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A Co-created Incarnational Missiology For Evangelizing Hip-hoppers

Ferguson Lee Harris
Bethel University

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A CO-CREATED INCARNATIONAL MISSIOLOGY

FOR EVANGELIZING HIP-HOPPERS

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

IN LEADING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

BY

FERGUSON HARRIS

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First, I want to thank Bethel Seminary for allowing me to stay true to myself by researching hip-hop culture and music. Quite often, Christians who are affiliated with hip-hop music are unfairly criticized for such an association. I also thank my family, in particular my wife, for patiently enduring the late nights out, either writing or observing hip-hop artists at local hip-hop night clubs. This would not have happened without her support. In addition, I thank my children, who provided the passion needed to complete this project. I also thank holy hip-hop artists like Lacrae, Bizzle and Ambassador. Their music has personally strengthened my faith and provided an opportunity for me to have thought-provoking conversations with my sons as well as offer them alternatives to secular hip-hop. And to my editor, Andrew Gross, who has served as an excellent editor. His pastoral approach to providing feedback has helped me persevere. Also, I cannot forget my advisor Dr. Tim Senapatiratne. His consistent guidance helped me endure to completion. And finally, I sincerely thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me a passion for those who love secular hip-hop music.

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GLOSSARY

Culture: a "totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior."[1]

Gangsta' rap: "rap music with lyrics explicitly portraying the violence and drug use of urban gang life and typically expressing hostility towards whites, women, and civil authority."[2]

Hip-hop artist: an individual who performs hip-hop music, whether it is disk jockeying or rapping.

Hip-hop culture: a popular urban youth culture that began in the African American and Latino communities in New York, defined by five primary elements, rapping, disc jockeying, break dancing, graffiti art and spirituality.[3]

Hip-hop Generation: the generation that is concurrent with Generation X, but comprised primarily of African American people born between 1965 and 1984 who came of age in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, who share a specific set of values and attitudes. At the core are beliefs about family, relationships, child rearing, career, racial identity, race relations, and politics.[4]

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[1] R. T. Schaefer, *Sociology*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 65.

[2] *Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gangsta%20rap (accessed June 12, 2012).

[3] Emmet George Price, *Hip-hop Culture* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 21-40.

[4] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2002), 4.

Hip-hop's Second Generation: the generation that is concurrent with Generation Y or the Millennials. It is the generation born after 1985 and that came of age in the Third Millennium, who are experiencing the benefits earned by the Civil Rights Generation. This generation has experienced the social media boom, America's first Black president, and the accumulation of wealth by contemporary hip-hop artists.

Hip-hop or rap music: a music genre consisting of a stylized rhythmic beat that is accompanied by rapping, a rhythmic and rhyming speech that is recited. It originated in African American and Latino American communities during the 1970s in New York City.[5]

Hip-hoppers: those who love and are influenced by hip-hop culture and music.

Holy hip-hop: music with a Christian perspective, created with the dual purpose of challenging unbelieving hip-hoppers to submit their lives to Jesus and encouraging Christian hip-hoppers in their faith.

Human phenomenon: a reference to experiencing the human life cycle and development physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.

Norms: expectations about how people should behave in a particular social group or culture.[6]

Urban or Black church: an organized group of African American believers who, for the most part, live in African American neighborhoods. Members of such churches

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[5] "Hip-hop music" From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop_music (accessed November 27, 2012).

[6] S. A. McLeod, "SimplyPsychology," http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-roles.html (accessed July 29, 2013).

often face common social ills associated with ghetto neighborhoods, such as violence and

poverty.

ABSTRACT

This research project contextualized the gospel of Jesus Christ for unbelieving hip-hoppers. The research showed that hip-hop culture is a distinct culture that is worthy of contextualization by Christian evangelists. The literary review and the biblical implications suggest that it is the Christian's duty to contextualize the gospel for unbelieving hip-hoppers. This was concluded by presenting God's incarnational pursuit of sinful humanity in both the Old and New Testaments. God's self-initiated pursuit served as an example and mandate for believers to pursue unbelieving hip-hoppers.

In his quest to contextualizing the gospel, the researcher conducted a phenomenological investigation. The results of this investigation were then analyzed to discover the essence of each hip-hopper's experience with hip-hop music. Their individual experiences were then analyzed to discover the essence of their shared experiences. The findings revealed that experiences common to hip-hoppers are (1) their ability to relate to hip-hop artists; (2) the opportunity for self-expression; (3) the influence of the music on behavior and mood; and (4) the respect for authenticity on the part of the hip-hop artist. These common experiences served as a catalyst for discovering the deepest needs of hip-hoppers. This resulted in the following incarnational approach for contextualizing the gospel, Leaving and Leading, Listening and Learning and the critical analyzing and assessing of hip-hop Lyrics.

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my two sons, Khaleal and Isaiah Harris, whose love for secular hip-hop music concerned me because of the values it subliminally teaches. Quite often, I had to leave my place of comfort and lead in starting thought-provoking discussions about the music they love. I then would have to listen and learn, allowing them to teach me why they love the music. They served as mentors as I analyzed secular hip-hop lyrics and sought to discover the principles they taught. This generated many discussions, some that required patience and others that were intriguing and idea provoking. Because of our discussions, my passion for this project was sustained whenever I faced discouragement or fatigue.

This project is also dedicated to unbelievers who love hip-hop music. For many hip-hoppers, hip-hop music serves as a therapeutic means of self-expression. Hip-hop music speaks for the voiceless and speaks to the emptiness of this life. My hope is that this project serves as a tool for Christians to use to present a loving and pursuing God who wants to meet the deepest needs of unbelieving hip-hoppers through his intimate and incarnational presence.

*For the Son of Man came to **seek and save** those who are lost.*

Luke 19:10

Dear hip-hop, I met my real father

He said he loved me and he missed me and I'm not forgotten

He left me tons of messages but I must not of got em, I guess you must of lost them, but

anyway I found them

Hip-hop Artist Bizzle

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Problem and Its Context

The problem this project addressed was the lack of effective approaches for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers who are influenced by contemporary hip-hop music. In response to this problem the researcher developed a missiology contextualized for hip-hop culture. This evangelistic method was incarnationally co-created in cooperation with members of that hip-hop culture.

Hip-hop culture suffers from inadequate attention by missiologists. Those who construct evangelistic strategies often inaccurately group it together with the white youth culture of North America, imagining that the outreach tools and efforts of one are interchangeable with those of the other, ultimately dooming such efforts to failure. To construct a missiology contextualized for hip-hoppers, one that respectfully addresses hip-hoppers as they experience the world, the researcher conducted multiple in-depth interviews with 6 participants. The researcher then analyzed the data to discover emerging patterns and themes that described the essential meaning or essence of the participant's shared experiences with hip-hop music. This analysis, co-created with hip-hoppers themselves, was used as the basis for the researcher's contextualized hip-hop missiology. The method of research was qualitative in nature.

Delimitations

The research was limited to describing the participants' lived and shared social experience, or "Life World," of hip-hop culture and music. Therefore the project does not include a comprehensive history of hip-hop culture and music, or a description of them as a whole. The participants were limited to those who love and are influenced by hip-hop music. The methodology was limited to qualitative methods. Finally, the researcher limited his evaluation of effectiveness to the approach of this project, and did not evaluate the effectiveness of other evangelistic approaches to hip-hoppers.

Assumptions

This thesis project is guided by a certain set of assumptions. The first assumption is that the gospel ought to be contextualized for all different cultures. Second, hip-hop constitutes its own distinct culture, and is therefore in need of its own contextualized missiology. Third, hip-hop culture and music as a whole is not at odds with following Christ. Thus, a hip-hopper can be at peace with God, through Christ, and still love hip-hop culture and certain sub-genres of hip-hop music, such as holy hip-hop. Finally, the researcher assumes that the Bible is the final authority for determining how the Christian should live and what he or she should accomplish for God while on earth.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was to discover the biblical mandate for incarnationally engaging hip-hoppers. The second subproblem was to review literature about hip-hop culture and about the evangelistic methods used to reach unbelieving hip-hoppers in order to better understand this culture and the effectiveness of efforts to reach it. The third subproblem was to accurately discover and then describe the lived experiences of those

who are influenced by hip-hop culture and music, using an in-depth, multiple interview process. The fourth subproblem was to examine the lyrics of two hip-hop artists from both secular and holy hip-hop, analyzing, and to compare primary themes and the effects of secular hip-hop on the listener. This was done to determine whether holy hip-hop is an effective way to reach unbelievers with the gospel. The fifth subproblem was to develop an effective incarnational missiology that successfully presents the gospel to those who are heavily influenced by hip-hop culture and music.

Setting of the Project

Participants of the project were drawn from the second generation of hip-hop culture. This is the segment of the population, ages 18-35, who came of age in the most recent two phases of the evolving culture of hip-hop. According to hip-hop scholar Daniel White Hodge, "Hip-Hop music has gone from a social movement (1970s), to a marginalized political movement (mid-80s), to a mainstream entertainment genre and political movement (early 1990s), to a violent bicoastal clash (mid-1990s), to a celebration of hedonism (2000s)."[1] Participants were drawn from those who were shaped by these final two phases. This is a generation that came of age after the original "gangsta rap" music of the first generation of hip-hop. Participants were drawn from local churches, high schools, colleges and the military.

Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher and His Immediate Ministry Context

This project began as a reflection of the researcher's personal experience of the famous statement by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that "11AM Sunday morning is the

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[1] Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 58.

most segregated hour in America."[2] Regardless of the wider sociological truthfulness of this statement, which will be explored in the next section, it has certainly proven to be a reality in the researcher's own life.

The researcher's Christian experiences have taught him this central, yet disturbing truth: the church is divided along racial lines. Unfortunately, there is a Black church and a White church. The researcher attended many African American Baptist churches in his childhood and youth. The pastors and preachers were usually charismatic speakers who mastered the art of storytelling to communicate biblical truth. The music was "Black Gospel," accompanied by a multi-voice choir and most often directed by a flamboyant choir director who controlled both the choir and musicians with his or her ecstatic body movements. It was truly a lively experience.

However, upon joining the military at age 18, the researcher was forced to leave his myopic and exclusively African-American worship experience. He had the privilege of worshipping in various church settings and with various ethnic groups in different denominations. But as great a privilege as this has been for the researcher, the racial segregation became immediately apparent. The researcher noticed that when he attended a liturgical church, he was most often the only or one of the few African Americans in attendance. Or even when the researcher attended an Assemblies of God church, opposite in its less structured worship style, he would still be in the minority, although African Americans would be scattered throughout the congregation.

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[2] Martin L. King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1986), 270.

This sharp contrast to his upbringing required the researcher to open his mind to church experiences that were different from those he enjoyed as a boy. This diversity has proven to be highly beneficial to the researcher personally. But the racial divide that it exposed has served to arouse the researcher to new levels of concern for the welfare of the church.

A later experience in youth ministry reinforced the researcher's observation that Black and White churches are mostly segregated. When the researcher was a youth pastor at a predominantly Black church, he attended a summer elective course offered at a local seminary on effective ways to reach youth. In attending this course, the researcher hoped to gain insights for his ministry. But it quickly became abundantly clear that the teachers of this particular course were teaching ways to effectively reach White youth only. In fact, nothing they communicated related to what many of the youth in the researcher's church were experiencing in southeast San Diego, a predominantly Black, low-income area.

The researcher was shocked and a bit frustrated by the curriculum's marginalization of Black youth culture, even though he acknowledges that it may have been done unintentionally. Nevertheless, the focus of both this training and the majority of trainings for effective youth ministry have been White suburban youth.

Despite his frustration the researcher could empathize with some of the motivation for this focus. At about that time, two teenagers in the suburban area of Littleton, Colorado killed a number of their classmates at Columbine High. As a result, the White church, as well as White America in general, suddenly became more interested

in youth culture. They were seeking to solve what they perceived to be a problem in youth culture in general.

The researcher could understand this rising of tide of concern over youth culture provoked by well-publicized incidents like the Columbine shooting. But it was hard to ignore the duplicity of this new concern, for he was well aware from his own experience that just as, if not more, egregious violence had been perpetrated in African American and Latino youth communities for decades. The sad truth is that school shootings had been common in many inner city Black neighborhoods for years but were not presented as national problems. The following rhetorical question by Paul Kersey illustrates the point:

> So why does the media decide to highlight only cases of white violence at schools—turning it into a national story—and refrain from even mentioning the almost daily violence that is found at all-Black, 75 percent Black, all-Hispanic, 75 percent Hispanic, or the dreaded half and half Hispanic/Black school?[3]

Thus, while justifiable, this newfound concern over youth culture was in reality an inadvertent concern over White youth culture specifically, to the exclusion of other minority youth cultures.

Unfortunately, Blacks living in inner city ghettos are all too familiar with the lack of national reporting in regard to the problems in their neighborhoods, as the researcher will explain below. The researcher concluded from seeing this sharp contrast in concern that the racial divide in churches was impacting youth ministry. Black youth culture was being ignored, even as more attention was being paid to White youth culture.

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[3] Paul Kersey, "Stuff Black People Don't Like (SBPDL)," March 2, 2012, http://stuffblackpeopledontlike.blogspot.com/2012/03/school-shootings-and-white-people.html (accessed October 16, 2012).

When the researcher sat in this summer elective seminary course about effective ways to reach youth, he noticed that in spite of the enormity of problems faced by Black youth, there were no discussions on effective ways to reach them. There were no presentations on the unique challenges posed by inner-city ghetto life. This deeply frustrated the researcher. He realized that many of the youth he served lived in neighborhoods that were crime-ridden and drug-infested. Overworked and underappreciated single mothers led many of the homes in these neighborhoods. Yet there was no mention of these realities in the seminary elective.

The researcher has noticed that many of the books dealing with youth culture do not give the people in that culture a voice in helping to solve the problems in the culture, exacerbating this neglect of Black youth culture. In other words, the members of the targeted youth culture themselves are not adequately included in the process of contextualizing the gospel. While the researcher has found this to be true of youth ministry approaches in general, he has discovered it to be especially true of Black youth ministry. This has led to further frustration on the part of the researcher.

Because of the researcher's frustrations, he became a missionary to Black youth culture. In exegeting this culture, he discovered that Black youth are highly influenced by hip-hop music and culture. Reaching Black youth is therefore dependent upon understanding and embracing hip-hop music and culture. But the researcher has discovered in his experiences of working with youth ministry initiatives that hip-hop culture and music is never properly and adequately represented. It is a subculture that comes out of the inner city Black and Latin American experience. Therefore, those

attempting to contextualize the gospel to youth in general frequently fail to contextualize it for Black youth.

The researcher's later seminary training increased his determination to seek a contextualized gospel on behalf of Black hip-hoppers. While in seminary, when there were discussions on ways to meet the needs of the various generations in churches, terms like "Boomers," "X-ers" and "Millennials" were used to describe all Americans. However, after hearing the characteristics and traits of these particular generations, it became abundantly clear that the generations being described were White Americans.

For example, the Boomers were generally described as the generation born between the periods of 1943 to 1964 who are known for their rugged individualism and rejection of institutional authority. A few noteworthy events associated with Boomers are the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, as well crises like Watergate and the Vietnam War. Despite these challenges, the Boomer generation is known to have made significant contributions to the world. The Boomer generation is among the most represented as CEOs in today's multinational companies. They are also among the most represented as this country's politicians.

However, African Americans born in the same time frame experienced the events mentioned above differently. While White Boomers were protesting the Vietnam War, many African Americans of the so-called Boomer generation were protesting for equal rights and fairness. While White Boomers were fighting against traditional family values and institutions such as the church and government, many African American Boomers maintained their strength by depending on the church. In fact, the Civil Rights Movement was launched from the African American church. In general, African American

"Boomers" had vastly different experiences, and for that reason African Americans cannot be properly labeled "Boomers" as is widely conceived. They are more properly defined as the generation that experienced the Civil Rights Movement.

In a further example, when categorizing the next two generations of Americans as "Generation X-ers" and "Millennials," the same differences can be noted. "Generation X-ers" are generally described as those born between the years 1965 to 1985. Some of the common experiences that often describe "Generation X" are the highest divorce rates ever, the AIDS epidemic, the latchkey phenomenon, legalized abortion, and the dotcom boom.

While many of these were experienced in the African American community born in the same time frame, many African American youth and young adults encountered situations that strongly distinguished them from their White counterparts. For example, in the 80s and 90s, many African American youth and young adults lived in neighborhoods that were flooded by gangs and drugs. Other devastating situations included the crack cocaine epidemic and its destruction of many African American homes. It alone ensured the incarceration of a large number of African-American men. The AIDS epidemic dramatically hit the inner cities, and thus many of the African American communities. These experiences were compounded by a higher rate of unemployment among Blacks. Consequently, the experiences of many African American youth and young adults were different from those of white youth and young adults who are labeled "Generation X." Bakari Kitwana explains this phenomenon:

> Even at the height of the 1980s economic expansion, according to a 1989
> survey conducted by economists Richard Freeman and Lawrence Katz
> (The Boston Youth Survey, National Bureau of Economic Research,)

more than half of young Black men felt that they could do better financially in the underground economy than in the mainstream economy. High imprisonment rates due to increased policing focused on drug crimes have landed nearly 1 million Black men, many of them Hip-Hop generationers, behind bars. The crack explosion of the 1980s further heightened middle-class fears of Black violent crime. Despite higher rates of monthly drug use among whites, lawmakers insisted on more concentrated policing in Black communities.[4]

Because of this, African American youth and young adults, particularly males, faced experiences that were uniquely African American experiences. Therefore, African Americans do not fit the characteristics often associated with those who are labeled "Generation X." In contrast, African American "Generation X-ers" may more properly fit Bakari Kitwana's description of what he calls the "hip-hop generationers."[5] The hip-hop generation, according to Kitwana, is:

Those young African Americans born between 1965 and 1984 who came of age in the eighties and nineties and who share a specific set of values and attitudes. At the core are thoughts about family, relationships, child rearing, career, racial identity, race relations, and politics.[6]

The researcher's personal upbringing and experiences also illustrate why he has a passion for reaching hip-hoppers. Growing up in inner city Chicago was exciting to the researcher's senses. Sounds of police sirens, gun shots and urban traffic kept his adrenaline pumping. His grandmother's housing project apartment was like a busy greyhound station with teenage uncles and aunts running in and out of the house. The bullet shells and the drug paraphernalia in his uncle's chest drawer and the robbery of a White man who tried to deliver bread in his grandmother's neighborhood were events the

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[4] Kitwana, 39-40.

[5] Kitwana, 3.

[6] Kitwana, 4.

researcher personally witnessed. These are vivid memories of his life experiences in the Chicago housing project called the Stateway Garden Projects.

Many musicians who perform hip-hop music have similar stories. Like the researcher, many of the hip-hop artists were born as the result of teenage parents who were simply engaging in juvenile sex but were not ready for the responsibility of raising children. Like the researcher, many of the hip-hop artists were raised by dominate, angry, single Black women and were neglected by passive, irresponsible fathers. Unfortunately, these experiences typically produce an anger that is often expressed by hip-hop artists.

Also, like many hip-hop artists, the researcher has experienced the fear and anxiety that comes with protecting one's self from the elements of ghetto life, a protection that could not be provided by an overworked mother. The researcher has experienced the alienation that comes with being a latchkey kid, entering an empty apartment after school and having to provide for one's self. Many popular hip-hop artists have experienced several of the same woes of inner city life.

The harshness of inner city life made hip-hop all the more enticing because every aspect of it, from the lyrics to the beats to the instruments, echoed the researcher's experiences. The researcher remembers the first time he fell in love with hip-hop music. He remembers the excitement of having the cassette tapes of the hip-hop crews, the Fat Boys, Whodini, and Run D.M.C. The researcher loved the loud rhythmic sound of the drum machines that produced heart-pumping bass. The sounds were intimately familiar, raw and perfectly suited to resonate deep within the researcher's soul. They soothed and inspired a soul impacted by the negative aspects of inner city life. In short, it was a sound to which the researcher could deeply relate.

Hip-hop rap artists deeply and profoundly influenced the researcher. He wore the clothes they wore. He emulated their attitudes and spoke their language. He wanted to be a rapper. He wanted to be a hip-hop star. The researcher remembers engaging in what were called rap competitions. All aspects of hip-hop were fascinating to the researcher, the fashion, the graffiti art and the break dancing.

The researcher was so influenced by hip-hop culture that he became a break dancer. He formed a group called the Hyper Freaks Crew. His crew/group would compete against other crews to determine whose crew had the best break dancers, similar to what the gangs in the South Bronx New York did in the early 1970s to express themselves through dance instead of fighting.

Hip-hop music not only influenced how the researcher conducted himself, but it was also influential in introducing him to the gospel. Despite his tumultuous experiences growing up, he remembers how God made himself real through the use of hip-hop music. The researcher can vividly recall attending evangelistic street plays/dramas produced by Victory Outreach Ministry. These plays highlighted the destructive elements of inner city street life, a reality with which he was familiar, and the power of God to change anyone influenced by those destructive elements. Hip-hop music was used to draw many young people to watch these church plays.

As a preteen, the researcher remembers the actors of these dramas playing the role of street thugs, using violent storylines and hip-hop music to bring a true sense of inner city life to the plot of the play. The drama would then climax by showing how an all-powerful God can infiltrate the heart of the most hardened individual and make him or her a bold witness of God's saving power. These plays made the gospel incredibly real to

the researcher and were examples of God's work in saving the most depraved of individuals. Through Victory Outreach Ministry and their use of hip-hop music, the researcher learned that God loved the unbeliever.

Hip-hop music continued to have a tremendous influence on the researcher until he gave his life to Christ in 1991. After his conversion, he parted from hip-hop music until he discovered its value in sharing the gospel with those who loved the music, in a way similar to what Victory Outreach had been doing in the 80s.

In the late 1980s, hip-hop music shifted from a unique and creative expression of life in the inner city to a political voice that resurrected the Black Power movement of the late 1960s. For example, hip-hop artists began to express their views on racial inequality. Groups like Public Enemy began to expose what they perceived as inconsistencies in the American government during the 1950s and 1960s. Through hip-hop music, the researcher learned about the discriminating practices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in their surveillance of prominent Civil Rights leaders. For example, the FBI is now known to have wiretapped Martin Luther King's home phone. Hip-hop music of this era encouraged the researcher and many in his generation to read about Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and W.E. DuBois.

In the early 1990s, the voices popularized in hip-hop music changed. These voices became extremely angry. Songs like "F*** the Police" expressed the frustration and anger that many African Americans felt towards the police because of years of brutality and racial profiling. Simultaneously, in the early 1990s, some hip-hop artist began to speak of women in derogatory ways. Whatever the new focus, hip-hop music began to speak of the difficulties of inner city life in ways it had not done before. This form of

expression became known as "Gansta' Rap." For the researcher, these voices spoke a language to which he could relate because he personally experienced police brutality. He personally witnessed the crack and AIDS epidemic flood his neighborhood. Many of the realities expressed in Gansta' Rap were realities the researcher wanted to express himself. But he did not have the creativity or guts to express his sentiments the way that the hip-hop artists of Gansta' Rap did.

Because of the negative changes in hip-hop music, the researcher stopped listening to it after giving his life to Jesus. He completely disassociated himself with anything that had to do with hip-hop culture. He then joined a Pentecostal church, located in inner city Oakland, a neighborhood with dilapidated buildings, disillusioned people, and drug-influenced and drug selling thugs. It was similar to the neighborhoods in which the researcher was raised.

Acts Full Gospel Church was an exciting place for worship and evangelism. One of the most interesting things the researcher liked about the church was its passion to reach the city of Oakland for Christ. This church was not afraid to take the gospel to the streets. In fact, about a third of the 3,000 members shared the gospel of Jesus Christ in the streets of Oakland twice a month. As a result, many of the congregants came from the local neighborhood.

In 1993, the researcher began to teach Sunday school classes to youth from the local neighborhood. In order to be effective in reaching them with the gospel, the researcher made the Word of God relevant to their world. Therefore, the researcher began to engage hip-hop culture and music for the purpose of reaching the youth that were deeply entrenched in hip-hop culture.

After not listening to hip-hop for three years, the researcher was stunned at what it had become. Hip-hop transformed from a vivid expression of the woes and realities of inner city life to an excessively violent, extremely sexualized expression of hedonistic behavior. There was either a scandalously dressed woman or gun on every CD cover that the researcher viewed. The researcher was disappointed with hip-hop music.

What disappointed the researcher the most was the deceitful belief that life was good in the inner city. According to some hip-hop artists, it was okay to father children without taking care of them, murder other human beings, have sex with anyone and engage in criminal behavior to get rich. This bothered the researcher. So he did all he could to debunk these ideas through the preaching of the gospel.

Week after week, the researcher would take the lyrics of the most popular hip-hop artist and show his Sunday school class the danger in living out its message. Whether it was engaging in pre-marital sex or selling drugs, the researcher would find creative ways to engage hip-hop culture with the preaching of the Word of God. It seemed to be an effective way to increase the youths' interest in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The youth responded well. They participated in uncovering some of hip-hop's most vile lyrics.

What also made the researcher's use of hip-hop music effective in teaching the gospel was the fact that the consequences of living out the message of hip-hop music bore negative fruit. For example, in 1995, one of the pioneers of Gangsta' Rap died of AIDS because of his involvement in illicit sex with various women. Therefore, the researcher would have relevant object lessons that illustrated the Bible's lesson, that "the wages of sin is death."

Again, in 1999, when the researcher became the youth pastor of a large inner city church in San Diego, he found hip-hop music effective in sharing the gospel. He would use the popularity of hip-hop music as a springboard to show how the message was inconsistent with living out the Christian faith. But in doing this, the researcher would not outright reject the music. Instead, he would use the music to get the attention of the youth, and then guide them toward seeing how the music was not consistent with the way they should live. It fascinated the researcher to discover that the listeners of the music would be surprised by some of its messages. Formerly, they would listen without being totally aware of the message.

The researcher has gone back and forth with his level of intensity when engaging hip-hop culture. When the researcher first gave his life to Christ, he had denounced and rejected a culture and music that at one time had seduced and hypnotized him with its compelling beats and magnetic messages. Then, after a few years, he returned to the music so that he could effectively engage the youth that were being seduced by what had turned into a hedonist and materialist expression of art. However, once he stopped teaching youth groups, he stopped trying to understand the culture. He did not seriously reengage the culture until 2007. This is when he discovered that hip-hop culture and music was going in the same destructive direction. Hedonism and materialism seemed to be even more dominate themes than they had been in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Unfortunately, hip-hop music is now leading an entire generation down a road to destruction.

In conclusion, the researcher's personal experiences, starting from his own upbringing and his experiences with hip-hop music, to his initial encounter with non-

African American Christianity in the military at age 18, to his many experiences with seminary outreach trainings based on generation-specific contextualization, have convinced him that the racial divide has caused churches to neglect effective evangelism to Black youth and young adults. This deficiency must be corrected by a missiology that is contextualized for those influenced by hip-hop, the voice of African American young people.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The researcher is not only convinced of the need to contextualize the gospel for hip-hoppers because of his own experiences. There is abundant evidence from many sources of ongoing racial segregation within churches, as well as evidence of a neglect of outreach to African Americans as a result of this segregation. The fact that these realities exist and are in fact being propagated by the Christian church makes this project important to the church at large.

On Sunday morning, Blacks attend their places of worship and Whites attend their places of worship. In his book, *Black and White Styles of Youth Ministry: Two Congregations in America*, William R. Myers records the words of Gayraud S. Wilmore, who communicates why this is a reality. Wilmore is quoted to say,

> To speak of Black Christianity is simply to refer to a social and cultural fact of life. It just happens to be a fact that for the more than four hundred years of Black history in the New World, eighty-five to ninety percent of all Black Christians have worshiped with people of their own race in all-Black congregations.[7]

Perhaps the most famous example of this division along racial lines is that of Reverend Richard Allen. He was probably the most well-known Black preacher in the

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[7] William R. Myers, *Black and White Styles of Youth Ministry: Two Congregations in America,* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 18.

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He and his Black followers were

compelled to split from the Methodist church. This happened after an incident in which

Allen and Absalom Jones, another senior member of the Black community, were told to

get up from their knees during prayer at the White-controlled St. George Methodist

Episcopal Church.[8] This provoked him to organize the Free African Society, a protest

organization, which was the foundation for launching the African Methodist Episcopal

Church. Richard Allen's work was born out of the desire, common to many African

American leaders, to respond to the desperate needs of African Americans—needs that

were being ignored by White congregations. Myers explains:

> In part, blacks had removed themselves from white congregations because they
> felt insufficient concern on the part of whites "for the souls of their kin" and
> because of inadequate attention being paid to the stressful conditions in which
> many African Americans now found themselves.[9]

Another more recent example of this segregation is the relationship between the

Assemblies of God, a predominantly White Pentecostal denomination, and the Church of

God in Christ, a predominantly Black Pentecostal denomination. These share a common

history but were divided because of race in the early twentieth century. Kevin Sack

describes the division this way:

> When Mr. Parham [the white Pentecostal leader] came to visit his former
> student's [William J. Seymour, the Black Pentecostal leader] revival in October
> 1906, he was dismayed to find scenes of ecstatic praying and frenzied dancing. A
> Ku Klux Klan sympathizer, he was particularly displeased by the mixing of the
> races at services that he derided as 'Southern darky camp meetings.' The two men

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[8] Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen: The Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, Printer, 1833), 13-14.

[9] Myers, *Black and White,* 96.

dissociated, and not long after the revival ended the Pentecostals split along racial lines into two major denominations.[10]

These experiences and many others have led to the development of both a Black and White church in America.

The researcher believes it is important to address the racial differences in the church. Too often, when the Christian church in America seeks to solve the problems in its communities, the solutions depend on which church, Black or White, is addressing the problem.

This neglect of pushing contextualized solutions for African Americans is enhanced by the almost daily images on media outlets of Black and Brown people engaging in criminal activity. Such media exposure makes it seem justifiable to ignore problems like violent crime among Blacks. If the general population perceives violence to be a normal part of African American culture, then reports of it no longer provoke concern and soul searching like in the response to the Columbine shooting. In just one instance of this neglect, the national media pays little attention to the homicide epidemics in inner city neighborhoods, as exemplified by the situation in inner city Chicago. Consider these numbers,

> Since 2001, about 2,000 American service men and women have died in Afghanistan; in that same time period 5,000 people have died in Chicago. Yet the nation doesn't appear to even realize how bad things have gotten in Chicago— … And the numbers continue to go up. As of the end of July [2012], homicides in the city were up about 27 percent and in the first quarter of 2012 the number of murders had jumped 60 percent over 2011. … Most of those being killed are young African-American males—who are also most of those doing the killing.[11]

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[10] Kevin Sack, "The Pentecostal Church in America," June 4, 2000, http://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/race/060400sack-church-side.html (accessed October 1, 2012).

[11] Nick Chiles, "Why Are So Many Young Black Males Killing Each Other in Chicago," August 17, 2012, http://atlantablackstar.com/2012/08/17/why-are-so-many-young-black-males-killing-each-other-in-chicago/ (accessed Oct 16, 2012).

Violent crimes affect Blacks in Chicago more than they do the rest of the city's population. In 2012, 201 of the 259 homicide victims in Chicago were African Americans. Shockingly, while Blacks make up only 33 percent of the city's population, they accounted for nearly 78 percent of the homicide victims through the first six months of 2012.[12] These numbers should have gained national attention long before another Columbine type of tragedy happened again. But it was the horrific event in Newton, Connecticut in the spring of 2013, where twenty children were tragically murdered by gun violence, that woke up the nation and sparked national discussions on gun violence.

President Barack Obama, for political reasons perhaps, used this tragic event to bring attention to the gun violence in Chicago. In a speech in his hometown of Chicago, he stated, "Last year, there were 443 murders with a firearm on the streets of Chicago and 65 of those victims were 18 and under. So that's the equivalent of a Newton every four months."[13] The president's mention of Chicago's gun violence was also sparked by the tragic death of Hadiya Pendleton, a fifteen-year old Chicago teenager, who had participated in the President's inauguration. It took the connection between these two events for the murder epidemic in Chicago to be mentioned by a national leader. From the viewpoint of the researcher, President Obama knew that in order to make the problem in Chicago a national problem he had to connect it to the tragic event in Newton and to death of Ms. Pendleton.

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[12] David Heinzmann, "Homicide Number Reveal Stark Contrast," July 12, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-07-12/news/ct-met-chicago-homicide-demographics-20120712_1_homicide-victims-homicide-numbers-police-data (accessed Oct 16, 2012).

[13] PBS Newshour, "Obama Makes Gun Control Push Personal With Visit to Hometown Chicago" February 15, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_issues/jan-june13/guns_02-15.html (accessed June 16, 2013).

This illustrates the reality that tragic events in White neighborhoods generate national conversation versus similar events that happen in Black neighborhoods. Often, violence in Black neighborhoods is not brought to the spotlight until something happens as horrific as the death of a teenager who had just participated in the presidential inauguration. If the tragic events that are happening in the streets of Chicago were happening in White suburban neighborhoods, it would likely be front-page news. This would then get the attention of White suburban churches, colleges and seminaries, as was the case in 1999 after the Columbine shooting and in the 2013 tragedy in Newton.

Before Columbine, school shootings did not get the attention that such events should get from Christian churches, colleges and seminaries. But the nation and its church did begin to wake up as a result of Columbine. Even so, the White churches did not give attention to the problems of all youth, but only to its own White suburban youth. It failed to see that this had been happening in Black schools for years.

The researcher does believe that the Columbine and Newton shootings deserved the national attention they received. But horrific events in ghetto neighborhoods are often ignored because they are seen as the problem of "those peoples." Violence in Black neighborhoods is more invisible due to the nation's dismissive attitude toward Black people in general. This is something that is obvious to Black people as illustrated in many of the materials referenced by this project. But the national media often ignores it.

However, neither the national media nor the church can afford to ignore and neglect the problems faced by African American youth any longer. To continue to do so is a betrayal of God's heart and mandate for evangelism and outreach to all people, as explored in the next chapter. But this neglect is no longer possible for another important

reason. Hip-hop music and culture, and therefore hip-hop culture's belief system, its attitudes and its worldview, are now mainstream. No longer the exclusive possession of Black and Latino youth, hip-hop music and culture has been adopted by people from every ethnic background, including White Christian youth.

If one enters any church in America, including White suburban ones, and checks the iPod of the average teenager, there is a good chance of finding a number of hip-hop songs. What the researcher finds amazing is that this reality is being ignored at his local church. It would not be any surprise to find that it is being ignored in many, if not most, local churches. The aim of the researcher's project is to expose this reality and to offer viable solutions.

Why does hip-hop music hold such a universal appeal? The answer is simple. Hip-hop music and culture is a channel for frustration and anger, emotions to which anyone who has experienced difficulties in life can relate.

Hip-hop was born out of the oppressive and harsh reality of ghetto life. Its origin is similar to many Black art forms that were produced out of difficulties and challenges. Hip-hop's origin is similar to that of Negro spirituals. This older art form was sung out of a need for slaves to soothe themselves and to share the burden with each other of their mutually experienced suffering of forced labor. Likewise, hip-hop, born in the South Bronx, was birthed out of the labor pains of displaced and disillusioned people. Hip-hop historian and scholar Jeff Chang describes the conditions of its conception:

> Here was the new math: the South Bronx had lost 600,000 manufacturing jobs. 40 percent of the sector disappeared. By the mid-seventies, average per capita income dropped to $2430, just half of the New York City average and 40 percent of the nationwide average. The official youth unemployment rate hit 60 percent. Youth advocates said that in some neighborhoods the true number was closer to

80 percent. If blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor, Hip-Hop culture would arise from the conditions of no work.[14]

These conditions of suffering are why some forms of hip-hop music appear to be excessively negative. Hip-hop music is an inside look at the personal journey of many frustrated and angry Black youth who have experienced the woes of inner city life. This very expression of frustration and anger in hip-hop is also a large part of what gives the genre its broad appeal beyond the African American youth community. So it is not a stretch to assert that hip-hop music and culture are the personal reflections and voice of any frustrated group of people. That is why the researcher believes its influence is spreading.

The researcher believes the church at large needs to understand the hip-hop generation and its love for hip-hop music because hip-hop was born out of the marginalized and disenfranchised experiences of the inner city. However, the influence of its music and culture is now permeating all aspects of American culture, including White suburban culture. Its influence is global. That means its message is global. That means the values it propagates are becoming global. That is why the church at large must pay attention. In fact, if it does not, it will pay a heavy price because hip-hop is no longer a Black and Latino cultural expression, it is now a channel for all frustrated people. Unfortunately, the solutions hip-hop music offers its audience are not biblical. That is where Christian churches, Bible colleges and seminaries can step in and help. These Christ-centered institutions can be training centers for believers who have a passion for reaching those who are influenced by hip-hop culture and music.

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[14] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 2005), 13.

Overview of the Research Methodology

The interviews are the primary unit of analysis. Data was gathered by using an in-depth and multiple interview process of six participants. Every statement given by the interviewees that were relevant to the questions in the research was the primary data. Meaning units from these statements were created and clustered together in categories. Data analysis was accomplished by checking for the emergence of common patterns and themes that lead to the essential meaning or essence of the participant's shared experiences with hip-hop music. The researcher then describe, in detail, without personal preconceptions or judgment, the essence of the lived experience. The data was then used to develop an evangelistic approach that addresses those shared experiences.

Secondary data was gathered from hip-hop artist who, through their music, have given a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. Another data resource the researcher employed was a phenomenological data analysis process called "memoing," the practice of writing what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of data collection. In memoing, the researcher reflected on his experience as he engaged the phenomenon, paying particular attention to hunches, impressions, feelings and so on. He kept his field notes and descriptive notes[15] separate, taking care to date his memos/field notes so that he could later correlate them with his descriptive data.

In selecting interviewees, the researcher developed instructions and guiding questions that encouraged an exhaustive and in-depth description of the interviewee's lived experiences in the context of hip-hop culture, in particular the music. The

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[15] Descriptive notes, different from field notes, are notes that describe the participants experience with the phenomenon; whereas memoing or field notes are descriptions of the researcher's experience as he witnesses the participant experience the phenomenon.

researcher developed a criteria for selecting interviewees; for example, the researcher established contracts, obtained informed consents, ensured confidentiality, agreed to a meeting place, decided time commitments, and obtained permission to record and publish the findings.

After conducting the interviews, the researcher organized, analyzed, and synthesized the data, developing individual textual and structural descriptions. The researcher then synthesized the textual and structural meanings to get the essences of the lived experiences of the interviewees. Next, the researcher summarized the entire study by analyzing, comparing and combining the biblical and theological foundation, literary reviews, and results of the phenomenological study, articulating evangelistic implication for reaching hip-hop's second generation for Christ. Finally, based on his findings, the researcher articulated an effective evangelistic approach for reaching hip-hop's second generation.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Introduction

One of the prevalent truths in Scripture is God's willingness to initiate and pursue an intimate relationship with humanity. This chapter demonstrates God's pursuit of this intimacy in the Old and New Testaments. It proposes that God's pursuit is a call for the believer in Christ to engage in incarnational ministry. Incarnational ministry is an evangelistic approach in which the believer pursues and initiates contact with an unbeliever. This chapter presents a biblical and theological blueprint for being a wisely intrusive, Holy Spirit-empowered pursuer of unsaved hip-hoppers.

To accomplish this, this chapter presents illustrations from both Testaments of God the Father's self-initiating pursuit of lost humanity through the incarnational ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The chapter precedes chronologically, beginning with God's pursuit of several Old Testament characters, moving through key examples of this pursuit from the life of God the Son, and continuing through narratives of God the Holy Spirit's pursuit after the ascension of Jesus, with emphasis on the importance of the Spirit's role in carrying out effective incarnational ministry today. The chapter concludes by drawing out the evangelistic implications for the church today to practice incarnational ministry in imitation of God's example of pursuing lost humanity.

God the Father's Incarnational Ministry

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets
at many times and in various ways.*

Hebrews 1:1

This section looks at the various ways God spoke in the Old Testament and proposes that His purpose for speaking was to pursue reconciliation with humanity and to use those who have been reconciled to Him to reach those who continue to be alienated from Him.

A. W Tozer in his book *The Pursuit of God,* states, "Christian Theology teaches the doctrine of prevenient grace, which, briefly stated, means that before a person can seek God, God must first have sought the person." [1] Thus, it is God who makes the initial contact. It is God who begins the stirring of the sinner's heart. Tozer continues, "Before a sinful person can think a right thought of God, there must have been a work of enlightenment done within him. ...and it is by this prevenient *drawing* that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming (emphasis in original)."[2]

Bible story after story not only documents God's willingness to pursue and reveal Himself to humanity, but communicates His willingness to humble Himself to do so (John 1:14, Phil. 2:7). This is seen from the time He initially created humanity, "God made us know the tenderness of His love for us and His desire for closeness with us by presenting Himself in human form (Gen. 1:27). These verses record the exquisite and

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[1] A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, Inc., 1993), 11-12.

[2] Tozer, 11-12.

perhaps symbolic picture of God bending over Adam and making him alive by the breath of His mouth."[3]

Adam

Even after his disobedience, God pursued a fleeing and frightened Adam by asking "Where are you?" Martin Luther, in his commentary on Genesis, proposes that God's initial question to Adam was to condemn him for his sin, "The words, 'Where art thou?' are words of [divine] Law, directed by God to [Adam's] conscience."[4] However, God's approach to Adam was also an attempt to close the relational gap, to face the problem that caused the distance. It was a gesture of reconciliation. E. A. Speiser explains, "When Adam has been caught in his transparent attempt at evasion, Yahweh speaks to him as a father would to his child: 'Where are you?' In this context, it is the same thing as, 'and what have you been up to just now?'"[5] God's question was posed to begin the process of making right what went wrong.

Because Adam avoided God's presence, God had to initiate the conversation if there was going to be reconciliation. The fearful and frightened Adam was not going to approach God (Gen. 3:10). Luther's commentary offers additional insight on God's opening question. He writes, "Unless God helps and calls the sinner, he will forever flee God, try to excuse his sin by lies, and add one wrong to another until he ends in

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[3] Bible Study Fellowship International, *Genesis* (San Antonio: BSF International, 2012), 5.

[4] Martin Luther, *Luther's Commentary on Genesis,* trans. Theodore J. Mueller (Grands Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 75.

[5] E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), 25.

blasphemy and despair."[6] As illustrated by the example of Adam, sinful humanity

naturally avoids God's presence. However, God in His love and mercy pursues sinful

humanity for the purpose of reconciliation, even if the conversation is initially to

condemn.

> God's dealing with Adam was as much more kindly and merciful than he deserved. ... He did not reject Adam on account of his sin, but called him and drew him out of his transgression. … It was proof of (His) abundant grace that God, after Adam had sinned, was not silent, but spoke to him with many words to reveal to him His fatherly love.[7]

Abraham

One of the most profound and significant examples of God's pursuit of humanity

in the Old Testament is His calling of Abraham. "The call of Abraham initiates a radical

new development. God acts in history to set in motion a series of events that will

ultimately heal the breadth that sin has placed between God and the world."[8] It sets the

course of God's redemptive plan. Speiser discusses the significance of Abraham's call.

> The story commences with one individual, and extends gradually to his family, then to a people, and later still to a nation. Yet it is not to be the tale of individuals or a family or a people as such. Rather, it is to be the story of a society in quest of an ideal. Abraham's call, in short, marks the very beginning of the biblical process.[9]

By choosing Abraham, God began the process of reestablishing the intimate

relationship with humanity that was lost in Eden. God choosing a particular people,

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[6] Luther, 75.

[7] Luther, *Genesis,* 77.

[8] William Lasor, David Hubbard and Frederic Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 33.

[9] Speiser, *Genesis,* 87.

Israel, "from which came the Scriptures and the Savior of the world,"[10] was the mark of a new beginning. God did this to introduce Himself to the world. Andrew Hill and John Walton write, "His own initiative is introduced as he begins to form a covenant with Abraham as a means by which He can reveal himself to the world."[11]

God solidified His relationship with Abraham through a historical ritual known as a covenant. Scholars speculate about the meaning of the ritual because much of its ancient significance is mysterious. Sailhamer states, "Little is known of the specific customs from written accounts from the ancient world, though commentators frequently point to some possible parallels."[12] The likely parallels are from Jeremiah 34:18 and a treaty between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad in which Ashurnirari V states, "If Mati'ilu sins against (this) treaty made under oath by the gods, then, just as this spring lamb, brought from its fold, will not return to its fold…alas, Mati'ilu…will not return to his country."[13]

As a consequence of this ignorance over the nature of ancient covenants, modern commentators draw conclusions about this historical ritual from Jeremiah 34:18 referenced above. They infer that the violation of a covenant brings on a curse, meaning that the one walking through the parted animals must suffer the same fate of the animals if the demands of the covenant are not met. Gordon Wenham writes on this topic:

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[10] Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 102.

[11] Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 23.

[12] John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Leviticus,* ed. Tremper Longman and David E Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 173.

[13] Sailhamer, 173.

The interpretation of this mysterious rite is much discussed. Most modern commentators take their cue from [Genesis 15] v 18, 'The Lord made [literally, cut] a covenant with Abram,' and from Jer. 34:18, which speaks of the people passing between a dismembered calf. This act is then interpreted as an enacted curse. 'May God make me like this animal, if I do not fulfill the demands of the covenant.'[14]

Wenham goes on to speculate about the meaning behind the types of animals used and proposes that God obligates Himself to fulfill the covenant alone. He writes, "In Genesis, of course, it is God himself who walks between the pieces, and it is suggested that here God is invoking the curse on himself, if he fails to fulfill the promise."[15]

Desmond Alexander and Brian Rosner confirm this, "Whatever the precise symbolism, the important point to note is that God alone passed between the dissected animals, indicating the unilateral nature of the covenant. God alone took on obligation."[16] God not only graciously initiated a relationship with Abraham, but obligated Himself to fulfill the promises of the covenant. "This covenant with Abraham is a promissory oath made by God alone," according to Wenham.[17]

In establishing the covenant, God displayed His love to an unworthy beneficiary and set the course to continue to display His love to whomever He decided. Abraham's worth did not determine God's actions. Rather, His love and mercy motivated His own self-initiated act of grace toward Abraham. In addition, the Abrahamic covenant was

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[14] Gordan J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15,* ed. David A Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol 1. (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 332.

[15] Wenham, 332.

[16] Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 422-423.

[17] Wenham, 333.

significant in that God called Abraham so that He could personally promise to fulfill a covenant that would bless all people on earth.

Jacob

Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, was a manipulative swindler whose actions seem strongly to suggest that he did not have a relationship with God. But here again, a gracious and compassionate God initiates a relationship with an unworthy recipient. Walter Elwell states,

> The gracious character of Yahweh's covenant with the patriarchs was highlighted in Yahweh's interactions with Jacob, who was chosen in spite of his covetousness (25:29-34), deception (27:19), and clever manipulations (30:31-43). Election to covenantal privileges and responsibilities was not on basis of merit, but according to Yahweh's sovereign will and mercy (Rom. 9:10-18).[18]

Also, in speaking of God's call and choice of Jacob, House adds, "Jacob has demonstrated no godly character to this point. Rather God chooses before such actions could possibly occur."[19]

The Bible shows that God revealed Himself to Jacob after Jacob fled his home because he deceived his brother Esau (Gen. 28:12-15). God initiated the meeting between Himself and Jacob in a dream in which the angels of God were ascending and descending on a stairway to heaven. God reaffirmed the promise he made to Abraham, telling Jacob that all people on earth would be blessed through him and his offspring.

After waking from the dream, Jacob recognized the significance of the event and set up a pillar and gave the place the name Bethel, the house of God. His response to this

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[18] Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 127.

[19] Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 78.

incredible revelation of God is striking and suggests that knowing and seeking God were not his priority. His physical safety, shelter and food appeared to be his priority (Gen. 28:20-21). House states,

> He [Jacob] seems impressed that he has received such promises, but he offers an equivocal response that pales in comparison with his grandfather's and father's reaction to their own initial divine encounters. As if he were trading with Esau or a tribal leader, he promises to make the Lord his God only if he returns home safely at some point in the future. God's love for Jacob has not been conditioned by works, but Jacob seems determined not to offer his love quite so cheaply.[20]

God initiated contact with Jacob despite his questionable character. His pursuit of Jacob was based on His love and faithfulness, not Jacob's interest in Him. Jacob's loyalty seemed predicated on God's continued pursuit and presence. House clarifies, "God's grace selects this terribly imperfect man and not because of merit on his part. Love dictates the decision."[21]

<div align="center">Moses</div>

God initiated Moses' call as He had done with Abraham and Jacob. He initiated a conversation with Moses. Ronald Youngblood states, "God 'called' Moses, as He did every true prophet…so it was also with Abraham, with Jacob, with Samuel."[22] Furthermore, Moses' call was just as significant as Abraham's, although the manner in which it happened was different. Graham Scroggie states, "His call was as definite as

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[20] House, 79.

[21] House, 78.

[22] Ronald Youngblood, *Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 32-33.

Abraham's, 430 years before, but it was to a very different task. Abraham's faith in God distinguished him, but Moses' distrust of himself is outstanding."[23]

Like Abraham and Jacob, Moses was an unworthy recipient of God's call. Dunnam explains Moses' circumstance before the call: "Remember Moses' situation. He had killed an Egyptian and had fled lest Pharaoh take his life."[24] Consequently, he fled from Egypt because he feared the Pharaoh's justice. Moses' circumstances convinced him that he was not worthy of God's call, illustrated by his objections. Scroggie states, "When God called him, he offered five excuses in an attempt to evade the task."[25]

Despite Moses' failure and assessment of himself, God's goal was to establish a relationship with Him so that he could use him to establish a relationship with the Israelites. Albert Baylis clarifies God's purpose for calling Moses: "God begins an outright program of revealing himself to this people nurtured in the womb of idolatrous Egypt. But his revelation to the deliverer [Moses] comes first."[26]

The Israelites

By God's initiative, the Israelites were about to experience Him in a whole new way. Hill and Walton state, "God's presence reaches a new level as he appears in the burning bush to Moses and reveals his name and the next step of his plan,"[27] His plan

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[23] W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption: The Bible as a Whole* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 153.

[24] Maxie D. Dunnam, *The Communicator's Commentary: Exodus,* ed. Lloyd J Ogilvie, vol. 2 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 59.

[25] Scroggie, 153.

[26] Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996, 101.

[27] Hill and Walton, 24.

was to recover the intimacy that was lost in Eden and confirm the promises he made to

Abraham by making Israel a great nation. Speaking on God's plan, Baylis writes, "God is

now ready to act on the basis of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[28]

Through His call of Moses, the Lord delivered Israel from a powerful and

oppressive Pharaoh, rescuing them through the miraculous use of plagues and personally

revealing Himself by guiding them out of Egypt. Hill and Walton reflect on God's

initiatives to reveal Himself, "His presence is made known through the plagues, evident

temporarily in the pillar of cloud and fire, and settles on the top of Mt. Sinai, where he

reveals how his people can be in relationship with him and how they can preserve his

presence."[29]

Baylis further reflects on God's purpose for revealing Himself to Israel,

The Exodus marked out God's choice of Israel to *bring restoration to mankind*. As such, it marks out the truth that God is acting in history to bring to pass his promise to Abraham—and through that promise, *universal blessing to the world*. It also provides a working model or pattern for God's future activity in completing that restoration (emphasis added).[30]

God pursued Israel for much the same reason as he pursued Abraham, Jacob and

Moses. God pursued and protected Israel, not because of any worth or moral integrity on

their part, but because of His incredible love, grace, and mercy. Moses makes this clear in

Deuteronomy 7:7a-8a (NIV), "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you

because you were more numerous than other peoples,… But it was because the LORD

loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors…" James Dunn, in writing on this

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[28] Baylis, 100-101.

[29] Hill and Walton, 24.

[30] Baylis, 113.

passage states, "As Deuteronomy repeatedly points out, it was nothing that Israel was or had done which caused God to choose them as his people, to enter into covenant with them; it was only his love for them and his loyalty to the oath which he had promised to the fathers."[31]

<p align="center">*Samuel*</p>

Another example of God's pursuit and call of an Old Testament character, Samuel, the first prophet of Israel, is recorded in 1 Samuel 3. It is an account of an individual who served God, yet who appeared to not have personally experienced Him prior to the call. In the passage God called Samuel by name three times but the young boy did not recognize the voice of the Lord. Carl Laney writes, "three times he mistook God's voice for the voice of Eli. Verse 7 explains why. Although Samuel had been assisting Eli in the Tabernacle, he did not yet know the Lord in a personal way nor had he ever received God's Word by divine revelation."[32]

Scholars disagree about the meaning of 1 Samuel 3:7, "Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." Klein expounds on the debate about the ambiguity of this verse. He states, "Samuel's not knowing Yahweh is ambiguous. In 2:12 the same words are used about Eli's sons. For them not to know Yahweh meant they did not obey him, or they had no relationship to him. None of these seems relevant for the situation of Samuel." [33]

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[31] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 342.

[32] J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 23.

[33] Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel,* ed. David A Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 10 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 32.

One view is that "Samuel did not yet know it was Yahweh who was calling to him,"[34] whereas, the other view is that "Samuel did not yet have the special relationship with Yahweh that he would subsequently enjoy (cf. vss. 19-20)."[35] First Samuel 3:7b supports the second interpretation. Klein argues, "Yahweh would later reveal himself to Samuel (3:21); so far he had not. The word of Yahweh would come to Samuel (3:11-14) and make him a prophet (3:20); so far (3:7) the word of Yahweh was a rare thing (3:1)."[36]

In this story, God was the initiator, the pursuer, the one who called Samuel to reveal Him to others. Samuel had faithfully served God but now he was about to experience Him personally. Harris agrees. He writes,

> He had been conversant with many facts concerning Jehovah before this time, but he now awoke to such a personal consciousness of His existence, and such an abiding sense of His nearness that up to this crisis in his history it is said of him that he 'knew not the Lord.'[37]

After God's gracious approach and call, Samuel experienced God like never before. "Evidently there passed a vivid and permanent change over this boy's heart and history in that night's experience: God called him."[38]

David

First Samuel 16 records the account of Samuel facilitating God's pursuit and call of David. When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem, David's hometown, to participate in God's

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[34] Klein, 32.

[35] Klein, 32.

[36] Klein, 32.

[37] W. Harris, *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary On the Book of First and Second Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 60.

[38] C. S. Robinson, *The Biblical Illustrator* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 88.

pursuit of Israel's next king, he ordered Jesse, David's father, to call his sons to a

sacrificial feast so that he could anoint whomever God chose. However, David was not

present at the meeting because his father decided that his presence was not necessary.

This decision by David's father serves to emphasize the effort God made to ensure that

His choice was anointed. The events surrounding God's choice leave no doubt that God

particularly pursued David as the next king of Israel. R. J. Campbell states,

> Remember that of the sons of Jesse seven were honored and esteemed by their
> father, and among men; one was neglected and despised; yet were all the former
> rejected by the Lord, while the poor David was taken from the sheepfold to be a
> king and the ancestor of the blessed Messiah.[39]

Just as Jesse wrongly presumed God's choice, Samuel the prophet also misread

God's choice, assuming Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, would be a prime candidate. Klein

explains,

> Though the aura of Samuel lent prestige to David, the choice itself was not
> Samuel's. He was seemingly ready to anoint Eliab until he was rebuked by
> Yahweh and reminded that fitness for kingship is not necessarily indicated by
> stature or attractiveness.[40]

Despite Jesse and Samuel's ignorance, God pursued and chose David. First

Samuel 16:13[41] records God's confirmation of David, "And the Spirit of the LORD came

powerfully upon David from that day on." God blessed him with His direct presence and

power.

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[39] R. J. Campbell, *The Biblical Illustrator: 1 Samuel,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 384.

[40] Klein, 162.

[41] *New Living Translation Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004).

The New Covenant and Deeper Intimacy

God's covenant relationship with Abraham, partially fulfilled by His protection

and care of Israel, is an example of God's desire to draw humanity to Himself for the

purpose of relationship. However, the Israelites repeatedly failed to keep His covenant

(Psalm 78:10). God responded to their failure by promising to establish a New Covenant,

an everlasting covenant. Jeremiah 31:32b-33 communicates the differences in the New

Covenant: "'Because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares

the Lord. 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,'

declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be

their God, and they will be my people.'" In this covenant, He promised to place His law

on their heart and minds. Brown states,

> In this new covenant, God's *tora* ("teaching, law") will be put within his people
> (*b'qirbam*, lit., "in their midst/interior"; the NIV's "in their minds" is too
> interpretive) and will be written on their hearts, in obvious contradistinction to the
> Sinaitic covenant, which was written on tablets of stone.[42]

The motivation to obey God would be inward and supernatural (Jer. 32:40).

Brown supports this idea when he writes, "God's people will not have wayward hearts

any longer; rather they will be wholly devoted to him, never again turning away."[43] His

personal presence will reside in them. Ezekiel 36:26, explains how, saying, "And I will

give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony,

stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart."[44] Ralph Alexander speaks of the

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[42] Michael Brown, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Jeremiah-Ezekial,* ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, vol. 7, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 396.

[43] Brown, 415.

[44] New Living Translation Bible.

work of this new spirit, "In the new covenant the people will also receive a new spirit, God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will enable them to live God's way, strengthening them to follow the commandments of the Mosaic covenant."[45]

Through the New Covenant, God planned to solidify His relationship with believing humanity, a relationship that He personally initiated, by permanently residing in them through the Holy Spirit. Also, according to Alexander, the new covenant "provides forgiveness of sin once and for all and the Holy Spirit's indwelling."[46] But this would not happen until God, the Son, played His part in pursuing humanity.

God the Son, the Essence of Incarnational Ministry

One of the most gripping truths about the Christian faith is that God's solution to the enormous problem between Himself and humanity was to personally enter the world through human flesh (John 1:14) and die a human death. The Word and wisdom of God became flesh so that He could resolve the hostility between Himself and humanity.

This is not only an Old Testament truth that was demonstrated by God's pursuit of His covenant people Israel, but also a New Testament truth that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Paul testifies to this truth, saying in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In speaking on this passage, Fitzmyer states that this act was initiated by a gracious God,

> There is no quid pro quo in the love manifested: divine love is spontaneously demonstrated towards sinners without a hint that it is repaying a love already

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[45] Ralph Alexander, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ezekiel,* ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2010), 845.

[46] Alexander, 845.

shown. …God's love is manifested in the love that Christ revealed by his passion and death for the sake of humanity.[47]

Moreover, in Romans 5:10 Paul states, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" This passage demonstrates the tremendous effort God made to connect with humanity. He sought, through Jesus, to connect to individuals who were hostile toward Him, while ensuring that His hostility towards them was appeased through the death of His Son. Douglas Moo explains,

> Particularly important for an understanding of Paul's teaching about reconciliation is the recognition that, as the language suggests, there is a situation of mutual hostility that must be overcome. We, of course, are hostile toward God—sinning against his laws, rebelling against His rightful rule, putting other gods in His place. But, as Paul has repeatedly affirmed in this letter (cf. 1:18; 3:35), God is also hostile towards us—our sins have justly incurred His wrath, which stand as a sentence over us (1:19-32), to be climactically carried out on the Day of Judgment (2:5).[48]

Based on Jesus' example, all believers are called to leave their places of comfort to enter settings of hostility and unfamiliarity to reach others for Christ. Just as Jesus entered the world He created (Col.1:16), a world that was hostile towards Him and became flesh, He calls the believer to do likewise. Just as Jesus entered humanity's "life world" so that He could experience the human phenomenon, He calls believers in Christ to enter the world of unbelievers, the world of their thinking, feelings, and lived experiences, so that believers will know how to effectively present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

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[47] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans,* ed. William F Albright and David N Freedman, vol. 33, (New York: Doubleday Press, 1993), 400.

[48] Douglas Moo, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary: Romans 1-8,* ed. Kenneth Barker and Silva Moises (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 320.

Incarnational Ministry Defined

Before presenting incarnational ministry examples from the life of Jesus, it is important to give the researcher's definition of incarnational ministry. Incarnational ministry is a ministry approach in which the believer, empowered by the Spirit of God, enters the hostile world of the unbeliever, learning his or her way of thinking and how everyday life is experienced in hopes of comprehending the essence of that "life world." The purpose of this is to share how Jesus Christ can impact people in their own "life world."

This definition of incarnational ministry is demonstrated by Jesus. He entered a hostile unbelieving world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, learning the way that unbelievers think and how they experienced everyday life in hopes of comprehending the essence of their "life world", all in order to draw them to Himself. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, authors of the book, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, gives the evangelistic implications of Jesus' incarnation. He writes, "The first significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus came as a helpless infant."[49] Infants are in a position of dependence. Someone has to take care of them, teach them and guide them. They enter the world in a state of complete ignorance. God chose to enter the world in this state. Lingenfelter and Mayer add, "It is noteworthy that God did not come as a fully developed adult, he did not come as an expert, he did not come as a ruler, or even as part of a ruling family or a dominant culture. He was an infant, born into a humble family in a conquered and subjugated

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[49] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships,* (Grands Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 16.

land."[50] Likewise those who seek to reach others for Christ should follow his example by working to understand those they seek to reach by entering their environment in complete dependence, allowing the unbeliever to teach them about their environment.

Lingenfelter and Mayer continue:

> The second significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus was a learner. He was not born with a knowledge of language or culture. In this respect, he was an ordinary child. He learned language from his parents. He learned how to play from his peers. He learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph and studied the Scriptures and worshipped in the same manner as did all young men of his time. In Luke 2:46, we read that Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, listening to the teachers of the law and asking them questions. This is a profound statement: The Son of God was sitting in the temple, listening and questioning.[51]

This quote clearly and profoundly communicates why it is important for the evangelist to enter the hostile world of the unbeliever as a learner, an apprentice, a novice, similar to Jesus entering this hostile world as an infant, experiencing normal human development until He became an adult. Like Jesus, the goal of the evangelist should be to discover the essence of the unbeliever's "life world" by learning, listening and engulfing him or herself in the essence of the lived experiences of the unbeliever, for the purpose of reaching them for Jesus Christ.

Lingenfelter and Mayer further explain the implications of Jesus' incarnation. He writes,

> The implications of Jesus' status as a learner are seldom discussed, let alone understood or applied. God's Son studied the language, the culture, and the lifestyle of his people for thirty years before he began his ministry. He knew all about their family lives and problems. He stood at their side as learner and as coworker. He learned to read and study the Scriptures in his local synagogue and

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[50] Lingenfelter and Mayers, 16.

[51] Lingenfelter and Mayers, 16.

earned respect to the point that the people called him Rabbi. He worshiped with them in their synagogues and observed the annual Passover and other feasts in the temple in Jerusalem. He identified totally with those to whom he was sent, calling himself the Son of man.[52]

Believers today are called to do no less than Jesus. Believers are called to fully enter into and identify with the "life world" of unbelievers.

Incarnational Ministry Exemplified

The essence of incarnational ministry is exemplified in the life of Jesus. It is realized in Jesus responding to the question God asked Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" It is the answer to that question, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa. 6:8). Similarly, the audience and the research methodology the researcher has chosen is an answer to the same question. Who will enter the immoral and hostile world of hip-hop culture? Who will befriend those who love hip-hop music? Who will show a genuine concern for them and develop an effective evangelistic approach for sharing the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ? The researcher has chosen to respond with an affirmative, "Send me!"

In addition, the incarnation of Jesus Christ was about a holy and transcendent God humbling Himself and enveloping His deity with human flesh to pursue a hostile and sinful humanity. Jesus is the supreme example of a humble, self-sacrificing, self-giving servant.[53] Philippians 2:6-8 says,

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a

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[52] Lingenfelter and Mayers, 16-17.

[53] Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians,* ed. David A Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 43 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 87.

slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.[54]

Gerald Hawthorne writes concerning this passage's implication for incarnational ministry, "In the incarnation Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, that is, as a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of his own for the express purpose of placing himself completely at the service of all mankind."[55]

In the incarnation, God the Son humbled Himself to make peace with humanity. "God has come to the 'other side of the tracks,' and voluntarily shares the prison house which remorse and defiance have built for themselves, that he may set free the prisoner."[56] Second Corinthians 5:19a, makes this clear. It reads, "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them."[57] John Knox writes on God's incarnational work in reconciling sinful humanity to Himself in Christ. He states, "God himself, acting with gracious purpose to redeem men, took the initiative and through Christ did everything needed to reconcile men to Himself."[58]

Essentially, God was in Christ pursuing and presenting the possibility for peace. Furthermore, He took the initiative to ensure it would happen. Again Knox provides insight, "God in Christ is the 'aggressive lover' who has come to break into the citadel of our self-will and set us free from the guilt and the power of sin. This is what God has

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[54] New Living Translation Bible.

[55] Hawthorne, *Philippians,* 87.

[56] John Knox, *The Interpreter's Bible: The Gospel of Luke,* ed. Nolan B. Harmon, vol. 8, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 265.

[57] New Living Translation

[58] John Knox, *The Interpreter's Bible: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* ed. Nolan B Harman, vol. 10, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 339.

done in Christ. His whole life was an offensive of divine love, which culminated in the Cross."[59]

Accordingly, God's efforts in Christ have incarnational ministry implications. Just as God in Christ was the aggressive lover who pursued a hostile and unbelieving humanity, so He calls the believer to take the initiative, to go on the offensive, to pursue the unbeliever. And to ensure that the believer is capable of carrying out this mission, Jesus, through the person of the Holy Spirit, empowers the believer to execute His mission. Second Corinthians 5:19b-20 explains, "And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'"[60] Knox explains it this way: "Our task is that of building the bridge between men and God."[61]

Additionally, God the Son not only enveloped Himself in human flesh to reconcile humanity to God but also experienced the difficulties and limits of humanity. In the incarnation, He was troubled, greatly distressed, very sorrowful, depressed, deeply moved, and grieved. He sighed, wept, sobbed, and groaned. He experienced agony and surprise and felt amazed. He experienced anger, indignation, and compassion. He deeply desired and loved. He truly lived among humanity. John Biragno explains in his book, *The Word Became Flesh*, "Jesus temporarily took up residence with us, tabernacling right

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[59] Knox, 342.

[60] New Living Translation Bible.

[61] Knox, *Corinthians,* 342-343.

here in the midst of us. For thirty-three years, God moved in and lived right here with us, understanding, bleeding, loving, living, agonizing, hurting, caring and dying."[62]

Fundamentally, Jesus experienced the full measure of the human phenomenon. That is why the Bible says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).[63] Koester explains the meaning of the word "sympathize" in this passage, "The Greek word *sympathein* is formed from roots meaning 'to feel' (*pathein*) something 'with' (*syn*) someone."[64] He then gives an illustration. He writes, "In its fullest sense sympathy is a bond similar to a mother's feeling for her children or one brother's feeling for another. Sympathy goes beyond 'curbing the emotions'; it is a heartfelt bond that is expressed in acts of mercy toward those who suffer."[65]

Jesus also experienced loneliness because of rejection, shame from being socially scorned, and divine discipline that resulted from sin, albeit not his own sin, but humanity's. This illustrates unmistakably that Jesus engulfed Himself in the human phenomenon. He was swallowed up by human suffering and experienced human weakness—to the point of death. From a truly phenomenological perspective Jesus experienced humanity's "life world." The incarnation of Jesus illustrated His desire to

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[62] John R. Biragno, *The Word Made Flesh* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1975), 83.

[63] New King James Version Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005)

[64] Craig R. Koester, *The Anchor Bible: Hebrews,* ed. William F Albright and David N Freedman, vol. 36, (New York: Doubleday Press, 2001), 283.

[65] Koester, 283.

experience humanity's "life world" so that He could be a sympathetic advocate for those

who believed in Him. John MacArthur states,

> Jesus was the very Son of God, yet His divinity did not prevent Him from experiencing our feelings, our emotions, our temptations, our pain. God became man, He became Jesus, to share triumphantly the temptation and the testing and the suffering of men, in order that He might be a sympathetic and understanding High Priest.[66]

Jesus not only experienced the human phenomenon physically and emotionally,

but He also experienced the human phenomenon relationally. God became human so that

He could intimately commune with humanity. The incarnation of Jesus is the most

amazing and remarkable demonstration of God's desire for relationship. He wanted a

relationship with fallen humanity so much that He was willing to experience human

limits and die for that relationship. Again John Biragno illuminates the incarnation by

sharing a story about a conversation between a father and son. In a powerful way, it

illustrates God's purpose.

> Once a little boy stepped on an anthill destroying many of the ants and sending others frantically running. When he saw their panic, he told his father, "I do wish I could go down there and tell them how sorry I am." "Son," his father said, "the only way you could do that would be to become an ant just like them and speak to them in their language, for only then could they understand." Something like that is what has happened to us—God became a man to tell us that He loves us and has provided for our redemption.[67]

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a profound demonstration of His willingness to

cross all barriers to connect to humanity. He was willing to cross and even abolish social,

racial, religious, and cultural barriers to ensure that every human had the opportunity to

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[66] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews,* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 96.

[67] Biragno, 81.

intimately commune with God. It is the crossing and abolishing of those barriers that the researcher will now consider to determine an effective way to share the gospel with those who are influenced by hip-hop music, looking at Jesus' pursuit of those who were considered social outcasts because of their socially unacceptable behavior.

God the Son's Pursuit of Matthew

Jesus' pursuit of Matthew in the gospel that bears his name is a good example of Jesus' willingness to cross social and cultural barriers to establish a relationship with someone considered unworthy. Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government who was perceived by the Jews to be the oppressor of the Jewish people. Therefore, his occupation was not a good choice for a Jewish man. Donald Hagner explains, "Tax collectors, or tax farmers, in that culture were despised as greedy, self-serving, and parasitic. They grew rich at the expense of the poor by extorting from them more than was required by their superiors in order to fill their own pockets."[68] Furthermore, they had little regard for Jewish customs and rites in their handling of money. Hagner continues, "They furthermore often compromised regulations for purity in their handling of pagan money and their dealings with Gentiles. That Jesus should call a tax collector to be his disciple must have been in itself scandalous."[69]

The religious leaders of that day, the Pharisees, reacted negatively when Jesus chose to fraternize with Matthew and his friends. Matthew 9:11 records their reaction,

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[68] Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-1,* ed. David A Hubbard and Glenn W Barker, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), 238.

[69] Hagner, 238.

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" David Turner explains

why the Pharisees ask Jesus' disciples this question:

> The term "sinner" designates those whose behavior was egregiously ungodly, but from the Pharisaic perspective it may also include those who did not observe the traditional interpretations of the Bible on such matters as ritual purity, food laws, and Sabbath observance. The Pharisees would not attend such a dinner as this, and they were offended that Jesus and his disciples did attend.[70]

Despite the Pharisee's criticism, Jesus pursued Matthew and accepted his

invitation to share a meal with him and his friends. This action illustrates Jesus'

willingness to cross cultural norms and social barriers to cultivate a personal relationship.

Turner explains why, "His Kingdom ministry is not circumscribed by ritual impurity,

ethnicity, or gender, and neither will social stigmas limit its outreach."[71] Jesus was

willing to enter Matthew's social context, his "life world", to share in his daily-lived

experience for the purpose of cultivating and developing a relationship with Matthew and

his friends.

When questioned about His actions by the Pharisees, Jesus' answer speaks to the

essence of His ministry and provides insight into the evangelistic implication for the

believer today. Matthew 9:12a, 13b, NIV, says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor,

but the sick. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." In explaining this

passage, William Pettingill states, "The Physician had not come to those who did not

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[70] David L. Turner, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew,* ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 137.

[71] Turner, 138.

need Him. His call was not for the righteous, but for sinners. He was about to die for the ungodly—the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."[72]

The calling of Matthew is a call to pursue the unworthy, the unhealthy and the sinner for Jesus, even if the message is not well received. "There is no suggestion here that he went to sinners because they gladly received him; rather he went to them because they were sinners, just as a doctor goes to the sick because they are sick."[73]

Just as Jesus pursued the socially unacceptable and unworthy Matthew and his associates in order to offer them peace with God, He calls those who have placed their faith in Him to do likewise, to pursue the unworthy. "God's primary desire for his people is for them to show mercy."[74]

Jesus seemed to have this in mind when he prayed for the believers in John 17. He prayed in verse 18, "Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." D. A. Carson, expounding on this passage, states, "Even if his apostles are primarily in view, nevertheless it applies to all believers inasmuch as Jesus prays that all of them may have an impact on the world."[75]

This is a call to pursue the unworthy, unlikely and unrighteous, just as Jesus did. It is a call to enter the hostile world of the unbeliever, empowered by the Spirit of God, learning their way of thinking and how they experience everyday life in order to

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[72] William L. Pettingill, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Simple Studies in Matthew,* (Findlay, Ohio: Fundamental Truth Publishers, 1866), 110.

[73] D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew-Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 264.

[74] Turner, 138.

[75] D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980), 193.

understand the essence of their "life world" for the purpose of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

<p align="center">*God the Son's Pursuit of the Samaritan Woman*</p>

Another example of Jesus' willingness to cross social, cultural and even racial barriers to pursue a relationship with an individual is seen in His pursuit of the Samaritan woman in John 4. The first barrier Jesus crosses is the barrier of avoidance. No self-respecting Jewish person would associate with a Samaritan, let alone a woman. In fact, it was the norm to avoid Samaritan neighborhoods at all cost, even if it meant traveling a longer distance to reach one's destination. James Boice and Merrill Tenney write, "The shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee lay on the high road straight through Samaritan territory. Many Jews would not travel by that road, for they regarded any contact with Samaritans as defiling."[76] Incredibly, Jews would cross the Jordan River and travel on its east side to go either north or south (Matt. 10:5; Luke 9:52). Therefore, when Jesus made the decision to walk through Samaria, He demonstrated His willingness to disregard any obstacle that attempted to prevent Him from reaching the lost.

This story is the perfect example of Jesus' willingness. Jesus, tired from traveling, noticed a woman drawing water from Jacob's well and asked if He could have a drink. She replied, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)" (John 4:9, NIV). Her response illustrates that it was a social aberration for Jesus to ask her for a drink of water.

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[76] James M. Boice and Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John-Acts,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 54.

However, Jesus, in His quest to reach her and the Samaritan people, ignored the social and cultural norms of that day, taking a drastic step to pursue her.

First, in pursuit of the Samaritan woman, Jesus purposely traveled through Samaria to pursue her. John 4:4 states, "Now he had to go through Samaria." Concerning this verse, Boice and Tenney writes, "The words "had to" translate an expression of obligation. While the term speaks of general obligation rather than of personal obligation, in this instance it must refer to need and desire other than mere convenience. As the Savior of all people, Jesus had to confront the division and hatred between Jew and Samaritan by ministering to His enemies."[77]

Second, Jesus crossed social and cultural barriers by initiating a conversation with a woman, something no self-respecting Jewish leader would do. Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7b, NIV). He started the conversation. Her reply to him suggests that she was surprised that He would talk to her. "The request did have a surprising element for no Jewish rabbi would have volunteered to carry on a public conversation with a woman, nor would he have deigned to drink from a Samaritan's cup, as she implied by her answer."[78] Thus, in talking to her, he crossed a major barrier.

Third, He asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water. This was an out of the ordinary act because a Jew would never share a cup of water with a Samaritan. Such an act would make a Jewish male ceremonially unclean for worship. F. F. Bruce provides additional insight about the sharing of a cup,

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[77] Boice and Tenney, 54.

[78] Boice and Tenney, 54.

The evangelistic expansion of her surprise—another of his typical parentheses—is not simply that 'the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans' but more specifically that (as the NEB renders it) 'Jews and Samaritans, it should be noted, do not use vessels in common.' If the woman complied with Jesus' request, he would have had to drink from her vessel, since he had none of his own. This would have involved a risk of ceremonial pollution for a Jew even if the owner of the vessel have been a male Samaritan, but the fact that the owner was a woman made that risk a certainty, from the standpoint of a strictly observant Jew. No wonder that Jesus' request astonished the woman; by asking such a favor from her he had shown most unexpected goodwill.[79]

Jesus not only crossed cultural and social barriers but also crossed a religious barrier, risking defilement by drinking from the cup of a Samaritan.

And last, Jesus crossed a socially unacceptable behavior barrier. He approached a Samaritan woman that the Samaritans may have despised because of her inability to maintain a relationship. In John 4:16-18, "the woman is reminded of her many disappointments in personal relationships in order that she may appreciate the more the deep and lasting satisfaction that Jesus brings."[80]

Jesus' pursuit of and approach toward this woman was an unlikely and out of the ordinary act for many reasons. This act and others by Jesus caused many of His critics to denounce Him as not of God. John 8:48 says, "The Jews answered him, 'Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?'" Despite the pressure from His critics, Jesus pursued this Samaritan woman knowing that in reaching her, He would reach the Samaritans.

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[79] F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 103.

[80] Bruce, 107.

There are clear evangelistic implications for the believer in this story. If Jesus approached this unlikely person, what excuse does the believer have when called to practice incarnational ministry? What racial, social, or cultural barriers are legitimate obstacles for reaching the lost?

God the Son's Pursuit of Zacchaeus the Chief Tax Collector

Another example of Jesus crossing cultural, social and religious barriers was His pursuit of and approach to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a social outcast because he was employed by the Roman Empire as a tax collector. However, he was not only a Jewish male who exploited his own people for the benefit of the Gentiles, similar to Matthew, but he held a leadership position. He was a "chief" tax collector. John Nolland explains the implication of Zacchaeus having this position: "If tax collectors were considered to be unsavory characters, then Zacchaeus as a *chief* tax collector can only be considered to be that much worse."[81] Although Zacchaeus had a prestigious position and enormous wealth, he did not have a good standing with the crowd that witnessed this event. Again Nolland provides insight: "Though this man has the power of wealth and official status, he is clearly a social outsider."[82]

Despite his reputation, Jesus starts a conversation with him and invites Himself to Zacchaeus' home. Zacchaeus' reputation did not stop Jesus from seeking him. He was being divinely appointed to share time with Jesus on that day. Although it appeared as if Zacchaeus' curiosity made him the pursuer that was not the case. Nolland explains,

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[81] John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 18:35-24:53,* ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 35c (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), 907.

[82] Nolland, 907.

The true initiative in the story belongs to Jesus. The Lukan Jesus has an uncanny knowledge of the secret affairs of others. Zacchaeus is not hidden from him! He insists that anonymous acquaintance should give way to close encounter. Jesus invites himself home, and this enables Zacchaeus to welcome him in a manner that echoes the proper reception, in Luke 10, of the missioning seventy with their message and accompanying manifest reality of the kingdom of God. For Zacchaeus the kingdom of God has made its approach, and he has embraced it with joy: he is no longer the outsider of vv. 3-4.[83]

Zacchaeus reacted to Jesus' gracious act by promising to give half his possessions to the poor and repay all he had extorted. Jesus responded by announcing that salvation had entered Zacchaeus' home. Then Jesus articulated His life's mission statement and reason for pursuing the lost through the incarnation, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Ray Summers's commentary gives insight on Jesus' role as seeker of the lost.

The role of seeking and saving the lost, both in chapter 15 and here in chapter 19, recalls God's words to the shepherds (spiritual leaders) of Israel, "I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed" (Ezek. 34:16). Even though Zacchaeus was a Jew—a son of Abraham—he was as lost as a Gentile who knew not God. Jesus had come to seek and to save just such lost ones.[84]

Again, there are clear evangelistic implications for the believer in this story. If Jesus approached this unlikely person, what excuse does the believer have when called to practice incarnational ministry? There are no racial, social, or cultural barriers that are legitimate obstacles for reaching the lost. This was God the Son's primary mission. He pursued the lost where they lived, in their environment, in the midst of their everyday lives, and He calls the believer to do the same.

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[83] Nolland, 907.

[84] Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke: Jesus, the Universal Savior* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), 224.

God's Pursuit Exemplified in the Lost Sheep, Coin and Son

The final example from the life of the incarnate Christ is God's pursuit of fallen

humanity in the three parables Jesus shared in response to criticism because of his

association with the lost. The researcher believes these three parables, the lost sheep, lost

coin and lost son, are pertinent to this discussion in that they illustrate the tremendous

love the Father has for the lost and the extent He will go to pursue them.

In looking at these three parables, the researcher acknowledges that the objects

lost in the parables were at one time in the possession of the owners. However, because

of circumstances or choice they were lost. For example, in the story of the lost sheep, the

one sheep strayed, which caused the owner to leave the ninety-nine to go after the

straying sheep. In the story of the lost coin, the owner possessed ten silver coins but lost

one of them because of circumstances. Therefore, the owner goes through great efforts to

search carefully to find the one lost coin.

Finally, in the story of the lost son, the son chooses to leave the care of a loving

father. This particular story suggests that it was the son who came to his senses and made

the decision to return to the Father. However, the son coming to his senses is an example

of prevenient grace. To suggest otherwise would imply that a lost person has the ability to

come to his or her senses without God. A divine and gracious call always precedes a

human response. God is the initiator.

> No one believes who is not called, God calls in his mercy, and not as rewarding
> the merits of faith. The merit of faith follows his calling rather than precedes it.
> …Unless, therefore, the mercy of God in calling precedes, no one can even

believe, and so begin to be justified and to receive power to do good works. So grace comes before all merits.[85]

David Wenham writes, in speaking of the parable of the lost son, "The parable gives us a picture of the lost before they are found."[86] Wenham then explains how the lost son came to realize that he was lost, opening the door for a seeking God to find him. He writes,

> It is probably significant that the boy has to be brought very low and to experience hunger and even the degradation of keeping a foreigner's pigs before he comes to his senses and sees that he is indeed *dead* and *lost*, since it was precisely the poor and the degraded (including those servants of the foreigner, the tax-collectors) who responded to Jesus' ministry (emphasis added).[87]

Moreover, when the parable of the lost son is considered in context with the two other parables, the thrust of the message is the Father's relentless search for the lost. William F. Arndt comments on the three parables, "In an exquisite way they exalt God's love, which is ever active to seek and to save that which is lost" [88] He then explains how all three parables are similar. He writes, "It seems that Jesus does not intend to let the sheep, the coin, and the son stand for three different classes of lost sinners, but rather wishes to emphasize, by using three parables, that the course He takes is the right one."[89] Despite the criticism of the influential religious leaders of that day, Jesus stayed focused

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[85] Augustine, *Augustine: Earlier Writing,* trans. John H. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 391.

[86] David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 110.

[87] Wenham, 110.

[88] William F. Arndt, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series: Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 346.

[89] Arndt, 346.

on His mission to seek and to save that which was lost. He calls the believer to do the same.

It is important to note that in the parable of the lost son the Father was the seeker because in the story it appears as if the Father passively waited for the son to return. But Luke 15:20b says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; *he ran to his son*, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (emphasis added). Wenham explains the Father's actions,

> There is the picture of the father who had been so insulted looking out for his son, running to meet him and overwhelming him with generous love and undeserved forgiveness. This is how Jesus understood his ministry: God was opening his arms of love to welcome the lost home."[90]

This story, in its context with the other two parables, is about a loving and compassionate Father aggressively pursuing the lost. God pursued, chased and sought the lost to show His extravagant love. This is the central mission of God the Father and God the Son, "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). He calls those who believe in Him to do likewise and He empowers them through the presence of God, the Holy Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit's Incarnational Ministry

God's desire to intimately connect and commune with humanity is even more profoundly demonstrated in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Not only did God express His desire for intimacy by clothing Himself in flesh, but He also promised to permanently reside in believers in the person of the Holy Spirit.

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[90] Wenham, 110.

God the Holy Spirit's Permanent Presence

When Jesus warned the disciples of His departure after the resurrection (John 13:33), He promised to send them a helper that would be just like Him. In John 14:16, He said, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you." The word "another" means "another of the same kind." D. A. Carson explains,

> Jesus promises to send in his absence "*another* Paraclete."…In John 14:16, the word for "another" in the expression "another Paraclete" is the same word as the second "another" in Galatians 1:6f. Jesus is promising not a *different* Paraclete but a Paraclete who is *essentially the same kind* that Jesus himself is (emphasis added).[91]

Just as Jesus Christ came to help the disciples carry out God's mission, the Holy Spirit came to do the same, but in a more complete way in that He would indwell the believer. Raymond Brown states, "The Spirit of truth is a Paraclete precisely because he carries on the earthly work of Jesus." [92] He will continue to pursue the unbeliever. He will continue to seek and save the lost. However, His mission will differ from that of Jesus in that He will always be available to the believer by living in them. Brown explains, "The Paraclete/Spirit will differ from Jesus the Paraclete in that the Spirit is not corporeally visible and his presence will only be by indwelling in the disciples. The OT theme of "God with us" is now to be realized in the Paraclete/Spirit who remains with the disciples forever."[93]

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[91] D. A, Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 50.

[92] Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel of John,* ed. William F. Albight and David N. Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1970), 644.

[93] Brown, 644.

The Spirit living within the disciples would take the place of Jesus living beside the disciples; therefore, their communion with God would not be broken, but would be an internal and permanent communion. Accordingly, the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the enduring evidence of God's desire to deeply commune with believers. He is "The 'ultimate climax' of the personal relations between Jesus and his disciples."[94]

God the Holy Spirit's Personal Power

From the first day of humanity's creation, when God breathed life into Adam, to the very moment in which Jesus appeared to the disciples and breathed new life into them, God has demonstrated His desire for intimacy with humanity. In John 20:21b-22 Jesus said, "'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'" And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" F. F. Bruce, explaining this passage, writes,

> The Spirit is imparted by the breath of Jesus. The verb used here *(emphysao)* is that used in the LXX of Gen. 2:7 where, after fashioning the first man from dust, God 'breathed into his face the breath of life, and the man became a living soul', and again in the command to the *pneuma* in Ezek. 37:9, 'Come from the four winds and breath into these corpses, and let them live.' But it is not the bestowal of life that is in view now, but empowerment for ministry.[95]

This was the beginning of Jesus' giving of God the Holy Spirit's power to the disciples. In doing this, Jesus was commissioning them to carry on His incarnational mission. Brown clarifies, "There is a close relation between the mission of the disciples

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[94] Brown, 1038.

[95] Bruce, 392.

and the giving of the Spirit, for it is the Spirit who consecrates them or makes them holy

so that, consecrated as Jesus was consecrated, they can be sent as Jesus was sent."[96]

Through this experience, the disciples were given the task of seeking and saving

the lost. They were tasked to enter worlds of unfamiliarity, empowered by the Spirit, to

share the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ. To ensure that they could carry out

this all-important mission, they were given the power of the Holy Spirit, which would

help them do it. Acts 1:8 is written: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit

comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in

Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[97]

Universal Blessing for All Who Believe

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul the Apostle as an ambassador of God

exemplified the call of Acts 1:8 by pursuing the Gentiles and presenting the gospel of

Jesus Christ to them. Through his work, he began to fulfill the promise made to Abraham

of a universal blessing of justification by faith. This justification by faith, which is the

means by which the believer was to experience intimacy with God, was fulfilled through

Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, and was confirmed by the indwelling of God, the Holy

Spirit, in the heart of the Gentile believers. That is why Paul asked the Gentile believers

in Galatians 3:2, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the Law of Moses? Of

course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about

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[96] Brown, 1036-1037

[97] New Living Translation Bible.

Christ."[98] He goes on to say in Galatians 3:6-7 "In the same way, 'Abraham believed

God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.'"[99] The real children of

Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. Howard F. Vos, addressing the

universal blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, states,

> The promise had been made in the Abrahamic covenant that in Abraham all
> families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This fulfillment was possible
> only in and through the person and work of the infinite Son of God, Abraham's
> greatest son. The blessing of Abraham or blessing promised to Abraham involved
> the universal blessing of justification by faith.[100]

Therefore, God the Holy Spirit does not indwell and intimately commune with

believers because of meritorious acts done on their part, but because of their faith in the

finished work of Jesus Christ. As Paul states in Galatians 3:15: "Through Christ Jesus,

God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we

who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith."[101] Accordingly,

all believers experience intimacy with God, the Holy Spirit, because of their faith in the

finished work of Jesus Christ.[102]

Incarnational Ministry in the First Church

Following Pentecost, incarnational ministry was lived out in the early church,

specifically in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Consider this, the Apostle Paul, a Jew's

Jew, a man who stated that if anyone had the right to place confidence in his personal

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[98] New Living Translation Bible.

[99] New Living Translation Bible.

[100] Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 60.

[101] New Living Translation Bible.

[102] Vos, 60.

credentials, he was the man: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of

the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal,

persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil. 3:5-6). The

Apostle Paul set the standard for being a Pharisaic Jew. Johannes Munck states, "Paul

was a zealot Pharisee, ardently occupied with the traditions of the fathers and a fanatic

persecutor of the Christians who, on his own initiative, extended the persecution to cities

outside Jerusalem."[103]

However, after encountering the resurrected Jesus, Paul's life-mission changed.

He received one of the most revolutionary, groundbreaking, world-transforming,

incarnational ministry assignments. Munck provides insight,

> Paul's call was related in the same way as the call of the Old Testament characters
> in the history of salvation. Like Paul's, their call had no story leading up to it and
> came from God as a claim that could not be refused. But there is no Old
> Testament parallel to Paul's being called while an unbeliever and a persecutor.
> Paul was called to something greater or more glorious than any of the Old
> Testament prophets and servants were.[104]

He was called to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles throughout the world,

something that had not been done.

Paul's ministry was incarnational in that, when carrying the gospel to the

Gentiles, he entered a hostile and unfamiliar world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and

through the understanding of Gentile culture; he presented the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When they responded, he did not require them to change aspects of their culture that did

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[103] Johannes Munck, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles,* ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 82.

[104] Munck, 82.

not prevent them from living out their Christian faith. Paul's approach was what Alan

Hirsch describes as "an incarnational impulse":

> The incarnational impulse will require that we always take seriously the specific culture of a group of people—seriously enough to develop a community of faith that is both true to the gospel and relevant to the culture it is seeking to evangelize. This is what is meant by contextualizing the gospel and the church. When we frontload mission with a certain culturally bound model of the church, we cannot avoid simply imposing a prefabricated notion of church on a given community.[105]

Paul did not impose a prefabricated notion of church on the Gentiles. Like Jesus,

he simply pursued them because he knew that they desperately needed to be reconciled to

God. He then taught them how to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them in the correct way

to live out their faith.

Because of the large influx of Gentile believers, Acts 15 describes a conference

that cleared up the confusion caused by Jewish believers who tried to impose their culture

on the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas, leaders of the largest Gentile community in Antioch,

attended the conference to argue that Jewish cultural norms are not required for Gentiles.

The Jerusalem Church leaders, Peter and James, agreed and sent a letter to the Gentile

believers, communicating their acceptance into the fellowship of believers. Writing about

this decision, Liefeld and Pao state,

> The effects of the decision were far-reaching. …It freed the gospel from any necessary entanglement with Judaism, whether expressed as Jewish rites or Jewish customs. Nevertheless, it did not renounce the legitimacy of a continued Jewish expression for Jewish believers in Jesus. Thus both Paul's mission to the

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[105] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), 140.

Gentiles and the Jewish-Christian mission to Jews were enabled to progress side by side without conflict.[106]

The gospel was allowed to thrive because the integrity of the gospel was maintained, while the first century church also made room for cultural relevancy.

Evangelistic Implications of Receiving God, the Holy Spirit

When the Spirit of God enters the life of a believer, He has a two-fold purpose. The first is to facilitate intimacy with God, creating a Christ-like character. The second is to empower believers to carry out their mission as ambassadors for Christ. Just as God was in Christ calling sinful humanity to return to God (2 Cor. 5:19), God the Holy Spirit resides within the believer, pursuing, seeking and calling lost humanity to reconcile with God. As stated earlier, "there is a close relation between the mission of the disciples and the giving of the Spirit, for it is the Spirit who consecrates them or makes them holy so that, consecrated as Jesus was consecrated, they can be sent as Jesus was sent." [107]

So those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ must be willing to take the initiative, to be the pursuer, to be the seeker in assuming cultural identity with contemporary society, through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. This is God's call to all believers, to live as He lived,

> God took the initiative in assuming cultural identity through Christ and so we are to take the initiative in developing ministerial and ecclesiological forms that identify with the shifting patterns of contemporary society. It is no longer enough to assume that the world will come to us. It is no longer enough to assume that we should go to the world. …It is not enough to *think* as 'they' do: the Church must

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[106] Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke-Acts,* ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 953.

[107] Brown, *John,* 1036.

actively choose to operate beyond its own boundaries – beyond the safety of its own walls – in order to be fully incarnational.[108]

The biblical record demonstrates God's initiative in closing the relational gap caused by humanity's sin. From His initial question to Adam after the fall to His pursuit of Abraham, reconciliation has always been His goal and He humbled Himself to make it possible. God's pursuit of humanity ultimately led to the universal blessing of all believers and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

Effective outreach to hip-hoppers requires a genuine pursuit of a personal relationship with them, in imitation of God's own self-initiated pursuit of an intimate relationship with lost humanity. This survey of the Bible is the foundation for the researcher's contextualized approach to reaching hip-hoppers. It is a biblical and theological blueprint for being a wisely intrusive, Holy Spirit empowered, pursuer of unsaved hip-hoppers.

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[108] Steve Griffiths, *Open Source Theology: Collaborative Theology for the Emerging Church.* January 30, 2007. http://www.opensourcetheology.net (accessed January 24, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT
LITERATURE

Introduction

According to hip-hop researchers and scholars, Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* and Ralph C. Watkins, author of *The Gospel Rimixed: Reaching the Hip-hop Generation*, hip-hop's birthplace is the South Bronx, New York City.[1] Both authors note that hip-hop music was developed out a desire by disenfranchised, underprivileged, poor Blacks and Latinos to medicate themselves through entertainment because of their common experiences with unemployment, housing displacement and other challenges that came with living in an impoverished inner-city and ghetto neighborhood.[2]

Hip-hop music has been and still is one of the central means by which inhabitants of the inner city communicate their experiences. Whether it is in hip-hop's birthplace or any other inner city neighborhood in America, hip-hop music attempts to be an honest reflection of the trials and triumphs of inner-city life.

This chapter will attempt to accomplish three things in order to form a theoretical basis for the contextualized ministry approach offered in succeeding chapters. One,

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[1] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 13. Ralph C. Watkins, *The Gospel Rimixed: Reaching the Hip-hop Generation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), 6-7.

[2] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 13. Watkins, *The Gospel Rimixed*, 6-7.

analyze and synthesize the writings of hip-hop researchers and scholars, briefly focusing on their assessment of hip-hop culture and music in a quest to understand the culture. Two, review the literature on hip-hop's spirituality, analyzing its origin, characteristics and impact on hip-hop music and culture, in order to determine whether it is a spirituality that holds to absolute truth or a postmodern spirituality. And three, review the literature on the evangelical approaches Christians have used to reach hip-hoppers, evaluating which approach seems most effective for evangelizing and discipling hip-hoppers for Jesus Christ.

Hip-hop Culture

Its Expressions and Its History

It is undisputed in the literature on hip-hop culture that it is a cultural expression that resulted from the difficult circumstances of inner city life in the South Bronx, New York. Hip-hop historian and scholar, Jeff Chang, notes that hip-hop culture and music was started by New York City gang culture in the early 70s.[3] One of its recognized founding fathers, Afrika Bambaataa, was the leader of the gang Black Spades in 1973.[4]

Ralph Watkins, associate professor of evangelism and church growth at Columbia Theological Seminary, writes in his book, *Hip-Hop Redemption: Finding God in the Rhythm and the Rhyme,* "Hip-Hop culture is a child of the city, specifically ethnic-

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[3] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 13 and 63.

[4] TheUrbanDaily: Beat, Buzz and Lifestyle, *Black Music Moment #45: Afrika Bambaataa Organizes The Black Spades Gang Into The Zulu Nation,* June 17, 2011. http://www.theurbandaily.com/2011/06/17/black-music-moment (accessed January 12, 2013).

minority, working-class communities."[5] In another book, written by the same author, *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation,* Watkins describes the conditions that produced hip-hop culture in the inner city. He states, "Jobs were drying up, public education was being undermined, social services were being withdrawn, and affirmative action was being attacked."[6]

To escape these dire circumstances, in 1973 a local disk jockey name Clive Campbell known as DJ Kool Herc began hosting neighborhood parties.[7] His parties became an alternative to the New York City gang culture. DJ Kool Herc's parties were opportunities to forget the challenges in the neighborhood and encouraged unity, creativity and a new cultural identity.[8] Hip-hop culture gave Black and Latino youth a creative, nonviolent way to express themselves through dance, graffiti art and the voice of rap. Hip-hop pastor and rapper Tommy Kyllonen, author of *Un.Orthodox,* in describing rap states, "a new type of song and communication was birthed: rap. The movement now had a voice. Voices expressed the joy and pain of the inner-city."[9]

Although the literature on hip-hop culture and music agrees that the early 70s was the time frame of its origin, some experts disagree regarding the foundational elements or

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[5] Ralph B. Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption: Finding God in the Rhythm and the Rhyme* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 17.

[6] Ralph C. Watkins, *The Gospel Rimixed: Reaching the Hip-hop Generation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), 6-7.

[7] Rebecca Laurence, "40 Years On from the Party Where Hip-hop Was Born," August 9, 2013. http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130809-the-part-where-hip-hop-was-born (accessed September 3, 2013).

[8] Watkins, 7.

[9] Tommy Kyllonen, *Un.Orthodox: Church.Hip-Hop.Culture,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 73.

expressions of hip-hop style. While hip-hop historians Jeff Chang and Tommy Kyllonen believe that hip-hop's primary stylistic elements or expressions are disk-jockeying, rapping, break dancing, graffiti and spirituality, another hip-hop historian and activist Lawrence Parker, whose hip-hop name is KRS-One,[10] as well as expert Daniel White Hodge, add four additional elements or expressions: street knowledge, street language, street fashion and entrepreneurialism.[11]

According to Watkins, hip-hop's stylistic elements developed mainly through the skill set of disk jockeys. He writes, "Hip-hop begins with the DJ."[12] In fact, the founding fathers of hip-hop, Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Grand Master Flash, are all disk jockeys.[13] This is important to note because the prominent figures in hip-hop today are rappers or emcees. However, without the skill set of the disk jockey, the rappers would not have had a means to express their ideas through rap. Also, the break-dancers would not have had music to dance and the graffiti artists would not have had a stage to display their creativity. So, although hip-hop has evolved into a rap dominant culture, it began with disk jockeys.[14] Kyllonen says that the men or women who motivated the crowd while the DJ played the music became the individuals who are popularly known as

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[10] Lawrence Parker, *The Official Website of KRS-One,* January, 2012. http://www.krs-one.com/ (accessed September 20, 2012).

[11] Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 43.

[12] Watkins, 17.

[13] Watkins, 20.

[14] Watkins, 18.

rappers today.[15] They are the men and women who have made hip-hop music the cultural and commercial giant it is today.[16]

Further proof of the critical function of disk jockeying in hip-hop's foundation comes from descriptions by historians of the beginning of break dancing. Break dancers, or "B-Boys" were those who danced during the break portion of party songs played by the DJ.[17] They competed against one another in ways that mimicked the gang fights in the neighborhood. Kyllonen states, "B-boying, widely known as break dancing, was the dance form of hip-hop. As the gang era faded out, it became a new way to battle with your crew and gain respect. Passionately and physically, you settled your beef on the floor rather than with your fist."[18] Break dancing became a non-violent way for gangs to express their aggression without committing harm to one another.

Along with rapping, disk jockeying, and break dancing, graffiti art became a way for disenfranchised youth to make a name for themselves in their neighborhoods. Graffiti artists would use their talents to promote parties where the other elements, DJ-ing, break dancing and rapping, would be expressed. Graffiti artists also began to express their talent on abandoned buildings and subways that traveled throughout the city.[19]

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[15] Kyllonen, 74.

[16] Kyllonen, 74.

[17] Watkins, 9.

[18] Kyllonen, 74.

[19] Chang, 73-74.

Chang highlights one more stylistic element that expressed itself through hip-hop

culture, namely, its knowledge or spirituality.[20] But before presenting hip-hop's

spirituality, the researcher will discuss the generation that evolved as a result of hip-hop's

development.

The Hip-hop Generation versus the Civil Rights Generation

The literature agrees that hip-hop culture has produced a distinct generation

known as the hip-hop generation and that it is a generation separate from the Civil Rights

generation.[21] Bakari Kitwana defines the hip-hop generation as individuals who grew up

listening to hip-hop who were born during the time period 1965 to 1984.[22] This

generation came to age in the eighties and nineties. According to Kitwana, those in this

age group "share values about racial identity, family, relationships, race relations, and

politics."[23] The hip-hop generation, while contemporaries with Generation X, are a

distinct generation because of race and experiences. Also, it differs from the Civil Rights

generation because of experiences.

Kitwana offers a social and political review and assessment of the hip-hop

generation's worldview, influence, and the direction the generation is headed. For

example, he compares the responses to racial injustice by the hip-hop generation to the

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[20] Chang, 89.

[21] Emmett George Price, *The Black Church and Hip-hop Culture: Toward Bridging the Generational Divide* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 25.

[22] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2002), 3.

[23] Kitwana, 4.

responses of the Civil Rights generation. Speaking as a member of the hip-hop generation, he states,

> The Civil Rights/Black power generation grew up with a harsh, overt racism and has not been surprised by contemporary America's racial contradictions. The civil rights/black power generation experienced segregation and second-class citizenship firsthand. Although progress has been made, the older generation realizes that institutional racism lingers. In contrast, the hip-hop generation was socialized on a steady diet of American democracy and the promise of the American dream. We grew up with television sitcoms, film, and advertisements that portrayed it as a reality. Lip service to equality, civil rights, freedom of movement, and integrated schools and neighborhoods created high expectations--even if we didn't experience it firsthand. Rodney King's color-coded justice was a slap in the face to racial equality for African-Americans, revealing a double standard that few could deny.[24]

Kitwana's insights clarify why the two generations have reacted so differently to racism, based on their different experiences and expectations.

Kitwana goes on to discuss the political differences between the two generations. He states:

> We often see our parents themselves (and their peers) as the enemy within. Poverty, unemployment, and limited job options, as they play out in alternate ways for our generation, further feed this divide; our parent's generation views poverty as simply something many of them overcame.[25]

Because of this reality, Kitwana believes that while the Civil Rights generation engaged in social activism to promote change, the hip-hop generation is more prone to deal with injustice through career advancement, excess materialism, and a quest for individual progress.[26]

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[24] Kitwana, 41.

[25] Kitwana, 41-42

[26] Kitwana, 6.

Kitwana not only assesses the generational differences. He also discusses issues related to material greed, to the devastating Black male incarceration rates and to the gender wars in the Black community. He calls the hip-hop generation to personal and social action. He states,

> Due to the nature of the America we've grown up in, we've developed a different sense of urgency rooted in what we've lost in a mere generation—what some of the critics have deemed the reversal of the civil rights gain, such as welfare reform and the decline of affirmative action—as well as in new attacks targeting black youth like police brutality, anti-youth legislation, and the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of hip-hop generationers. We don't mythologize the social gains of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s because having experienced the benefits of these gains first-hand we know they weren't panaceas.[27]

He then calls the generation to develop a political agenda that militates against the issues that he believes harm the hip-hop generation. According to Kitwana, this agenda needs to include education, equal employment, police brutality, mandatory minimum prison sentencing and health care.[28] In the chapter, *Activism and the Hip-hop Generation,* Kitwana highlights the work of community leaders who are addressing these issues.

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Re-Connecting the Generations

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In the book, *The Black Church and Hip-hop Culture,* leading thinkers, preachers and scholars acknowledge the uniqueness of the hip-hop generation and communicate the need for the Civil Rights generation, who are leaders of the Black Church, to connect to the hip-hop generation's culture. This connection is crucial, since the culture that produced the hip-hop generation was developed out of the same oppression experienced by the Black church.

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[27] Kitwana, 147-148.

[28] Kitwana, 178-182.

Hip-hop by all means is a culture! To assert that it is not would be ludicrous…
Hip-hop has had the privilege to lean on the supports of the spirituals, blues, jazz,
R&B, soul, and all the inner voices of these broad genres. They all were borne out
of the need to respond to systematic oppression. They all serve as a voice of hope
in hopeless lifecycles, and they all push toward, in part, the desires for liberty,
justice, and equality.[29]

With thought provoking dialogue, Emmett George Price's work explores the relationship gap between the Civil Rights generation and the hip-hop generation, demonstrating the need for both generations to connect. Joshua Hutchinson, one of the contributing authors, lays out how the generational gap happened in his chapter entitled *Dissed-Enfranchised: The Black Church under the Steeple.* He states:

The civil rights generation after being granted legal equality, soon began its work
to make it a part of the American social fabric. The emergent hip-hop generation,
however was faced with another set of problems: Street violence and drugs
flooding into the community. Though the benefits of integration outweighed
segregation, it too came with much backlash, weakening the overall black
community. The black church, then in the hands of the civil rights generation,
began to lose clout in the vanishing community as it became more evident that it
was losing touch with the ever-changing landscape.[30]

The book *The Black Church and Hip-hop Culture* challenges the Civil Rights generation to see their responsibility in closing the generational gap by passing on the lessons learned during the Civil Rights era.[31] It uses influential leaders from around the country to help the Black church understand its responsibility in leading reconciliation, reminding the Black church of God's redemptive work during the Civil Rights era. Price writes:

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[29] Price, 26.

[30] Price, 18.

[31] Price, 9.

What becomes quite evident after some pondering is that the black church remains the only space that can serve as neutral territory to bridge the generations in a manner to not only recognize the growing detachment but usher in a much needed season of generational healing. The black church, due to its challenging past and forgiving future, remains the only space with the strength and courage to facilitate generational reconciliation. Created under distress, the black church is the only space that can safely reorient all generations to respect one another in a manner to defuse the dilemma of the generational divide.[32]

In addition, contributing author Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou encourages the Black church to become more relevant in reaching the hip-hop generation. In his chapter titled *Hip-Hop, Theology, and the Future of the Black Church*, he writes: "Hip-hop reflects the situation of youth in America. And if the Black church is to remain relevant in the 21st century it must ponder its relationship to hip-hop, youth activism, and young people.[33] The future of the Black church is interconnected with the future of hip-hop.

Price's book communicates hope despite the differences in the generations. Alton Pollard, in his chapter, *From Civil Rights to Hip-hop: A Meditation,* bears witness to the fact that the same divine presence that empowered the Civil Rights generation, is present in hip-hop. He writes, "I see the same divine presence that was at work during the era of civil rights and Black consciousness pervasive in hip-hop music and hip-hop culture today." [34] With hopeful enthusiasm, he communicates how God's presence is pervasive, he declares, "I see it in the growth, innovativeness, and empowerment of all my young adult children, and I see it everywhere. …I see it in our largely uncelebrated, even

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[32] Price, 27.

[33] Price, 153.

[34] Price, 8.

resourceful and resilient, intergenerational strength." [35] He says of himself, "I am the affirmation of our past. I bear witness to our future. I am the transmission of ancestry memory. I am the premonition of hip-hop.[36]

Watkins discusses the development of the hip-hop generation by looking at the sociopolitical environment that helped to shape it in the 70s and 80s. After the disgraceful resignation of President Richard Nixon and the Ford and Carter years, the country took a sharp political right and adopted a conservative agenda that cut many social programs that affected the inner city. [37] The effects were being felt in every area of inner city life. Watkins explains, "Industrial jobs were drying up, public education was being undermined, [and] social services were being withdrawn."[38] These were the forces that formed the hip-hop generation differently than their parents.

Watkins also looks at how the generation gap happened between the Civil Rights generation and hip-hop generation. Racial integration brought prosperity to many in the Civil Rights generation that had not experienced it. Therefore, many of them abandoned the inner city. Watkins writes, "Black flight followed white flight to the suburbs, and the result was a concentration of poverty in the inner-city's that was overwhelmed by black and brown.[39] According to Watkins, this growing divide provoked the generational gap. While the Civil Rights generation was enjoying the fruits of their labor, the hip-hop

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[35] Price, 8.

[36] Price, 8.

[37] Watkins, 6-7.

[38] Watkins, 6-7.

[39] Watkins, 13.

generation was dealing with the harsh reality of inner city life. This caused the hip-hop

generation to question both the gains of the Civil Rights generation and the Black church.

Watkins writes about this cynicism that, "the Hip-Hop generation's feelings of

abandonment have led to a sense of cynicism."[40] He goes on to say,

> They are cynical because they have seen the promises made during the Civil Rights era broken. They have worked hard in school and infiltrated corporate America, only to find that racism and what was once described as a glass ceiling have become a tiled ceiling. They are overwhelmed with their ability to sense racism.[41]

In *The Gospel Remix,* Watkins and others discuss ways the Black church can

make the gospel of Jesus Christ more appealing to hip-hoppers, something that will be

reviewed when looking at evangelistic approaches to reaching hip-hoppers. But first, it is

important to look at hip-hop's complex spirituality.

Hip-hop Spirituality

The specific stylistic element that is important to the research problem posed by

the researcher is what Jeff Chang calls the mysterious fifth element, "knowledge," or

"spirituality."[42] Hodge states that "Hip-Hop is rooted in spirituality." He explains that

"feeling the beat, moving your mind to a higher elevation, connecting with the

community in song and dance, building up one another and even relationship with God

are disciplines and practices woven throughout the history and culture of Hip-Hop."[43]

Spirituality is at the center of hip-hop culture.

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[40] Watkins, 14.

[41] Watkins, 15.

[42] Chang, 89-90.

[43] Hodge, 46.

A Pluralistic Spirituality

Based on the writings that address the spirituality of hip-hop, it is fair to say that it

is a spirituality that is pluralistic in nature. Hip-hop's spiritual father, Afrika

Bambaataa,[44] started an organization called the Universal Zulu Nation. He saw the need

for a moral and spiritual foundation in hip-hop. His goal was to unify the New York City

gangs through entertainment. The motto of his Universal Zulu Nation is "Peace, Love,

Unity and Having Fun."[45] Chang explains the forming of Bambaataa's spirituality:

> So here they were, Bambaataa's army—MCs, the DJs, the graffiti writers, the B-boys and b-girls, the crews they brought and the crowds they moved. They were elemental in their creative power—four, after all, was 'the foundation number,' representing air, water, earth and fire, and in another sense, the rhythm in itself. What they were doing was yet to be named. But in the cooling sunlight of a park jam or the mercury-bursting intensity of an indoor one—from everywhere a crowd arising, the DJ exercising and extending the groove, ciphers and crews burning, distinctions and discriminations dissolving, the lifeblood pulsing and spirit growing—Bambaataa took Herc's party and turned it into the ceremony of a *new faith*, like he knew that this was exactly how their world was supposed to look, sound and flow (emphasis added).[46]

Bambaataa believes in one God who he calls the Most High, Jehovah, Allah, and

Yahweh.[47] He states, "We…respect all names of the Supreme God."[48] When listing the

authoritative writings that guide his movements, Bambaataa writes, "We…believe in the

Holy Bible and The Glorious Qu'ran and in the Scriptures of all the Prophets of God. We

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[44] Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption*, 18.

[45] Chang, 105.

[46] Chang, 107.

[47] Afrika Bambaataa, *The Museum of American Poetics,*
www.poetspath.com/transmissions/messages/bambaataa.html, (accessed October 24, 2012)

[48] Bambaataa (accessed October 24, 2012).

respect and believe in all Truth of both Holy Books, the Scriptures of all the prophets of

God in both books, and the Prophets who were not in either Books."[49]

The teachings of other religious groups, like *The Nation of Earth and God*s and

The Nation of Islam, have had a strong influence on hip-hop's spirituality. Both Nation of

Islam leaders, Elijah Mohammad and Louis Farrakhan, have influenced hip-hop artists.[50]

Also, the Nation of Earth and Gods, also known as the Five Percent Nation, a religious

sect that stresses the elite status of Blacks have influenced hip-hop artists.[51] In addition,

orthodox Islam is represented in rap music."[52] Christianity, on the other hand, according

to hip-hop's spiritual father Bambaataa, is often rejected because of its connection to

American racism.[53] Bambaataa states:

> Because of White Supremacy, many of the history books which are used to teach
> around the World in schools, colleges, and other places of learning have distorted
> true history of other Humans of Color, races, nationalities in the Human family.
> There are hundreds of lies in history because of White Supremacy.[54]

Christianity is often called the White man's religion by Bambaataa and others, and he

therefore encourages its rejection by hip-hoppers.

Challenges to Christian Contextualization

Two books, *The Soul of Hip-hop* and *Hip-hop Redemption,* written by two self-

proclaimed Christian hip-hop theologians, seek to lay out a hip-hop theology for the

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[49] Bambaataa (accessed October 24, 2012).

[50] Anthony Pinn, "Rap's Humanistic Sensibilities," in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music,* ed*.* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 15.

[51] Pinn, 15.

[52] Pinn, 15

[53] Bambaataa, (accessed Oct 24, 2012).

[54] Bambaataa (accessed Oct 24, 2012).

purpose of equipping the church to contextualize the gospel message to hip-hoppers.[55]

These Christian authors, as a basis for their arguments, use influential scholars and

historians within hip-hop culture who hold to religious pluralism or no religion at all. It

remains to be seen how successful their contextualization effort will be, given their

openness to non-Christian spirituality and the danger it brings of corrupting the gospel's

purity. The religious pluralism of these scholars could potentially backfire on the very

efforts by these Christian authors to contextualize the gospel for the hip-hop culture.

One of the Christian theologians, Daniel Hodge, bases some of his work on the

views of Lawrence Parker, known as KRS-One, a respected historian and spiritual leader

in hip-hop culture. KRS-One, whose acronymic stands for Knowledge Reigns Supreme

Over Nearly Everyone,[56] is one of the most influential hip-hop promoters and activists

since hip-hop's beginning. He has not only promoted the nine stylistic elements of hip-

hop, but is considered hip-hop's spiritual authority according to Afrikaa Bambaataa.[57]

KRS-One has over 20 hip-hop albums and is credited with writing the most

rhymes in hip-hop history. [58] Known as a hip-hop philosopher and "teacha," KRS-One

has taught everything from self-creation to vegetarianism to transcendental meditation.[59]

His influence has led to the establishment of a hip-hop appreciation week and hip-hop as

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[55] Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-Hop*, 19-26. Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption*, 11.

[56] Lawrence Parker, *The Official Website of KRS-One,* January 2012. http://www.krs-one.com/ (accessed September 20, 2012).

[57] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[58] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[59] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

an international culture at the United Nations.[60] His official website states that, "KRS-One has single-handedly held the history and original arts of Hip-hop together now for over two decades."[61]

Based on KRS-One's influence in hip-hop and his role as a vanguard of the culture, it should be expected that any serious work on hip-hop culture would include him. But from a biblical perspective, his religious history does not hold much promise for successfully contextualizing the gospel. For example, early in his career as a rapper, he mocked his listeners for reading the Bible and urged them to use their minds to find God within themselves. He states,

> Keep the Bible on your shelf.
> God helps those that help themselves.
> Stop readin' from a dead book.
> Stop readin' from a dead book for a live God.
> You know how stupid you are.
> God reads the Bible with you.
> You both read the language of the devil that's dissing you.
> What can the next man do?
> Whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim or Jew
> Burning candles don't get you down with the universal crew.[62]

Later in his life, he claims to have received a divine call to institute a religion by himself, the hip-hop religion.

To understand how he came to this conclusion, an analysis of his spiritual journey is important. This will demonstrate how he claimed divine inspiration to promote hip-hop as a spiritual practice, culminating in his writing a "hip-hop bible."[63]

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[60] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[61] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[62] KRS-One, "The Real Holy Place," in *Sex and Violence* (1992).

In 1975, KRS-One began practicing yoga, meditation and fasting, while studying the Bible and Rastafarianism.[64] In 1976, he claims to have had dreams and visions that communicated that he had special work to do in the areas of philosophy, music and art.[65] His mother confirmed his visions and dreams through astrology and numerology.[66] In 1978, after reading two Bible passages, Matthew 11:37 and 12:48, he ran away from home.[67] In 1980, he began to take more seriously his aspirations to be a rapper and philosopher/mystic.[68]

In 1982, he was "Introduced to Christian Science…begins studying 'The Game Of Life.' Metaphysical training intensifies."[69] Shortly after, he ran away from home again and began to pursue his childhood dreams and visions.[70] In 1983, he met the Hare Krishnas at a homeless shelter and began to use the graffiti name "Krs." In 1985, he was arrested for defacing public property. It was during this time that he also "begins a theological study of Christ Consciousness and the life of Jesus while being introduced to the Nation of Islam by the popularity of the Five Percenters."[71]

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[63] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[64] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[65] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[66] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[67] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[68] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[69] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[70] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[71] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012). According to Parker, "Five Percenters theology is based on black Muslim traditions, black nationalism, kemetic symbolism, Masonic mysticism and Gnostic spirituality." They believe that "85% of humanity is considered mentally dead and ignorant destroying itself through vice and immorality. 10% conspires to hide the truth (religion) and the 5% are the poor

Two years later, KRS-One released his first commercial hip-hop album, *Criminal Minded.*[72] In 1989, after releasing his second album, *By Any Means Necessary,* KRS-One launched the "Stop the Violence Movement," a movement that sought to reduce violence in inner-city neighborhoods. That same year, he began to use the term "metaphysician" when speaking of himself.[73] In 1990, he studied "advance metaphysics."[74] In 1994, his philosophical studies continued[75] and he launched the "I am Hip-hop" philosophy.[76] In 1996, he "established the Temple of Hip-hop for the spiritual exploration of Hip-hop's culture"[77] and was the first to argue that "rap is something we do; Hip-hop is something we live."[78]

As the new millennia began, a few noteworthy events solidified KRS-One as the spiritual authority in hip-hop. First, "Rolling Stone Magazine acknowledges KRS-One as Hip-hop's 'institutional authority' and 'self-help guru.'"[79] Then in 2004, "the Temple of Hip-hop arrives in Albuquerque New Mexico teaching Hip-hop as a spiritual way of

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righteous teachers who do not subscribe to the teachings of the 10% as they believe that God is the black man of Asia. 'Black' in 5% doctrine includes all non-Caucasians and 'Asia' refers to the whole planet Earth."

[72] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[73] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[74] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[75] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[76] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[77] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[78] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[79] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

life."[80] Third, in 2009, "The 'Gospel of Hip-hop is completed and published."[81] Most

recently in 2011, KRS-One's Temple of Hip-hop "holds the first 'Gathering' for the

Temple of Hip-hop at the Spirit Works Center for Spiritual Living in Los Angeles. The

lecture was entitled 'GOD's Son.'"[82]

Based on his life experiences with various faiths, particularly metaphysics and the

Nation of Islam's Five Presenters, KRS-One believes that he has been divinely called to

institute a new religion, the religion of hip-hop, and that his new religion will do away

with all other historical religions.[83]

To support this new religion, KRS-One wrote his own sacred book called *The

Gospel of Hip-Hop*, a 600-page book that examines the spirituality of hip-hop culture.[84]

When speaking of the book, he writes, "I'm suggesting that in 100 years, this book will be

a new religion on the earth."[85] When asked what gives him the authority to write what he

believes is a sacred book, he states, "Well, I think I have the authority to approach God

directly, I don't have to go through any religion."[86] He goes on to say, "I can approach

God directly myself and so I wrote a book called *The Gospel of Hip-hop* to free us from

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[80] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[81] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[82] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[83] Parker, (accessed September 20, 2012).

[84] Michael Stone, *Rap religion: KRS-One to Release Hip-Hop Bible,* August 25, 2009. http://www.examiner.com/article/rap-religion-krs-one-to-release-hip-hop-bible (accessed November 29, 2012).

[85] Stone, (accessed November 29, 2012)

[86] Stone, (accessed November 29, 2012)

all this nonsense garbage right now. I respect the Christianity, the Islam, the Judaism but their time is up."[87]

In the opening of the book, entitled "A New Covenant," KRS-One asserts that a voice led him to leave home, drop out of school and start his spiritual journey of Hip-hop.[88] This voice also led him to start the Stop the Violence Movement and the Temple of Hip-hop, as well as to write the *Gospel of Hip-hop*.[89]

KRS-One not only believes that he has the authority to write his own sacred book, but he believes the lyrics that are in his rap songs are divine. He writes: "Hip-hop is divine. We're not just rapping. This is divine speech we are giving."[90] In speaking of two of the most famous hip-hop artists who were violently murdered, he says, "I look at Tupac as John the Baptist and Biggie" speaking of the rapper Biggie Smalls, "may be Jesus Christ."[91] He also once stated, "I believe that God is a blood line as opposed to a belief. I believe that there are certain people who are born god."[92]

Based on KRS-One's spiritual journey, it is uncertain whether Daniel Hodge's efforts at contextualization are faithful to orthodox Christianity. Hodge could have been more successful, perhaps, if he had at least more carefully acknowledged KRS-One's

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[87] Stone, (accessed November 29, 2012)

[88] KRS-One, *The Gospel of Hip-hop,* (Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books, 2009), 17.

[89] KRS-One, 17.

[90] "Hip-hop A New Age Religion, Part 1," You Tube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNgm6iZq4x4&feature=endscreen&NR=1 (accessed October 3, 2012).

[91] A New Age Religion, (accessed October 3, 2012).

[92] A New Age Religion, (accessed October 3, 2012).

religious pluralism. Without this acknowledgment, Hodge's work stands in danger of merely perpetuating religious syncretism.

For example, after attending a lecture given by KRS-One, Hodge shares his experience in his book *The Soul of Hip-hop.* He writes, "KRS-One had everyone in that room clinging to each word of his message of love and peace, like that found in the Bible, particularly the New Testament." [93] Dr. Hodge was so mesmerized by KRS-One's message that he states, "He could have taken an altar call, and many of the 400 students gathered there would have come to know Christ a little better."[94]

Based on his spiritual journey, KRS-One does not appear to believe in the Jesus of the Bible. That is why he wrote his own, *Gospel of Hip-Hop.*[95] Again, he believes that "in 100 years, this book will be a new religion on the earth."[96]

Hodge not only gives credibility to KRS-One when articulating his hip-hop theology, but also uses Harvard graduate and scholar Anthony B. Pinn as a foundation for his hip-hop theology. Pinn is a professor of religious studies at Rice University[97] whose expertise is in the areas of African American humanism, Liberation theology and

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[93] Hodge, 36.

[94] Hodge, 36.

[95] Stone, (accessed November 29, 2012).

[96] Stone, (accessed November 29, 2012).

[97] Jenée Desmond-Harris, *The Root: On Black Atheism: Anthony B. Pinn,* November 30, 2011. http://www.theroot.com/views/exploring-black-atheism-anthony-b-pinn (accessed October 7, 2012).

American religious history.[98] He was the first scholar to analyze what he calls the "religious and spiritual sensibilities of rap music."[99]

Pinn proposes a Black humanism that seeks to solve the challenges in the Black community through human strength, creativity and ingenuity.[100] He writes: "I suggest that another, but seldom considered manifestation of religion's elemental nature is humanism—a nontheistic form of life orientation that relies on human ingenuity and creativity to achieve greater life options and a greater degree of subjectivity."[101] He further suggests the need to use a Black humanistic perspective to understand and analyze the spirituality in rap music.[102] Pinn explains the perspective of Black humanism. It is an,

> (1) Understanding of humanity as fully (and solely) accountable and responsible for the human condition and the correction of its plight.
> (2) Suspicion toward or rejection of supernatural explanation and claims, combined with an understanding of humanity as an evolving part of the natural environment as opposed to being a created being.
> (3) Appreciation for African American cultural production and a perception of traditional forms of black religiosity as having cultural importance as opposed to any type of 'cosmic' authority.
> (4) Commitment to individual and societal transformation.
> (5) Controlled optimism that recognizes both human potential and human destructive activities.[103]

Hodge, in seeking to articulate a hip-hop theology, proposes that the above principles are keys to understanding hip-hop's spirituality,[104] not mentioning the fact that

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[98] Desmond-Harris, (accessed October 7, 2012).

[99] Anthony Pinn, "Rap's Humanistic Sensibilities," in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music,* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 85.

[100] Pinn, 86.

[101] Pinn, 86.

[102] Pinn, 91.

[103] Pinn, 87.

Pinn seeks to answer the challenges of life without God. Hodge states, "These five elements are essential to Hip-hop's theological mantra…"[105] Hodge also asserts in his footnotes, "I am not suggesting that Hip-hop is entirely humanistic. However humanism is not without some educational and theological positives."[106] Hodge's attempt to contextualize the gospel may be difficult if it is so squarely based on Pinn's humanism, a particular brand of humanism that rejects the supernatural elements of the Christian faith.

Pinn's atheism is further attested to by many of his own statements. He writes, "I think African Americans are worse off because of their allegiance to theism. The belief in God and gods has not been particularly useful or productive for them."[107]

Pinn clearly views belief in God to be a crutch, a safety mechanism, a security blanket. He says as much when he writes: "I think this belief in God remains fairly strong within the African-American community because it provides a kind of safety mechanism…it's a kind of cosmic security blanket."[108] His conclusion is that, "Nothing good can come out of that."[109]

Despite this contradiction to biblical Christianity, which calls the believer to trust in Jesus Christ when dealing with the challenges of life, Hodge believes that Pinn's five humanistic perspectives are essential to understanding hip-hop's theology. That is

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[104] Hodge, 24.

[105] Hodge, 24.

[106] Hodge, 24.

[107] Desmond-Harris, (accessed October 7, 2012).

[108] Desmond-Harris, (accessed October 7, 2012)

[109] Desmond-Harris, (accessed October 7, 2012).

partially true since hip-hop's theology, if there is in fact a well-defined hip-hop theology, is pluralistic in nature as described earlier in the chapter. It allows the synchronizing of different beliefs, even non-theistic beliefs. This is difficult if not impossible to reconcile with Hodge's statements that hip-hop speaks to the challenges in urban America and seeks spiritual answers connected to Jesus to bring about a higher involvement with God.[110] Hodge does acknowledge that hip-hop theology may be out of sync with traditional orthodox Christianity when he writes of its challenge to the institutionalized church and questioning of centralization of power in pastors. Even so, Hodge's endorsement of KRS-One and Pinn is difficult to square with his attempts to contextualize the gospel that Jesus, the Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers communicated, unless in contextualizing the gospel he deliberately ignores what the Bible says about Jesus.

Hip-hop does speak about the challenges in urban America and often highlights the hypocrisy of the institutional church, but it does not seek spiritual answers connected to Jesus unless it is holy hip-hop. Secular hip-hop seeks spiritual answers to the challenges in urban life through various gods or no god at all, as illustrated by the beliefs of the individuals referenced in Hodge's book: KRS-One, Anthony Pinn and Afrikaa Bambaataa.

Similar to Hodge, Monica Miller, in her article *The Promiscuous Gospel,* uses Anthony Pinn's humanistic viewpoint and proposes that any religious exploration of rap music requires an, "epistemology of uncertainty, paying careful attention to the ways in

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[110] Hodge, 25.

which our traditional theological assumptions and religious language constricts the diversity of meaning present."[111] The basis of her argument is that rappers communicate a complex and diverse theology that is informed by their personal experiences with the challenges of life. She continues "many rappers seem to display a level of comfortability with the religious uncertainty that pervades the reality of their lives, the fact that each day is a new day with new questions, fresh answers and innovative ways to 'get by.'"[112] Her conclusion is that rap artists engage in religious syncretism and any belief in absolute truth is outdated. She writes, "Rap music, like the spirituals and the blues, does not boast a monolithic religious preference."[113] She continues, "When exploring the religious dimensions of rap music, meaning of words are slippery and traditional values both are and are not being held in place."[114] Therefore, she contends that in the analyzing of hip-hop's spirituality, one must be open to the complex meaning that hip-hop artists give to traditional religious language and avoid placing absolute meaning on their use of religious language. She adds that any theological analysis of rap music "necessitate interdisciplinary theoretical, methodological and conceptual broadening."[115]

Miller's insistence on an "epistemological uncertainty" and on "theoretical...broadening" make it difficult to include a worldview like Christianity, which claims certainty in a number of areas.

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[111] Monica Miller, *"The Promiscuous Gospel': The Religious Complexity and Theological Multiplicity of Rap Music."* (Culture and Religion, 2009), 57.

[112] Miller, 54.

[113] Miller, 42.

[114] Miller, 42.

[115] Miller, 58.

Like Hodge, Miller's work was influenced by the works of Anthony Pinn. But unlike Hodge, Miller admits to the difficulty of reconciling traditional Christianity with Pinn's humanistic version of hip-hop. Miller seems more aware of the contradictions between the two worldviews. In contrast, Hodge's quest to contextualize Christianity within hip-hop culture is made problematic if not impossible because of the way in which he builds on Pinn's humanistic principles.

Watkins, author of *Hip-Hop Redemption,* is another hip-hop historian and theologian who attempt to articulate a hip-hop theology. But in contrast to Hodge's approach and more in line with Miller's, Watkins notes the contradictions. For example, he places the lyrics of hip-hop artists on the same level as the inspiration of Scripture. He uses the words "divinely inspired," "inspired," or "revelation" to refer to both the Scripture and the words of hip-hop artists. [116] He writes:

> In the context of hip-hop culture, the emcee claims a status of being sent by God that is affirmed by the community, and his or her words take on an elevated, sacred status. As those in the hip-hop community search for authenticity and truth, they do not center this discussion on the Bible.[117]

He goes on to explain why this is true by quoting William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*. He writes,

> In essence, the Bible has lost much of its earlier widely recognized stature as the only textual authority transcending national boundaries, sectarian divisions, ethnic or cultural diversities, and differences of socio-economic or intellectual class. …Once a generally recognized locus of contact with the transcendent, the Bible has undergone a 'leveling.'[118]

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[116] Watkins, 87.

[117] Watkins, 87.

[118] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 167. In Watkins, 87.

Watkins then uses Graham's statement as the foundation for his argument that hip-hop artists speak with a prophetic voice on equal footing with God's Word. Watkins explains, "This leveling of the Bible as the only sacred text has been balanced by the sacred words of emcees who speak truth out of a story that is true." [119] The danger of equalizing an emcee's inspiration is that Scripture's priority and authority is threatened to be lost in the attempt to contextualize the gospel. The final result of such an effort is the total loss of the gospel's message. It will cease to exist altogether if it is no more inspired than rap.

Watkins, Hodge and Anthony Pinn all propagate the idea that hip-hop artists are prophets crying out about the suffering in the world. This equating of the artists with the prophets fails to differentiate between a true prophet of God who speaks the word of God and the hip-hop artist who simply articulates the woes of life.

Also, Anthony Pinn's humanistic, "nitty-gritty"[120] hermeneutics influences Watkins and Hodge's thinking. "Nitty-gritty" hermeneutics are an interpretive process that "urges a rethinking of Black religion beyond the confines of theological conformity and strict theistic expression."[121] It is an interpretative expression that "entails 'telling it like it is' and taking risks."[122]

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[119] Watkins, 87.

[120] Anthony B. Pinn, *Why Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology,* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 135.

[121] Pinn, 135.

[122] Pinn, 166.

The following quote from Watkins illustrates Pinn's influence on Watkins. When speaking about the theological perspective of hip-hop artist DMX, who Watkins assert is a prophet to his hip-hop audience, Watkins writes, "DMX tries to tell the entire story. He isn't bound by doctrinal constraints. He is engaging in nitty-gritty hermeneutics as he tells about his struggles."[123]

Pinn's nitty-gritty hermeneutics appears to influence Hodge as well. For example Hodge, in a chapter in his book entitled *Tupac's Nit Grit 'Hood Gospel,* gives prophetic credence to Tupac Shakur. He writes, "Prophets are divinely inspired revealers, interpreters, teachers and students—thought to have a connection with the Godhead and having divinely inspired insights into life and societal issues."[124] Hodge believes that Tupac possessed this type of prophetic authority and influence, he writes, "Tupac was all of this… Tupac was a street prophet, one who could connect the 'hood' and the thug to God through life, language, music and community."[125]

Both Watkins and Hodge credit and draw upon Pinn's nitty-gritty hermeneutics as an influence as they lay out their hip-hop theology. But both authors depart from Pinn when espousing that hip-hop emcees are inspired prophets, similar to divinely inspired prophets of the Bible. When making the claim that hip-hop artist are prophets, both

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[123] Watkins, 94.

[124] Hodge, 142.

[125] Hodge, 142.

Hodge and Watkins aligned more with KRS-One who once stated, "I look at Tupac as John the Baptist and Biggie may be Jesus Christ."[126]

Watkins' and Hodge's attempts to lay out a hip-hop theology for evangelistic purposes are admirable. However, their theoretical underpinnings that are based on thinkers who either hold to a postmodern belief about God or reject His influence altogether are objectionable. This objection is based on the following three reasons.

First, KRS-One claims to have received divine revelation from God to establish a hip-hop religion and to write a hip-hop bible. For Hodge and Watkins to give credence to KRS-One without warning the reader that his beliefs about Jesus differ from what the Bible teaches about Jesus can cause confusion to the reader and thwart any effort to successfully contextualize the gospel. In addition, it gives credence to KRS-One's belief that he has authority to establish his own religion and to write his own bible.

Second, Anthony Pinn believes that the existence of God is unsubstantiated.[127] He has systematically sought to disprove the need for God in his lectures and writings. In his latest book, *Writing God's Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist,*[128] he recounts how he moved from being a Methodist minister to becoming a devout Atheist. But despite these admissions Hodge believes that Pinn's nontheistic humanist

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[126] "Hip-hop A New Age Religion Part 1," YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNgm6iZq4x4&feature=endscreen&NR=1 (accessed October 3, 2012).

[127] Antony Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012), 45-46.

[128] Anthony Pinn, *Writing God's Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist* (2014).

perspective is "not without theological positives."[129] Assuming Hodge is aware of Pinn's nontheistic theology, it is difficult to understand how he reconciles a nontheistic theology with a contextualization of the gospel that includes the Jesus Christ of the Bible.

Third, both Hodge and Watkins appear to be influenced by Anthony Pinn's nitty-gritty hermeneutics, believing that certain hip-hop artists have the same prophetic authority of a John the Baptist or Jesus Christ himself. This assertion devalues the role of a true prophet of God.

The implications of these teachings are damaging. For example, if a young hip-hopper gives his or her life to Jesus Christ and reads *The Soul of Hip-hop* or *Hip-hop Redemption* and makes the decision to research the teachings of KRS-One or Dr. Anthony Pinn, that young believer in Christ may be confused by KRS-One's proclamation that Christianity's "time is up" [130] and is given way to the new pluralistic hip-hop religion. That young believer may be led astray instead of developing a deep faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if he or she comes to believe that Pinn's Black humanism is the answer to life's challenges, the young hip-hopper may be provoked to trust in oneself instead of trusting Christ with life's challenges.

A sound biblical theology coupled with a compassionate incarnational empathy for unbelievers in hip-hop culture can produce and encourage a belief in Jesus Christ that is rooted in biblical truth instead of humanism. Jesus must be reintroduced to hip-hoppers because there is a multiplicity of beliefs in hip-hop, many of which are more dominant

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[129] Hodge, 24.

[130] "Hip-hop A New Age Religion Part 1," YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNgm6iZq4x4&feature=endscreen&NR=1 (accessed October 3, 2012).

than Christianity. This leads to a review of the evangelistic approaches that have been used to reach hip-hoppers.

Evangelistic Approaches to Hip-hop Culture

It has been established that the pioneers of hip-hop have developed a unique culture that is worthy of pursuit by those who take seriously Jesus' mandate for the believer to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Because this is true, believers in Jesus Christ who love the culture have felt compelled to preach Christ to the culture. But their approaches have been different from each other based on their philosophy of ministry.

Three main approaches for reaching those in hip-hop culture have been used. First, there are Christian evangelists to hip-hoppers who allow the culture to determine the approach used in reaching the culture. Second, there are Christian evangelists who believe it is important to get hip-hoppers out of the culture because it is altogether evil. And third, there are Christian evangelists who believe it is best to inject Christ into the culture, working with the Holy Spirit to modify those parts of the culture that are incompatible with the Christian life, but not requiring believing hip-hoppers to come out of the culture. It is expected that believing hip-hoppers will use their knowledge of the culture to reach those within the culture.

To aid the review of the three evangelistic approaches that Christian evangelists have used to reach the hip-hop culture, it is important to present a summary of H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture" paradigms. Niebuhr was a twentieth century theologian who is most famously known for writing the book, *Christ and Culture*, a work that attempts to answer the question, "what should be the relationship between Christ, the

church and believers to culture?"[131] In this book, he presents five ways the church has

tried to reconcile a sinless and perfect Christ to a sinful and imperfect culture. The five

ways are: "Christ against Culture," "Christ and Culture in Paradox," "Christ of Culture,"

"Christ above Culture," and "Christ Transforms Culture."[132]

The Niebuhr paradigms do not offer an exhaustive list of ways Christians have

tried to reconcile Christ and culture, but they are sufficient enough to look at how hip-hop

evangelists have approached the hip-hop culture. They best illustrate the tension that is

present for the hip-hop evangelist when determining how to present Christ to hip-hop

culture.

<div align="center">

Christ against Culture

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The first view in the Niebuhr paradigms is the "Christ against Culture"

perspective. In summary, this view is the belief that Christ and culture are polar

opposites. Niebuhr states, "The counterpart of loyalty to Christ and the brothers is the

rejection of cultural society; a clear line of separation is drawn between the brotherhood

of the children of God and the world."[133] There is a clear separation between believers in

Jesus Christ and individuals who do not follow Him. The biblical passage that appears to

support this view is 1 John 2:15: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If

anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him."

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[131] Gideon Strauss, *Christianity and Culture: The Case for Reformational Culture Activism,* October 2, 1992. http://thebigpicture.homestead.com/files/CHRISTIANITYANDCULTURE.html (accessed October 12, 2012).

[132] Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1951)

[133] Niebuhr, 47-48.

In terms of Christ and hip-hop culture, the biggest proponent of this view is Craig

G. Lewis. He teaches that hip-hop culture is evil to the core and should be rejected at all

costs.[134] Lewis's work has had a tremendous effect on the African American church and

has perpetuated the generational gap between the hip-hop generation and the Civil Rights

generation.[135] In the minds of some in the Civil Rights generation, Lewis's work has

confirmed their fears and concerns. Therefore, proponents of this belief do not see any

value in evangelizing hip-hop culture and encourages the avoidance of it.

Price's work referenced explains the drawbacks of adopting Lewis's views and

argues for an approach that does not set the generations against each other. It argues that

it is counterproductive for both generations to focus on their differences and recognize

the need for cross-generational efforts to close the generational divide. [136] Price writes,

"Simply stated we need the lessons of Civil Rights and Hip-Hop. Civil Rights is African

American's sacred legacy. Hip-Hop is this era's sacred hope."[137]

<div align="center">Christ and Culture in Paradox</div>

The second view in Niebuhr's paradigms is *Christ and Culture in Paradox*. In

summary, this view holds that the "tension between Christ and culture cannot be

reconciled by any lasting synthesis."[138] It recognizes that there is sin and grace, good and

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[134] Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-hop,* 216.

[135] Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-hop,* 215. William Branch, *AMBA 2.0 The Ambassador Online,* http://www.ambassador215.com/wanted-yes-or-no/ (accessed October 27, 2012)

[136] Price, *The Black Church and Hip-hop Culture*, 9.

[137] Price, *The Black Church and Hip-hop Culture*, 9.

[138] Angus J. L Menuge, *Niebuhr's Christ and Culture Reexamined,* www.mtio.com/articles/bissar26.htm (accessed October 12, 2012).

evil and that both realms exist side by side in a paradoxical relationship, never to be resolved in this life.[139] The researcher did not discover a hip-hop evangelist that holds this view.

The next three views, "Christ of Culture," "Christ above Culture" and "Christ Transforms Culture" appear to provide more opportunities to contextualize the gospel message to hip-hop culture because they seek to reconcile a sinless Christ with an imperfect world.

Christ of Culture

The next and third view in the Niebuhr paradigm is the "Christ of Culture" view. In summary, this view seeks to affirm both Christ and culture and rejects any conflict between the two. Those who hold this view seek to maintain communion with the believer and unbeliever. They seek to see God in both the good and the bad, the holy and the profane. According to Angus J. L. Menuge, in his work, *Niebuhr's Christ and Culture Reexamined*, he states, "This view leads to accommodationism, the attempt to reconcile Christianity with what appears to be the greatest achievements of a culture."[140]

The problem with this view is that it focuses on the Christian's relationship with humanity more than it is a focus on the Christian's relationship with God. It removes the distinctions between God and humanity because it focuses primarily on this world. This view results in self-reliant humanism.[141] Menuge states:

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[139] Menuge, (accessed October 12, 2012).

[140] Menuge, (accessed October 12, 2012).

[141] Menuge, (accessed October 12, 2012).

The inevitable result is a theology in man's image, a danger which will always arise from the apparently innocent attempt to connect Christianity with some cultural movement one wishes to endorse, to create what C.S. Lewis called 'Christianity And.'[142]

Hodge and Watkins both appear to hold this view, as will be further examined after describing the next two views.

Christ above Culture

The fourth view in the Niebuhr's paradigm is the "Christ above Culture" view. In summary, this view does not make Christ and culture opposites, but seeks to bring harmony between the two. This view holds that the good works that are carried out in culture are the result of God's common grace. Therefore, the common grace of God from above influences the culture from the world below. Both Hodge and Watkins appear to hold this view as well.

Christ Transforms Culture

The fifth and final view in Niebuhr's paradigm is "Christ Transformer of Culture." This view is similar to "Christ and Culture in Paradox" but holds to the belief that the evangelist can infuse Christ into the culture and challenge it to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The hip-hop evangelist and rapper, William Branch, also known as "The Ambassador" holds this view. This is the view that the researcher has adopted as most compatible with his model for incarnational mission among hip-hoppers.

Christ Transforms Hip-hop Culture

The researcher has adopted Niebuhr's category that "Christ Transforms Culture" to help frame his incarnational model of evangelism to hip-hoppers. The following

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[142] Menuge, (accessed October 12, 2012).

critiques of other models will show why the researcher finds it to be the best available model.

<p style="text-align:center">Critiques of Hodge and Watkins</p>

Hodge calls Reinhold Niebuhr's book *Christ and Culture* "extremely valuable in missionally engaging with the hip-hop generation."[143] He then goes on to personally categorize Niebuhr's paradigms in his own words, describing "Christ against Culture" as "avoidance," meaning that because culture is bad, it must be avoided at all cost. In his critiques of this view, he writes, "Avoidance is not in the language of the Great Commission, nor is it part of the gospel. Rather, we find avoidance when we misuse and misinterpret the Scriptures. We find a God who seemingly hates anything that is not Christian."[144]

Hodge then describes "Christ and culture in paradox" as "caution."[145]In explaining his view of "caution," he writes, "Caution does not really believe that God is in control and is based on fright."[146] He continues,

> Caution as a posture toward culture promotes, breeds, and incubates trepidation and anxiety within its users.
> Trepidation gets reinforced when Christians decide to isolate themselves from culture—having only Christian friends, listening only to Christian radio, watching only Christian films and television. [147]

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[143] Hodge, 194.

[144] Hodge, 197.

[145] Hodge, 194.

[146] Hodge, 195.

[147] Hodge, 195.

Hodge does not believe that Avoidance and Caution can bear any meaningful fruit in reaching those who are in hip-hop culture.

Next, Hodge describes the paradigms that he finds most effective in contextualizing the gospel for unsaved hip-hoppers. He defines "Christ transforms culture" as "dialogue," "Christ of Culture" as "appropriation," and "Christ above culture" as "divine encounter." He argues that each paradigm is a stepping stone that moves from an open conversation ("dialogue") to a belief that the divine can be discovered in all aspects of hip-hop. He seems to weave in and out of all three paradigms, ultimately contending that "divine encounter" is the best way to contextualize the gospel because it offers many avenues to salvation. He writes, "Seeing Christ as above culture and the transformer of it means that we recognize the many avenues to salvation available to God." [148] He also contends that the "divine encounter" paradigm offers the best way to contextualize the gospel because it does not adhere to a "conventional theological paradigm."[149] It allows the hip-hop evangelist the freedom to merge the ideas of popular culture with what Hodge describes as a "biblical hermeneutic to discover new ways to understand evangelism, salvation, church, culture and even God."[150]

As stated earlier, Hodge's attempt to contextualize the Christian faith with hip-hop culture is admirable, but his affirming of the last three paradigms can make it difficult to truly contextualize the biblical message of Jesus Christ with hip-hop culture. This is because Hodge makes the Christian message undistinguishable from hip-hop's

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[148] Hodge, 199-200.

[149] Hodge, 199-200.

[150] Hodge, 199-200.

message. He does not clearly communicate that God's word should be the final authority in determining whether some components of hip-hop culture needs to be avoided or accepted. Hodge seems to place hip-hop culture above Christ, conceding a prophetic voice to hip-hop artists and interpreting the Christian faith through cultural art, like popular hip-hop movies, rather than allowing God's word to be the final authority on truth.

For example, Hodge, in defending the "Christ of Culture" view, which he calls "appropriation,"[151] writes, "Appropriation is a new frontier for much of Christianity, in which we venture out of our sacred canopies and into the unknown and unchartered waters of popular culture." [152] He contends that the best way to accomplish this is to be "fluid in our theological foundation, knowing that God is in control of all things." [153]

It is Hodge's idea of being "fluid in our theological foundation" that is troubling. Hodge gives credence to KRS-One, a hip-hop icon and spiritual leader who believes that he has the authority to lead a new religion, the hip-hop religion. He also gives credence to Anthony Pinn, an outspoken critic of Christianity, who believes that the existence of God is unsubstantiated.

Should not the hip-hop evangelist have standards against the parts of hip-hop culture that militates against Christian beliefs in his or her effort to contextualize the gospel of Jesus Christ with hip-hop culture? Should not the evangelistic approach be influenced more by the word of God than it is by culture?

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[151] Hodge, 195.

[152] Hodge, 198.

[153] Hodge, 198.

It appears that Hodge contends for an evangelistic approach that is more influenced by hip-hop's cultural icons and trends than it is influenced by Scripture. For example, Hodge argues that hip-hop evangelists are to look for Christ in the profane, a "Christ of culture" view. As the bases of his argument, he uses a movie that is highly revered by unbelieving hip-hoppers, *Scarface*. Unfortunately, this movie is revered by unbelieving hip-hoppers because it glamorizes a relentless pursuit of money and power.

Scarface follows the life of Cuban refugee Tony Montana and his close friend Manny Ray, who both built a strong drug empire in Miami. According to Molly Eichel, Scarface is revered because its "release coincided with the rise of hip-hop and the genre's transformation from party jams to a harder sound, with lyrics that reflected the urban reality."[154] As the popularity of Gangsta Rap, a hard form of rap, increased, the movie Scarface became a visual example of the events depicted in Gangsta Rap.

Ken Tucker, author of *Scarface Nation: The Ultimate Gangster Movie and How It Changed America,* further explain why hip-hoppers love Scarface, specifically the movie's leading character, Tony Montana. He writes:

> He brought himself up from nothing, so people seized on all of these catchphrases from Oliver Stone's wonderful script. It was a completely over-the-top movie that you could laugh at—like when Pacino falls into that huge pile of cocaine. But on the other hand, in the beginning when Tony Montana arrives as a Cuban immigrant, it shows the ambition and drive that is talked about so much in hip-hop culture.[155]

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[154] Molly Eichel, "Why 'Scarface' Became an Icon in Hip-Hop," Philadelphia Daily News, August 30, 201, http://www.newsobserver.com/2011/09/01/1450766/why-scarface-became-an-icon-in.html (accessed September 2, 2013).

[155] Eichel, (accessed September 2, 2013).

Hodge seeks to affirm this movie without showing the conflict between Christian values and the values this movie propagates. For example, he contends that instead of seeing the pervasive sinful elements in the movie, one should see the evangelistic implications. He contends that one should see the need to reach characters like Tony Montana. In arguing this, he seeks to remove the conflict between Christ and a popular movie in hip-hop culture. He seeks to see God in the good and the bad, the holy and the profane. He seeks to engage the culture in all its profanity and sacredness.[156]

It is imperative that the gospel is presented to individuals like the movie character Tony Montana. However, in doing so, the word of God must be the guide and the Holy Spirit must be the power leading the effort. Contextualization does call for an awareness and understanding of culture, but biblical truth coupled with the Holy Spirit's guidance must be central in reaching the culture. Also, culture should be highly respected, but some aspects of culture must be secondary to biblical truth and if need be, respectfully rejected.

Similar to Hodge, Watkins appears to move from the "Christ transforms Culture" viewpoint to ultimately a "Christ above Culture" viewpoint. However, unlike Hodge, Watkins does not categorize Niebuhr's paradigms into evangelistic approaches that are clearly seen in his writings, although his arguments are similar to Hodge's arguments in that he weaves in and out of the "Christ transforms Culture," "Christ of Culture," and "Christ above Culture" viewpoints.

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[156] Hodge, 218-219.

For example, on one end, he appears to support the "Christ transforms Culture" viewpoint when he stresses the need for hip-hop music to communicate a message that leads the listener to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. While, on the other end, he seems to support the Christ of Culture viewpoint when criticizing the Scripture laden lyrics of holy hip-hop artists as "theological right,"[157]calling them to be more accommodating. He argues and assumes that holy hip-hop artists are on what he calls the "theological right" because they are working to avoid criticism from the Black church which he believes forces them to be more holy than they actually want to be.[158] But in reality, his criticism appears to be influenced by his desire to remove any conflict between a holy Christ and the unholy elements in hip-hop culture, something holy hip-hop artists seek to expose. For Watkins, there is "no great tension between church and world," a Christ of Culture viewpoint. [159]

Watkins also proposes that God is not simply a personal being who can influence hip-hop culture, but that He is personally present in all aspect of hip-hop culture. He writes, "If I believe that God is omnipresent, which I do, then I must ask not if, but how God is in hip-hop" [160] Like Hodge, the hip-hop artist KRS-One influences Watkins belief about the divine in hip-hop. In recounting an event he attended in which KRS-One was the featured artist, he writes, "KRS-One led us into the spiritual force of hip-hop. …KRS-

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[157] Watkins, 133.

[158] Watkins, 133.

[159] Niebuhr, 83.

[160] Watkins, 8.

One called on the Spirit as he took us to places I hadn't planned on going."[161] After this experience, Watkins began to question what was behind the spiritual force and investigated whether it was redemptive or destructive.[162] He concluded that the spiritual force in hip-hop was redemptive because God was present in the hip-hop. He writes, "The Spirit is working in the music in a new way. As God manifests Godself in this space, a holy encounter is enacted. … God is present because God is omnipresent. God knows what is going on because God is omniscient."[163] His conclusion is that "there is a theological core in hip-hop, and this is a theology of redemption as the beats and lyrics come together to give form and shape to a worldview."[164] Watkins worldview does not make any distinctions between good and bad. In fact, it is a worldview that believes that God is in all aspects of hip-hop because culture is sustained by God, a Christ above Culture viewpoint.[165]

Because of his worldview, as stated in the section of hip-hop spirituality, Watkins likens the words of hip-hop artists with the words of prophets, appearing to give the words of hip-hop artists the same inspiration as that of biblical prophets. For example, when discussing the inspiration of Scripture, he writes, "We have to start with this question: what is scripture?"[166] He goes on to quote Wilfred Cantwell Smith, author of

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[161] Watkins, 8-9.

[162] Watkins, 9.

[163] Watkins, 11.

[164] Watkins, 11.

[165] Niebuhr, 117.

[166] Watkins, 85.

What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach, who writes, "No text is a scripture in itself and as such. People exacerbating this neglect of Black youth culture, — a given community — make a text a scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way. I suggest: scripture is a human activity."[167] Smith continues, "In hip-hop culture, the words of the emcee, as he or she becomes seer, prophet, and teacher, are of central importance. The emcee's role morphs from artist into one assigned by the divine. The emcee becomes a teacher sent by God."[168]

Based on Smith's comments, Watkins proposes that hip-hop artist, DMX, and others words can be understood as sacred if the hip-hop community confirms them as such. Thus, as those within hip-hop culture are the determiners of what is divinely inspired, ultimately they become the determiners of what is true. Watkins confirms his beliefs with these words, he writes, "theology is a divinely inspired reflection that happens in the real world by real people on the ground in community. The Holy Spirit inspires reflection as we ask God-questions in the context of our lived reality. It is through this dialogue between God's spirit and our reality that we arrive at tentative theological conclusions."[169]

Therefore, theological truth is determined by the hip-hop community, not the word of God or the body of Christ. Watkins gives the hip-hop community this authority

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[167] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 18.

[168] Smith, 18.

[169] Watkins, 99-100.

because he believes that "God can use whatever means he wants to speak to his people" because it is the people who determine whether it is the word of God or not.[170]

Watkins' attempt to see God in hip-hop culture is in keeping with the Christ above Culture viewpoint and can make it difficult to truly contextualize the biblical message of Jesus Christ with hip-hop culture. This is because Watkins makes the Christian message undistinguishable from hip-hop's message. Like Hodge, he does not clearly communicate that God's word should be the final authority in determining whether some components of hip-hop culture should be avoided. He seems to place hip-hop lyrics on equal footing with Scripture, conceding a prophetic voice to hip-hop artists and interpreting the Christian faith through hip-hop lyrics, rather than allowing God's word to be the final authority on truth.

The Ambassador and Christ Transforms Culture

Hip-hop evangelist and Christian rapper William Branch, known as the Ambassador, holds a different view—the view that "Christ transforms Culture." He believes that it is important for believers in Jesus to inject Him into hip-hop culture in order to bring God's glory. In his master's thesis, the *Theological Implication of Hip-hop Culture,* he states, "Christians should seek opportunities to inject Christ into the culture so that the potential for reflecting God's glory will be maximally realized."[171] He challenges the body of Christ to engage in cross-cultural ministry, highlighting Paul's

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[170] Watkins, 100.

[171] William Branch, *Theological Implication of Hip-hop Culture* (master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004), 26.

example, who stated, "'…though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more' (1 Cor. 9:19)."[172]

He believes that Christian hip-hoppers who have submitted their lives to Jesus Christ will be more effective in preaching Christ to the hip-hop culture. He explains:

> When indigenous hip-hop Christian converts come to faith, they stand the best chance of speaking to their peers. They understand their people so they are naturally equipped to minister in the hip-hop culture, through the hip-hop context, and not just to the hip-hop context. This would be a Christian's responsibility.[173]

He also contends that believing hip-hoppers should not be made to feel bad for being in their cultural context, but should be encouraged to grow deep in their faith and bring Christ to the culture they love. The Ambassador states, "Unless they can experience the core of Christianity in a way that is culturally familiar, they may reject Christianity altogether." [174] He then looks to the Bible to illustrate his point. He writes:

> Both the Jewish and Greek cultures were still noticeable in the life of the early church, and hip-hop should be noticeable in the lives of Christian hip-hoppers. In other words, rather than assimilation, there must be an integration of what one believes and an example of how one lives that out.[175]

In fact, this is exactly the experience William Branch had in his own life. As a young man he was heavily influenced by the destructive elements of hip-hop culture, including drug use, promiscuous sex and criminal behavior. His website recounts his life, "He followed the example of the genre's heroes, in both positive and negative ways—…unfortunately, falling prey to the urban drama of heavy drug use, petty dealing and

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[172] Branch, 26.

[173] Branch, 57.

[174] Branch, 59.

[175] Branch, 59.

sexual promiscuity."[176] This left him empty and asking questions that secular hip-hop could not answer. However, the pain and emptiness of living out the values of secular hip-hop left him empty and the "pain ignited the spirit of the maturing artist, instilling in him an appetite to impact the hip-hop culture with a refueled faith."[177]

In 1997, Branch and his friends started the Christ-centered hip-hop group Cross Movement. Cross Movement and The Ambassador began to write and present Christ-centered, scripturally based lyrics set to hip-hop beats.[178]

Shortly afterwards, Branch began Bible college at the Philadelphia Biblical University, eventually graduating from Lancaster Bible College because he believed that it was important to know both the Scriptures and the culture he sought to reach.[179] After co-planting and co-pastoring an urban church in North Philadelphia, he decided to deepen his knowledge of Scripture and pursued a Masters in Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary.[180] While at Dallas he wrote his thesis, "Theological Implication for Hip-hop Culture," in which he argues for a "Christ Transforms Culture" view. He states, "Hip-hop itself is not the main problem; it just needs an effective work of the transforming Spirit of God. Hip-hop must be made aware of God's standard, and individuals within the hip-hop community must be empowered by God to conform to that standard." [181]

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[176] William Branch, "AMBA 2.0" *The Ambassador Online,* http://www.ambassador215.com/ (accessed October 27, 2012)

[177] Branch, (accessed October 27, 2012)

[178] Branch, (accessed October 27, 2012).

[179] Branch, (accessed October 27, 2012).

[180] Branch, (accessed October 27, 2012).

[181] Branch, 32.

Critics of this view have accused him of ignoring the destructive and sinful elements of hip-hop. He responds to this criticism by agreeing that there are elements of hip-hop that are sinful and calls the church to biblically evaluate those parts. He writes, "When the assertion is made, that a sin-filled hip-hop culture (or any culture) has in some way been permitted or assisted by God, expectedly, internal conflict arises. Therefore biblical filters can and should be applied when evaluating the culture's components."[182] But he does not believe the culture is sinful altogether and calls the church to use the good parts of hip-hop to spread the gospel. He writes: "Christianity is charged with going into cultural contexts of all sorts, seeking to make disciples that are Christ's (Matt 28:19-20)." [183] But instead of catering to the culture and allowing it to influence the approach that is used to reach the culture, he calls for a rejection of anything that conflict with the Bible. He writes, "This effort will inevitably result in the rejection of any component that is inherently unbiblical and modification of any culture or component that can be improved for God's glory."[184]

He has personally been Jesus' ambassador to hip-hop culture. He has released three Christ-centered hip-hop albums, *Christology: In Laymen's Terms*, *The Thesis* and *The Chop Chop: From Milk to Meat*. He passionately believes that hip-hop culture can be transformed for the glory of God. He asserts, "Jesus referred to the disciples as 'salt of the earth' (Matt 5:13), which at least suggests that where Christians are, impact should be

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[182] Branch, *Theological Implication,* 29.

[183] Branch, 33.

[184] Branch, 33.

also."[185] So instead of standing outside of the culture and judging everything that is wrong with it, he as a hip-hopper and evangelist has worked to inject Christ into the culture in hopes to transform it for the glory of God.

As a result of his work and the work of Cross Movement, Christian hip-hop artists are gaining ground in secular hip-hop and giving Christians who love hip-hop music an alternative to its secular counterpart. His work has inspired Christian hip-hop companies, producers and Christ-centered hip-hop artists.

An example of this is the up-and-coming hip-hop record label Reach Records. Hip-hop artists who are part of this record label are unashamedly Christ centered. In fact, they produced a hip-hop album entitled *13 Letters*, communicating the biblical message of Paul's 13 epistles through hip-hop lyrics and beats. This hip-hop CD comes with a study guide for further examination of Paul's epistles.

Although Cross Movement, The Ambassador and Reach Records have been successful in infiltrating hip-hop culture through Christ, the biggest opponent to Christian hip-hop is the Black church.[186] Therefore, for Christian hip-hop to be truly successful it is important to bridge the generational gap between the Civil Rights generation and the hip-hop generation. As Price states, "Somewhere between these oppositional views and antithetical stances lies the much-needed cross-generational recognition that we as a people are only as strong as our weakest link."[187]

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[185] Branch, 33.

[186] Branch, (accessed October 27, 2012).

[187] Price, 9.

This generational gap between the Civil Rights generation and hip-hop generation must be bridged. If it is not, a generation of youth, no matter what race, who love hip-hop, will be lost. For many young people, hip-hop music is central to their existence. If an alternative form of hip-hop music is not given, they will listen to secular hip-hop and as a result be influenced by its message.

Moreover, if Christian churches do not have relevant answers when hip-hoppers have questions about spirituality then it will continue to fall behind the Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist sect of Islam. In fact, as have already been stated, the Nation of Islam already has a foothold in hip-hop culture and has been mentioned in the lyrics of hip-hop artists.[188] Price in speaking of hip-hop and religion states that, "Christianity is hardly the only religious game in town."[189] He goes on to say that hip-hop is informed by Islam and other religious traditions and that if the Black church is going to reach the hip-hop generation then it will require a greater commitment to social struggle and a deeper dedication to young people than what is currently the case.[190] Because of this, it is important that the Black church, and all churches for that matter, support the missionary work of Christian hip-hoppers who have a passion for unbelieving hip-hoppers.

The best approach to reaching the hip-hop culture is Niebuhr's paradigm of "Christ Transforms Culture." Hip-hop culture was sparked by a generation of young people who felt marginalized not only by white America but by the leaders of the Black church, the Civil Rights generation. Because of this, a rejection of the culture will not and

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[188] Hodge, 184-185.

[189] Price, 10.

[190] Price, 10.

has not been effective in reaching those in the culture. Therefore, an incarnational approach for reaching those in hip-hop culture is the best approach.

Reaching Hip-hoppers with the Gospel

Whether one is a Christian hip-hopper with the talent to speak intimately to the culture through hip-hop or simply a Christian who has a love for the lost enough to present the real Jesus through personal relationship, hip-hoppers need to hear the gospel from believers who have an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Mike King, in his book, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry,* describes the type of relationship that hip-hoppers need to see in Christians. He states, "This is not a generation seeking answers to the philosophical questions that have preoccupied Christian apologists.… They want to meet people who have a transforming relationship with God."[191] Hip-hoppers value authenticity and what they call "keeping it real." As King states, hip-hoppers "respect honest people who are prepared to admit that there are things they don't understand as well as to own up to their own shortcomings."[192]

Currently, authentic biblically informed Christian hip-hoppers are in the best position to present the transforming work of Jesus Christ to unbelieving hip-hoppers. Unfortunately, they are being criticized by certain communities in the body of Christ, as well as secular hip-hop artists who do not respect their work.

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[191] Mike King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 71.

[192] King, 71.

Despite this criticism, Christian hip-hop artists like The Ambassador believe that there are components in hip-hop culture that should be evaluated for its usefulness in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. He states:

> Looking at the place of hip-hop in society at large, it would seem as though the church could stand to evaluate hip-hop at least for its usefulness to Christ and its compatibility with Christianity, and then use the valuable elements for Jesus Christ whenever possible.[193]

He then compares hip-hop's usefulness to Hellenism's influence in spreading the gospel in the first church. He continues, "Hip-hop as a cultural influencer is like a modern day Hellenism, although only history will reveal whether it will be as pervasive."[194] Branch then goes on to communicate five ways hip-hop culture can be useful to the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The first is the role of art. Hip-hop's use of art as a means of self- and social-expression can be used to spread the gospel. Rappers express themselves through lyrics. Graffiti artist express themselves through paintings. DJs express themselves through the mixing of music. The gospel has been and can continue to be expressed through these means for the glory of God. Branch writes, "The message of Christ must be heard (Rom 10:14-15), so being and music is an effective vehicle for amplifying the preaching of God's message, music should be strategically used."[195] He explains why music can be an

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[193] Branch, 60.

[194] Branch, 60.

[195] Branch, 61.

effective tool. He contends, "In any culture music is one of the most effective carriers of ideas and philosophies, making it a great vehicle for dissemination of theology."[196]

The second way hip-hop culture can be used in spreading the gospel is its focus on community. Similar to Christianity's focus on community, the hip-hop community gathers to express itself through its four stylistic elements. In the past, it was done to express peace, unity, and having fun. Since hip-hop cannot be lived in isolation,[197] but requires the gathering of many people, the church can use hip-hop's emphasis on community as a means to call people together to present the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The third way hip-hop culture can be used in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ is its emphasis on being a voice for the voiceless.[198] The Ambassadors states that, "Hip-hop is a hero to many among the socially disadvantaged because it provides them a voice—an outlet for communicating most thoughts and feelings." [199] The Christian evangelistic can emphasize Jesus' message of hope for the hopeless. As Branch argues, "This would be another aspect of hip-hop that is compatible and not in conflict with Christianity.[200]

According to Branch, the fourth way hip-hop culture can be used in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ is its influence as a message carrier.[201] He contends, "If hip-hop

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[196] Branch, 61.

[197] Branch, 63.

[198] Branch, 64.

[199] Branch, 65.

[200] Branch, 65.

[201] Branch, 66.

provides message-carrying-ability, and is employed in spreading the gospel, then again hip-hop, in the right hands shows itself to be compatible with Christianity as an effective vehicle of communication."[202]

The fifth way that hip-hop culture provides a way to effectively spread the gospel is its global impact.[203]The Ambassador compares the global impact of hip-hop to the Roman roads at the start of Christianity. He writes, "Even as Roman roads, by virtue of extending into many regions beyond Rome itself, greatly advanced the spread of the gospel message and the Christian way, metaphorically speaking, the global infatuation with hip-hop could do the same." [204] He explains why, he writes, "Hip-hop has already received a welcome internationally, and could serve as a road into the lives of international communities."[205]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of the literature on hip-hop evangelism supports the idea that the most effective way to reach those in the culture is to use the tools of the culture to reach the culture. Those who hold the belief that the most effective way to reach the culture is to denounce it are in the minority. Unfortunately, this minority has impacted the Black church, the very institution that must wake up if the generation gap between the Civil Rights generation and the hip-hop generation is going to be bridged.

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[202] Branch, 66

[203] Branch, 67.

[204] Branch, 68.

[205] Branch, 68.

But because hip-hop is a global phenomenon, the body of Christ as a whole must take up this call to evangelize, disciple and send out hip-hop missionaries and evangelists who will inject Christ into the culture. This is crucially important to do because hip-hop culture, from its origin, has been religiously pluralistic. If biblical Christianity is going to make inroads then it must be made by those who understand the culture and are part of the culture. The paradigm of "Christ the Transformer of Culture" is the best paradigm for effectively evangelizing hip-hop culture.

Because of this embrace of Niebuhr's fifth paradigm, a phenomenological investigation will be employed in order to discover the most effective way to reach the culture. This will encourage a truly incarnational approach to evangelizing the hip-hop culture that will produce authentic personal relationships.

The nation of Islam has done this for hip-hop. It is time for biblical Christianity to do so as well. This must be done on an individual and a personal level, not only on an institutional level. As Kyllonen states, "many Christians believe that evangelism is an event, something that you do at a certain time, but evangelism from a biblical perspective is about establishing an authentic relationship."[206]

Ralph C. Watkins emphasizes this same principle. He states, "The Hip-Hop generation is looking for spiritual encounters that get them in touch with their feelings, encounters with the holy that are relevant, encounters that are applicable to their circumstances and aren't shrouded in religious language."[207] Authentic relationships and

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[206] Kyllonen, 142.

[207] Watkins, *The Gospel Remix,* 62.

authentic divine experiences with Jesus are what hip-hoppers need. They want someone who will "keep it real" in hip-hop parlance. Hodge states that hip-hoppers want, "Authentic relationships without agendas."[208] Hip-hoppers want individuals to genuinely care about their personal well-being. The Body of Christ, through the hip-hop culture, can be a transforming instrument to make this happen.

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[208] Hodge, 197.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study with 5 hip-hoppers,

discovering and describing their lived experience of listening to hip-hop music. The

researcher described "what" and "how" the hip-hoppers experienced hip-hop music, in

accordance with M. Q. Patton's directions for phenomenological research. [1] It was

accomplished through the long interview process in which the researcher immersed

himself in the phenomenon of hip-hop and uncovered the qualitative factors in the

experience. The results of the investigation produced a thoroughly explained and accurate

depiction of the hip-hopper's experience with hip-hop music. The purpose of this study

was to describe and validate these experiences and contextualize the gospel in such a way

that it speaks to the hip-hopper's experience.

Overview of the Research Process

Instructions and Guiding Questions

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher developed instructions and

guiding questions that encouraged an exhaustive and in-depth description of the hip-

hopper's experience with hip-hop music. The goal of the instructions and guiding

questions was to discover how each individual hip-hopper perceived and experienced the

music, knowing that the music is perceived and experienced differently by different hip-

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[1] M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Method*, 2nd ed. (New Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 71.

hoppers and by the same hip-hopper in different settings. Therefore, the researcher sought comprehensive stories of how hip-hoppers perceived hip-hop music in their everyday lived experience.

The researcher used the word "what" in his guiding questions to facilitate a clear and concise wording of the questions and to arrive at a vivid textual description of the experience. Here are examples of some of the questions: "What are your experiences with listening to hip-hop music?"; "What does hip-hop music do for you at the times you enjoy it most?"; "What mood does hip-hop music provoke in you?"; and "In what activities are you usually engaged when listening to hip-hop music?"

The researcher also used the word "how" in his questions to communicate his openness to whatever else may have emerged about hip-hop music in the course of the interviews. For example, he asked, "How does it make you feel when you are listening to your favorite hip-hop artist?"; "How does hip-hop music influence you positively?" and "How important is wordplay in hip-hop?" These "how" questions opened him to the possibility of hearing answers in a fresh way and free from the assumption that he knew the answers based on his past experiences with hip-hop. Through these guided questions, the researcher sought comprehensive stories from the research participants of how they perceived and described hip-hop music in their everyday lived experience.

The researcher developed a criterion for selecting participants in the conduct of the phenomenological investigation. He chose both male and female hip-hoppers from various geographical areas in the United States. They were hip-hoppers who listened to the music daily and had a significant knowledge of its history and its most current

developments. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 35. The researcher established

signed contracts with them, obtained their informed consent, and ensured them of their

confidentiality. The researcher and the participants also agreed to a meeting place,

decided time commitments, and the researcher obtained permission to record and publish

the findings.

Before, during and after each interview, the researcher began the

phenomenological reduction process, a process of identifying and removing his own

perceptions, attitudes and moods.[2] This was accomplished by applying the

phenomenological reduction steps: *Epoche*, Horizonalization and Clusters of Meaning.

The researcher used the resulting data to create a textual description of the hip-hopper's

experience.

The First Step in Phenomenological Reduction: Epoche

Before each interview, the researcher, as best as humanly possible, engaged in

Epoche, a process in which the researcher refrained from judgment, took no position or

determined nothing in advance about the phenomenon. [3] The researcher set aside his

everyday understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon by recalling his own personal

experiences with hip-hop music in the last 35 years. He recalled some positive and

meaningful experiences, as well other, not so positive experiences. As he reflectively

meditated during this process, the researcher recalled three experiences in particular,

letting his preconceptions and prejudgments enter and then leave his mind freely.

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[2] John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 237.

[3] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 34.

First, the researcher thought about the first time he heard hip-hop music. It was in 1979. The song, "Rapper Delight," was by a group called the Sugar Hill Gang. He remembered loving the words to the song, "Hotel, motel, Holiday Inn, if your girl starting acting up, then you date her friend." Next, the researcher reflected on the first time he purchased hip-hop music. He purchased an album by the hip-hop group Run DMC in 1985. He recalled remembering the words of their songs and acting like he was performing on stage. And last, he recalled his experience of using hip-hop music to teach the Scriptures to teenagers from 1993 to 1996. The researcher positively reflected on these experiences from recent times and long ago and set aside any way in which they might influence this research. His goal was to disconnect himself from those memories. He repeated this process until he felt a sense of closure. This process helped him move toward the non-judgmental stance. Once fully in that stance, the researcher was able to concentrate fully and hear the participant's presentations without coloring it with his own habits of thinking, feeling and seeing.

*Epoch*e was important to accomplish so that the researcher's moods, attitudes and prior experiences with the phenomenon did not prevent an accurate description of the interviewee's experience.[4] It gave the researcher the opportunity to learn about the hip-hoppers' lived experiences with a fresh set of eyes.[5] The researcher consciously reminded himself that he was entering the experience as a learner. The goal of the researcher was to

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[4] Moustakas, 85.

[5] Moustakas, 85.

simulate his first entry into the phenomenon of hip-hop music to get at the essence of what it meant for a hip-hopper to love hip-hop music.

The Second Step in Phenomenological Reduction: Horizonalization

The researcher then moved from *Epoche* to the second step in the phenomenological reduction process, Horizonalization, in which specific statements from the transcribed interviews were identified as relevant to the lived experience being studied. These statements were gathered by reading the interview transcripts in their entirety twice. The first read-through was done to get a global sense of the whole interview. The second was done slowly to gather the relevant statements.

Next, the relevant statements were tested by two questions to determine whether they were integral to understanding the experience. The first question was, "Does the statement contain meaning that is essential for understanding the experience being studied?" [6] The second was "Is it possible to label the statement with a phrase or word?" [7] If the statements met these two tests, they were considered a "horizon" of the experience. The horizons were then tabled as equally significant. This gave the researcher the ability to identify the range of perspectives about the lived experience.

As an example, one of the interviewee's stated: "You tend to gravitate to those artists whose music or ways of looking at things are similar to yours." This statement was considered relevant because it was a moment of the experience that was essential to understanding the whole experience. Furthermore, it was possible to label the statement

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[6] Creswell, 235.

[7] Creswell, 235.

with a phrase or word. This was a horizon of the experience. From this statement, the researcher learned that this interviewee gravitated to artists to whom he could personally relate. The researcher labelled his statement "personally relate."

The Third Step in Phenomenological Reduction: Clusters of Meaning

Next, the researcher slowly read the entire interview again to validate the horizons and to divide the data into meaningful sections, or clusters of meaning, the third step in the phenomenological reduction process. Dividing the data into clusters of meaning units was accomplished by grouping the horizons, or the relevant statements, into themes, while simultaneously removing all irrelevant, repeated and overlapping statements. For example, in one of the interviews, the interviewee made two statements in different parts of the interview that could be clustered together under one theme. In one section, when speaking of a hip-hop artist's expression of authentic emotions, he stated: "He's spanned every human emotion possible." In another section, he stated: "Hip-hop is very, very specific. It's very specific in the message it's trying to say or what the artist is trying to say. It's just different. It's almost like reading someone's diary set to music. The connection is deeper than it is with a lot of other music." These two statements were clustered under the theme "Authentic Expression of Emotions."

Next, the clusters of meaning units, or themes, were used to create a textual description of the experience.[8] The textual description is a written description of what was experienced. It was derived from the clusters of meaning units.

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[8] Creswell, 237.

After creating the textual description, the researcher rigorously examined the list of cluster of meaning units in a process called imaginative variation.[9] This is a process of using the imagination to look at a lived experience from all possible ways to determine the invariable or unchanging attributes of the phenomenon that are essential in giving the lived experience a fixed identity.[10] It involves using imagination to seek all possible meanings and differing perspectives. This process was essential to writing the structural description, a description of "how" the phenomenon was experience.

It was essential to engage in imaginative variation, which resulted in the structural description, in order to discover the essence of the lived experience being studied.[11] It helped the researcher discover the essential underlining meaning of the experiences within the context of the complete interviews.[12]

The Final Step in Phenomenological Reduction: Essence or Invariant Structure

After rigorously engaging in imaginative variation, each interview was summarized, validated, and where needed, modified to ensure that the essence or the unchanging attributes of the lived experience were discovered. This was done through the research process referred to as "intuitive integration." This is when the textual (what) meaning of the lived experience as well as the structural (how) meaning of the lived experience are reduced into a brief description that is commonly shared by all who

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[9] Creswell, 235-236.

[10] Dan Lukiv, "Free Imaginative Variation," AE-Extra, accessed July 29, 2013, http://www.unco.edu/AE-Extra/2005/11/Art-1.html.

[11] Lukiv.

[12] Moustakas, 97.

experienced the phenomenon being studied.[13,14] This is done by moving from the participant's individual experiences to consider his or her individual experiences in a social context, the "life world."[15]

The concept of "life world" is the idea that the way an individual experiences the world grows out of his or her social connections. It is the world of objects around one as one perceives and experiences them in everyday situations and social relations. It is a world "that appears meaningfully to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-ness; not an objective world 'out there,' but a humanly relational world."[16] In other words, it is a world that focuses attention on the individual's lived experience in a social context, not simply his or her inner world of introspection. Therefore, it includes individual, social, perceptual, and practical experiences.[17]

Lastly, the researcher analyzed the findings by describing how the phenomenon of hip-hop effects individuals and how an individual phenomenological experience with Christ can ultimately lead to a life of purpose, satisfaction, and significant contribution to the Body of Christ.

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[13] Moustakas, 100.

[14] Creswell, 235.

[15] Moustakas, 48.

[16] L. Finlay and V. Eatough, "Understanding the Experience of Discovering a Kindred Spirit Connection: A Phenomenology Study," *Phenomenology and Practice,* 1 (2012): 69-88.

[17] Moustakas, 48.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The researcher's analysis suggests that the hip-hopper's experience with hip-hop music can manifest itself in various ways in different context. Nonetheless, within these differences are "essential" or core experiences that are shared by all hip-hoppers. These shared experiences are: (1) the ability to intimately relate to the hip-hop artist due to shared life experiences; (2) the opportunity for therapeutic self-expression; (3) the influence of the music on the hip-hopper's behavior and mood; and (4) the respect and appreciation of authenticity on the part of the hip-hop artist.

The researcher will now present an analytical description of these four experiences that form what it means for a hip-hopper to love hip-hop music. Discovering these experiences was critical to creating an evangelistic strategy to hip-hoppers because it provided critical insights into their deepest needs. These insights provided the framework for developing a missiology contextualized for hip-hop culture, an evangelistic strategy that meets the deepest needs of hip-hoppers.

Ability to Relate/Similar Life Experiences

Similar Difficult Experiences

The hip-hoppers the researcher interviewed testified to experiencing tragic events that are similar to the stories told in hip-hop music. The loss of loved ones due to murder, the loss of intimate relationships because of disloyalty and the loss of innocence because of the difficulties posed by inner city life are experiences faced by hip-hoppers that love

hip-hop music. These types of experiences are common themes in hip-hop music and are also common experiences in the life of hip-hoppers. Thus there is an intimate connection.

Co-Researcher Three talks about this intimate connection when speaking about one of his favorite hip-hop artist, Kanye West. He says,

> Kanye West's whole album, 808s and Heartbreak, will always be there for me whenever I experience heartbreak 'cause he lost his mom, his wife, or soon-to-be-wife, girlfriend, cheated on him. He experienced so much disaster in that time and he changed as a person, as an artist.

Co-Researcher Three intimately connects and can relate to Kanye West because he has had similar experiences. For him, West will "always be there for" him through his music because he can deeply relate to West's pain, a pain that Co-Researcher Three voiced with passion when the researcher asked him why hip-hop music was important to him. The researcher can still feel the pain in his voice when he made the following response:

> When everyone turned their back on me before I joined the Navy, I had music. When I was away from my parents, cause I was in boarding school, I had music. When that girl and I ended, I had music. When my grandmother died, I made music.

Co-Researcher Three could deeply relate to Kanye West because, like him, he had experienced heartbreak. He experienced the betrayal of family and friends. He experienced the death of loved ones. Hip-hop has helped him get through and grieve these losses through common and shared difficult experiences.

Similarly, Co-Researcher Two described his experiences and the connection to hip-hop artists. He said, "A lot of rappers talk about who they've lost in their life and I can relate to that because sometimes you don't know how to deal with it and that's where depression comes from." Co-Researcher Two lived through the murder of his brother

who was shot multiple times. He lived through being accused of a murder. He lived

through the death of his father and is still living through a difficult relationship with his

mother. He credits hip-hop with helping him deal with these difficult experiences.

Relatable Mentors

The hip-hoppers the researcher interviewed testified to being able to relate

personally to hip-hop artists because of their shared and similar life experiences.

According to Co-Researcher One, "You tend to gravitate to those artists whose music or

ways of looking at things are similar to yours." Many of today's most influential hip-hop

artist are from crime-ridden, impoverished neighborhoods where they were either raised

by a single mother, father, grandparent or by "the streets." Because of this, hip-hoppers,

who have similar experiences view their favorite hip-hop artists as mentors because of

their ability to overcome these experiences.

For example, Co-Researcher Two loves hip-hop because the hip-hop artists that

he enjoys share struggles that are similar to his. These artists therefore serve as mentors.

He speaks about one of his favorite hip-hop artist, Jay-Z, "I feel like I'm listening to a

mentor. He's mentoring me and he don't even know who I am. It's like a faceless mentor.

I can listen to a Jay Z song and just know what I need to do."

This truth is profound when one considers the fact that Jay-Z grew up in a crime-

ridden neighborhood where he was raised by a single parent, sold drugs and engaged in

all sorts of deviant behaviors. He overcame these experiences by sharing his story

through hip-hop music. This resulted in a successful career. He then turned his successful

hip-hop career into a multimillion dollar business. Hip-hoppers, such as Co-Researcher

One, who have had similar experiences, gravitate to artists who have overcome those experiences.

Co-Researcher Two also loves the fact that no matter how much success or wealth that a hip-hop artist accumulates, there is still a connection to his or her past life experiences through hip-hop. Successful hip-hop artists view their past struggles as badges of honor, not experiences that cause them shame. Co-Researcher Two viewed such experiences as encouraging and used them as motivation to help him deal with the myriad of challenges he has had, such as dealing with the murder of his brother. Jay Z's story, as well as others like his, have helped Co-Researcher Two. He looks to hip-hop artists like Jay Z when the difficulties of life are overwhelming.

Co-Researcher Four shared the same experience. He sees hip-hop artists and music as a guide when life is overwhelming. For him, inner city life posed many challenges and threats, especially for a young man raised in a single parent home. Hip-hop artists helped him survive the difficulties caused by his experiences.

When a young hip-hopper is confused and frustrated, hip-hop artists provide solutions because they themselves have overcome similar experiences. And because the solutions are provided through music hip-hoppers enjoy, and through artists they respect, they take heed, even if the solutions are not the best. Co-Researcher Four explained this relationship:

> Because it relates to me. I've experienced the same things. I've been broke. I've dealt with things. I know people in gangs. I've felt sad. I've seen friends get locked up. I've been pressed by the police. I've dealt with situations like that. At the same time, I've also tried to heed warnings played by rappers in their songs.

For Co-Researcher Four, hip-hop music speaks a language that is familiar. It talks about experiences to which he can intimately relate. Therefore, he listens.

Examples of Resiliency

Another common experience that hip-hoppers share with hip-hop artists is resiliency. Many hip-hop artists show resiliency despite multiple disadvantages, such as crime-ridden neighborhoods, single-parent homes and the significant loss of loved ones. Hip-hoppers find strength in the stories of their heroes, hip-hop artists. These men and women are great examples of perseverance. The belief is that if "Jay Z" or "Kanye West" can make it out of an impoverished situation, then the hip-hopper believes that he or she can as well.

Co-Researcher Two has displayed a tremendous amount of resiliency and credits listening to hip-hop music as his source of healing. He also credits writing hip-hop as a source of resiliency. Through his own music, he has vented about the death of his father, brother and friend, and this has helped him enormously.

Co-Researcher Two has persevered through being falsely accused of murder. With anger in his voice and a change in body language, he recounts a story of being shot at because he was falsely accused of killing a young boy. The young boy's family sought to exact revenge. He recounts,

> I got shot at over that because his family was like gang members and stuff and they again, the media, this is what they put in front of our face, this is what happened. So here I am dodging bullets at 13 years old, well, 14. You see the correlation between music and real life and your experience?

Co-Researcher Two credits hip-hop music, both listening to it and writing it, with helping him get through those tough experiences. Co-Researcher Five echoed the same

sentiment. She says, "I've listened to quite a few artists talk about their experience in life and how they manage to make it out of that. How they're not another statistic to what they grew up from. So, that's how it relates to me. That's how I feel."

Despite the challenges that life has caused and continues to cause hip-hoppers, they find strength through hip-hop music to deal with the challenges in their own lives. This communality fosters a relationship between the hip-hop artist and the hip-hopper that makes the famous hip-hop artist more relatable and somewhat approachable, even if it is only through the music. This makes hip-hoppers feel like they have a comrade in their struggle, as if they have a confidant and advocate.

Influences the Hip-hopper's Thinking/Mood

Changes Frame of Mind

The hip-hoppers the researcher interviewed confirmed that hip-hop music has a profound influence on their thinking and mood. It has been reported that it "relaxes," "eases," and therefore, changes their frame of mind. It is often used as a means to forget about external stressors. Co-Researcher Two described hip-hop as "mood music," music that provokes anger, happiness and other emotions. For Co-Researcher Four, hip-hop music is so important that it determines the type of day he will have, whether it is going to be a good or bad day. He says,

> Yes, because honestly, music for me—it eases me. There'll be times where I'm stressed or I'm annoyed so I'll listen to music to relax me. If I couldn't listen to music, I'd probably be very, very grouchy. It helps me get through the day, honestly. Music helps me get through the day.

Hip-hop music is so significant in his life that it prevents grouchiness.

Hip-hop music also influences and improves the hip-hoppers' thinking and mood because of its relevancy to his or her personal life. Again, Co-Researcher Two said that hip-hop music allows him to "escape from that everyday routine life." He goes on to describe how it helps with his thinking and mood when he listens to songs that relate to his struggles. "It's all about what mood I'm in and what I wanna' hear that relates to my struggle through life and it feels good to hear. ... All over the country to hear someone who's had the same or similar experiences. So that's what [hip-hop] music does for me."

In addition, it was reported that hip-hop music has a unique way of influencing and improving the thinking and mood because of the authenticity of the artists. It is emotionally therapeutic for the listener. Co-Researcher One says hip-hop "seems like it has a real distinct way of helping people express their inner feelings that's different from other types of music." This unique way of expression allows the listener to connect on a deep level because it is "like reading someone's diary set to music." For example, if the hip-hopper has experienced the loss of his or her loved one, he or she can usually find a hip-hop song that speaks to that loss. If the hip-hopper has had a hard day or has experienced a difficult season of life, he or she can usually find a hip-hop artist that has spoken to that particular circumstance. As Co-Researcher Four reported, the hip-hopper will often respond, "Alright, let me listen to this real quick and maybe I'll feel better."

The availability of hip-hop music that honestly communicates the woes and struggles of life serves as a therapeutic means to improve the hip-hopper's mood. Hip-hop music affords the hip-hopper that opportunity because, as Co Researcher Two stated,

> A lot of rappers talk about who they've lost in their life and I can relate to that because sometimes you don't know how to deal with it and that's where

depression comes from. I lost someone and I don't know how to deal with it. What do I do? Oh, my favorite rapper, he lost his parents, let me turn his song on and listen to what he's saying.

Hip-hoppers agree that hip-hop has a way of providing healing by changing their thinking and mood.

Influences Behavior

Because hip-hop influences the hip-hopper's thinking and mood, it was discovered that it also influences behavior. Hip-hoppers report that they are susceptible to the messages of hip-hop and it can either influence them towards good or bad behavior. Co-Researcher Four gave an example of an experience in which he did not feel motivated to complete a task. But after listening to a hip-hop song, he felt encouraged to "hustle hard," the name of the song to which he was listening. This song motivated him to complete the task. He said, "There will be times where I will be mad, if I listen to that song and if I have a stack of folders, I will finish them in probably 30 minutes tops because that song just puts me in that zone and I just get the work going."

On the other hand, Co-Researcher One tells a story about being shocked by how susceptible he is to the negative messages of hip-hop music. He says,

I forgot what song it was that we were listening to, one of Pac's [Tupac] songs. You gotta keep in mind that this was in 1994/1995, that gets you hyped up, that gets you riled up type of song and I remember feeling like taking on the world, like you know, like if something popped off right now.

He was shocked by the fact that he was about to behave in ways that he did not usually behave. He admitted that it was because of the music and the people with whom he was hanging around. He was humbled by the fact that he was susceptible to the music and its message.

Further illustrating the point, Co-Researcher Three talks about how hip-hoppers use hip-hop to motivate them to engage in behavior that is not good. He says,

> So, you know you're about to get into a fight and you're not in the mood to fight. You play a song by Waka Flocka and it's called "Fight."And this whole song is about getting ready to fight. So it puts you in the mood to fight and you go ahead and do your thing. Win or lose, you showed up and you didn't punk out.

He further discussed how hip-hop music puts the listener in a trance-like state and causes them to focus on the emotion that causes the behavior. For example, if a person is angry and he or she listens to hip-hop music that encourages anger, then the music prevents the listener from thinking about anything else. He says, "At a certain point, you just stop hearing lyrics, you're just going to the beat. And then after the beat, it's just all your emotion." For hip-hoppers, the "music takes you to that place where you're so focused on the music that you're not paying attention to what you're doing. You're just gone," according to Co-Researcher Two.

Strong Personal Connections

Hip-hoppers also reported having strong personal connections to hip-hop music because it has been pervasive in their lives from an early age. In fact, it was usually introduced to them by their parents. It was a part of their family culture. Co-Researcher Six recounts his father introducing him to one of his favorite hip-hop artist, Biggie Smalls. Co-Researcher Five says that it was her mother who introduced her to hip-hop. In fact, her mother was a hip-hop artist.

Co-Researcher Four recounts, "I grew up listening to hip-hop music. When I was younger, I didn't really understand it until I started getting old. I'd say around the age of 11, 12, when I could actually start to comprehend it a little bit. Of course, it was always

around me." Co-Researcher Three says that it is the only genre of music in his music device. Co-Researcher Two shared a story of riding with his parents and listening to Tupac. He listens to hip-hop music everyday, all day.

Because hip-hop music was introduced to these hip-hoppers at early ages, they have a strong personal connection to hip-hop. They speak of hip-hop as if there is an emotional connection shared between two people. Co-Researcher Three, with a serious look on his face, said, "I love hip-hop. I view hip-hop the same way I view my wife. I love them equally and I can't choose which one I love more." He has admitted to allowing hip-hop to control his thinking and losing relationships as a result.

Co-Researcher Six, speaking in similar language says, "[With hip-hop, it is] kind of like a love at first sight just like how you talk about a woman." He has admitted to allowing hip-hop to make him unfaithful in relationships. It has also gotten him in trouble at work. Co-Researcher Five admits that hip-hop is pervasive in her life. She says, "Hip-hop is everything. Like, you loved it at times, you hated it." For her, hip-hop has served to calm her as well as to anger her. Because hip-hop music has been so pervasive in these hip-hoppers' lives, they are personally connected in ways that influences their thinking and mood.

Causes One to Reflect

Hip-hop also influences the thinking and mood of the hip-hopper by encouraging them to reminisce about life. It provokes them to reflect on the good times and helps them grieve when thinking about life's challenging times. In fact, there is a strong connection between the hip-hopper and hip-hop songs that are relevant to their particular

situation. Quite often for hip-hoppers, certain songs are connected to either a pleasurable or challenging life event.

Co-Researcher Six connected his favorite hip-hop artist with times when his father would visit him. The hip-hop song "Hypnotize" by Biggie Smalls provokes good memories of shared experiences with his father.

He also shared frustrating events that he connects to hip-hop music. For example, certain songs remind him of when he worked at his family business, and instead of working he wanted to hang out with his friends. A hip-hop artist he enjoys, Kanye West, wrote a song that perfectly connected to his frustrating circumstance.

> He was rapping about his frustrations but like I mean, who can't relate to that? Who can't relate to like ever wanting; you're not gon' do it but I mean let's be honest, everybody done physically thought about choking out they boss like I'm sayin' of course I didn't think about that with my parents but I did have this thought in my head like "this some bullshit, like I don't wanna be in this damn store everyday. I wanna' go out and have fun." That's just showing you how hip-hop like connect. … You start feeling like the artist wrote it for you.

When he hears this certain song by Kanye West, he reflects on this experience.

Hip-hop encourages the hip-hopper to reflect and ponder life. It helps the hip-hopper process life. It helps them in ways that are similar to when another person is helping them. Co-Researcher Three again makes the connection clear, "When I was away from my parents, 'cause I was in boarding school, I had music. When that girl and I ended, I had music. When my grandmother died, I made music." Hip-hop provoked him to reflect on and ponder these past experiences.

Hip-hop music influences the hip-hopper's thinking and mood. It helps them escape life's external stressors and reflect on life. It also motivates their behavior, whether good or bad.

Authenticity

Hip-hoppers' Universal Truth: "Keeping it Real"

"Keeping it Real" is a core value in hip-hop. This means being painstakingly honest, candid and authentic. There is no core value in hip-hop higher than this one. Hip-hoppers repeatedly reported that one does not want to be accused of being "fake" as a hip-hop artist or as a hip-hopper. Authenticity is a universal truth. It is one of the reasons hip-hoppers value the opinion of hip-hop artists. "It's honest," says Co-Researcher Five. She then goes on to talk about how blunt and direct hip-hop music can be and how hip-hop artists do not have any regard for the feelings of their listeners.

According to hip-hoppers, hip-hop artists "tell it like it is." Curse words are the norm. Conversations about sex and drugs are the norm. Taboo subjects are no longer taboo. Homosexuality, premarital sex and adultery are commonplace. It is one of the core reasons why hip-hoppers listen. It normalizes such behavior and thus appeals to the hip-hopper. Co-Researcher Two explained: "People gravitate towards that honesty because it makes music more authentic."

In fact, to be successful in hip-hop today, it appears that hip-hop artists have to have stories so extreme that they are either lying, or they do not care about embarrassing themselves or their families. Hip-hop artists are brutally honest about their own lives.

They talk about experiencing sexual abuse, domestic violence and other traumatic experiences. Hip-hop artists have popularized alcohol abuse, date rape and drugs.

Hip-hoppers use curse words without apology and talk about sex without blushing. No subject is off the table. Being "real" in hip-hop is not discussed—it is expected. As Co-Researcher Two says, "Honesty is starting to become more normal. … The most popular rappers that ever touched a mike, like from L.L. to Drake; they all were honest about what they've been through." This includes past and sometimes even present criminal behaviors, such as drug dealing, rape, domestic violence, attempted murder and actual murder. Hip-hop artists have also shared stories of drug addiction, depression and suicide. No subject is off the table and the more honest one is, the richer he or she may become.

Honesty Builds Rapport

Extreme and blatant honesty is what hip-hoppers respect. Co-Researcher Five explains why. "Even if it's only four to five minutes, they're still telling you some part of their life and I respect that honesty." This respect is why this hip-hopper listens to hip-hop music and allows hip-hop artists to function as guides and mentors to her. Hip-hoppers feel like they can relate, as well as trust hip-hop artists. Honesty builds rapport and trust because nothing is hidden. This type of honesty is appealing to the hip-hopper and makes them feel safe to express themselves.

Co-Researcher Two highlights an experience that illustrates how honesty impacts the hip-hopper.

> He talks about when he was depressed and being depressed. It's a song called "Beautiful" and the purpose of the song is no matter who you are, no matter what

you are going through, God gave you your shoes so wear 'em. You are a beautiful person. And I was going through so much stuff when I heard this song. I was just like man you know; very rarely do songs make me tear up but this song made me tear up cause it was so honest. This man is worth millions of dollars and he's admitting he's depressed and he's a drug addict and he hates who he is.

Hip-hoppers report a deep connection because of the honesty of the hip-hop artists. The hip-hop artist's expression of raw emotions allows the hip-hopper to express raw emotions. The hip-hop artist's authenticity allows for an emotional connection that cannot be experience if the hip-hop artist is not honest. Co-Researcher One shares an experience that illustrates this connection.

> We're on deployment and this deployment has been kind of stressful on me for a number of reasons because it's like "Walking Alone." I just felt by myself. Like I don't have an advocate; I'm out here. It's me against everybody else and that was essentially the sentiment of this [hip-hop] song and just everything that they had to say about being out here by yourself and having to essentially fend for yourself or these external forces.

Co-Researcher One felt like the words of the song communicated exactly how he felt. "I felt like if me and that artist were sitting around talking about things that were going on with us at that time it would sound exactly like words that he would put in his songs." The honesty of the hip-hop artist allowed Co-Researcher One to intimately connect. There was a rapport, a bond.

In addition, the researcher found that in his conversations with hip-hoppers, he had to remind them not to apologize for swearing so that he could get the essence of what they truly experienced when listening to hip-hop. This allowed the researcher and Co-Researchers to build a rapport. That is why curse words are a part of the interview transcripts because the hip-hoppers were "keeping it real." Hip-hop is not authentic if the

artists or those who love them cannot say exactly what they feel in whatever way they want to say it. Hip-hoppers expect nothing less.

Self-Expression

Therapeutic

Because blatant and brutal honesty is a universal truth in hip-hop, the research demonstrates that self-expression is important to those who love hip-hop. Whether it is venting frustrations accompanied by hip-hop instrumentals or relating to a hip-hop song that speaks to exactly how the listener feels, hip-hop music is about expressing one's true self. It is therapeutic in that it allows hip-hop artist to express themselves in ways that validate their existence. It does this by removing barriers about what can be said. Hip-hoppers can say whatever they want to say and will usually have other hip-hoppers validate their experiences.

According to Co-Researcher Three's experience, hip-hop is a way to express himself and validate that he is human. He says, "It's just about being heard. … Just recognized as a human." He recalls the first time he realized the power of self-expression through hip-hop. He says with excitement, "I fell in love with the way to express yourself through music cause I've always done it through words but I never thought I could put it behind an instrument."

This experience was therapeutic and validating. Hip-hop gave him an alternate way to express himself when dealing with challenges. He recalls a time a friend encouraged him to express himself through hip-hop after a romantic breakup. With passion in his voice, he reminisces, "And when we split, it hit me pretty hard. And so I

went to my friend's house and I told him what happened. And 'Yo', get it off your chest.'
He said, 'Go ahead. Rap.'" He followed his friend's advice and it made him feel better.
Hip-hop music functioned as a therapeutic means for dealing with a difficult situation. He
would say that hip-hop music healed him.

For Co-Researcher Two, hip-hop music serves as a therapeutic means because it
allows him to also express himself through hip-hop lyrics. Similar to Co-Researcher
Three, hip-hop music helped him get through the challenges in his neighborhood as well
as the loss of his loved ones.

According to Co-Researcher One's witness, hip-hop music is like no other music
in that it is an intimate look into the emotional life of the hip-hop artist. It gives the hip-
hop artist a real and distinct way of releasing emotional frustration. Co-Researcher One
described hip-hop lyrics as the hip-hop artist's personal diary set to music. He said, "Hip-
hop is very, very specific. It's very specific in the message it's trying to say or what the
artist is trying to say. It's just different. It's almost like reading someone's diary set to
music. The connection is deeper than it is with a lot of other music."

Expression of Artistic Talent

Hip-hop also allows hip-hoppers to display their poetic talents. Co-Researcher
Two said that he likes to create hip-hop that people are not used to hearing. For example,
he created a song in which he uses various birds as metaphors for expressing his desire to
be free of pain. He describes himself as an artist who is "lyrically driven," which means
he carefully selects words and metaphors when creating his music. For him, hip-hop
gives him a way to express his creativity.

Co-Researcher Six's love for hip-hop is also expressed in his personal talent as a hip-hop artist. He is a student of hip-hop and believes it makes him a better artist. He says, "A lot of times when I listen to the music, it's really to motivate me to write something or to get me in the mood." Listening to hip-hop gets him in what he describes as "that zone." It motivates him to express his poetic talent.

Co-Researcher Six studies the lyrics of other hip-hop artists. He studies their selection of instrumentals and the "whole production that goes into it." In describing his love for hip-hop, he says, "I love hearing the beat. I love just kind of focusing on the small details, not just like the words." He enjoys hip-hop artists that use words to paint a picture, artists that make him feel like he is watching a movie. He pays attention to the details. In speaking of one of his favorite hip-hop artist he says, "I can seriously picture everything as he was rapping it, like he's one of the illest storytellers of all time cause I thought I was right there with him." For him, the hip-hop artists that can paint a picture are the "best artists." He says, "They paint movies. Like I'm sitting there and I'm watching." When he is listening to these types of artists, he says he can literally "feel it." He can relate to it. It causes all types of emotions to stir in him. He enjoys what he describes as "flow," the way a hip-hop artist delivers his lyrics over a beat.

Co-Researcher Three also shared his experience as a hip-hop artist. He has been writing poetry since he was twelve years old and discovered that he could combine his poetry with music. To better himself as an artist, he studies the lyrics of those who are successful. He intently examines their word play, metaphors and flow for his "own progression" and to "make myself a better artist." He listens to the best so that he can

become the best. He listens to hip-hop primarily as an apprentice and occasionally for entertainment purposes.

For him, hip-hop is to be studied, not just enjoyed. He also feels that being an artist connects him to other hip-hop artists in a unique way. He explains, "I respect them. … 'Cause I'm an artist myself." He feels this allows him to relate to them. "I understand where they're coming from. I get the music he's making and I can relate." Co-Researcher Three, whose hip-hop name is "Cyde 8," is currently seeking a contract with a commercial record company.

There are essential experiences that are shared by all hip-hoppers. These shared experiences are: the ability to intimately relate to famous hip-hop artists due to shared life experiences; the opportunity for therapeutic self-expression; the influence of the hip-hopper's mood and behavior due to the music's influence and a respect and appreciation for authenticity on the part of the hip-hop artist.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The researcher's goal was to discover why hip-hoppers loved hip-hop music. From this discovery, the researcher hoped to develop an incarnational model for effectively reaching hip-hoppers for Christ. Based on his review of various evangelical methods and models, he discovered that outright rejection of the culture was not the best way to reach hip-hoppers. He also discovered in his literary review that hip-hop music's development was the result of a marginalized people seeking to find comfort through entertainment. To reject a cultural form of self-expression would doom any evangelical effort to failure. Therefore, the researcher developed an incarnational model for ministry to hip-hoppers that imitates God's self-initiating pursuit of unbelievers by engaging them through a phenomenological investigation. He first summarizes and analyzes his findings and then presents his model.

Summary and Analysis of Findings

The biblical analysis in Chapter Two demonstrated that it is God's will that believers imitate His behavior by becoming wisely intrusive, Spirit-filled pursuers of unbelievers. God's self-initiating pursuit of unbelievers, from the Old Testament to the incarnation of Jesus and ultimately through the advent of the Holy Spirit, shows this pattern for evangelism. The literary analysis and critique of evangelical models for

reaching unbelievers in Chapter Three confirmed the fact that the most effective way to carry out God's pursuit is not to reject hip-hop culture outright but to use the parts of the culture that can bring God glory by injecting Christ into the culture.

What Do Hip-hoppers Love about Hip-hop?

It was discovered through a phenomenological investigation that hip-hoppers love hip-hop music because it provides an avenue for authentic self-expression. It is a way to communicate that their existence and experiences are important. In addition, hip-hoppers assert their love for hip-hop because their existence and experiences are further validated by successful hip-hop artists who share similar experiences through creative hip-hop music. These shared experiences become opportunities for successful hip-hop artists to function as mentors and guides for hip-hoppers.

Hip-hoppers also conveyed their love for hip-hop music because of its influence on their mood. It relaxes, eases and functions as a retreat away from the challenges of life. It is also therapeutic and therefore eases their mood and mind because it is a vehicle for authentically venting difficult emotions. It allows hip-hoppers to express themselves in whatever way their artistic abilities allow. There are no barriers. It is this ability to brutally and honestly express oneself that increases the hip-hopper's love for hip-hop music.

How Do Hip-hoppers Experience Their Love for Hip-hop?

Hip-hoppers convey that hip-hop music has been pervasive in their lives from an early age. It was the background music at family functions and significant life events. It was either introduced to them by parents or through friendships. It is usually the music to

which they listen exclusively. It also accompanies hip-hoppers everywhere and functions as motivation when they are exercising, working or relaxing. It functions as a parental figure when the hip-hopper is confused.

Hip-hop permeates every aspect of the hip-hopper's life. Hip-hop artists play various roles, such as father, leader, teacher, pastor, personal trainer and friend. Hip-hop artists have provoked hip-hoppers to consider religion seriously, to start businesses and to contemplate their place in the world. Hip-hop artists have taught hip-hoppers how to dress, talk and relate to others.

The Researcher's Perspective on the Findings

Because the researcher is familiar with the origin of hip-hop music, he is not surprised by these findings. Since its inception, hip-hop music has remained a means for honest self-expression, and hip-hop artists have functioned as mentors and guides during its entire tenure. The findings simply confirmed the fact that music, in particular hip-hop, is extremely influential and can be used to change moods and behaviors. The findings also confirmed the fact that hip-hop music can be used to disseminate messages, including religious messages.

The phenomenological research methodology gave the researcher the opportunity to become intimately familiar with his co-researchers, the hip-hoppers. This intimacy was critical for making his discoveries. The approach enabled him to discover that the hip-hopper's love for hip-hop music illustrates a deep need for authentic relationships expressed by their need for validation through self-expression and shared experiences.

A phenomenological investigation provided the best opportunity to enter the world of the hip-hopper's thinking, feelings and lived experiences for the following reasons and ensured the development of an incarnational missiology for hip-hoppers.

The Benefits of *Epoche*

The phenomenological approach required the researcher to practice *epoche*, a process in which he, to the best of his ability, refrained from judgment, took no position, and determined nothing in advance about the phenomenon. This gave the researcher the ability to approach each interview as listener and learner, depending fully on the hip-hopper to teach him about the experience anew and to hear the presentation of the hip-hopper's experience without coloring it with his own habits of thinking, feeling and seeing.

As illustrated in Chapter Two, Jesus laid out the biblical and theological blueprint for incarnational ministry, in which He entered the hostile world of unbelievers. He learned their way of thinking and how everyday life was experienced. He did this in hopes of comprehending the essence of their "life world," all in order to reach them. Jesus placed Himself in the position as listener and learner, allowing others to teach Him before He began His ministry. This aspect of His ministry has incarnational ministry implications for the believer.

Chapter Two's exploration of incarnational ministry, along with the phenomenological approach of *epoche,* allowed the researcher to discover through multiple statements from the Co-Researchers that evangelists who seek to reach hip-hoppers are to lead in entering places of unfamiliarity as listener and learner, seeking to

understand the individuals they hope to reach. The data collected not only confirmed the need for self-validation, but *epoche* also helped facilitate the need for self-validation, which made honest sharing possible.

Intense Interest

The second opportunity provided by the phenomenological approach was that it allowed the researcher to initiate and pursue contact with the hip-hopper. In this way, he was able to show an intense interest in a subject important to the hip-hopper. One of the best ways to reach others for Christ is to show interest in what is important to them.

As illustrated in Chapter Two, Jesus displayed interest in the life of Matthew when asking him to follow Him and entering his home and socializing with his friends. He displayed interest in the Samaritan woman when He crossed social, cultural and religious barriers to give her the ultimate solution for the void in her heart. He showed interest in Zacchaeus by entering his home and granting him forgiveness.

A phenomenological investigation allowed the researcher to show a genuine interest in an area that is critically important to hip-hoppers. It allowed him to enter the hip-hopper's world to better understand them and ultimately discover their deepest needs so that through the Holy Spirit he could develop an effective missiology for reaching them.

The intense and genuine interest shown by the researcher confirmed again the researcher's finding that the best incarnational approach for evangelizing hip-hoppers is as listener and learner. During the interviews, the hip-hoppers expressed excitement and fascination with the researcher's interest in hip-hop music. This intense interest met the

hip-hoppers need for validation through self-expression and resulted in genuine dialogues between the hip-hoppers and researcher. The data, through multiple statements, not only confirmed the hip-hopper's ability to relate to hip-hop artists because of common experiences, but the research methodology established a rapport that ensured the validity of the data because of the trust built through a genuine and intense interest.

Wise Intrusion

Third, conducting a phenomenological inquiry allowed the researcher to wisely intrude in the life of the hip-hopper. This called for the researcher to ask questions that drew out descriptions of the hip-hopper's life experiences. Questions like: "What activity are you usually engaged in when listening to hip-hop music?" or "How does it make you feel when you are listening to your favorite artist?" These questions and others allowed the researcher to get into the thinking, feeling and lived experiences of hip-hoppers. It was a wise way to get at the essence of the hip-hoppers experience with the promise that the essence of the experience would be authentically described.

The researcher likens this wise intrusion to how Jesus initiated a conversation with the Samaritan woman by asking her for a drink of water. She knew that it was not right for him to ask her for water. But it was a wise way to start a conversation about relationships, religious customs and faith. It was wisely intrusive in that it was an astute way to start a dialogue. Likewise, a phenomenological investigation allowed the researcher to ask the unbelieving hip-hopper intrusive questions that started dialogue, a dialogue that can result in hip-hoppers coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

The findings concluded that hip-hoppers long for authentic personal relationships. They speak affectionately about hip-hop music and its ability to be there for them. They describe hip-hop artists as guides and teachers. A wisely intrusive incarnational approach can be the start of a life transforming relationship with an unbelieving hip-hopper. The data, through multiple statements, not only confirmed the hip-hopper's desire for authentic personal relationships but the research methodology made an authentic Christian relationship possible.

Empathy for Hip-hoppers

Fourth, conducting a phenomenological investigation helped the researcher have empathy for each hip-hopper. This empathy grew as the research validated the fact that each hip-hopper's individual experience was important enough for the researcher to discover the essence of it. The subjective experiences of the hip-hoppers became objective proof that their experiences were real and their love for the music came from the authentic needs faced by all humans. For example, it was discovered that Co-Researcher Three loves hip-hop because it gives him a way to express himself. This was discovered by applying the second step in the phenomenological redaction process called horizonalization, a process in which specific statements from Co-Researcher Three's transcribed interview was identified as relevant to understanding his love for hip-hop.

Here are examples of "horizons" from different portions of Co-Researcher Three's interview. The theme of self-expression was consistent throughout.

"And I fell in love with the way to express yourself through music."

"It gave me a way to express how I felt without just crying."

"I came back to writing because it was a way for me to vent."

"It has the ability to, to express what you're feeling."

"Taught me how to, how to express myself without my fists."

"As long as my music is heard, it'd be nice to get a profit but that's another form of recognition. It's not about that. It's just about being heard. Not recognized as the best. Just recognized as a human."

These were determined to be horizons or "relevant statements" of his experience by asking two questions. The first was "does the statement contain meaning that is essential for understanding his love for hip-hop?" The answer is "Yes." These statements helped the researcher learn why Co-Researcher Three loves hip-hop. The second question was "is it possible to label the statement with a phrase or word?" These statements were labeled "self-expression."

Therefore, in the researcher's quest to get at the essence of a hip-hopper's experience, he gained a greater understanding of why each hip-hopper loves hip-hop music. This increased his compassion for each one of them. The goal was to understand each hip-hopper's experience at its core, which led to the development of an effective missiology for reaching hip-hoppers, a missiology that seeks to address each individual's thinking, feeling and lived experience.

Discernment by the Holy Spirit

The fifth and most critical benefit of conducting a phenomenological investigation was that it required the researcher to depend on the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment in his quest to understand the essence of a hip-hopper's love for hip-hop music. For example, phenomenology requires the researcher to create questions that provide for an

in-depth description of the experience. The researcher learned that there are often unspoken and sometimes even spoken needs in the description of a lived experience. For example, a common theme for the hip-hoppers interviewed was the idea of "self-expression." The hip-hoppers affirmed that hip-hop music gives them the opportunity to express themselves through hip-hop lyrics or helps them relate to hip-hop artists who communicate in ways that speak for them.

The researcher believes that it was the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment that gave him insight into the hip-hopper's deepest needs, a need to be recognized, heard and validated. That is why the Holy Spirit must lead in developing an effective missiology for reaching hip-hoppers. The Holy Spirit must lead in carrying out the ministry to hip-hoppers. For this reason, the researcher claims this benefit to be the most critical for the construction of an effective missiology.

Another instance of this was the common theme exposed by the phenomenological investigation of hip-hoppers' susceptibility to the influence of hip-hop music. The hip-hoppers the researcher interviewed were not quick to admit to being influenced in a negative way by hip-hop. But with further questioning, hip-hop music's influence on their mood and behavior was exposed. This demonstrated that it is not simply entertainment.

Through the long interview process, it was revealed that hip-hoppers allow hip-hop artists to function as mentors and guides through hip-hop lyrics, even if the lyrics express behaviors that are not good. Also, hip-hoppers speak of hip-hop music as if it were a person in which they shared a relationship. Hip-hoppers say things like, "I love

hip-hop as much as I love my wife" or "Hip-hop will always be there for me." The medium for this relationship is the artists' messages through lyrics. For the researcher, this further illustrated the hip-hopper's need for a relationship with Jesus. One hip-hopper described hip-hop music as being there during some of his toughest times in life. The researcher believed that he discerned this with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Not only is the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment important in seeing the hip-hoppers' need for a relationship with Jesus and with others, but the Holy Spirit's gift is important for discerning the destructive messages spread in hip-hop lyrics. As will be demonstrated in the evangelical implications, the Holy Spirit's gift of teaching is critical for teaching essential Christian doctrines through hip-hop lyrics. In doing so, the Christian evangelist is "developing ministerial and ecclesiological forms that identify with the shifting patterns of contemporary society."[1]

Evangelical Implications

Incarnational Approach: Leaving and Leading

Believers who have a burden for reaching unbelieving hip-hoppers for Jesus must be willing to leave their place of comfort, whether the comfort is a location or mindset, and enter a place of unfamiliarity, hip-hop culture, to reach them. Imitating God's self-initiating pursuit, believers must lead in this process. They must pursue, seek, chase and search for opportunities to reach unbelieving hip-hoppers. Just as Jesus' role was to

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[1] Steve Griffiths, *Open Source Theology: Collaborative Theology for the Emerging Church.* January 30, 2007. http://www.opensourcetheology.net (accessed January 24, 2012).

"come to seek and to save,"[2] likewise, the role of believers today is to seek those who Jesus desires to reach.

Believers cannot be content with simply providing youth programs that are catered to drawing unbelieving hip-hoppers but must be open to an incarnational approach, a personal approach, an intimate approach. This is a lot more uncomfortable than providing a program but it is the way Jesus reached the loss. He entered Matthew and Zacchaeus' home, both considered vile sinners. He was willing to drink from the cup of the Samaritan woman, a sinful woman.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers must discover wise ways to intrude in the life of unbelieving hip-hoppers. For example, on a personal level, a wise intrusion would be to invite a hip-hopper to lunch and ask about his or her interest in hip-hop music. Another such intrusion would be to attend a hip-hop concert with hip-hoppers. Still another is to give them opportunities to share their abilities and art. During the researcher's phenomenological investigation, he would ask hip-hoppers to share their artistic gifts. He was shocked by how many hip-hoppers are gifted poets. Many of the poems he heard should be published due to their high quality and demonstration of skill.

Through the phenomenological investigation, the researcher has learned that a personal relationship with hip-hoppers is most effective when it includes an open sharing of difficult experiences. Personal testimonies shared by both the believer and the unbelieving hip-hopper are extremely effective because they meet the hip-hopper's need for authenticity and self-expression. Moreover, authenticity about personal struggles

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[2] Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke: Jesus, the Universal Savior* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), 224.

builds rapport that increases trust. This in turn opens the door for a clear presentation of the gospel.

On a social level, churches can invite unbelieving hip-hoppers to share their poetic gift during church services, asking them not to use curse words. Again, the researcher was shocked when he allowed a hip-hopper to share poetry in a church service about love and was blown away by his creative and descriptive use of words in his presentation. This, in turn, sparked a personal relationship.

Also, Bible colleges and seminaries can invite hip-hop scholars and teachers to share their views on hip-hop's influence on faith. Anthony Pinn and KRS-One are often asked to speak at colleges. This, in turn, could spark dialogue about faith in Christ. Believers, like Jesus, must leave their places of comfort and lead in the pursuit of such relationships. They cannot expect unbelieving hip-hoppers to come to them. Believers must leave and lead.

Incarnational Approach: Listening and Learning

Believers who have a burden for reaching unbelieving hip-hoppers must be willing to humble themselves by both listening and learning. This is where believers must depend on the hip-hopper to teach them about the music and culture. It is similar to what Jesus did in the incarnation. As noted in Chapter Two regarding the incarnation, "The first significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus came as a helpless infant."[3] Infants are in a position of dependence. Someone has to take care of them, teach them and guide

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[3] Lingenfelter and Mayers, 16.

them. Believers must humble themselves and allow hip-hoppers to teach them about their culture and the best way to meet their needs.

That is why the phenomenological approach was effective in learning about the culture. It facilitated an unbiased understanding of the culture. It allowed the researcher to do what Jesus did in His incarnation. Come to the earth as learner as noted in Chapter Two: "The second significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus was a learner. He was not born with a knowledge of language or culture."[4] Like Jesus, the believer must approach hip-hoppers with listening ears, seeking to learn their culture for the purpose of reaching them for Jesus Christ.

This brings the researcher to a very important point. Based on the literary review, the researcher believes that the Black Church has a moral obligation to lead in the listening and learning. Unfortunately, the Black Church has been on the frontline of rejecting the culture and, as a result, rejecting hip-hoppers. The researcher believes this must change since the Black Church bears some of the responsibility for hip-hop's expansion. It was its children that birthed hip-hop music and the movement.

Hip-hop artists have merited millions talking about the lack of strong parental and spiritual influences over hip-hop beats. One prominent theme in the life of many successful hip-hop artist is fatherlessness. Moreover, the Black Church is often mocked in hip-hop music due to the moral failings of its leaders and the lack of concern and solutions for the problems that plague Black and Latino youth. Hip-hop was and still is the voice crying in the wilderness saying, "My parents and society have neglected me and

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[4] Lingenfelter and Mayers, 16.

I am going to tell the world through art." The Black Church bears some of the responsibility. Therefore, it must leave its places of prominence and comfort to reach unbelieving hip-hoppers. It must be willing to listen and learn about the culture so that it can learn how to reach unbelieving hip-hoppers.

The Black Church must reconsider God's self-initiating pursuit of unbelievers and see it as a mandate to pursue a generation that it has neglected, both parentally and spiritually. The Civil Rights Generation must lead in closing the gap. As the researcher stated earlier, this generational gap between the Civil Rights Generation and hip-hop generation must be bridged. If it is not, a generation of youth, no matter what race, who love hip-hop, will be lost. For many young people, hip-hop music is central to their existence. If an alternative form of hip-hop music is not given, they will listen to secular hip-hop and as a result be influenced by its message.

This brings the researcher to the next incarnational approach to reaching hip-hoppers: exposing the message in secular hip-hop lyrics and using Christian hip-hop lyrics to teach doctrine and lifestyle.

Incarnational Approach: Analyzing Lyrics

The most important element in hip-hop music for hip-hoppers is the lyrics. Hip-hop lyrics create images, feelings and thoughts that are accompanied by loud rhythmic beats and dominated by bass and catchy hooks or choruses used to draw the hip-hopper. The words or lyrics are the most important because they have the ability to influence the hip-hopper's behavior and mood. The research also confirmed that hip-hop lyrics often speak on behalf of hip-hoppers. More than anything, hip-hop lyrics are important to the

hip-hopper because the lyrics confirm whether or not the hip-hopper and hip-hop artist have shared interest.

Hip-hoppers memorize, quote and make reference to hip-hop lyrics and study them as if they are sacred. As a result, the opinions and values of prominent hip-hop artists are important to hip-hoppers. This influence, as stated earlier, becomes even more prominent when the hip-hop artist thrives despite the disadvantages in his or her life. This influence is doubled when these artists overcome their challenges and brag as if their own power merited their success.

The researcher recently went on a nine-month combat deployment and used the incarnational approach of analyzing hip-hop lyrics to teach the Scriptures to unbelieving hip-hoppers. He used the hip-hop album, *13 Letters*, an album that has a hip-hop song for each of Paul's 13 letters. It was produced by the up-and-coming hip-hop record label Reach Records. The hip-hop artists who are part of this record label are unashamedly Christ centered.

This album came with a hip-hop curriculum. Each verse in every song is explained and have both a referenced verse and commentary. The attending students were asked to listen to the hip-hop song for each biblical book, review the lyrics and verses and answer questions. It was the most attended bible study on the researcher's war ship. He had people of all military ranks, races and age groups. There were both unbelieving and believing hip-hoppers. There were serious discussions about justification, sanctification and atonement.

Summary

The researcher's phenomenological investigations, while fulfilling academic interests, simultaneously allowed him to fulfill the biblical mandate to imitate God's self-initiated pursuit of unbelievers. It enabled him to become a Spirit-led, wisely intrusive seeker of unbelieving hip-hoppers.

The literary review affirmed the fact that hip-hop music was birthed out of a desire for underprivileged Blacks and Latinos to find comfort through entertainment.[5] The phenomenological investigation confirmed that hip-hop music still has strong traces of this original motivation, although it has somewhat changed because of the wealth and success of hip-hop artists. That being said, hip-hop music is still the primary means for individuals in the inner-city to communicate their experiences. Further, it still offers hope to possibly make one's way out of the inner city. It is these common experiences that helps the hip-hopper relate to the hip-hop artists.

However, because of the prosperity of today's hip-hop artist, difficult experiences are now glamorized and the solutions or "ways out" are not good. This is exactly why the church must lead in bridging the gap between itself and hip-hoppers. The church must lead in entering the culture as listener and learner and use the influence of hip-hop lyrics to teach biblical truth.

The findings of the phenomenological investigation also demonstrated that the hip-hop artists to whom hop hoppers listen to express messages that are not consistent with biblical spirituality. In fact, many of them communicate a pluralistic spirituality. The

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[5] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 13, and Watkins, *The Gospel Remixed*, 6-7.

challenge with this is that many hip-hoppers see these artists as mentors and guides. What is even more troubling is the fact that hip-hop scholars and authors give these artist prophetic status, as was described in Chapter Three. Unfortunately, these are the mentors to many hip-hoppers.

The phenomenological investigation also supported the researcher's view that Niebuhr's "Christ Transforms Culture" is the best evangelical model for reaching hip-hoppers for Christ. This is because it seeks to inject Jesus into the culture, instead of outright rejecting the culture.

As illustrated in Chapter Two, the incarnate Christ came to earth to share the human experience. In fact, Jesus' incarnation gave Him the ability to empathize and understand what humans experience when dealing with trials and temptations in life. The incarnation gave Him personal insight into what each and every person needs. Because He understands, He knows how to respond to those needs. That is why the Bible says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15, KJV).[6] Again, Koester's explanation of the word "sympathize" helps, "The Greek word *sympathein* is formed from roots meaning 'to feel' (*pathein*) something 'with' (*syn*) someone."[7]

Similar to Jesus injecting Himself into human history so that he could feel with humans, the believer and the church must inject Jesus into hip-hop culture, instead of outright rejecting the culture. This is important for hip-hoppers because they testify to

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[6] New King James Version Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005)

[7] Craig R. Koester, *The Anchor Bible: Hebrews, Vol. 36,* ed. by William F Albright and David N Freedman (New York: Doubleday Press, 2001), 283.

having a strong personal connection to hip-hop music. It has been pervasive in their lives

from an early age. Many of them speak of hip-hop music as if they have a personal

relationship with the music. Therefore, it would be ineffective to tell an unbelieving hip-

hopper to outright reject music they love for a relationship with Christ when the music

itself is not evil. The lyrics determine if the music is evil. Therefore, it would be more

effective to use hip-hop music as a means to inject Christ into the culture with Christ-

centered lyrics.

Also, through this phenomenological investigation, the findings helped the

researcher discern the deepest needs of hip-hoppers. The researcher learned that it is

empowering for hip-hoppers to have someone listen and validate their individual

experiences. This gave insight to the researcher, which in turn provided the framework

for developing an effective missiology for reaching hip-hoppers.

Based on the biblical mandate to imitate God's self-initiated pursuit of

unbelievers and the confirmation that an incarnational approach is the best way to reach

hip-hoppers, the phenomenological investigation supports an incarnational model of

leaving and leading in initiating a dialogue, listening and learning to gain insight from

hip-hoppers and using lyrics to teach Christian doctrine and lifestyle. This incarnational

model should include the use of hip-hop lyrics to teach Scripture to contextualize the

word of God for hip-hoppers.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Design

Strengths

As stated earlier, the strength of the research design is that it allowed the researcher to develop an objective "essence" of the hip-hopper's love for hip-hop through the gathering of their subjective experiences. The two words "how" and "what" were key words that provided a solid basis for asking questions and recording answers. Moreover, the phenomenological investigation relied on the individual experiences of the co-researchers. Therefore, the data is based on the co-researchers' voices. It allowed the co-researchers' own chosen words to fully describe how they experienced hip-hop.

Finally, unlike experimentally-oriented research, the "sample" was not random. The researcher was allowed to pursue a specific type of individual for the study, which was important when seeking to develop a way to reach hip-hoppers for Christ.

Weaknesses of the Research Design

The research design allows for a limited amount of participants, which can be perceived as a weakness. This was purposeful, since the focus is on qualitative issues, not the number of individuals interviewed. A related weakness was that, even without a large number of co-researchers, there was such a vast amount of data collected through the long interview process and follow-up interviews that the researcher was challenged to process it all. In part this reflects the fact that the "essence" of the hip-hopper's experience can never be totally exhausted. While having too much data in and of itself is not weakness, it is a challenge to data analysis.

Another weaknesses was that there was an unavoidable, subjective influence of the researcher on the data. As described earlier, the researcher's own relationship with hip-hop music and culture exerted itself on him, despite his best efforts to practice *epoche*. In connection to this challenge was the difficulty in applying *epoche*. It proved to be a difficult mindset to fully adopt.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS

Personal Reflections

What God Taught the Researcher about His Love for Unbelieving Hip-hoppers

The researcher learned through his review of God's self-initiated pursuit of sinful humanity how much God loves His creation and that this includes unbelieving hip-hoppers. Initially, it was obvious to see God's pursuit through the person of Jesus. But to realize that God has been pursuing humanity since the beginning of time was encouraging and affirming. It not only reminded the researcher of God's love for him but also illustrated his need to express that same type of love to unbelieving hip-hoppers.

What Hip-hop Has Done for the Researcher's Relationship with His Sons

The researcher was motivated to conduct his study because of his sons' love for hip-hop. Unfortunately, they do not like the type of hip-hop music to which he grew up listening. Instead, they listen to a type of hip-hop music that is so blatantly offensive that it concerns him that his sons enjoy it. He has had multiple discussions with his sons about the ungodly messages of hip-hop music and has had success sharing Christian hip-hop with them. One of his sons often asked to hear the Christian hip-hop instead of his normally listening choices.

Additionally, conducting this research has made the researcher a student of secular hip-hop. Quite often he now knows more about hip-hop music than his sons and uses that knowledge to warn them about the dangers in the messages. This has

facilitated a common interest that he enjoys with his sons. This in turn has encouraged healthy discussions about sex, drugs and violence.

What Hip-hoppers Taught the Researcher about Hip-hop and the Hip-hopper?

What the researcher enjoyed the most about this project was the relationships he developed with the hip-hoppers. Hearing about the challenges and trials of these individuals was at times challenging but also rewarding. For example, hearing that one of the co-researcher's brother was murdered was deeply troubling. It was even more troubling to hear that this co-researcher was accused of murder and was almost shot himself. Seeing his resiliency was encouraging. It strengthened the researcher with a sense of purpose to learn that listening to and creating hip-hop music helped this co-researcher get through those experiences. This resiliency gave the researcher energy to continue his work.

The researcher was also troubled but ultimately inspired to hear the stories of the co-researcher who had experienced multiple losses from his parents sending him to boarding school and from the breakdown of multiple love interests. Knowing that hip-hop music had helped him vent his challenges and had gotten him past those painful moments gave the researcher energy to continue his work.

Before conducting this study, the researcher did not realize how significant hip-hop music was for healing the listener. To know that music can be used as a form of self-expression to bring healing was eye opening. To know that music can be used as a way to receive validation as a human was eye opening. Learning these things made the researcher a bit more compassionate toward hip-hoppers and their music. The researcher

used to unfairly judge today's hip-hoppers. Listening to them share their experiences gave him compassion. It also drove him to make his vision for an effective incarnational model into a reality.

The researcher liked the fact that this project allowed hip-hoppers to play a significant role in developing an incarnational model for reaching them. This helped the researcher realize that the hip-hopper needs authentic Christian friendships.

What Hip-hoppers Taught the Researcher about His Responsibility as a Christian

Readers may assume that because of the researcher's past experience with hip-hop that developing relationships with hip-hoppers was easy. That was not the case. Because today's hip-hop music is extremely objectionable in language and attitude, the researcher had to leave his Christian comfort zone to interview hip-hoppers who used language that made him cringe. He also had to leave his comfort zone to listen to and immerse himself in contemporary hip-hop music in order to get a real feel for today's culture.

Today's hip-hop music is a lot more vulgar than when the researcher listened to it 25 years ago. Hip-hop lyrics include themes like: lesbianism, adultery, fornication, prostitution, drug dealing, murder and any other offensive behavior one can imagine. This is stated without exaggeration. This made entering the contemporary hip-hop world difficult.

The researcher recalls attending a hip-hop club on February 21, 2013. A young lady approached him to flirt. When he told her the purpose for his being there, her demeanor changed. She became interested in the research and began asking questions.

When the researcher made a judgmental statement about the hip-hop artist on stage, she reminded him that the artist was sharing his journey. When he judged the way one of the hip-hop artists was dressed, she informed the researcher that his purpose was to be recognized. She reminded the researcher that the hip-hop artists on stage wanted to be considered important. The key things the researcher remembered her saying was that hip-hop artists perform hip-hop music to share their journey, their struggles, their frustrations. She reminded the researcher that they bragged in order to pump themselves up because no one else will. That evening the researcher was reminded of his purpose for doing the research, to understand an unbelieving hip-hopper's deepest hurts and fears.

That night, the researcher learned that hip-hop music may be brutally honest, angry and offensive but that his behavior was similar to the Pharisees in the New Testament. That night the researcher realized that unbelieving hip-hoppers probably do not expect Christians to show a genuine interest in why they enjoy hip-hop and what needs the music meets. They expect Christians to tell them that it is wrong. That night, the researcher repented and reminded himself of the purpose of his research.

After that, the researcher, filled with the Spirit, more wisely intruded on the minds and hearts of unbelieving hip-hoppers to understand why they loved hip-hop. The researcher invited unbelieving hip-hoppers to do poetry pieces in his church services and asked them to share their deepest pain through hip-hop lyrics. He has also taught Christian doctrine to them through Christian hip-hop lyrics. The researcher has personally learned that the most effective way to reach unbelieving hip-hoppers for Christ is to leave one's places of comfort and lead in establishing personal relationships with hip-hoppers.

This permits one to share the life changing message of the cross through hip-hop. For many unbelieving hip-hoppers, it is the only avenue for reaching them.

Possible Research Question as a Result of This Project

As a result of this project, several research questions come to mind for future study. The first is, "What are the most effective strategies for bridging the relationship gap between the Civil Rights Generation and the Hip-hop Generation?" The second is, "What are the results of conversion at Christian hip-hop concerts and how many of those converts become genuine followers of Jesus Christ?" Finally, "What are the long term effects on the unbelieving hip-hopper when hip-hop evangelists use Christian hip-hop lyrics to teach Christian doctrine and lifestyle?"

The researcher is now a wisely intrusive, Holy Spirit-filled purser of unbelieving hip-hoppers. He has used hip-hop lyrics to disciple them. His hope is to motivate others to do the same.

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