Christian adults achieves Christian self-actualization.

### *Recommendations and Conclusions*

Based on this research project and on these three principles, the researcher has devised several recommendations for how churches and other organizations can apply these principles in a practical way so that life-wisdom will be transferred successfully from an older to a younger generation. The desired result is that younger adults will more easily find keys to unlock the meaning and purpose of their lives and move not only into self-actualization but Christian self-actualization.

The first recommendation is for Christian groups and organizations to move away from the current emphasis on groups segregated by age. The majority of churches market themselves in both outreach and internal ministries to attract younger adults while for the most part ignoring older adults. This creates churches dominated by populations of younger adults who can gain knowledge and be entertained in worship, but who do not gain the depth they need from an adult who has “been there, done that.” The unfortunate result of this age-specific targeting is shallow Christians who do not know how to achieve Christian self-actualization. Thus, the researcher recommends that church leaders recognize the extreme benefit of a wide range of adult groups which can provide spiritual growth for both older to younger generations, and which allow for all generations to mix with one another.

A second recommendation is that churches train their own spiritual leaders to better understand and accept the importance of transferring life-wisdom from one generation to the next. Christian leaders must discover the value of older Christians mentoring younger adults. They must discover the benefits of putting the two generations together for life change. These Christian leaders need to believe, accept and then apply God’s design that white haired seniors are a large part of God’s prescription to mature young adults.

The third recommendation is for churches and organizations to find ways to train older generations to be more pro-active and intentional mentors. Training will heighten an older person’s ability to coach and guide protégés. Many older Christians can become even more effective mentors as they improve their leadership abilities. For instance, listening is a critical leadership skill, and older Christians will enhance their influence if

they can better understand a follower's issues through listening. When potential mentors are nurtured in these skills, they can provide more precise advice. When senior adults learn to listen better to a young person's life story, they can better determine the most precise way to advise them. A mentor's ability to listen, understand, empathize, affirm and lead a younger adult contributes to mentoring excellence. This training of older mentors can also be accomplished through peers who already coach young people.

The fourth recommendation is that older Christians be given more opportunities to actively share their wisdom with younger generations. Churches can make this sharing happen at regular Sunday morning services. If they allow others to preach besides the ordained pastor, or if they make room for testimonies by congregants, this sharing can be facilitated through the regular services. Other helpful traditions include Sunday school or mid-week Bible studies or small groups, any of which can be opportunities for older Christians to share their experiences of learning to deal with real life. This can create a pathway for young adults to discover Christian self-actualization. One thing that was abundantly evident to the researcher during the course of this project was that older Christians want to walk with younger adults and to give them help to find their way in life. But many of these older adults feel insecure and almost fearful of actually making a difference in the next generation. Churches can help move older Christians past this insecurity by providing opportunities for them to share.

The life-wisdom and self-actualization to which older Christian adults have attained provides adults two generations younger footprints that lead to the meaning of life. Mentors invite their protégés to live for spiritual self-fulfillment. Their life-wisdom enriches the emotional responses, the understanding of life, the acceptance of life's



purpose, the affirmation of values, the comprehension of a life-vision, the determination of the life calling of Christian young adults. In short, these recommendations will help one generation give younger adults footprints to find the meaning of life.

The need for older mentors is almost endless. Too often younger adults do not discover the benefits of older males and females helping them resolve life's pressures. Instead, young adults are left to feel only panic, stress and insecurities. A growing relationship with a guide who knows life's frustrations and how to resolve these is crucial.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project**

#### *Strengths*

There were several strengths in the research project. First, the research successfully demonstrated that life-wisdom advice from older Christians is indeed valid and applicable to young adult Christians. More important than the mere discovery of this is the fact that this life-wisdom will change the lives of follower. Each theme of the findings demonstrated that older Christian adults advice could relate to the experiences of younger Christian adults, because the lessons learned by the elders are transferrable to the younger generation.

Second, the research creates a bridge between the disconnected generations. It shows the applicability of wisdom from older generations, and thereby increases the possibility of creating a bridge both generations can use to reconnect in a significant way.

A third strength in the research was the successful integration of the Christian meaning of life with and the secular concept of self-actualization. Sometimes evangelical Christians and secular psychologists eye one another with mutual suspicion. Sometimes

the philosophical premises of certain schools of theologians, scholarship, and psychology differ on many points. But this research showed many points of legitimate integration between the Christian and secular concepts and viewpoints. Both Christian leaders and psychologists look for ways to release and improve people's lives, and this research gives them all many points of commonality. In a related strength, the research deepens the Christian understanding of the meaning of life with the concept of self-actualization. Too often Christian belief systems distract believers from the full Christian meaning of life. But following the research theology and psychology and sociology concerning self-actualization will open up readers to an even deeper and fuller understanding of Christian fulfillment and spiritual self-actualization.

A fourth strength was that the interview questions were appropriately crafted and the interviews were well conducted to obtain the maximum data possible. The researcher had wrongly assumed that the variety of questions and topics in the interviews might surprise or confuse respondents. Instead, the interviewee's responses to each question were filled with conviction, confidence and calm. This surprised the researcher and encouraged him that his research had been well performed.

A fifth strength was that this research provides a new level of awareness and application for churches and organizations to develop young adult growth in Christian self-actualization.

Sixth, the interviews provide younger adults with guidance that is accurate, proven and reliable. Christian young adults can discover the wisdom and advice gathered by the researcher in this thesis and experience genuine movement toward Christian self-actualization. When God uses these discoveries, contributions and recommendations to

infuse deep insight and wisdom into the lives of younger adult's, their journey toward Christian self-actualization changes their lives.

### *Weaknesses*

There were several weaknesses in the research project.

First, the data lacked insights from the leaders of organizations that develop maturing adults through older adult mentoring. If the researcher were to repeat the project, he would have sought their contributions in order to triangulate the data.

A second weakness was the data lacks interview insights from young adults themselves. While the surveys were a helpful way to get inside the minds of several young adults, their deeper input through extended interviews would have provided discoveries, which would have helped triangulate the data as well.

A third weakness was the lack of investigation into the success of mentoring programs. The researcher would have loved to have taken the time to study the effect of seasoned adults who mentor adults two generations younger. In an ideal world he would have examined how these groups interacted and discovered their recommendations for powerful outcomes.

Fourth, the project did not provide an opportunity for its participants to mentor young adults. Several indicated a desire to do so, but the researcher did not have the resources to match such mentor-protégé pairs.

A fifth weakness was that the researcher did not gather data about whether or not the interviewees had themselves been mentored by an older adult when they were young. Some of our participants mentioned the effects of older adults in their growth. The interviewees should have been asked more specifically if an older adult had contributed

to their lives, and if so, at what age and with what outcome.

A sixth weakness was that the researcher did not make a comparison between a group of young adults who had been mentored by older Christians and a group who had not. The researcher would have loved to discover the measurable costs afflicted on young adults who rely predominately on peer advice.

The researcher regretted not asking interviewees “How easily do you develop relationships?” in the section of questions about Relationships. He felt that such a question would have yielded even more rich and valuable discoveries and contributions for the research problem.

Overall, the research methodology could have been improved. A series of miscommunications prevented the researcher’s original plan of analyzing sixty completed surveys from young adults in his first attempt to distribute them. He had chosen a colleague to administer the survey, under the belief that the young adults would be more honest if they took the surveys without the researcher present. He gave this colleague very clear instructions for how to conduct the surveys. Unfortunately, this associate improperly handed out the surveys and the *Life Wisdom Collections* booklet the first time. He handed out the surveys and booklets together, and then told sixty potential young adult participants to do them on their own time and to return them by a certain time. They were supposed to be done under the administrator’s direct supervision, and in a certain order (First take Survey One, then read the booklet, then take Survey Two). But none of these things happened, and out of the sixty copies, only one copy of both completed surveys was returned to him.

The researcher thought he had been very clear giving this associate the instructions for completing the surveys. The researcher realized that in the future he needed to type research instructions for anyone helping him so they could hear and see the research protocol. He also realized that it would help to ask anyone to whom he delegates responsibility to read the instructions back to the researcher with the opportunity to ask process questions.

Another improvement would have been the addition of the survey question: “Given the opportunity, would you respond to an invitation to be paired with an older adult and benefit from their understanding of life?” Discovering the responses to this question would have helped the researcher determine whether or not young adults concerning were open to a relationship with an older adult.

The researcher also would have conducted his overall interactions with research participants differently, in a manner more in tune with his own natural style. He has learned that the average attention span of American adults is five to seven seconds. So he has learned when speaking to have his presentation focus on one word. Then his sub-points focus on that word. The results have been very favorable—when people leave his presentations they articulate what was presented. This discovery by the researcher has greatly improved audience memory when he speaks. Thus, when interviewing senior adults and having younger adults take the surveys, the researcher would have used one word that captures the reason for the research. He then would have repeated this word a number of times at appropriate times. Then, participants in both age groups would know exactly what their compliance is providing for the research.

Finally, the researcher thinks in hindsight that after taking the surveys it would have been a good idea to have asked specific questions to the young adult survey takers about age bias facts and provided them information about age bias. Using this format the researcher could have led the survey takers to determine whether or not their opinions of older adults are based on vague notions they have heard and accepted as fact. At this juncture the group can choose to evaluate their thinking and choose to be open to the benefits of a senior adult in their life.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Six demonstrated the validity of an older adult's life-wisdom for helping young adults achieve Christian self-actualization. This chapter reflects on the contribution this research project has made to the field of transferring life-wisdom from one generation to the next. The responses of both age groups capture powerful insights for the transfer of wisdom from an older to a younger generation. The research makes both generations understand how desperately they need each other. This is an essential discovery.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

In this chapter the researcher reflects on his academic and spiritual journey, as well as on the potential avenues for future related research.

### **Personal Reflections**

The researcher thanks the Lord for giving him the opportunity to participate in the Bethel Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program. His relationships with his cohort colleagues, the insights gained from the professor's lectures and the process of completing the thesis, have all been are inspiring. They have changed his perceptions, challenged his presumptions and motivated him to new, more expansive goals.

### *Relationships*

The researcher's relationships with his professors and fellow students live on in his heart and mind as priceless treasures. These precious men and women have shared their faith, struggles and spiritual resolutions. This has affected the researcher's values and motivation. These men and women modeled authentic faith, and a means of handling disappointments by choosing to surrender to God. They shared God's light and community with the researcher. Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed what relationships with cohort members and professors have been to the researcher:

It is in the light that the good works of the disciples are meant to be seen. Men are not to see the disciples but their good works, says Jesus. And these works are none other than those, which the Lord Jesus himself has created in them by

calling them to be the light of the world under the shadow of His cross. It is by seeing the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God.<sup>1</sup>

The professors and cohort members continue to stimulate the researcher's spiritual health.

The Holy Spirit began liberating the researcher from himself. God gave him a very special gift of learning with this group, choosing to accept each member, and then choosing to learn from each other's success and failures.

These relationships supported the researcher and his wife through her battle with cancer. The diagnosis left them feeling as Henri Nouwen felt when he wrote his journal entries published as *The Inner Voice of Love*. Nouwen chose to leave scholarship for a ministry in which he endured eight years of misery. He lost his self-esteem, his energy to live and work, his sense of being loved, even his hope in God. Nouwen's experience taught him,

there is a deep hole in your being, like an abyss. God will send you the people with whom you can share your anguish, who can lead you closer to the true source of love. God is faithful to His promises. Only by attending to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy. A community can let you experience the fact that, beyond your anguish, there are human hands that hold you and show you God's faithful love. You have to trust the place that is solid, the place where you can say yes to God's love even when you do not feel it. God has promises that you will receive the love you have been searching for. God is faithful to that promise. You will never succeed in filling that hole, because your needs are inexhaustible. When you acknowledge your loneliness in a safe, contained place, you make your pain available for God's healing. God does not want your loneliness; God wants to touch you in a way that permanently fulfills your deepest need<sup>2</sup>

In particular, Nouwen's phrase, "God will send you the people with whom you can share your anguish, who can lead you closer to the true source of love" expresses Bethel's design and what this cohort has meant to the researcher. God allowed the researcher to

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, McMillan Publishing, 1937), 133.

<sup>2</sup> Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love* (New York: An Image Book, 1996), 3-9, 47.



live with extreme home struggles as he aged. He asked a simple question in those years, “Does anyone love me?” The Lord placed him with his professor and cohort members so that each could experience their spiritual love and then refine his faith.

During his wife’s cancer treatments, these friends shared the couple’s pain and their fears. They supported them with God’s care. These dear friends held Karen in their hearts, prayed for her and encouraged them. Oswald Chambers learned, “Friendship is rare on earth. It means identity in thought and heart and spirit.”<sup>3</sup> John the Apostle reflected that for the Christian, their fellowship is with the Father, with His Son and with one other (1 John 1:3). The men and women of the cohort challenged the researcher to become the man God created him to be so that he would accomplish God’s calling and mission for his life. The professor’s lectures, discussions with cohort members and experiencing their love continues to stimulate the researcher to give love to everyone.

Even the relationships with the research participants proved helpful to the researcher’s family in a very practical way. The researcher personally experienced the benefit that younger adults can find when interacting with older people of wisdom. For example, one older couple among the interviewees talked with the researcher and his wife about a family tension they had experienced. This was the same heartbreaking experience of the researcher and his wife. Listening to their story and the wisdom they learned through the process was healing and gave the researcher and his wife hope. Eventually the researcher experienced God’s healing in his family situation. The older couple’s faith was inspiring for the researcher and his wife. This gave them the confidence to face their pain and affirm the value of older adults mentoring younger adults.

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<sup>3</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), 7.

The faith, personalities and lives of the seventy and eighty-year old interviewees were and are inspiring personally to the researcher. Each one, in one way or another, encouraged him to persevere in walking closely with Lord. The researcher has walked with the Lord for forty-five years. But when he ponders and reflects upon the living testimonies of the older adult research community spiritual lives, he feels like a faith novice in comparison.

### *New Questions*

The researcher has found strength from how the research has caused him to reflect on one particular question that arose during the course of the project. This question is, “What makes persons or a person wise?” In this generation, knowledge has been substituted for wisdom. The accumulation of facts or theories is more valued than skilled discernment. In his first forty years, Moses was educated with the exceptional knowledge from Egypt. This prepared him, as it can for people today, to live within a knowledge-oriented culture. But it cannot prepare one for living and making astute life choices.

Determining if an individual has wise council begins with their lack of pride. Leadership trainers and potential protégé’s must know an older man or woman’s wisdom and prudence. Benefits emerge from such a relationship because they know “the Lord gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Prov. 2:6). The relationships between younger adults and wise older adults benefit them because, “the person who walks with the wise grows wise” (Prov. 13:20).

A wise person’s response when problems are solved echoes Daniel’s words: “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever, wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and

knowledge to the discerning” (Dan. 2:20b-21). The wisdom of older, maturing and senior adults is the application of God’s wisdom in relationships. The researcher wonder if he could have enhanced the overall research by asking the simple question, “What makes persons or a person wise”?

### *Lectures and Writing*

Interacting with the lectures challenged the researcher to make a change and begin putting the past behind him and living for what the Lord has in store for him. His sense is to pursue what Paul said about himself to the Philippian Christians.

I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back (Phil. 3:12-14).

A number of years ago the researcher’s life drastically changed. The Lord allowed situations into his life that were confusing and that altered his ministry. In the years since this, God changed his sphere of influence. This was upsetting when it occurred, and the researcher wondered if his leadership skills that he’d previously gained could apply to his new, altered situation. Now, after his years with Bethel Seminary, the researcher’s leadership skills have born fruit. He has put into practice the concepts taught by his professors. The professors’ lectures and assignments moved and motivated the researcher’s values. He discovered as he worked through a given topic that the information challenged him to a deeper devotion to the Lord. He found the assignments perfected his abilities as a leader on a daily basis.

Now he is able to evaluate situations better and see a preferred future. The frustration and pain of the past is now a source strength focused on the leadership of civic

and business pursuits and the leadership of clients and of a board of directors. He realizes in the success that he does not have it all together. There is an understanding the researcher is on the way God has intended as He searches the Lord's wisdom for leading in the nonspiritual world. The researcher thanks the Lord for the impact He has made through a willing heart whose eyes are on the goal. When any person's life is turned upside down there is confusion and disorientation. The researcher's grasp of leadership has flourished through our professors teaching.

More specifically the inspiration from the Doctor of Ministry lectures and assignments challenged the researcher to adopt new these new leadership concepts. The Spirit is using what he learned in class and from the Scriptures to change his thinking and behaviors. Through this process of considering what he was taught, the Lord will continue the progression of refining his faith. The tools he learned from the Doctor of Ministry program continue a transformation of his leadership vision and skills. The concepts presented urged each person not just to live, but to live so their leadership results in peoples' life change. The professors' intent and content invited the researcher to be led by the Holy Spirit, to know Him deeply, to walk through life with Jesus so those he trains will walk in Jesus' footprints (1 John 2:6).

The third Doctor of Ministry tool of gathering research data and writing the thesis was inspiring. The researcher believes that at the core of his leadership abilities is a daily choice. To focus one's thinking, emotions and choices on the Lord can be a struggle much like the thesis process. But the opportunity is to make the choice to confront this strife daily has lead him to set aside his old perspective and believe that God is working through this process.

### *Spiritual Formation*

As the researcher ventures out to live and to lead from what he has learned, he realized better than ever before that it is his oneness with the Trinity that will give him God's presence and power to accomplish His plan. This is true even when the researcher does not know what to expect and resolution seems impossible. The Lord prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one" (John 17:20-21). Often, thinkers and preachers relate this prayer for oneness to church unity. However, the essence of Christ's prayer is that believers can become one with Him and His Father.

A. W. Tozer's words express wonder of walking with God: "To have found God and still pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love. Scorned indeed too easily by the satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart."<sup>4</sup> The researcher has learned more deeply to be a child "of the burning heart."

The spiritual formation that has emerged from the researcher's studies and writing at Bethel Seminary are priceless. His biblical life purpose remains the same in many aspects but there are revisions he had not attained prior to this this degree. His faith and leadership standards have strengthened. His prayer is that God will enhance his vision, calling and mission so he lives God's priceless vision, calling and mission.

This Doctor of Ministry process was not without struggle. The researcher struggled to determine the precise problem statement. He made mistakes while participating in the thesis workshop. Were these frustrations justifiable? Or, was God

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<sup>4</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God, The Human Thirst For The Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 1993), 15.

using the tensions to create excellence in the thesis? This is part of the battle the researcher, as well as all Christians experience between their flesh and the Holy Spirit.

My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions or selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence? (Gal. 5:16-17, MSG).

God is using this intense struggle that the researcher does not fully comprehend as a means of leadership transformation to benefit people.

At these junctures the researcher had to make a choice; to choose to live pleasing the Lord or justify the human frustration (1 Thess. 4:1, Col. 1:10-12). Making this choice was the real challenge of the process of writing this thesis. The writer's understanding had to shift in order to agree with God. He had to accept that the Lord was using these events and interactions to hone excellence within him and the thesis.

God is changing the researcher each day so He continues to become his leader. The wisdom found in the Doctor of Ministry course content and in the process of research writing has developed the skills that the researcher needs to achieve God's excellence. God is teaching him the wonderful insights and skills essential to accomplish His plans for the researcher's leadership. No matter the position in which he serves, he has confidence that what he has learned "is an easy thing in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 3:18). In other words, in any situation or in any difficulty, the researcher can remember and believe, "Nothing is too hard for you Lord" (Jer. 32:17). No group of people will be too hard for the researcher to lead. The Lord gives His assurance and provides His direction so the researcher's leadership will lead to a harmonious yet a

heterogeneous group. “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘with man this is impossible, and all things are possible with God’” (Mark 10:27). The Lord is shaping the researcher to minister to the same types of audiences He challenged.

Listening to the senior adult responses to questions was a personally amazing experience for the researcher. While he expected these older adults to have more life experience than younger adults, their honest, heart-felt and wise expressions were not just above average, but exceptional. The researcher was also heartened at the findings of the surveys. God is using these above mentioned relationships, as well as the insights and wisdom gained from D Min studies and the research project, to facilitate the researcher’s own spiritual self-actualization.

### **Further Research**

Research projects could be pursued to expand upon the questions and recommendations of this work. One topic for investigation is to determine if the Christian self-actualization advice of forty to fifty year-old adults is as advantageous as that of seventy and eighty-year olds when compared to each other. The researcher desires to interview adults forty and fifty years of age, to see if their replies possess the same wisdom, understanding and inspiration of seventy and eighty year old adults.

Another possible avenue of future research is how to provide mentoring when a young adult’s upbringing has only cause pain. If older people can provide enormous benefits to younger people through their mentoring, then the reverse is also true: the lack of good mentoring by older generations can drastically inhibit a person’s growth. One interviewee still remembers vividly the rejection she felt from her parents. Moses wisdom for parents, (“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the

things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them (Deut. 4:9)) is very helpful for loving parents who guide their children and emerging adult children. A weakness to this model is the destructive fire set by parents' self-absorption and the difficulties faced by their children trying to extinguish it. Protégés too often find only a struggle to survive while succeeding and failing to find loving relationships. When an older adult provides this damaged "child" with Christ's love they can choose to move toward self and spiritual self-actualization.

This thesis project and many others kept begging the question: what causes this age bias among young adults? Related research should ask why young people often spurn the advice of older, wiser adults. This would help determine if it is age bias that causes many young adults to avoid a mentoring relationship. Do they feel superior or inferior towards experienced adults? Could it be exaggerated self-confidence? The results would provide insights into this group's thinking, resolution methodologies and satisfaction levels.

A fourth, related path of research would be to penetrate more deeply into the damaged psychology of many young people today. Too often these damaged younger adults have the same issues as their peers who do not know how their lives are damaged. Many of today's young people are doing whatever is necessary to medicate their pain rather than living to find Christian self-actualization. This research did not probe into younger adults psychological pathology, but future research should address it more deeply.

A fifth research path that overlaps the one just mentioned is to better uncover the



faulty worldviews that lead so many young people down the path of despair and ineffective living. The culture and younger people have been led to accept the worldview of materialism, postmodernism, humanism, hedonism and existentialism. These influences can lead young people to the common conclusion that there is no God and each person should get what he or she wants in life. Many adults, young people, teenagers and even children have knowingly or unknowingly been taught and have often accepted a worldview that does not lead to Christian self-actualization. The researcher would love someone to study how these negative worldviews can be counteracted by the classic Christian worldview through mentoring.

The opposite approach ought also to be pursued. Research would benefit this field that sought the optimal ways to use a mentor/protégé relationship so that it leads to Christian self-actualization. Studies are needed to determine if younger adults develop a better sense of self-esteem, life satisfaction, problem solving skills and contentment from interrelating with a seasoned adult. Future such investigations may provide evidence indicating whether or not young adult relationships with older mentors can improve their social, spiritual, occupational outcomes, and whether or not they better resolve depression symptoms and issues related to poor self-esteem and failure. Such studies could eventually be used to form a model of excellence, or a set of best practices for multi-generational mentor protégé relationships.

A related avenue of research would be to find reasons that young people desire a relationship with an older mentor—what influences younger people to seek and accept experienced adult counsel. What might motivate a young person, who has been hurt by the advice of peers, to turn to an older mentor instead? This sort of research would also

need to probe into the reasons why peer advice alone can cause suffering and pain. It would need to look at what induces a young person to look to peers instead of more experienced people in the first place. Is peer advice, input and guidance initially more calming to young peoples' anxieties? All this feeds into the question of how society might redirect this impulse to rely on peer advice.

Future research would also do well to figure out how to match the needs experienced by undergraduates and young adults to the successes and strengths of older adult advice. In other words, if a young adult is struggling with depression, how could he or she be matched up with an older adult who has experience overcoming depression?

### **Conclusion**

The interview and survey results opened the researcher's eyes. When he grew up, his home life and fractured family relationships did not guide him to develop mature relationships that helped him achieve Christian self-actualization. Just as many younger adults struggle with the same kind of liability, the researcher wishes he could have had one of these senior adults as his relationship mentor. From the results of these relationship interview questions, the researcher can grasp the immense benefit older mentors would give to young adults in their search for self-actualization. The improvement of young adult esteem toward elder wisdom recorded in the surveys gave the researcher to hopefulness of reconnecting the generations. He hopes this project will enable Christian young adults to embrace the wisdom of their elders, that it will help older Christian adults to embrace young adults, and that it will direct all the generations to look to Jesus for Christian self-actualization.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS WITH OLDER CHRISTIAN ADULTS

## **Appendix A: Interviews with Older Christian Adults**

### **Spiritual Attitudes and Practices**

1. Describe the spiritual practices you have used throughout your life. Please be as specific as possible.
2. How have these practices helped you find fulfillment and satisfaction?
3. Think of a very challenging situation you have faced. What did you do spiritually to thrive?
4. From your experience, what is the one thing about faith you would pass on to a younger adult?

### **Relationship Attitudes and Practices**

1. Explain the role that family has played in your fulfillment or frustration?
2. What relationship skills did you need to become a fulfilled person?
3. What advice would you give a younger adult on how to find fulfilling relationships?
4. From your experience, what is the one thing about relationship practices and attitudes you would pass on to a younger adult?

### **Work Attitudes and Practices**

1. How did your life's work (both jobs/career done for money and jobs done voluntarily) contribute to your life's fulfillment and satisfaction?
2. What was your pattern for balancing work and family/friendships and how did this balance help you feel fulfilled?
3. What should a young person do now to prepare for a fulfilling work life?
4. From your experience, what is the one thing about work you would pass on to a younger adult?

APPENDIX B: SURVEYS OF CHRISTIAN YOUNG ADULTS

**Survey 1**  
**Please take prior to reading the Life Wisdom Collection**

*Instructions:* Each of these items expresses a specific attitude toward life. As you read each item, circle the response that most accurately reflects your own feeling.

1. The advice of senior adults is applicable to my relationship problems.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
2. The advice of senior adults is relevant to my work and to my studies.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
3. Senior adult advice is pertinent to my spiritual life.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
4. I benefit directly from the wisdom of senior adults.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
5. Senior adults have learned how to deal with what I am going through today.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
6. I understand the meaning of life better because of my interaction with senior adults.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree
  
7. Senior adult advice helps me better understand what is important in life and what my purpose is here on earth.  
disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

Before moving to Survey 2 on the following page, please take some time to read the accompanying packet called "Life Wisdom Collection." It has three main sections: relationship struggles, work struggles, and spiritual struggles. Please choose and read 3-5 entries that begin with "when" in each of the three sections.

**Survey 2**  
**Please take after reading the Life Wisdom Collection**

Thank you for reading the Life Wisdom Collection. Now please circle the term that most appropriately reflects your attitude toward each statement.

1. The relational experiences of senior adults are applicable to my relationship problems.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

2. The advice from seniors concerning work and studies will be relevant to my work and to my studies.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

3. The advice of senior adults is pertinent to my spiritual life.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

4. I would benefit directly from the wisdom of a senior adult's understandings.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

5. My life is improved from my exposure to senior adults.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

6. I understand the meaning of life better because of my interaction with senior adults who have lived life and have gained knowledge through experiences like mine.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

7. The proven insights and understandings of the lives of senior adults will help me find my life's purpose.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

8. After reading this collection of stories, I have more appreciation for the wisdom and life experience of senior adults.

disagree                  somewhat disagree                  somewhat agree                  agree

9. After reading this collection of stories, I am more likely now to turn to senior adults because their experiences will give me the advice for my life's direction.

disagree

somewhat disagree

somewhat agree

agree



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