MOVING TOWARDS RELEVANT CHURCH SERVICES IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

BY

NEIL CUDMORE SMITH

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER ARTIUM

In the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

The study was done through the Cape Town Baptist Seminary

SUPERVISOR: Prof. Julian Müller

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ronnie Davis

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Summary

This thesis is concerned with the recent trends within church gatherings where it is reported that there are growing numbers of 15-35 year olds missing from many evangelical churches. This is the generation commonly labelled as postmodern, and is even associated with the most up to date reaction of post-post modernism. The startling facts around this missing generation are explored in this thesis.

This investigation looks at the present status of church services (Chapter 2) where the research identifies this problem of attendance of the younger generation at church gatherings, as well as the danger of the irrelevance of the church in its postmodern context. From here the study moves to suggest the basis of authority (Chapter 3), which is the biblical model for church gatherings. Once this foundation is established we move to detect the specific gaps between the current status (Chapter 4) and the biblical model. This leaves the application (Chapter 5) of what the church needs to do to get back to the original scriptural shape, and to be relevant to the postmodern era in which it finds itself.

Due to the nature of the topic, the thesis discusses the characteristics of emerging generations, and what it means to be relevant to postmodern society in the way that a church gathering worships, preaches and styles itself. Other elements of liturgy are examined, such as the Lord's Supper. In this manner, this thesis moves the reader to a point where they are able to see that the church at large needs to make some drastic changes to the way that it designs its gatherings.

The author is careful to show that being relevant to culture is an endless quest, and that church leaders are wise to understand that this pursuit must be secondary to the main issue of seeking Jesus Christ and sticking to the power of the unchanging gospel. This must come before trendy worship music, flashy lights, big loud sound systems and professionally designed web pages. All these are simply smoke and no flames if the church is simply passionate about the superficial surface stylistic features of its gatherings.

Therefore, in moving towards relevant church services for the postmodern era, the author takes the reader on a journey where he encourages the church to take some bold steps into adapting and "redesigning the packaging" of Christian ministry in church gatherings. Church meetings cannot just be about being social, creative and communal. They must be defined by the biblical framework that calls for a spiritual gathering of believers that come to worship together as God ordained, to participate in a reverent, powerful, experiential, participative, creative, multi-sensory meeting where they meet with God.

List of Key Items

1. Relevant.
2. Postmodernism.
3. Emerging Generations.
4. Worship.
5. Preaching.
6. Style.
7. Service.
8. Lord's Supper.
9. Experiential.
10. Multi-sensory.
11. Church Gathering.
12. Service.
13. Liturgy.
14. Biblical Model.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis highlights the phenomenon of declining emerging generation's attendance at church services. It investigates this, and seeks to offer a solution by suggesting a movement towards relevant church services for the postmodern era.

In 2006, the movie Happy Feet (Millar 2006) won an academy award for the best animated feature film of that year. It tells the story of a young penguin who does not fit into his community. All the penguins before him were born to sing. But he cannot sing at all. However, what he is born to do, is dance. But this is such un-penguin like behavior that he is kicked out of his penguin community into the cold by the traditionalistic leaders of the penguin community.

As an anecdote, this movie vividly portrays how emerging postmodern generations are finding it difficult to fit into modern church services. Sadly, rather than finding a place to express their unique style in worship, they find themselves being misunderstood and pushed away.

This thesis explores this phenomenon and seeks to suggest a biblical model that is desperately needed in this postmodern generation.

1.2 A wake up call to the Church

Gibbs and Coffey in their description of the quantum changes necessary in the church have these sobering words to say (2001:10):

> "The church has always been potentially just one generation away from extinction. But now, with a generation of under thirty-five-year-olds turning away from institutional expressions of Christianity, churches in the west recognize that they face a challenge that is more urgent and radical than it has been for many generations."

This statement is not hyperbole. Biblical support is found for the church to be aware of the challenge that is before them. In Judges 2:11 it says; "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD or what He had done" (NIV). This scripture explains that there was a generation in history who did not know the Lord, partly because the generation before them failed in their role to pass on the faith.

Should the church be engaging the culture around it? Is the church scratching where it itches in society today? Are our churches making an indelible impression on our communities? Would our neighbourhoods be any different if our churches disappeared from among them, or would they remain the same as if nothing had changed? And do our church gatherings, which are the "face" of our churches to the world around us, get the communities around them talking? Are they noticed, are they powerful, dynamic, inspiring meetings? These are some of the key questions that this thesis seeks to answer.

The church of Jesus Christ must pass on the faith and allow emerging generations the freedom to express their worship to God, in a way that is natural and unique to them as a generation, in order for them to find their place in the body of Christ.

The global church of today is faced with this challenge, as have generations before. Currently the South African (SA) church is experiencing an occurrence of declining emerging generation's attendance at church services. Faced with this challenge one has two options; either one pretends it's simply not true, or one can face up to it, and try to do something about it. The challenges that the SA church is facing, are particularly significant. Thomas Jefferson said; "Every generation needs a new revolution" (JC 1900). It is the author's view that a revolution is needed in the way that church in the postmodern era is done. We need a new contextualized church to reach a new generation.

It is important to understand that this is nothing new. This is not the first time in history that such a movement has been needed, nor will it be the last. The author of this thesis has no desire to provide another new method of "doing church" or to make empty promises that this will fix the negative trends. As this thesis will prove, every generation through history was faced with the responsibility of doing church in a way that was meaningful and effective in its own context and time.

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It is therefore critical to see that the church has constantly had to adapt and change throughout history (re-engineer itself), and the church will need to continually do so into the future, if it is to reach future generations. Thus, the methodology that is proposed in this thesis (That is not an unchanging biblical principle) is not a great new tool to be used endlessly into the future. Methodology must be flexible to further change in the not so distant future. But the biblical model remains the same.

1.3   Personal Background

For several years I served as an associate pastor responsible for ministry towards postmodern young people (age 13-25). This opportunity to serve as a youth leader and a pastor was valuable in teaching me how to engage with young people who do not believe in God and have negative perceptions of what a church service is.

As a pastor and a worship leader, I have had the responsibility of overseeing the preparation and up-front leadership of church services. I have been directly involved in the full planning of the services; leading the worship music, leading the announcements, and regularly being the preacher that delivers the message. Very quickly, as a young minister, I learnt what Woodrow Wilson held to; "If you want to make enemies, try to change something!" (WWPL 2009). This is true, particularly in the church context. People become accustomed to what they know – and when things are done differently, a leader can quickly become unpopular.

But through all of this, I have become very aware of the opportunity that the church has to influence its community through its services. Sadly, it is in these very same services where much tension resides over how to do church. Large numbers of church workers have become frustrated and demoralised by the clash and frustration between the modern and the postmodern cultures which are both prevalent in churches today. Kimball shared his story in an article that captured my personal experience (YS 2003:1):

> "The church I was in was a great church. It was a large, modern, alive, contemporary church. It wasn't backwards or out of touch with culture. I'd been the youth pastor there for eight years and had a large thriving youth ministry. But the trouble all started when we noticed that, although our church was effective for those with a modern Judeo-Christian mindset and

worldview, we weren't connecting with emerging generations who were growing up in a postmodern, post-Christian world. I actually never even heard of the word postmodern back then, and I would by no means say we became postmodern. We were just instinctively feeling that we needed to change the way we were working with teens and young adults because of the changes happening in their worldviews and the way they were approaching spirituality."

This tension between the modern and postmodern cultures in many churches is very obvious (See Appendix A). In church services, it can be seen in the way that worship is led, sermons are preached, announcements are made, and in the way that ministry response times are conducted. There is a growing number of believers who are looking for church to be different.

Two years ago I was a part of a survey done at a local school in my community where a group of bible education teachers sought to identify why young people from the school were not comfortable in attending our local church services. The results were astounding. Many felt that it was simply another world to theirs, one which they were not comfortable stepping into. This survey spurred me into making it my life's mission to make church services a welcoming positive experience for this emerging generation. I believe now more than ever that shifts are necessary in how we do church.

1.4   Purpose of thesis: moving towards relevant church services in the postmodern era

It is the purpose of this thesis to suggest a course of action that will encourage facing up to the problems churches are facing today in our current context of reaching the generations of under thirty-five years of age, and to provide a practical blueprint for how we can go about making our churches relevant to them today.

There are many aspects of the ministry of the church that one could seek to address in doing this; cell group ministries, prayer meetings, youth ministries, Sunday school programs, the list is endless, and all of these are valuable ministries and programs, but they are just too many and broad to address. It is for this reason that this thesis focuses in on one particular aspect of church ministry – that of church services. The author is aware that in focusing solely on weekend worship

gatherings that this could fail to communicate the full biblical concept of church. Kimball explains (2004:27):

> "I am worried that a book that focuses on their weekend worship gathering communicates that church = weekend worship gathering. That is far from the scriptural reality of what church is. Church is a people of God on a mission (1 Cor 12:27, Acts 1:8) – people who spend most of their time outside of the weekend worship gathering. So, I need to state right of front that the worship gathering is but one part of a holistic worship experience."

But a worship service is important. Church services are the "face" of a particular church to its members and to its community. A church service is the commonly held primary program of a church for members, adherents and visitors to attend, usually on a weekly basis. It is the gathering where the combined church family converges to hear the preaching of the Word and to join together in worship and fellowship. It is where the individual faces of the church come together and the body becomes one.

It is this gathering of the church that I want to focus on. I want to suggest a movement towards a relevant way of doing church services in this current post-modern era in which we all live.

It cannot be over emphasised just how important it is that the church rises up and engages the postmodern world (and the moderns and pre-moderns) with the life transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some will sadly misunderstand the motives of this thesis, thinking that the author is just another young revolutionary seeking to find his own personal importance by raising his voice and challenging the status quo and the traditional values of the previous generation. This is the unfortunate nature of misunderstanding the heart of a stranger who writes his thoughts down on paper.

It is clearly recognized that every generation voices a call for change. Every generation cries revolution. The author has made an honest attempt not to do this. But the winds of change are blowing, and they are changes that are critically important. A generation is at stake.

This thesis focuses primarily on how to reach this postmodern generation. Some might think this to be very narrow minded in a country like SA. The author has been

reminded by friends and colleagues of the real questions that need to be asked in this thesis. Such as, what are emerging SA generations passionate about? And, how are they communicating this passion? (Or, are they lacking in passion for the right things?).

One cannot ignore the vast differences in culture and subculture between the emerging young generations in SA. Although this thesis looks at the postmodern generation, and the newly emerging post-post-moderns, the author is highly aware that worldview in this nation cannot be painted with one brush stroke. There are new generations born into privilege, with the benefits of good education, and those who are disadvantaged in the rural areas of South Africa, the urban townships, and many other communities. Are they postmodern? Does the church care about them?

This thesis does not have all the answers for how to design church services in multicultural SA. The complexities are immense. But this process has been a tough, eye opening journey into a worldwide post-Christian culture and into God's plan for the church, and the way that these two connect. Some might consider the conclusions herein to be bold and radical, but they are the appropriate applications as perceived by the author.

At the outset, when the thought of this thesis first begun to form, there was excitement at what could be learnt and applied in the author's own particular local church context. Conversely, as research into the subject developed, excitement was replaced by concern at the magnitude of the changes that were necessary to the way that the large majority of church services are conducted. There is no doubt that something so valuable to God won't endure by his power and grace, but there is a serious concern that the full potential of church gatherings won't be realized by many churches due to the extent of the change that is necessary, and human beings inherent dislike for change.

1.5   Methodology

The method underpinning the form of this thesis is inspired by the model provided by "X-Ed: Experiential Education" (Davis 2009) as cited from Hendrix. Thus the flow of this thesis resembles the figure below:

```
        ┌─────────────────┐
        │   Experience    │
        │ Church Gatherings│
        │ (Where we are)  │
        └─────────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
  │ Application  │      │    Exegesis      │
  │ What we need │      │ Biblical Church  │
  │ to apply to  │      │   Gatherings     │
  │  get there   │      │(Where we should be)│
  └──────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
        ┌─────────────────┐
        │   Reflection    │
        │ Identifying the │
        │      Gaps       │
        └─────────────────┘
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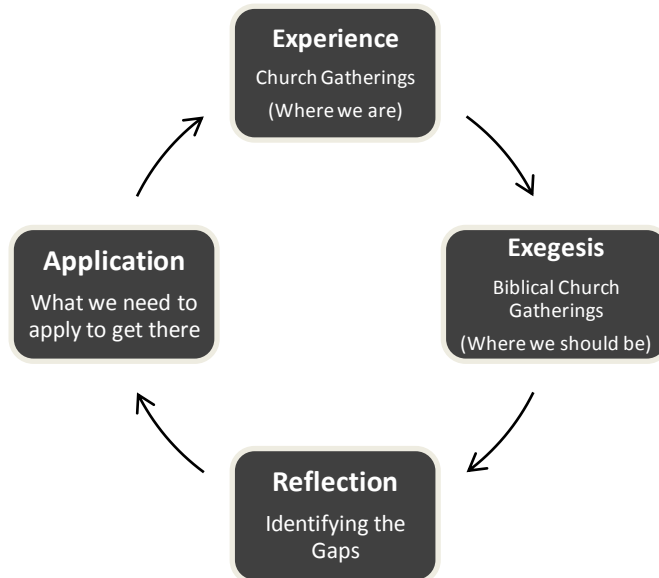
Fig.1.1. *Form of overall argument of thesis.*

Chapter 2 will identify the current problems with church gatherings, chapter 3 will formulate a biblical model of what they should be like, chapter 4 will identify where the gaps are between the biblical standard and current experience, and chapter 5 will show us what needs to be applied to get church gatherings to where they should be.

1.6   Definition of Terms

1.6.1   Relevant

This thesis shares the same definition of "relevant" as the book "The Relevant Church" in which Ashley (2005:i) describes relevancy in three points: "1. Socially and culturally significant; important to real-world issues, present day events or the current state of society. 2 Having a bearing on or connection with the matter at hand. 3. Distinctive." Therefore relevant church services would be communities of faith that are passionate for Christ as well as culture. They eagerly desire to be believers who have a bearing on, and significance to, present day culture. That which is irrelevant must be dealt with and be changed or re-engineered if it is not a biblical imperative. It is useful to note that a lot has been written regarding relevancy and its connection to postmodernity. The author is aware that one can cross a line

theologically when attempting to make church services so "relevant" that a church service ceases to be a church. This is avoided and explained throughout this thesis.

1.6.2 Church Services

The term church service in this thesis describes a formalized (Not necessarily "formal") period of communal worship. A church service occurs when the people that make up the church gather together to be taught the word of God, to worship, and to fellowship together. They are the church. Not the building. Styles of services vary greatly, and it is to this end that this thesis encourages a movement towards a style and a liturgy that is appropriate to the postmodern context in which many churches exist. The phrase "church gathering" is also used by the author and is preferred to the phrase "church service" as will be explained.

1.6.3 Postmodern

For the purposes of this thesis the author has used the following definition: postmodern literally means "after the modern movement." McLaren has usefully given four key values of postmodernity which are helpful in understanding what it is (2006:168-170): Postmodernism is sceptical of certainty; postmodernism is sensitive to context; postmodernism highly values subjective experience; for postmoderns, togetherness is a rare, precious and illusive experience. A further explanation is offered in the chapter that deals with postmodernism.

1.6.4 Emerging / Emergent

According to the New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary (Cayne 1987) and the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHPC 2000), the word "emerging," is an adjective meaning: "Newly formed or just coming into prominence v. To come into light, being discovered." The word has gained meaning in contemporary Christian churches to describe a new way of being Christians and of doing church. This movement has been described as the "emerging church" or the "emergent church." At the heart of this movement is a belief that the culture around the church has changed, and therefore Christian leaders must adapt to it, or have their churches die. Unfortunately this movement is difficult to describe as it has hazy

boundaries and not all of its proponents even realize that they are aligning themselves with it. It has a number of strengths and a number of weaknesses which Carson deftly defines in his book, "Becoming conversant with the emerging church" (2005:11-56). This thesis attempts to build on the strengths of this movements ability to read the times, its missional thrust and authenticity, but endeavours to avoid its relativism which is seen in some of its more extreme supporters. Ultimately one must continue to be authentically "evangelical" and "biblical."

1.6.5   Missional

This term is used to describe the nature of a church that is clear in its gospel missions mandate (Mat 28:19). A missional church is a church that proclaims the gospel. A strong element of this missions thrust is focused into the community in which the church finds itself. Not only to the rest of the world. A missional church is a church that has become a missionary church into its own culture, and not only other cultures of the world. It is in essence "incarnational" into its own community.

1.6.6   Post-Christian

This term describes the pluralistic culture in which we live today. Although generalized, by and large, generations before ours have enjoyed a "Christian culture" in the West. One could call it Christendom. But today, most outsiders are "post-Christian." Kinnaman's (2007) title of a book which describes this postmodern culture is apt, this generation is; "Unchristian." He says; "They think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be" (Kinnaman 2007:15). Are they right?

1.6.7   Liturgy

Traditionally liturgy is defined as a set of words, music and actions to be used in a church ceremony. This thesis defines it differently. It sees liturgy as the structure or structures which a church makes use of to aid the congregation experiencing God. As has been described, this is one of the challenges of this thesis, to determine these appropriate structures for church services in a postmodern context.

1.6.8   Traditional Worship Music (TWM)

Music has always played a big role in a church service. By Traditional Worship Music (TWM) the author refers to worship music that is traditional and conservative. By "conservative" the author refers to music that is non controversial and safe. For example: hymns and choruses that do not have a contemporary style.

1.6.9   Contemporary Worship Music (CWM)

This thesis defines CWM as music styles that are contemporary, Lucarini's (2002:17) definition is suitable, a CWM style can be: "soft rock, pop/rock, easy listening or classic rock, but could also include other forms of heavily syncopated music with rock influences such as jazz, rap, blues, hip-hop, punk, ska, or modern country and western." Frame (1997:5-7) in his book, Contemporary Worship Music, provides a very thorough description of the origin and history of CWM that is very useful to study.

1.7   Summary

What if emerging generations cannot sing like we do? What if they are born to dance? Will they find a place where they can fit in within our gatherings? Or will the church push them away for fear of having to change the way it does things?

The church is safe from extinction because it belongs to a powerful God. But how magnificent would it be if his people arose to see the need for a new contextualized church to reach this new generation. Every generation through history was faced with the responsibility of doing church in a way that was meaningful and effective in its context and time. Thus, we too must now move toward relevant church services in the postmodern era.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

2.1   Introduction

Dorrel (2006:120) is a master at listing realities about today's church that we don't want to see.

> "Most church services are boring to the average person. Young children squirm, wiggle and talk too loudly. Teens write notes and whisper. Adults often fade in and out of sleep, just getting through the sermon. What should be one of the most celebrative and meaningful times of the week usually ends with a 'whew,' instead of an 'amen." As Creator God, how he must grieve over our lack of creativity and sameness. The God who made mountains and oceans, flowers and trees, kangaroos and iguanas, and people...must wonder at our dullness. Somehow through the years, we have reduced worship to stoic readings, outdated hymns, and mundane sermons. And though these traditions become sacred to the die-hards, the unbelieving world is not very interested."

It is the view of many that the church has become boring. Postmodern outsiders remain outsiders because of this perception. And those inside the church do little to change the perception.

Kimball in his book "They like Jesus but not the church" speaks about "The danger of the Christian Bubble" (Kimball 2007:40). It is the belief of the author that this is one of the main problems contributing towards ineffective irrelevant church services. The church of the 21st Century has become stuck in a Christian subculture bubble. Kinnaman expresses his agreement with this same predicament by saying that 21st Century Christians have become "Sheltered" (2007:121).

The concern regarding this is that Christ never intended for his church to become completely separated from the world. In John 17:15 Jesus said; "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (NIV). Here it is clear that Christ's desire for his church was that it not become separated from the world – even though it was separate unto God.

The very real danger here is compromise. However, the church has more likely erred on the side of separating itself from the world culturally, where many churches are still doing what they have been doing for the past thirty years in their services. As a result, there is a perception from outsiders that church services are boring, of no importance, old-fashioned, and out of touch with reality.

In October 2008 a team of bible education teachers at a local high school I work in conducted a survey. The question was asked to these predominantly unchurched young people; "What do you think of church services?" 95% of them responded with one word; "Boring." This is a candid generation that is not shy in expressing its opinions. Yet if the church is to have its heart opened to the lost in its community it must hear what they are saying; "church is boring." Something, which is meant to be so special, so holy, so beautiful, so glorious, something that belongs to Christ, his family, his body, is viewed by many as "boring."

Churches need to become aware of the misconceptions out there about church services so that we can develop a plan, and an approach to reach people. This was always Christ's desire for the Church. "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18 NIV).

It could be argued that these young people are non-Christian, and don't know any better, and that the church should not be worrying about what they think or trying to conform our gatherings to what they want. Some in the church could have the following attitude; "We have no need to panic, nor do we have to make any changes to our church services, and put simply, they should fit in with us. After all, isn't the real reason they are so critical of the church because they are sinners and they don't want to give up their sin. Are their objections to church not just an excuse for them to carry on sinning?"

There is some truth in this argument, but simply put, their opinions should matter, because these are the lost who the church is trying to reach. These young people are not radicals. They are normal young people living in a normal SA community. This is what they think about church.

This is not just the view of one particular local high school. Empirical studies show that this is becoming a major trend around the world. The statistics back it up factually. African churches are not immune to these global dynamics. As Hendricks (2002:5) says; "Africa is in no uncertain way being affected by global mega-trends." It is important to note that in SA we "fall into several time zones" (Hendricks 2002:56). Even in our cities we still have strong mixes of premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism, and even more recently post post modernism. So the environment in SA is not straightforwardly labelled, as it is diverse and complex. But it is seeing similar problems as identified in other parts of the world.

Therefore church should be engaging in a major rethink about how it does church services. Interestingly, although this new generation does not like the church – they do like Jesus. We are living in a culture that is increasingly open to Jesus, yet at the same time they are increasingly suspicious and untrusting of Christians and the church. Hence a church service is the last place you will find them. Fig 2.1 describes how churches have found themselves stuck in this position (Kimball 2007:40):

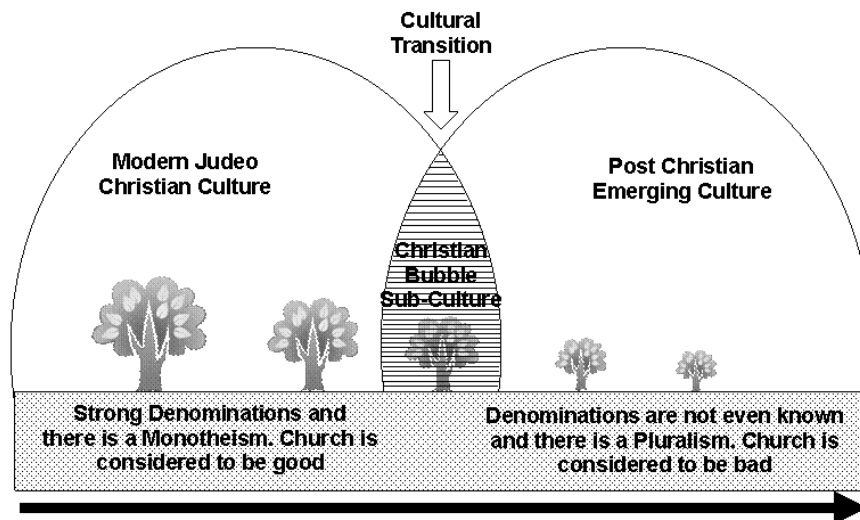Fig. 2.1. *Diagram explaining how churches have disengaged from the culture around them*. Adapted from (Kimbal 2007:40)

This diagram shows where there has been a cultural transition between the culture of the past, and what is now evident. In society, there has been a move from a Judeo-Christian era to a Post-Christian era. This is a world where many do not believe in Jesus Christ, and they do not trust the church.

In the past Monotheism ruled, most people believed in one God and church was considered good. In present culture however, Pluralism rules, and there are many faiths. As a result, churches find themselves in this position in the centre of a cultural transition, in between two very different "generations." And herein lies the problem. As culture has moved from a time of Christendom (Where the church enjoyed a prominence in society), into the new emerging culture (Where church is overlooked and is seen as archaic) – the church has become trapped in a bubble. Church services have become isolated from the world, and the world has changed around us and we have slowly lost touch. Kimball (2003:13) says:

> "While many of us have been preparing sermons and keeping busy with the internal affairs of our churches, something alarming has been happening on the outside...new generations are arising all around us without any Christian influence. So we must rethink virtually everything we are doing in our ministries."

2.2 There is a problem - Where are all the young people?

There are post-Christian generations that are emerging in danger of not knowing the Lord and what he has done. This challenge is left to the church to rectify. McNeal states (2003:2-3):

> "The world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century, and everyone knows it. But knowing it and acting on it are two different things. So far the church largely has responded with heavy infusions of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and come back around to the church. The rate of disconnection indicates a dilemma far more serious than mere youthful rebellion… The further you go down the generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation report going to church..."

Kinnaman thinks that due to the sheer numbers of those who are outsiders to the church, the body of Christ needs to recognize their concerns and he suggests that "if we want to influence new generations, we have to pay attention to the swelling group of outsiders" (2007:18).

There can be no doubt that there is a problem. Studies show that there is a wellspring of opinion that the church is not drawing in the new emerging generations. McNeal's words sum up the dilemma: "The further you go down the

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generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation report going to church" (2003:3). Some churches are still not totally convinced of the problem and through their denial to face reality, the problem is further exacerbated. Church services are bound by tradition rather than relevance because life in a Christian bubble can shrink your vision and distort your view of reality.

The fear is that this denial is partly fuelled by the fact that churches are still "ticking along" and have some successes with the younger generation. Whilst we must praise God for this, we must not take our eyes off the greater truth that we have been given a missionary gospel and that we need to be reaching out to all who are not yet believers. Being satisfied with a few is not good enough. There is concern that the church is hanging in on life support from a previous generation's input of resources and energy. As Fig 2.2 below suggests, religious trends in SA are not faring well for the traditional protestant (PF 2009:1):
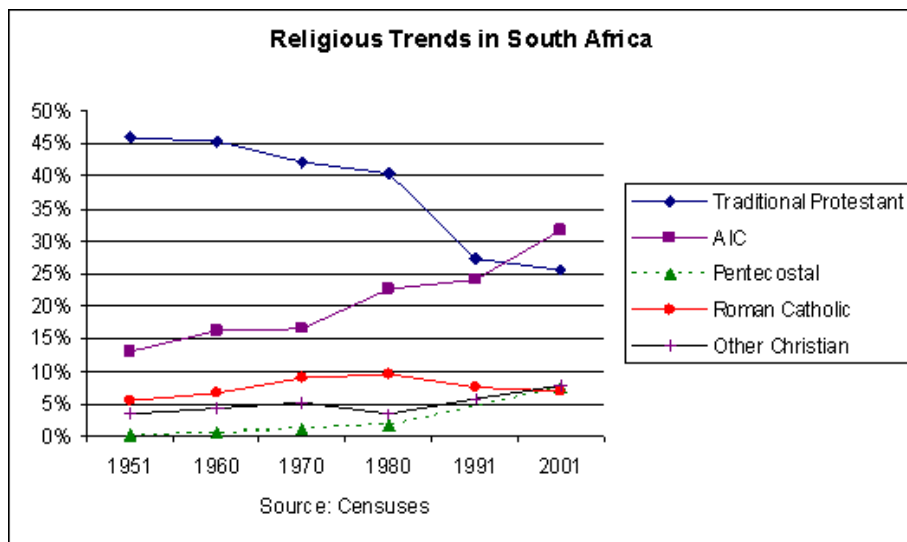
Fig.2.2. *Religious trends in South Africa.* (Census 2001)

In the next diagram we can see that this is not a good state to be in as the age demographics of SA show that there is a very large percentage of young people living in this country (SSA 2001):
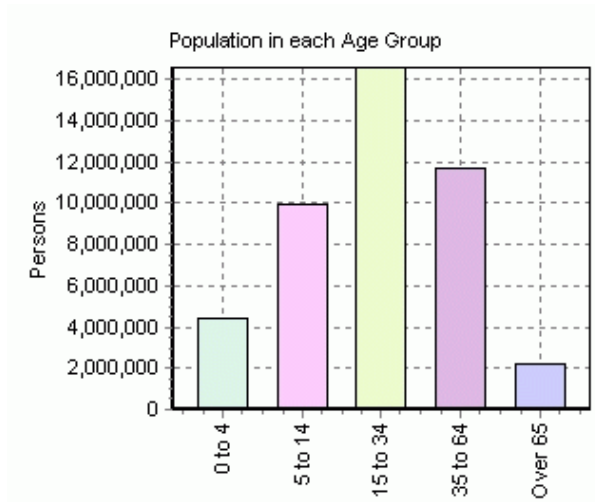
Fig.2.3. *Graph showing SA population numbers and corresponding age groups.*

Botha (2007:2) in a thesis paper on the importance of young adult ministry in SA, points out that our country is a country made up largely of young adults. With this mass of individuals between the ages of 15-34, the big question is why this is the group which seems so absent from our evangelical churches? Fig 2.4 below also illustrates this disparity (SSA 2003):
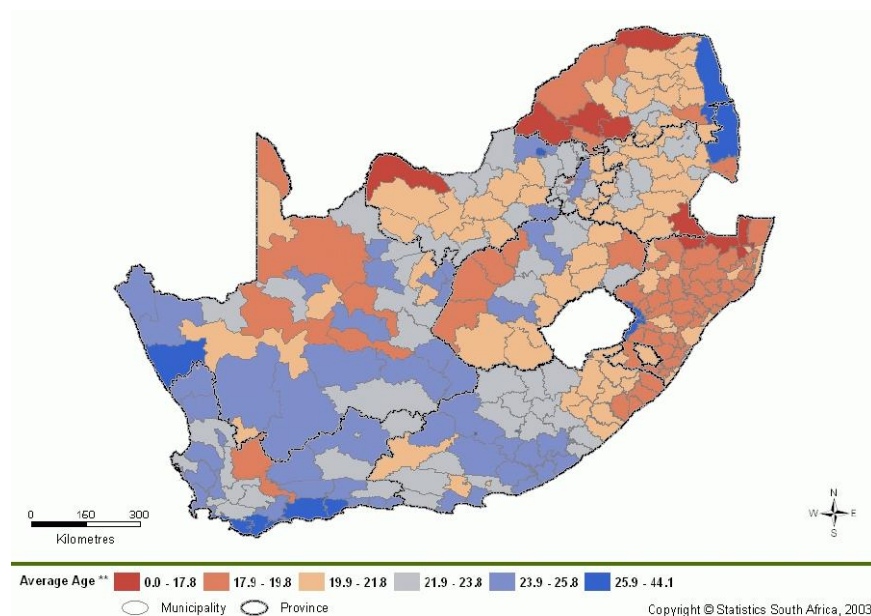
Fig.2.4. *Geographical age demographics in SA.*

Church services have found it very difficult to draw and keep the emerging generations. Could it be that they are simply bored with church? Census 2001 was helpful in pointing to an issue, but what is the current status? In the latest 2009 mid-year population estimates in SA, it is interesting to see the following; "Nearly one-

16

third (31,4%) of the population is aged younger than 15 years and approximately 7,5% (3,7 million) is 60 years or older" (SSA 2009:3). In Fig 2.5 below we see how overwhelming the numbers are of the emerging generations in SA. The last three columns on the right display the masses of emerging generations under the age of 40 (SSA 2009:9):

| Age	African			Coloured			Indian/Asian			White			South Africa		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0–4	2 165 000	2 139 400	4 304 400	209 800	207 300	417 100	50 000	48 700	98 700	126 400	122 300	248 700	2 551 200	2 517 700	5 068 900
5–9	2 217 000	2 192 400	4 409 400	212 000	209 900	421 900	46 300	45 000	91 300	133 000	129 000	262 000	2 608 300	2 576 300	5 184 600
10–14	2 230 700	2 205 500	4 436 200	210 400	208 200	418 600	51 000	49 700	100 700	148 000	143 700	291 700	2 640 100	2 607 100	5 247 200
15–19	2 197 500	2 178 600	4 376 100	206 200	205 000	411 200	54 900	53 900	108 800	161 500	156 700	318 200	2 620 100	2 594 200	5 214 300
20–24	2 042 000	2 068 200	4 110 200	191 000	193 700	384 700	61 000	58 400	119 400	155 400	151 200	306 600	2 449 400	2 471 500	4 920 900
25–29	1 742 700	1 906 700	3 649 400	179 300	191 900	371 200	64 400	60 200	124 600	139 700	138 600	278 300	2 126 100	2 297 400	4 423 500
30–34	1 493 800	1 638 900	3 132 700	182 300	198 000	380 300	55 800	53 700	109 500	133 100	132 700	265 800	1 865 000	2 023 300	3 888 300
35–39	1 191 800	1 355 000	2 546 800	173 700	191 300	365 000	45 300	45 400	90 700	140 100	139 700	279 800	1 550 900	1 731 400	3 282 300
40–44	799 900	925 000	1 724 900	143 800	161 000	304 800	40 800	41 800	82 600	166 200	164 700	330 900	1 150 700	1 292 500	2 443 200
45–49	719 800	855 400	1 575 200	125 600	142 000	267 600	38 300	39 500	77 800	168 800	170 600	339 400	1 052 500	1 207 500	2 260 000
50–54	640 500	769 500	1 410 000	99 800	115 100	214 900	34 800	36 300	71 100	168 200	174 500	342 700	943 300	1 095 400	2 038 700
55–59	498 500	611 600	1 110 100	73 000	87 700	160 700	30 100	32 500	62 600	152 900	158 800	311 700	754 500	890 600	1 645 100
60–64	363 100	480 700	843 800	50 200	65 200	115 400	23 500	26 700	50 200	138 500	151 200	289 700	575 300	723 800	1 299 100
65–69	256 200	352 900	609 100	35 000	46 000	81 000	17 200	20 300	37 500	110 800	123 400	234 200	419 200	542 600	961 800
70–74	171 300	260 000	431 300	23 700	35 300	59 000	11 100	14 400	25 500	71 800	87 100	158 900	277 900	396 800	674 700
75–79	103 100	168 500	271 600	13 200	22 200	35 400	6 700	9 400	16 100	42 400	61 100	103 500	165 400	261 200	426 600
80+	68 100	126 900	195 000	8 300	16 000	24 300	4 500	7 500	12 000	37 900	72 100	110 000	118 800	222 500	341 300
Total	18 901 000	20 235 200	39 136 200	2 137 300	2 295 800	4 433 100	635 700	643 400	1 279 100	2 194 700	2 277 400	4 472 100	23 868 700	25 451 800	49 320 500

All numbers have been rounded off to the nearest hundred.

Fig.2.5. *2009 mid-year SA population estimates by population group, age and sex.*

This means that 75.49% of SA's population is under the age of 40. The majority of these are in their youth. Yet this age group is missing from the church. Where are the young people in our churches? Where are the young adults in our churches?

How does the church respond to this problem? All are aware that no church can be perfect. But all are also aware that some get it right far better than others. Some are flourishing and some are failing. Those that flourish get it right in terms of being missional in their communities, they get it right with relevant contextualized preaching, they get it right with relevant contextualized worship, where young and old all join together as one family to worship God. But it's sad that many people have only dreamt of being a part of a church like this. Why is it that some churches seem destined to be stuck in the same hole they have been in for the past twenty years? Hendricks's thinking is helpful here: "Contextual Analysis is necessary when a congregation is self centred, or to such an extent focused on its own institutional well-being that it looses sight of its missional character and the needs and challenges that must be addressed in its community" (2004:69).

There is a problem, many churches have lost sight of their missional character, many have not adapted in the light of current mega-trends and cultural changes, and as a result, a generation is missing from evangelical church gatherings.

2.3 A clear and present danger – Irrelevance

Sweet says: "Postmodern culture is a change-or-be-changed world. The word is out: Reinvent yourself for the 21st C or die. Some would rather die than change" (1999:75). An examination of an existing city church taught me a valuable lesson on the danger of irrelevance.

2.3.1 An example of a real church

This church is in a very prominent position in a city in SA. Demographically, the church is made up of largely white middle class people. There are a small number of black immigrants and refugees who feel more at home in its English services than nearby local black church's where they do not understand the language and feel that they do not fit.

In terms of age – the church had a very large youth and young adult group who attended the church evening services a few years ago. Yet the older members of the congregation never bought into the contemporary worship approach which was used in the evening service. There was a complement of leaders who were on staff that ensured that this style of worship was employed in the evening services in order to reach the younger generation. When these leaders left the church, the remaining leadership decided to return to an old liturgy and music style which alienated the younger people from the evening service, and over past few years the strong evening service filled with committed Christian young people dwindled in numbers and the young people no longer attend this church. Some have moved to other churches in the area where they feel more at home and others no longer have any link to a church due to their disappointment in how a church could disregard them. This church lost 100 young people in the span of a few months from its evening service. To this day the church is fortunate if it receives a handful of visitors to the service.

Is the church being relevant? That is the question we must be asking ourselves. And if not, why not? As God's children entrusted with a timeless message of salvation to the world we dare not take our irrelevance lightly. The past and present of this problem will now be investigated.

2.4 Historical analysis of the problem

A study of church history shows us that this problem is not fresh to this generation. The story is told (Deffinbaugh 2009:1) of a Protestant church where the worshippers always turned and bowed as they passed by a blank white space on a side wall in their church. No reason for this could ever be found, other than the fact that it was tradition. Years later when the church was restored and the paint stripped from the side wall, a mural painting of the Virgin Mary was found beneath the whitewash. A Catholic tradition had survived in practice in a protestant church because of the belief that tradition is always correct. This happens in churches today where the practices in the gatherings are thought to be biblical, but are in actual fact, nothing more than manmade traditions. Regrettably, churches today continue with an un-biblical tradition because we think it is correct biblical procedure. In this section the intention is to show how the early church designed their church services and that even in these early days of the birth of the church, they faced the very same problem of contextualization. Once again, it is not a new problem. I will attempt to show how throughout church history those involved in designing church gatherings have had to constantly think about how to maintain the biblical imperatives and how to adapt to their specific context. Here are some different ways that evangelical churches have traditionally approached the early church model.

2.4.1 Adoption of the early church model

With adoption, an attempt is made to try to adopt ancient church practises. The idea here would be to get our current church gatherings to change form to match that of the early church services as closely as possible. The problem with this however, is that this fails to understand that our 21st Century church exists in its own unique historical and cultural context. As such, this cultural climate must be recognized and the church needs to be aware of its method of ministry within it.

2.4.2 Reinvention for each new generation

This model seeks to reinvent church gatherings for each new generation. One might argue that this is the purpose of this thesis. But it is not so. This approach would question absolutely everything and lead our church gatherings into a liberal stance. One here must understand the relationship between form and substance. If one preserves the message (theology), but changes the medium in different contexts (Method of communication), one can still slide into error as the medium does form part of the message. From history, we should see that the gospel is still the same old gospel message. There is no reinvention necessary. That is dangerous ground. Rather, we look to a third approach.

2.4.3 Hold fast to the biblical model, but adapt style to culture where biblically acceptable

The model which is preferable, and which this thesis will propose is to embrace the biblical model, whilst allowing style to be open to adaptation. Reinvention is so radical that it questions the foundations upon which a church service is built, but adaptation recognizes that the gospel is the gospel, and it's still the same old story, simply repackaged and adapted for a new generation. This position acknowledges that some stylistic things from the early church do not fit into the post modern 21[st] century context, but the biblical things do and always will. Likewise, we should be open to learn from a church that was so closely connected to the apostles. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul said: "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (NIV). This scripture alone should make the church at least pay attention to how the early church did their church gatherings. Here then follows a brief outline of the history of church gatherings, and then some application to the problem at hand.

2.4.4 How the first Christians worshipped at their gatherings

i An assembly on the first day of the week

According to Walker, we know historically, that from the earliest times the church gathered, that they "assembled regularly on the first day of the week" (Walker

1986:101). Observing this special day was a very important part of their lives as believers. Even though its name had a pagan name (Sun-day) they referred to it as "The Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10 NIV). It was a day of celebration, not suited to sadness or despair. Walker states: "The business of these first day assemblies was to celebrate the new life and the hope which believers shared in the risen Christ" (Walker 1986:102).

ii A Jewish Flavour

The Lord's Day started at sunset the day before, a traditional Jewish custom. This Jewish "flavour" permeated much of how the early Christians worshipped when they met. This is not surprising as all these early believers came out of a Jewish background, and, as such, Jewish influences are seen in their patterns of worship. According to Martin "The Jews...handed on a recognizable legacy to the Christian Church. The synagogue played the more dominant role in both Judaism and early Christianity. The pattern of Scripture readings and sermon within a framework of praise and congregational prayers was taken over by the Jewish Christians" (Dowley 1990:123):

iii A Special Meal

Out of this Jewish framework, particularly the Passover, a special meal developed, known as the Lord's Supper. Paul in fact used the framework of the Passover to interpret the Lord's Supper, and Christians realized early on, that the Lord's Supper effectively replaced the Passover. In the early days of the church there was another meal which was very similar to this, known as the "Agape" or "Love Feast." Over the years this has become seen as one entity with the Lord's Supper. According to Walker (1986:102):

> "One of the marks of the day (Lord's Day) was the participation in a ritual meal that repeated and bore the sense of the Lord's actions at his Last Supper with the disciples. On that occasion, according to the liturgical tradition whose earliest form is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25."

In fact, we know from Acts 2:42-46, that initially, the Christians probably observed the Lord's Supper daily. It would seem that this did not continue and eventually

ended up only happening weekly when the whole church assembled. It is important to understand that the Lord's Supper was considered to be completely central to the worship of the early church. Over the years this tradition has evolved. In the middle ages Roman Catholicism begun to move away from a simple remembrance of the person and work of Christ and became blurred with doctrines of transubstantiation (Perpetual Sacrifice). Although each believer would eat and drink, church gatherings moved away from the individual participation in serving and sharing, and became much more ritualistic with strong elements of mediation from the clergy (Dowley 1990:125). Deffinbaugh describes the reaction of the Reformers to this period of Roman Catholic influence (2009:4):

> "The Reformers totally rejected the Roman Catholic error, emphasizing a restitution of the vernacular in worship, encouraging greater participation on the part of the people, and introducing the singing of hymns. The Scriptures were translated into the language of the people and the masses were exhorted to study the Word of God for themselves. Direct access to God without the mediation of the church was taught and there was a renewed emphasis on preaching."

Both Luther and Calvin were very serious about emphasising the need for remembrance of the Lord's Supper (Deffinbaugh 2009:5). At first Luther felt it should be held daily, and then only on Sundays, but it was always central in his thought. Calvin felt is should be celebrated once a week at least.

However, it was not the Lord's Supper alone which marked the earliest observances of the Lord's Day. Other activities which no doubt resembled the worship of the synagogue in its earliest days also took place.

iv **Singing**

Singing has always held a special place in the hearts of the people of God. Exactly what these songs were is not clear. In the following chapter there will be a discussion of Paul's perceptions of the church and his comments on the "Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" which were evident in the church (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), but as to whether these songs have survived is not known. Scholars are not certain, but scriptures such as the following, contain what may well have been hymns sung in worship to Christ:

22

Phil 2:6-11 (NIV): "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Col 1:15-20 (NIV): "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

1 Tim 3:16 (NIV): "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory."

Ephesians 5:14 (NIV) is also likely to have been an early church hymn, it says: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." The three line invocation is a clue to this and it could possibly have been sung at a baptism (Dowley 1990:25).

v *Prayers*

As with singing, prayers have always played an important part in Christian worship gatherings. From the earliest art and sculptures that we have of Christians, we see images of Christians standing with their arms raised when praying, such as one carving found of woman with raised hands on the side of third-century sarcophagus in Rome (Dowly 1990:125).

In the book of 1st Corinthians, we gain a lot of insight into the church in Corinth. Prayers obviously played a large role in their gatherings. Paul speaks in 1 Cor 11:2-16 about propriety in worship. He is aware of problems in the church where the women were praying with uncovered heads. So he addresses this, resists the practice, but allows them to act as leaders of prayer in the assembled churches. After a long discussion on matters such as the Lords' Supper and the use of Spiritual Gifts in church gatherings, he sums up his whole argument by saying in 1 Cor 14:40 (NIV): "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." This is still good advice.

As with the Lord's Supper, gradually a set of prayers became formalized, and these were used at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and all public gatherings of the believers. We can see this in the Didache (Dowley 1990:126) and in the writings of Clement of Rome (Dowley 1990:127) who included a long prayer of intercession in his liturgy (Form of Service).

vi Instruction

Throughout the history of the church there has always been a strong element of instruction. The letters of the New Testament were written for this reason. In Acts 2:42, there is a clear reference of the early believers desire to receive instruction; "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching" (NIV). From a liturgical point of view, statements of faith arose out of the problem of false teaching. As a result, leaders in the early church used church gatherings to teach the believers the truth to counteract early heresies. After the time of the New Testament, other formal creeds developed such as the Apostles Creed (Dowley 1990:126).

vii Baptism

As Walker states; "The rite of baptism was from the most primitive times the mode of formal initiation into the eschatological community of God's people in Christ" (1986:104). As with the other elements studied, there is little evidence in certain parts of church history as to the form of the rite of baptism. It is not my intention to discuss the theology and method of baptism, save to say, that it formed a part of the gathering of believers.

2.4.5   A Jewish flavoured church that contextualized to reach Gentiles

One thing that is frequently overlooked in the early church, is that right from its inception, it knew it needed to adapt, and it did. Some of these changes were for the good, and some were for the bad. One change that had to be made was for the church to make the shift from being a Jewish "only" church, to a "diversified" church that could also reach and minister to gentiles. It must be understood that the process of contextualization is not new. It's as old as the church itself. It is not something to be feared like some monster that will rob us of truth, but it must be correctly handled, or it can rob us.

In the early church the meetings gradually evolved towards a standardized form of worship. In this they always gave prominence to the Lord's Supper as the focal point of the liturgy. Justin's First Apology written in about AD 150 contains what has been called "The oldest systematic description of Sunday worship." (Dowley 1990:127). By his time, the church gatherings had begun to shed their Jewish flavour, as they realized had to reach the gentiles who had no Jewish background. Sadly, with the shedding of these Jewish elements, they also shed some of the good Jewish qualities of these early gatherings, and possibly began to loose their warmth in the sharing and individual participation of the Passover meal and love feast. The fellowship and homeliness had given way to formality and a transcendental (more "other-wordly") character to worship (Dowley 1990:127).

By this time, what had come to be known as a "church service" was fixed. But note that they made the transition from being an all Jewish church, to a diversified, Jewish and Gentile church. This is a significant adaptation.

Notice the progression. At first the church is an all Jewish church, and then there was a shift to then include the Gentiles. In the beginning, the meetings had a strong Jewish flavour. Jesus the founder of the church had been a Jew. His disciples were all Jewish. The first believers were all Jews. They were born as Jews and lived as Jews. They all fellowshipped and worshipped regularly at the Jewish temple courts in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46). Without trying to state the obvious again, they were a Jewish church. As we have seen, in the beginning these Christians kept the Sabbath and Jewish Festivals (Acts 13:13-15). Although Paul became an apostle to

the Gentiles, he was thoroughly Jewish. The church in Jerusalem continued as a Jewish church for a few generations until gentiles took over.

So, how did an all Jewish church, whose gatherings were marked by their "Jewishness," adapt to include Gentiles? In short. Not easily. Because the church was so thoroughly Jewish it struggled greatly from its inception with the Gentiles. In Acts 8, Philip is seen going to Samaria, preaching the gospel, and having Gentiles respond in faith. This provoked an uproar in Jerusalem. They had to send Peter and John, to check it out and at their arrival, these gentiles received the Holy Spirit.

Soon more and more Gentiles became believers, and problems such as eating non-kosher food emerged. Without addressing the whole dramatic story, there were big issues surrounding early Jewish believers and the Gentiles, culminating in Acts 15:1-35 where the Council of Jerusalem had to debate the question of whether or not the Gentile believers had to fit into the Jewish custom of circumcision. One could almost certainly say there were some issues in the way the church gatherings were conducted.

In Acts 15:9, James, the leader of the church gave his opinion that the church should not make it hard for Gentiles to come into the faith. It was resolved then, that Gentiles coming to faith would not have to become circumcised. So, we see that the church was very Jewish, their practices and meetings were Jewish. The big question back then was "How do the Gentiles fit in?" One might say that today, the big question is "How do the postmoderns fit in?"

So initially the Gentile churches that sprung up, patterned themselves after the Jews, but then slowly but surely there was a separation. There were many other historical reasons for this, such as the issues that arose in leadership of the church, one of the major themes of Romans chapters 1-3, but one could safely say that as Christianity rapidly moved out into the Gentile world that it began to adapt itself to the Gentile culture. One could also say that its Jewish roots were forgotten. Perhaps church leaders understood the need for adaptation to a Gentile world. Sadly, it appears that the church not only forgot about its roots, it also developed an odd attitude towards Jews. By the time we arrive in Justin's time (AD 150-160) there appears to have been an attitude in the church that was anti-semitic (CIF 2009:3)

By the time of Constantine the church was effectively completely cut off from its Jewish roots.

With the arrival of the 1500's, insightful church leaders once again realized that reform and adaptation were necessary. Hence the need for the Reformation. The reformers did not waver in their desire to adapt the church. They resisted the errors of the Roman Catholic church. Along with the theological changes which were imperative, something that is much less spoken of during the time of reformation, are the changes to worship. "Reformed leaders wanted worship to be as simple and scriptural as possible, and their liturgies were plainer than those of their Lutheran counterparts" (Dowley 1990:374). Much is said about the doctrine of grace when it comes to the reformation (and rightly so), but not much is said about the adaptations that were instituted to church gatherings.

As believers in a postmodern world, we would do well to recognize that we are once again standing at the brink of a church in dire need of adaptation.

2.5   Application to the problems of the present-day church

From this study, let me suggest some thoughts regarding the current church context to which I will add in further chapters.

i *A sacred assembly that is neglected.*

When one looks at church gatherings today, one's first impression is rarely associated with the act of celebration. As mentioned earlier, in the localised survey of a high schoolers perception of church services, their impressions of church today is the antithesis of this. One cannot help but wonder how far we have strayed from the celebratory, fun, joyful enthusiastic nature of the early church gatherings.

ii *A disconnection from a great heritage.*

Evangelical church services today are completely severed from their Jewish heritage. One could say that the church is cut off from its roots. Whilst it is true that the shift away from a "Jewish church" was necessary for the gospel to reach new

people groups, it is equally true that the church is robbed of its beautiful heritage. It is the writers view that young people today are actually longing to find a faith that is far bigger than themselves and their lives, but one that spans hundreds of years, and one that is rich in history and heritage. To offer a faith that does not recognize this is to be novel, but small minded and naive.

iii A special meal that has become formalized, institutional and stale.

One of the ways we have been robbed of this heritage is through the loss of intimacy in the act of the Lord's Supper. Hurtado (1999:39) in a chapter on the features of early Christian worship sheds some interesting light on this. It seems odd that so many have forgotten the Jewish Christian roots of the Passover meal and the warm family atmosphere which it fostered. "Likewise, the physical setting of the earliest Christian worship was in homes...probably the homes of comparatively better-off Christians with sufficient economic resources to have space to accommodate worship gatherings" (Hurtado 1999:41).

Because the love feast was the central component of early Christian worship, this most likely occurred in the dining area. Rarely would these rooms be able to seat more than nine individuals, but in the Roman Hellenistic fashion of the atriums, these rooms could have accommodated no more than 40-50 people (Hurtado 1990:41). It is my belief that because of this, there was a strong sense of intimacy among the early believers. The kononia that is spoken about in the book of Acts is a strong vein that runs through the life of the early church. Not to mention the gesture known as the "holy kiss" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thes 5:26). It is likely that this gesture was widely practised in the early church and particularly linked with the Lord's Supper. The suggestion is not for a resurgence of this practice, but rather a pointer to the fact that the Lord's Supper has become a sacrament that has lost the intimacy around which it was originally practiced, and it has become formalized, institutional and stale. For something which was intended by Christ our Lord to be so special and warm, it has become a cold unappreciated act in many churches, simply dutifully done once a month.

Despite the reformers high view of the Lord's Table, in the Reformation and to this present day, it has not held its central place which it used to have. Possibly we have

never shaken the idea that only a "priest" is allowed to serve communion. Why is that? As an evangelical church we believe in the "Priesthood of all believers," yet we still think of the Lord's Supper as something only a "priest" or "minister" can perform. Another factor that could possibly have led to a lack of appreciation for the Lord's Supper is the modern church services emphasis on the sermon. It is clear that this has now become the central form around which the church gathers. This is a notable shift from the central position of the Lord's Supper in the early church.

Perhaps this is a sad commentary on how modern believers have looked more towards a form that speaks to their needs than something which is God-centred. Some have suggested that possibly the frequency of the Lord's Supper has made it less significant. But the communion time is a pretty precise measurement of our personal spiritual state. If there is a careless and apathetic attitude toward participating, it likely speaks of an issue more with us spiritually, than the practice.

iv *A people who are embarrassed to show emotion and praise God*

In the early church God's people sang and praised him. In Acts 10:4-46 which was highlighted earlier, Peter was preaching when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles. As a result, these gentiles began to praise God. Spontaneous praise is the language of people who are excited and thrilled about their experience of God. It should involve our whole personality, including our emotions. Some people ask the question, "Is it right to express emotions in church? Isn't there a danger of emotionalism?" The danger for most of us in our relationship with God is not emotionalism, but a lack of emotion – a lack of feeling. Our relationship with God can sometimes be rather cold. But every relationship of love involves our emotions. The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote this (Gumbal 1993:138):

> "Why is it that if a comedy produces laughter, the movie is regarded as successful; if a theatre tragedy brings tears to the audience it's regarded as touching; if a sporting match thrills the spectators, the game is reviewed as exciting; but if a congregation is moved by the glory of God in worship, the audience accused of emotionalism?"

There is a very real risk of over emotionalism and hype, but too many churches today have not found freedom to be released in songs of praise.

v A prayerless Generation

Recently a short survey was conducted with my church in one of our local church services, where I asked some questions about prayer. It was concerning to find that amongst a group of strong believers there was such a great neglect and misunderstanding of prayer. In the early church, whether they got their prayers right or not, they were quite correct to place such a high value on prayer in their gatherings. When one looks at how prayer is incorporated into church meetings today, one wonders if we are not missing something of the intimacy and power for which they were intended.

vi A generation that desperately needs instruction

The early church understood the value of instruction. As will be discussed next, the postmodern worldview in which today's church operates is one that has lost its way when it comes to absolute truth. In this context, life-giving truth is desperately needed. Instruction is desperately needed. The manner in which this instruction is conveyed is the all important question, because for postmoderns, they no longer think and see things like generations before them. Therefore postmodernism will now be addressed.

2.6   The problem and opportunity that postmodernism presents

Postmodernism is a word that has been flung about repeatedly over recent years by church leaders. It is feared by some, and embraced by others. For students of theology and ecclesiology, one has the liberty to stand at a distance and comment on postmodernism. One can point out all its faults and warn others of all its hazards. One can like it or dislike it. But it is here. It is the way that many people think today.

For a church leader who is seeking to draw new generations into the church, one does not have this liberty of commenting on it from an objective distance, for one comes face to face with it everyday and must learn to understand it and engage it, or stand the risk of being overrun by it. We live in a postmodern world. Yet some are still inclined to think that postmodernism has nothing to do with them and their

churches. They are blind to its effect on church gatherings across the world. Those who are wise, and who truly care about reaching new generations for Christ, are willing to learn about postmodernism and to engage it.

The purpose of this chapter is not to give an extensive description of post-modernism, as there are volumes of material currently available on this, but rather, to show specifically how it has affected church services. A brief description is however necessary to assist the reader of the writers understanding thereof.

2.6.1   Defining Postmodernism

To define postmodernism, one must first define modernism.

i Modernism

If someone calls something "modern," the assumption is to think of it as new. But modernism is actually quite old now. It began in the 17th and 18th century with philosophers who encouraged the human race to find their ultimate glory in science and the ability to reason. It was believed that with all of civilizations ground breaking scientific advances and vast knowledge and logic, that we would finally find our perfect society through our ability to learn and discover new things. Kelly (2004:1) points out that key aspects of this modern worldview included a focus around the individual as the most important person, rather than community. Kelly also notes the following (2004:1):

> "Traditional structures of authority (like the church) were challenged because they were considered to be an affront to people's ability to think and reason for themselves. As a result, the church became more marginalized and society became what we now call secular. Clearly, the values of modernism are alive and well in Western society. And clearly the values of modernism have invaded the church."

The author is in agreement with Kelly that the modern mindset is still alive within churches today, in fact, in SA, one could even argue that there are still numerous prevailing pre-modern churches. In the scope of this thesis however, the urbanized evangelical churches that are being investigated are primarily made up of those with

modern and postmodern worldviews. So the question must be asked, why did post-modernism originate?

As a simplistic answer, modernism never turned out to be as wonderful as most people thought it would be. With the advent of the World War I, and the horror of the deaths of thousands of people, it showed that there was a very definite evil side to the technological progress that we as humankind thought so highly of. According to Kelly: "World War II drove the point home even further with the systematic genocide of six million Jews and the advent of nuclear weapons" (Kelly 2004:2). Out of this disappointment and disillusionment with Modernity, Post-Modernity arose.

ii Postmodernism

Finding a sentence or phrase to define postmodernism is difficult as so many have attempted to do this in so many different ways. As such, it is best described by its core values. Many scholars have debated what these are, but certain tenets stand out as common to most. McLaren, an author who has written much about this subject, describes the following values.

a) **"Postmodernism highly values subjective experience"** (McLaren 2006:169)

It is commonly agreed upon that postmodernity holds the subjectivity of the individual in high regard. Postmoderns believe that to be completely objective is impossible, and they believe that this is quite acceptable. McLaren says: "For postmodern people, it's better simply to experience experience than to turn it into another theory or universalize it and proclaim it as truth" (2006:169). Therefore personal choice is a big virtue. Many scholars believe this emphasis on personal choice has been birthed out of the materialistic consumer world in which postmoderns live. Postmoderns believe that it is ones own choice to determine one's own value system, one's own beliefs, and one's own lifestyle.

b) **"Postmodernism is sceptical of certainty"** (McLaren 2006:168)

There is this idea floating around contemporary Christian writings that Postmodernists do not believe in absolute truth. Whilst one can understand how they arrive at this, due to the postmodern subjective trait, and certain literature, I

do not believe this to be entirely accurate. Yes, postmoderns believe that truth can vary from person to person, which is dangerous ground. They think that something can be true for one person but not necessarily for another. But they are open to hearing truth when it is conveyed in an appropriate manner. Their scepticism must not be misinterpreted to mean that they have no regard for absolute truth. Kelly explains the common evangelical response nicely (2004:2):

> "This scares many Christians, because it sounds suspiciously like moral relativism: the idea that there's no absolute truth. While many secular post-moderns certainly fall into the camp of moral relativism, that's not the case with all post-moderns. Post-modern Christians don't necessarily believe that there's no absolute truth, but many believe that it's very hard to understand and even harder to articulate."

Furthermore, there is actually a new reaction emerging in literature and practice in what is best described as post-post-modern. It would seem that this movement has righted postmodernity's extremist tendencies regarding truth. Post-post-moderns believe in absolute truth.

c) **Postmodenism is big on questioning basic assumptions** (Kelly 2004:2)

Because of the values described above, Kelly states that: "Postmoderns believe that everything must be questioned. This can be another scary thing for Christians, because questioning basic assumptions and things we've taken for granted all our lives can seem to border on heresy" (2004:2). This is not necessarily a bad thing though. Can anyone ever truly believe something to be 100% true if you have not properly considered the alternatives? When the younger generation questions the status quo, those in positions of authority in the church cannot allow themselves to be intimidated by this – it is simply a trait of this generation.

d) **"For postmoderns, togetherness is a rare, precious and elusive experience"** (McLaren 2006:169)

In today's world we are all too familiar with the technological wave that now dominates our lives. Young and old find themselves living hidden lives behind computer and television screens. The internet has opened a new digital world where many spend hours and hours of their lives interacting not face to face,

but over social connection sites such as Facebook®. As a result, real togetherness is rare, precious, and elusive.

2.7　The effect of Postmodernism on Church Services

Why does postmodernism matter? Well, it matters because it has affected the world and it has thereby also affected the church. It has affected the way that people think. It is no longer possible to assume that the modern way of presenting the gospel in methods such as "The four spiritual laws" whereby one uses scripture as a proof text for each point, will work anymore. Why is this? Because postmoderns won't accept that scripture is the final authority on things. One has to find new ways of sharing the gospel. Kelly says (2004:3): "This is very different from the type of apologetics found in Strobel's "The Case for Christ" (2008) or McDowell's "Evidence that Demands a Verdict" (1978) which are based on the modern idea of reason and rationale…convincing ourselves beyond any doubt."

Clearly things need to adapt. There is a restlessness amongst the postmodern generation when it comes to the way that church meetings are done. Kimball describes some of the ways this postmodern generation is feeling towards church services (2004:XIV):

> "They wonder if coming together to worship really only consists of a few songs and a central focus on preaching. They feel more and more uncomfortable with the way many worship services profile one or two male-only leaders up front. They are wondering why there is hardly (if any at all) participation from the people in the congregation....they wonder why they are seeing fewer and fewer people their own age. So they are getting restless. They are pacing while they wait for change to come – or at least for freedom to contribute and lead the way to change in their church."

It is valuable to make a connection before we go further, between post-modernism, and post-Christianity. Although this is a generalization, the postmodern generation, broadly speaking, and referring primarily to unbelieving postmoderns, have strong opinions about the Christian faith. Kinnaman, in his ground breaking book called "Un-Christian" (2007) shows what a new generation really thinks about Christianity.

It is shocking to see his picture of what Christianity looks like from the outside by postmoderns.

Let us try to articulate where these effects are being felt in terms of how postmodernism is exerting an influence on the church. There are three influences that we will explore:

- Postmoderns are wary of church gatherings and they keep away because of their common misconceptions about Christianity.
- Postmoderns are uninterested in church gatherings because they perceive the church as being irrelevant and lacking in certain key postmodern values.
- Postmoderns are afraid to come to church gatherings because they feel disconnected and do not know if they will find an authentic place to belong.

2.7.1 Postmoderns are wary of church gatherings and they keep away because of their common misconceptions about Christianity.

Postmodern society has perceptions and feelings regarding the church in general which are displayed in their non-interest in church services. It is good to investigate these feelings and then to draw some conclusions as to how the church can respond in the following chapters. Kimball suggests the following points regarding what postmoderns think about the church.

i The church is an organized religion with a political agenda (Kimball 2007:73)

"Organized religion" is perceived by postmoderns to be a bad thing. As a result, things like church services are not highly appreciated. Kimball believes this occurs because of the following reasons:

- Postmoderns think they can "relate to God without all of the unnatural structure the organized church would impose on them" (Kimball 2007:74). They believe that they can be spiritual without needing the church. Dangerous, but nevertheless true. They fear how the church will try to control them in terms of how they will be made to think, have to dress and act.
- Postmoderns think that "the church is about hierarchy, power and control with a political agenda" (Kimball 2007:76). The perception is that the church is out to push personal agendas.

- Postmoderns see a church that is "made of leaders who function like CEO's and desire power and control" (Kimball 2007:79). The use of language from the business and corporate world even in titles for Pastor, like "Executive Pastor," leadership meetings as "Executive Meetings," and administration venues as "Church Offices," has led people outside the church to assume that the church is simply business masquerading as some sort of spiritual group.

These are very real concerns that affect church services. These misperceptions (Although sadly sometimes true) cause postmodern people to keep their distance.

ii **The church is judgmental and negative** (Kimball 2007:96)

Kimball makes a very astute point here about how outsiders view church people. "We are known for what we're against, not what we're for" (2007:97). Although the bible clearly describes what we as Christians should be known for, to those in the world, often today, Christians are not primarily known for these biblical characteristics. Instead of being primarily known as people who love God and love people, we are known as a people who are negative, judgmental, and critical, the sad-faced bunch who just moan at other people. I remember when I was a student in PE. I found the non-believing fellow students that I did Graphic Design with very wary of the Christians in the faculty. They were more likely to open up to their unsaved friends because they had this perception that if they opened up about the problems in their lives to a Christian, that they would be judged and criticised. These are some serious and sad perceptions.

iii **The church is dominated by males and oppresses females** (Kimball 2007:115)

There is a perception that the church is male dominated and restricts women from being leaders in the church. Sadly, this is true in some cases. This is a topic that causes a lot of tension within the church because of the strong opinions people have about the issue - and a lot of it stems from the way that people interpret certain passages of scripture. For this thesis it is only pointed out as a factor that affects church attendance by postmodern people.

iv **The church is homophobic** (Kimball 2007:136)

Homophobia is a fear and hatred of people who are homosexual. A phobia is a fear that is irrational. Like Arachnophobia (the fear of spiders), there is a perception by many outside of the church that the church is homophobic and hates homosexual people. This is why it so important that the church teaches what the bible says. Homosexuality is becoming a huge thing in culture around us. Sadly, the church as a whole has not always responded well to gay people. It has not responded biblically and taught believers to love the person and hate the sin. We have changed that to hating the person too.

It is important that evangelical churches make it clear that they love everyone. They should love people, no matter what they have done or are still doing. But, they must also emphasize that they will never compromise on what the bible teaches, and that they will boldly preach the word of God and challenge all sinners to live lives of obedience to Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

On the whole, the church has historically not acted too "Jesus-like" about this issue. We have pushed gay people away from our churches and made them feel unwelcome. From what the author can see, the church by and large has not clearly explained from the bible what they believe and don't believe. In some cases they have forgotten that they are talking about people who are created in God's image and who he deeply cares for and loves. Homosexuality has been put in a category that is unhealthily focused on more than other sins. Yes, it is a very complex issue – but we must not be shy to speak about these things and know God's will.

v **The church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong** (Kimball 2007:163)

In John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and 1 Timothy 2:5-6, the bible is clear that Jesus is the only way to heaven. In other words, Christianity is the only faith that is the real thing. Now that can come across very arrogantly to those outside the church, so the church needs to be careful how they say it. There needs to be godly wisdom in how faith is shared to those outside the church, but fear of offending cannot be allowed to make us shy away from sharing the gospel – it must be shared in love. Not in arrogance. Not in an aggressive way. Ephesians 4:15 tells us how, by: "Speaking

the truth in love" (NIV). The church must live "Jesus-like" lives so that they will represent him well—they must be compassionate and humble, holding to truth, but without an attitude of superiority or arrogance. They need to listen to other peoples' beliefs, both to respect them as people, and to understand why they believe what they do.

Don't miss that in the attempt to design the "perfect" church gathering, some people still won't come because they don't really care about church. McNeal says: "Church leaders seem unable to grasp this simple implication of the new world – people outside the church think church is for church people, not for them" (2003:10).

2.7.2 Postmoderns are uninterested in church gatherings because they perceive the church as being irrelevant or lacking in certain key postmodern values.

Here are some thoughts as to how postmodernism has affected the attendance of younger generations at church gatherings.

i The church is irrelevant in its style of music

The logic is simple. Those outside the church have a perception that the church is irrelevant. To be effective within the postmodern culture, and to be able to minister into this society, it is necessary to be "like" the culture in certain ways. Yes, church services must remain theologically sound, but at the same time, they must achieve cultural relevance. Frame says: "It is simply not possible for someone to live in a culture without being in some ways like that culture" (1997:55). Throughout church history, Frame notes that "there has never been a form of church music that has been unrelated to the influences of its culture" (1997:56). The style of church music must be relevant to the culture around the church.

ii The church is irrelevant in its methods of preaching

If the church by and large has come to understand the necessary shift around the stylistic features of the worship music in the postmodern era, then the one area that is possibly still lagging is the way that sermons are presented to postmodern people. Preachers have become the epitome of frustration to postmoderns who

describe their experiences of hearing sermons as long, boring and "over-their-heads." McLaren suggests two things:

- "Find fresh ways to communicate the gospel to the post-modern mind" (2006:77)
- "Realize that old communication patterns are less and less effective in the new world, and discover new, appropriate modes of discourse" (2006:91).

The current and future generations that the church needs to reach do not understand the language the church is currently using. McLaren believes that our communication style has become outdated and is therefore unable to interest a postmodern audience (McLaren 2006:91):

"I am referring to our modes of discourse, our ways of arguing, our ways of structuring communications. I am referring to what makes a message boring or interesting, cogent or unconvincing, moving or cold, motivating or repulsive, funny or trite, overstated or understated, in good taste or in bad, delightful or ponderous."

iii ***The church is either irrelevant in its use of technology; or irrelevant in its over-technologized state***

This might sound like a contradiction, but it is in actual fact a fine balance that needs to be held. The worst thing that a postmodern adapted church can do is try to focus solely on keeping up in terms of technology, as postmoderns are actually so "over-technologized" that they are desperately seeking real human contact and relationships. Sweet says: "Postmoderns are famished for closeness, starved for contact" (1999:194). Kelly says (2004:3):

"Remember, one of the chief values of modernism is the individual. Modernism also preaches that technology is the way of the future. The last decade has seen the rise of the Internet, cell phones, and other communication technologies that were supposed to bring us all closer together. Instead they have isolated us from actual human contact. However, our desires for contact and community drive us to Internet chat rooms, instant messaging, Internet dating services, and an ever-growing voyeuristic fascination with reality TV. This is what modernism has brought us. Postmodernism, on the other hand, rejects the false claims that technology will bring us together. Many postmodern Christians are involved in intentional communities where people get away from their computers, turn off their cell phones, and share openly and honestly about what's going on in their lives.

Postmodernism embraces the old fashioned idea of community and emphasizes the value of fellowship and authentic relationships."

Therefore postmoderns have either felt that churches are out of touch with them because they are so backward technologically, or out of real human touch because the church in its attempt to become relevant has actually gone overboard and forgotten that they are a generation that values relationship more than having all the newest technology at their fingertips.

iv The church is lacking in creating opportunities of experience, participation, interaction and community

This point is something that will be studied in greater detail in the following chapters in order to show how to engage the postmodern individual. But it must be understood that because these values are so important to a postmodern person, church gatherings that do not actively incorporate these values; such as opportunities for personal experience, participation, interaction and community, find themselves creating a chasm between themselves and the average postmodern person.

When it comes to experience and participation, the church by and large does not understand how important this is. For example, a young person who hears a traditional message on the importance of missions is unlikely to grasp the importance of it in their lives. However, give that same individual the opportunity to go on a missions trip, where they build memories, see God doing wonderful things through them, touch the lives of the lost, hear from those who are far less fortunate than themselves, and get a taste for life in another culture, will never be the same again. For a postmodern, experiencing something is far more important than just hearing about it. Kelly says (2004:3):

> "Post-moderns also recognize the value of tradition. Many youth groups have abandoned spotlights, Powerpoint® presentations, and electric guitars (not that they're not cool, too) in favour of candlelight, contemplative music or pure silence, and ancient spiritual disciplines such as *lectio divina*, Ignatian prayer, and Taizé-style worship. Postmodernism encourages us to explore worship as an experiential and participatory act."

This includes ministry times in church gathering contexts. The modern mindset is one that used to promote that we can experience God by ourselves. Postmoderns

want to have those experiences in a community setting. They want to be together with others experiencing God in community.

2.7.3 Postmoderns are afraid to come to church gatherings because they feel disconnected and do not know if they will find an authentic place to belong.

When postmoderns view the church from the outside. Often the criticism is that those who attend church gatherings are not real, not genuine. Many who have been brave enough to attend a service come away having felt unwelcome or unnoticed. Biblically we understand that the church is a family (Eph 2:19), and members of God's household. The church is not simply some people coming together randomly, but they are part of a family, part of the same home, the same household. Postmoderns are not anti-truth, they are opposed to the forms in which most church meetings try to force that truth down on them in a cold non-relational manner. MacLaren says: "Postmoderns don't want truth without equal doses of love" (2006:171).

McDowell believes that this postmodern generation, even though they are "on-line," can be described as a "disconnected generation" (2000:8). McLaren says that (2000:9):

> "Today's youth are logging onto the internet for more than just information and entertainment. Increasing young people are using email and chat rooms in an attempt to connect socially with others. Yet people who are seeking emotional and relational connections on-line are finding electronic relationships unfulfilling, a cheap substitute for in-person friendships and interaction."

In 1996 Hutchcraft identified the following attributes of postmodern young people (1996:11):

- Tormented by loneliness
- Controlled by Sex
- Fascinated with Satan
- Used to Suicide

He then suggested twelve sentences that define this young emerging generation (Hutchcraft 1996:19-35):

- Loneliness is their heart condition
- Relationships matter most to them
- Music is their language
- Self-worth is their struggle
- Anaesthetic is more important than cure
- They know no boundaries
- They want authority
- Their now matters more than their future
- The world doesn't interest them
- Commitment is too risky
- Sex is expected...and confusing
- These teenagers are post-Christian

This is a truly accurate description of postmoderns. Even post post moderns. Because of this, there is a very real sense of disconnection to the church, an organization which some of them perceive as being hypocritical and therefore unsafe to trust, or, in some cases, too good for them whose lives are in such a mess that it is best to stay away. Either way, the culture of the world seems a safer option than to venture through the doors of a church.

Because the church is too scared to enter their world, the connection is never made and they never find the love, authenticity and security that they desire in life.

2.8   How seriously should we really take postmodernism?

Some church leaders think very little of postmodernism. In my discussions with church leaders about this topic, some go as far as saying that it's a ridiculous way of destroying national cultures and identities by trying to paint a "new culture" with one brush stroke. Have we made too much of postmodernism in the 21ˢᵗ Century?

There are some important questions to answer here as they are core to the final premise of this thesis. One argument runs along the following train of thought:

"Ecclesiastes 1:9 says; "There is nothing new under the sun." Postmodernism simply challenges the church with new terminology. People are still sinners. People still need Jesus. The gospel remains the same. The world is just trying to fool the church again as it has done in the past. Postmodernism is just a new attempt at this. It's age old relativism in new clothes. It is a ploy to ruin worship, preaching and communion in church gatherings."

How does one respond to this sort of argument? Is Postmodernism real? Are these worldviews truly an honest reflection of the society that we live in? The author believes that postmodernism is both a problem, and an opportunity. The relativistic tendencies are scary, but postmodernity's interest in spirituality in a wonderful opportunity for the church. Relativism and the calling into question of the ability to know objective truth is a hallmark of our generation. Yes, biblically, humanity has always kicked against God's standard. But in this pluralistic society it seems these aspects have escalated. I am in full agreement that there are dangers in making the church relevant, but there are also great dangers in keeping it irrelevant.

Thus far this thesis has identified that postmodernity has tremendously affected people within society with its worldview and value system, so much so that it has caused people to inherently mistrust the church. There are misperceptions around what happens behind the walls of our church buildings that create a reticence among postmoderns to attend church services. It has also been identified that the perception of the church's irrelevance and lack of postmodern ideals has played a significant role in a growing the outsider group. The culture of Postmodernism has also influenced a generation of people into feeling disconnected from the church.

The great fear the author has is that should this trend continue, that the church will only develop more of an attitude toward abandoning postmoderns rather than embracing them.

2.9   We must ask the right questions about this problem

Because this thesis is dealing very specifically with the issue of church services, here are some ways that the author may be misunderstood.

2.9.1 Who is the church trying to be relevant to?

When we come to think about the relevancy of churches, McNeal says this: "The first question we must ask is whether or not church is still relevant to Jesus Christ" (2003:12). Is the church still relevant to the gospel? Is it still relevant to the bible? We cannot only aim to be relevant to culture.

2.9.2 Is it just about creating "better" church services?

Readers might understand this thesis to be suggesting that the only question to ask is: "How do we do our Church Services in a better way?" I do not think this is the best question. It's a good question to ask, and it is definitely an important purpose to achieve, but there is an even better question (McNeal 2003:12) "How do we de-convert from "Churchianity" to Christianity?" For genuine relevance to take place we must get rid of all of the Christian static that is clouding church services.

2.9.3 Must the world come to the church, or must the church go to the world?

A reader might also understand the question to be: "How do we get them to come to our church services?" The desire to move towards relevant church services does not mean than the world must come to come to the church – on the contrary - the church must reach out to the world. The church must go out and transform our community. A better question is: "How do we hit the streets with the gospel?" (2003:51). McNeal says that "Only people without a missiology disdain attempts at being culturally relevant" (2003:51). It's important for to understand the difference between being the church and going to church.

Relevant church services also become important when new believers are brought into services, and yes, sometimes, because of various programs, outsiders do visit the church – and it is at this time that we must be relevant as well. For example – I am involved with a particular ministry that is currently not drawing significant numbers of young people to its meetings. It is no good trying to improve on these programs if no one is there to benefit from them and to see how meaningful they are. So there is plan to work on a number of solutions by doing mission work in the local schools where we are reaching them on their "turf." Once we have reached them and built relationships necessary for discipleship – the church has the ability to draw them into its church services.

2.10 Summary

Change is not easy. But it is necessary. In a recent medical study, the difficulty of change for people is highlighted (Rainer 2006:229):

> "Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypasses a year in America. These people are told after their bypasses that they must change their lifestyle. The heart bypass is a temporary fix. They must change their diet. They must quit smoking and drinking. They must exercise and reduce stress. In essence, the doctors say, "Change or die." You would think that a near-death experience would forever grab the attention of the patients. You would think they would vote for change. You would think that the argument for change is so compelling that the patients would make the appropriate lifestyle alterations. Sadly that is not the case. Ninety percent of the heart patients do not change. They remain the same, living the status quo. Study after study indicates that two years after heart surgery, the patients have not altered their behaviour. Instead of making changes for life, they chose death...in the same way the majority of churches do not change. They would rather die."

Churches cannot allow themselves to fear change, more than their fear of ineffectiveness. This chapter investigated the problem of irrelevant church services. It looked at the danger of getting stuck in a Christian bubble, where church services have become individual Christian subcultures which are completely out of touch with the world and culture around them. The problem of attendance was investigated. It was discovered that the younger the generation, the less percentages of them you see attending church services, even though in SA we have a very large percentage of young people. The problem of denial was dealt with. The church's denial of the problem is ensuring that nothing is being done to turn the statistic's trends. The problem that church people do not have a missiological understanding of the church was looked at. Many have no desire to be relevant. If the church has become irrelevant, and I believe that in many places it has, then we desperately need to get back to the biblical model.

We are a church that needs to adapt. We need to rethink our history. We need to learn from it. We need to understand that we have been a constantly adapting organism throughout the ages. As such we need to adapt to our current context which is changing so fast all around us. This need to change is not new. It is as old as the church itself.

The suggestion is that the church simply continue to do what it has always done in the past, and will have to continue to do into the future until the return of Christ. As we engage in this process, may we have the wisdom to learn from our mistakes, and to be willing to change and adapt as is necessary. Just like the chameleon who understands that its survival depends on an accurate understanding of its surroundings, so too does the survival of the church depend on its adaptation.

A BIBLICAL MODEL OF DOING CHURCH SERVICES

3.1   Introduction

The good news is that there are things a church can do to break out of the stagnating pool of ineffective ministry that many find themselves in.

3.1.1   Revisiting a definition of church services (Ekklesia)

When seeking to propose a biblical model for doing church, one can easily fall into a number of errors. This is primarily due to the term "church" and "service" being so widely misunderstood from its multiple uses, and terminology.

For example: the word "church" can refer to a building, a particular church, or a denomination. For the purposes of this thesis the author will primarily be defining church through the Greek word "ekklesia," which is translated in most places in the New Testament as "church." In a few places it is translated as "Assembly." This word "ekklesia" means an "assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly" (Scott & Liddell 1995:206). Simply stated, this thesis defines "church services" as the assembly of believers. The use of this word in scripture reveals that in most cases it refers to the meeting together of believers in the New Testament. We know that they would meet in homes and in rented halls. For example: "The assemblies (ekklesia) of Asia" (1 Cor 16:19 NIV), meaning, the "churches" of Asia. It is the intention in this chapter to look at these "assemblies" and to identify a biblical model of what we should be doing in church services.

Likewise, the word "service" can be widely misunderstood. For example: it is the same word we use to describe the routine maintenance done on vehicles. In some ways this terminology can become subtly confusing to those who believe that a "church Service" is there primarily for the people of the community to get their "spiritual tanks filled up." It is seen as a "service" to them, complete with a "pep-talk" sermon, and a "convenient coffee afterwards" (Kimball 2004:2). Once again, the

definition of this word is not about the church's service to us, or God's service to us, it's primarily about our service to God, as we come with our offerings of worship through bringing our whole lives, praise, money and service to others. I am personally not in favour of the phrase "church Service" for these reasons, but more about this shortly.

3.1.2   The purpose of church services

As a starting point Christians must understand the purpose of these gatherings. Too many believers are confused in their thinking around this and come up with all sorts of reasons for having church services. Often they offer suggestions like "singing songs" and "listening to sermons." These may well be the primary elements of most evangelical services today, but the question begs to be asked: Are they purposes that are clearly defined in scripture?

For example, in our current evangelical church culture there is a strong focus on the worship element within our church services. Perhaps rightly so? Is not worship after all the primary purpose of human existence? We are all created to worship. Warren says: "Anthropologists have noted that worship is a universal urge, hard-wired by God into the very fibre of our being – an inbuilt need to connect with God. Worship is as natural as eating or breathing. If we fail to worship God, we always find a substitute, even if it ends up being ourselves" (2009:1). The reason God made us with this desire is that he desires worshipers. Jesus said: "The Father seeks ... worshipers" (John 4:23 NAS).

The Westminster Confession states that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. This is based on numerous scriptures (Ps 86; Is 60:21; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 6:20,21; Rev 4:11; Ps 16:5-11; Ps 144:15; Is 12:2; Lk 2:10; Phil 4:4; Rev 21:3-4). Therefore, when we gather as believers, it is this primary purpose that should be foremost in our agenda, but, it is important to note that that the church does not primarily meet only to worship.

In a very astute article by Anderson, a theologian who seeks to answer why the church of Jesus Christ assembles, he points out a couple of misconceptions held by

evangelical Christians. Here is a summary of his thoughts, and mine and other scholars' responses to his views (Anderson 2007):

i **"The church does not primarily meet to worship"** (Anderson 2007:1)

There are some things that can be agreed with here. The term "worship services" have largely attributed to this understanding of the purpose of church services. Anderson highlights the fact that scripture does not in fact use this term. He also argues that the Old Testament practice of worship required the Jews to assemble for the purpose of worship and sacrifice at particular places and particular times (Ex 23:14-17; Deut 12:5-6), but that this model has now been superseded in the New Testament where there are no holy places (church buildings) or holy times (Sunday 9am-11am) for worship. Evangelical churches have wrongly assumed that they are to follow suit. He rightly explains that the church should worship God with song when it assembles (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), however, he is clear that this should not be the primary purpose for gathering. He suggests that as long as we call our services "worship services" we will continue to teach people that the primary reason for the meeting is worship. John 4:21-24 is crucial to understand as it shows how God is searching for a new kind of worshipper. Anderson says: "God commands his people to worship all day, everyday, in every place, by willing surrender and obedience to his will" (2007:1). He bases this on Romans 12:1. One cannot fully endorse this point, but the thinking is persuasive.

ii **"The church does not primarily meet to evangelize"** (Anderson 2007:2)

There are many who believe that the purpose of a church service lies elsewhere, namely; to evangelize the lost. Those who would hold to this view would be very strong on the habit of providing an opportunity for someone to get saved after every single service. Anderson here states that the New Testament does not promote or model the "altar call" methodology and misses the fact that church meetings in the New Testament exist primarily for the benefit of believers, not for the evangelism of unbelievers.

This introduces the concept of the "seeker-friendly" church service model. Is this biblical? More and more churches are adopting this philosophy for their Sunday meetings where the focus is to provide a non-threatening environment where the focus of the meeting is around the "felt needs" of "seekers." Anderson applauds the

zeal for evangelism but feels that this approach misses the mark in a number of ways (Anderson 2007:2):

- The bible states that no man seeks for God (Rom 3:11)
- Since when was the gospel meant to be presented in a non-threatening way? Luke 11 states that one must forsake everything standing between him and full allegiance to Christ, deny himself, and take up his cross. That is threatening.
- An unbeliever's greatest need is to be saved from the wrath of God, but this is not a felt need.
- A sinner who gives their life to Christ on the basis of having their needs met is in for a rude awakening when they discover the trials and hardships of the Christian life.

Scriptures do however present the possibility that there are occasions when unbelievers may be present at a church meeting and that this may result in conviction of sin and conversion (1 Cor 12:24-25). However, as Anderson points out, it would seem that most evangelism took place not in the gatherings of believers, but where unbelievers naturally congregated (Anderson 2007:2):

- City streets (Acts 2:12-40)
- The temple grounds (Acts 3:1-26)
- A desert road (Acts 8:26-40)
- The synagogues of non-Christian Jews (Acts 9:20;13:5;13:14-41)
- The home of an unbeliever (Acts 10:34-43)
- A riverside (Acts 16:13-15)
- Prisons (Acts 16:30-31; 26:1-29; 28:23-31)
- The market place (Acts 17:17)
- A hill dedicated to a pagan God (Acts 17:19)
- A military barracks (Acts 21:34-22:21)
- The governors official residence (Acts 23:35; 24:24-25)

The point that Anderson makes therefore, is that for evangelism to take place at a gathering of believers, was the exception rather than the rule in the New Testament. Indeed, we must zealously seek the conversion of the lost, but this is not the goal of

gathered church services in the NT, and therefore should not be the goal of our gathered churches today. With this one can agree.

iii **"The church does not primarily meet to listen to sermons"** (Anderson 2007:3)

This is another controversial point that he raises. It is a commonly held opinion that the purpose of a gathered church is to listen to a sermon. He is careful to stress the importance of sound doctrinal instruction when the church gathers (Based on 1 Tim 4:6,13,16; 5:17; 6:2,17; 2 Tim 4:1-4), but he also stresses the fact that we must not equate this instruction with our rigid view of a traditional sermon. Anderson believes that while this traditional model may well be helpful in instructing and edifying God's people (Anderson 2007:3):

> "It does not allow God's people to be involved in teaching, exhorting, or admonishing one another, nor does it allow the pastor to be ministered to by the rest of the congregation...furthermore, if the church adopts the view that the purpose of meeting as the church is to listen to a sermon, it's members will inevitably adopt a passive attitude. They will come, take notes, and fill their minds with wonderful biblical truth, but leave without fulfilling their God-given spiritual responsibilities."

Along with Anderson one would agree that biblical sermons can be a powerful tool in edifying the body, but that it should not be allowed to crowd out the ministry of the rest of the church.

iv **"The church primarily meets to edify one another"** (Anderson 2007:3)

Anderson concludes by suggesting that if worship, evangelism, and passive listening are not the primary purpose of the gathering of God's people, then the answer is to be found in a examination of 1 Corinthians 11-14, because in these chapters we find the most comprehensive description in the New Testament of what should take place when the church gathers.

Anderson interprets 1 Cor 12:7; 14;4;17,26 as proof texts for his theory that the ultimate purpose the church gathers is for the edification (building up) of the church when they meet. Along with these he quotes Heb 10:24-5 and various other

likeminded passages (Rom 14:19; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Thes 5:11). Anderson's thinking certainly does make a lot of biblical sense. His views are strengthened further one considers passages such as 1 Cor 14:26 where Paul writes: "What then shall we say brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (NIV).

While one can agree with much of the thought behind Anderson's understanding of the purpose of church, one cannot fully endorse his final conclusions that the purpose of church is primarily for the edification of the believers and that that trumps all else. For example: he states in conclusion: "Whereas we previously had primarily a vertical focus in our gatherings in which worship was our focus, we began to adopt more of a horizontal focus in which the edification of the body became the focus." (Anderson 2007:4). There must be a balance between the vertical and horizontal elements that must be maintained in our church gatherings. Chasing after a central purpose of edification of believers alone, even with the mass of scriptural verses to support this, may miss the big picture of Gods story with human beings throughout scripture.

v   The purpose of church services = The primary purpose of the church meeting is to worship God, out of this fundamental purpose, edification for others follows as a natural progression.

If one single primary purpose is to be identified, it must surely be for all to be encouraged to develop a closer and more intimate relationship with God, not just fellow believers. Matthew 22:37-39 describes Jesus teaching that the greatest commandment, and therefore the greatest purpose is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself" (NIV).

Therefore one can presume that in our gatherings, our primary (vertical relationship) ought to be in worshipping God, and our secondary (horizontal relationship) ought to be loving and edifying our neighbours. Even though one can disagree with Anderson's outcome, his thoughts are helpful in showing us that there are a number

of purposes for church meetings; ultimately however, it all comes back to worship. And yes, it is ones desire to move this "worship" from within our church gatherings to our daily lives, but it must be highlighted and prioritized at our gatherings in order to remind God's people of our primary purpose.

Consequently, one sees the vertical (Worshipping God) purpose of coming together as believers, but one also sees a horizontal (Fellowship with believers) purpose. We are warned in scripture not neglect this "Assembly" for its purpose is to encourage the believers (Heb 10:24-25). "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV). It is crucial to understand this essential reasoning before a further study is made.

The ultimate purpose of worship cannot be underestimated. The reason for this is that worship is incredibly important. It's important because of the severe consequences of false worship (See Gen 4:5; Ex 32; 1 Kings 11:31-33; Jer 1:16; Rom 1:25). It's also important because worship is greatly important to God (John 4). So with this central purpose of worship – let us proceed to lay a biblical foundation for church meetings.

3.2   Relevant biblical foundation

The New Testament does not give a lot of information about what worship gatherings in the early church were like, nor are there any specific liturgical outlines. So we have no prescribed pattern to conform to. Most churches have adopted a liturgy that finds its roots in history and denominational identity. There is much to learn from the models that history has provided, but in this chapter the intention is to focus solely on the relevant scriptures that provide the biblical principles that we need to employ when designing a church service.

There are many elements that are important when it comes to formulating a liturgy for church services, and this is a biblical investigation as to what they are.

3.2.1   General biblical principles for a church gathering

The first point to note here is that the term "worship service" is not used for the reasons discussed in the introduction. Without being semantic, it is my belief that this term can cause confusion over the role of a "church gathering." The logical conclusion of a "worship service," is that this is the time and place where you come to offer your worship in time and space, which implies you do not have to do it elsewhere in your life.

Secondly, from here on, the term "biblical church gathering" will be used to define the model that is being proposed. This will be identified with the acronym BCG.

i Biblical principles relating to general aspects of church gatherings

a) **A BCG must understand the difference between "form" and "meaning"**
   (1 Cor 12:23-30)

It is important to understand the difference between form (method) and meaning (principle). The Apostle Paul was very good at this. He would often change the form, but be careful not to change the meaning. There should always be a healthy respect for form, as sometimes form and meaning are so connected that if you change the form you inadvertently change the meaning.

An example may be helpful to understand the difference. In 1 Corinthians 12:23-30 Paul teaches on the Lord's Supper as Christ instituted it in Matthew 26:26. He is careful to understand form and meaning. In a communion service one can change the form to such an extent, that the meaning is lost. If one were to try to contextualize communion for a group of young people by using Coca-Cola™ instead of wine or grape juice, and instead of bread one uses potato chips, even though symbolically one could still make the point of communion, somewhere along the line the real message has been lost. There is a holiness and a reverence that forms a part of the message of communion that is lost in this radical contextualization. So form does matter. How we worship does matter to God. One cannot just say that the meaning must remain and the form must change. Sometimes they are inseparably connected. The medium can be the message.

Biblical principles that are important to understand here are words used for worship. Like humility, the Hebrew word for worship here is "proskuneo." It denotes an inner attitude of submission and humility. Another word is "reverence." The Hebrew word is "yare," and the Greek term is "sebonai." The idea is of fearing God, coming to him in respect. Irreverence is antithetical to worship. It the belief of some that it was the irreverence of the Corinthians at the Lord's table that resulted in sickness and death (1 Cor 11:30). Paul said they did not "judge the body rightly" (1 Cor 11:29 NIV). If we are not mindful of form and meaning in our meetings, and we participate in meetings and communion in a frivolous, light and irreverent way, this is not true worship and we bring upon ourselves the discipline of God.

b) **A BCG should involve a mixture of "old" and "new"** (Eph 5:19 and Colossians 3:16).

The concept of "Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" mentioned in scripture imply a form of mixture between new and old. Paul refers to "Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16. This can refer in some ways to culturally relevant forms of worship singing in a congregational setting – in particular the Greek meaning of "hymns." Some see these terms as synonymous because of their interchangeable occurrences in the Septuagint and other Hellenistic Jewish writings (Detwiler 2001:347 - 361), but one can safely assume the following distinctions:

"Psalms" (Grk. *psalmos*) - These most probably refer to the Old Testament Psalms. They were basically scripture used in song. They were quite likely songs sung with musical accompaniment as can be seen encouraged in numerous places in the book of Psalms.

"Hymns" (Grk. *humnos*) – or hymns directed to God. The humnos found its origins as a song of worship and praise to the Greek gods. Commentators believe that these were imported by early Christians into their forms of worship as humnos essentially were songs of praise to a god with a specific (Greek) structure and liturgical style (Carson 1994: 1274).

"Spiritual songs" (Grk. *odais pneumatikais*) –Perhaps the general term for songs, but in both verses, "spiritual" is the qualifying element, distinguishing it from general, pagan songs. So these were "spiritual songs." One could argue that these were like many of the contemporary worship songs that are written today. They were also probably more spontaneous songs (Carson 1994 1998:1274). One could also argue that these songs were prophetic or charismatic songs, inspired by the Holy Spirit. This would show us that lively spontaneous worship existed in the early church.

The principle that we can learn from the above is that there are many different means to bring praise to God. There are many kinds of appropriate songs, whether Psalms like that of the Old Testament, or hymns directed to God, or to other more contemporary and spontaneous songs that Christians are familiar with. We can use "old" and "new" songs to worship God.

c) **A BCG should provide an opportunity for fellowship** (Hebrews 10:24-25)

In Hebrews 1:24-25 we read: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (NIV). According to this passage fellowship is extremely important. One of the biblical purposes for church meetings is to strengthen the body through encouragement so that it may continue in love and good deeds. This cannot happen when believers get out of the habit of meeting together.

d) **A BCG should be orderly** (1 Corinthians 14:33-40)

1 Corinthians 14:33-40 is a key scripture here, it states: "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace...Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (NIV). This does not mean that our services should be quiet and boring, or stiff and predictable. They can and should be exciting and dynamic like the God we serve, but they should be not chaotic. A good principle here is to over plan, and then allow for flexibility. There needs to be a certain amount of flexibility

within the structure of the service to allow for spontaneity and the Spirit of God must be given room to move, but that doesn't mean things can be chaotic.

In the context of this passage there was a threefold control issue. The gift of tongues was getting out of control in church meetings (vs 27-28), likewise; the gift of prophecy was getting out of control (vs 29-33); and the married women in the congregation were getting out of control (vs 34-36). Paul encourages that we earnestly desire the gift of prophesy, and that we should not forbid tongues (vs 39), but all things should be done decently and in order. God desires order because he is a God of order. He is orderly, therefore, our worship services should be orderly. Chaos is not glorifying to God. We should worship God in a way that is acceptable to him, not in a way that is acceptable to us as the following scripture indicates.

Hebrews 12:28-29: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire" (NIV). Hence church services should be orderly and reverent.

Much has been said already about the need for contextualization of church services, but it must also be noted that biblically, God's people are to be different and set apart in their ways;

e) **A BCG should be contemporary but different (Deuteronomy 12:31)**

Although church services should be contextual they should also somehow not be the same as the world around it. In the Old Testament God taught his people that he wanted them to be different from the world around them. Thus it is not a simple case of adopting the worlds "style" while maintaining a biblical content.

Deuteronomy 12:31 states: "You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods" (NIV).

It is a very common teaching in Christian circles to say "We should be different to the world." But the application is always made in terms of living a godly life with a high standard of righteousness and morality. This same truth is never taught when it comes to our worship gatherings. So much is being said in Christian circles about contextualization into the world around us, and so little is said about standing out from the world. Standing out in our worship, and standing out in our meetings. Church services should not simply be mimicking rock concerts, even though they can have a contemporary flavour. Church services should not simply be mimicking coffee bars, even though they can have that contemporary flavour. The key is that they can be contemporary, but there has to be something different about them.

Bradley (2000:2) writes: "How do we determine when we have crossed the line in our worship service from:

- Sacred to ... secular
- Scriptural principles of worship to ... technique / unscriptural principles
- Worship to ... entertainment
- Reaching out to the culture in our worship to ... having our worship shaped by the culture."

This is the tension that must be held in careful balance. Church gatherings must be contemporary, but different.

f) **A BCG must strengthen the church and we should be mindful of the "style" when unbelievers are about** (1 Corinthians 14:22-26)

In 1 Corinthians 14:22-26, Paul makes some interesting points about the purpose of church meetings and style, he says;

"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a

hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (NIV).

Paul teaches here that we should be mindful of the way we do things (style) when unbelievers are present in our church meetings. It must be remembered that everything that we do must be done for the strengthening of the church.

g) **A BCG must have a balance between a "informal" and a "formal" approach**

In studying the life of Christ, we see that he attended "worship gatherings" at the synagogues (Mat 4:23; 12:9; 13:54; Jn 18:20). Luke 4:15-16 is particularly telling in that it explicitly states that this was his custom. In other words, he made a habit of going to synagogue. These were formal gatherings with set liturgies and practices. Jesus attended these. We also see his interactions with his disciples and his teachings in informal settings, such as during a walk, from a boat, or on a hilltop. From John chapter 4 we know that church for Jesus was not confined to a holy place or time. Therefore our worship gatherings should endeavour to teach and encourage the congregation in a way that is formal and liturgical, yet should also endeavour to teach and encourage the congregation in a way that is informal. It should be noted that without certain structures church can become so fluid and "layed back" that there is no order and plan. But likewise, it should also be noted that the church is a family, a body. Not a club. There is a certain warmth that comes with being a family that is not found in highly stiff religious liturgical formulas and church meeting structures.

ii *Biblical principles relating to worship*

a) **A BCG should provide an opportunity for corporate worship** (1 Cor 14:26-40; Col 3:16)

This thesis has already alluded to the importance of worship as the purpose of church gatherings in the opening of this chapter. This point however focuses on the biblical proof for corporate worship. The Corinthians practiced which could

be called participatory, open and interactive meetings. This is found in 1 Cor 14:26-40: "What shall we say then brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" (NIV). In this verse, Paul was discussing normal church life for the Corinthians. It may be hyperbole, but he did not say "when you come together the worship pastor has a song, and the senior pastor has a word of instruction." It says "everyone." Each believer at the Corinthian church came to church meetings ready to contribute something.

All of this is worship to God. Some came with hymns, others with various other offerings. In Colossians 3:16 NIV Paul says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." This is something that Paul envisages the whole body of Christ doing, we are to admonish one another as we all sing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs. It is disappointing that by and large we do not see this biblical principle at work in our churches.

b) **A BCG should not allow worship to be limited to the service alone** (Acts 2:42-47)

In the book of Acts, we see that in the life of the early church, worship was a part of everyday lives and took place in the believers' homes, and was informal, as well as formal. We see this particularly in Acts 2:42-47:

> "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (NIV).

The words "every day" in the above passage show that our worship is not meant to be boxed into the confines of a church gathering, but it must spill into every

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aspect and moment of our lives. Therefore the assembled congregation should continually be reminded of the need to worship beyond the walls of the places where they assemble.

A church can only become filled with true worshippers when believers learn that every activity of life must be turned into an act of worship. The Bible says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31 NIV).

c) **A BCG can use dramatic expression if it fits the mood** (Job 1:20)

Once again, although these verses do not apply specifically to a church gathering context, they are general principles for worship. Job is one such example. Job 1:20: "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship" (NIV). This is a spontaneous expression, and it is dramatic, but it fit's the mood of what God was doing in Job's life. Likewise, worship in church services should be encouraged to be a real expression of what God is doing in the lives of the believers. If they are filled with joy, it should be natural to express that, if they are filled with sadness, it should be okay to cry.

d) **A BCG can be enthusiastic and can involve music as well as movement with congregational involvement** (Psalms 150:1-6)

Enthusiastic praise is something which the evangelical church has reserved only for the charismatic ranks, which is a disappointing stereotype, and an unbiblical one. Enthusiastic praise should be a stereotype reserved for all genuine believers. Psalm 150:1-6:

> "Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD" (NIV).

From this passage we find a tremendously vibrant expression of worship. The Psalmist is encouraging God's people to worship God in an enthusiastic way. It's certainly a very different expression to the one found in most evangelical churches today. Music is an art form and a "language" that is used here to worship God. The psalmist encourages its use. It's actually even more of a command. We are told to worship the Lord with musical instruments such as the trumpet, the harp, and lyre, tambourine, strings, flute, cymbals and resounding cymbals. It's worth noting that this variety of musical instruments create different sounds and different volumes of music. A harp can be soft and soothing, while a resounding cymbal is nothing like that. The point is that this scripture teaches that our worship in church meetings should use music that fits the mood.

We also see another art form encouraged here, dancing. It is my understanding that this verse teaches exuberant praise. God is pleased when we worship him wholeheartedly, even to the point of breaking out into song, with music and movement. This scripture encourages God's people to be involved, and to participate fully in worship. There is a wonderful worship story by Dorrell in his book, "Truth about Trolls" (Dorrell 2006:71-74). In this book he describes the story of a young man who was mentally challenged who wanted to get involved on their worship team. After a lot of trial and error he now helps lead the worship on "air-guitar." It is a great story about how everyone worships in their own ability and way, but the point is that everyone in church can and must participate.

e) **A BCG must recognize the importance of "truth" and "spirit."** (John 4:23-24)

This is truth about God, and truth about who we are in relationship to Him. In John 4:23-24 it says: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (NIV). Truth comes through the scriptures. One cannot come to an accurate understanding of God without them. The scriptures and their truth need to therefore permeate everything in a church meeting. In the gospel of John truth is associated with Christ. This is very important in order to have a proper understanding of worship. A person can only worship God as they come

in Christ "The way, the truth and the life," as taught in the Word of God. Doctrines here are crucial. The doctrines we believe in impact the way that we do church. If our doctrines are biblically unsound, we will not be worshipping in truth. Likewise, we need to worship in spirit. The other point that this scripture is making is that the place of worship is irrelevant. God is spirit. Therefore, true worship must be in keeping with God's nature (God is spirit).

ii *Biblical principles relating to preaching*

a) **A BCG should provide a time and place for preaching the word of God**
(Mk 16:15; 1 Cor 1:23; 9:16; 2 Tit 4:2)

Throughout the New Testament, there is a strong thread of the proclamation of the word of God (Mk 16:15; 1 Cor 1:23; 9:16). 2 Titus 4:2 is very clear; "I give you this charge: Preach the Word" (NIV). One cannot escape the overwhelming biblical evidence of the importance of the preaching of the Word of God. Biblically however, this must be balanced with our primary purpose of gathering: worship. Not just "music and singing," but biblical worship. This takes many forms; even preaching is a true form of worship. These words by Webber are a good warning to those who desire true worship in their congregations (Webber 1976:15):

> "Part of the problem is that we have made our churches into centres of evangelism and instruction. The focus of our services are on man and his needs instead of God and his glory. This is true for example in music, where it's triteness in content and tune tends to entertain rather than provoke worship. Further, a fancy pulpiteering has made worship seem peripheral or at least preliminary to preaching."

Preaching which is God-centred and directs all of our attention and focus onto Him is genuine worship.

b) **A BCG can take peoples contemporary beliefs as a starting point to direct them to God** (Acts 17:23-32)

The Apostle Paul was a master of contextualization. He knew how to make things relevant to a different cultural group, and he knew how not to sink the Christian ship floating in the sea of culture in over-contextualization. He took people's contemporary beliefs as a starting place to direct them to God. This is vividly portrayed in Acts 17:23-32:

> "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject" (NIV).

This scripture provides a very thought provoking way to bring sermons at church meetings and in other contexts. He used the contemporary beliefs of the Athenians in order to be relevant and to gain common ground and understanding before he launched into his presentation of the gospel. The other well known Pauline example of contextualization is 1 Corinthians 9:20: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law" (NIV). Paul used people's contemporary beliefs as a starting point to direct them to God. We should do the same in the cultural groups we find within our congregations and communities.

a) **A BCG should regularly make time to practice the sacraments – Baptism and Communion** (Mat 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23)

Unlike Hugh of St Victor in the early twelfth century who listed thirty sacraments, and Aquinas who taught on seven sacraments (Dowley 1977:265), most evangelicals believe that there are only two sacraments that were instituted by Christ for his followers to perform; baptism as a once off act of obedience, and regular communion in remembrance of Christ. The primary scripture that shows Christ's institution of the practice of baptism is in Mat 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (NIV). The command is in the imperative, which implies that we should keep on going and not stop. Baptism is something that we should keep practising with new believers as an outward sign of an inward reality.

The Lord's Supper was also instituted by Christ in Matthew 26:26, and we are called by Paul in 1 Cor 11:23 to regularly partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ. There is no appointed place for worship in the NT, but we are called to a regular remembrance of the Lord in communion. Our Lord commanded us, "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19 NIV). There is debate around the regularity of communion in our meetings, as we know from Acts 2:42, 46, that initially the early believers observed it daily.

b) **A BCG should make time to pray** (Acts 1:14; 2:44)

Acts 1:14 reads: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (NIV). From this we can deduce that prayer was a very important part of the early believers lives when they gathered together and met. In Acts 2:44 we know that one of the things the believers devoted themselves to when they gathered, was prayer. As such it must be apart of the design of every church meeting.

c) A BCG should make time for scripture reading (1 Tim 4:13)

Paul charged Timothy, a young Pastor, to "Devote *himself* to the public reading of scripture" (1Tim 4:3 NIV) *Emphasis mine*. Biblically, church meetings should have scripture read out publicly. There is a trend in churches today to focus very lightly on scripture for fear of offending "seekers." Once again, we are given a very clear biblical command here to devote ourselves to the unashamed "public" reading of scripture in our gatherings.

d) A BCG should make time available for giving (Mal 3:8-10; Phil 4:14-18; 2 Cor 8:1-17; 9:6-12)

We see from the scriptures mentioned above that God's work needs finances and that God provides this through his people as they faithfully give. It seems quite logical that when believers gather, that this opportunity is taken to give towards the functioning of that local body, and God's work in general. The principle of tithing is taught in scripture and should therefore be a part of our gatherings. There is a concern by many emerging leaders that doing financial offerings in church gatherings creates the impression that the church is just after money, so they avoid it. Whilst one can understand the concern to give this impression, leaders must also not deny the church body the opportunity to give in worship to the Lord.

Therefore, within the broad principles laid down in the New Testament, we have seen that there is a great freedom in the expression of worship at the church meeting. Elaborate or detailed liturgy or structure is not found. I like the way that Deffinbaugh says it: "We find no stained glass conceptions of what worship must be." (Deffinbaugh 2009:1). Taking these into consideration, how do we move towards a specific model from which to operate?

3.2.2   Towards a Specific Biblical Model of Church Gatherings

Kimball, in his book "Emerging Worship," (which is a book that I will continually interact with in this thesis) suggests a series of questions based on scripture which relate to the design of a worship gathering (Dan Kimball 2004:10):

1. Did we lift the name of Jesus up as the centrepiece of why we gathered? (See Rev 5:6;and 5:13-14; Col 3:17; Phil 2:9-11)

2. Did we have a time in the scriptures learning the story of God and man? Did we invite everyone to be part of his story today in kingdom living (See 2 Tim 3:14-4:4)

3. Did we pray together and have enough time to slow down and quiet our hearts to hear God's voice and yield to his spirit? (See Acts 1:14; Jn 4:23-24)

4. Did we experience the joy, love and encouragement of being together as a church? (See Heb 10:25; Jn 13:34-35).

5. Did we take the Lord's Supper together as a church regularly? (See 1 Cor 11:20-32).

6. Did we somehow remind everyone of the mission of the church and why we exist? (See Mat 28:18-20).

7. Did we enable people to individually contribute something as part of the body of Christ? (See 1 Cor 12:27; 14:26).

Usually the questions asked by those who prepare for worship gatherings include things such as "What theme should we pick?" or, "What songs should we sing?" or "What announcements should be made?" These are all important and practical questions, but they do not adequately focus around the fundamental biblical reasons why we as a church gather. Church leaders must first understand the biblical model of why our church gathering exists. Here is the model I then propose for this thesis stated in eight points:

i ***There must be clarity that Christ is central to why we gather*** (Phil 2:9-11; Lk 4:8; Rev 5:6;13-14; Col 3:17)

As has been seen, when believers come together, it is ultimately for the purpose of worship. And our worship is directed to God. In John 4:23 Jesus says that: "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (NIV). Here we see that worship is directed to the Father. It is also appropriate however to focus our worship on Jesus Christ who is one with the Father and his exact representation. Philippians 2:9-11: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NIV).

When the church meets it must be understood that Christ is central. It is His church, He is it's head. We gather because of Him, we gather to worship Him and to serve him only. Luke 4:8 says: "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (NIV). Revelations 5:6 continues in this focus on Christ: "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, sanding in the centre of the throne" (NIV). Verse 13-14 goes on: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped" (NIV).

We see that God is drawing all things together under Christ, believers are encouraged in Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (NIV). Every church gathering must have clarity that Christ is central to why we have gathered.

ii *There must be reading and preaching of scripture* (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tit 4 :2)

This has been discussed in the above biblical principles. Church gatherings must be scripture based and God-centred. There must be a "devotion," a dedication and commitment to the public reading of scripture as well as to preaching from the scriptures. Anderson's views here are helpful to remember. We must not deny the importance of sound doctrinal instruction when the church gathers, but we must beware of equating this instruction too rigidly with the traditional sermon as many of us evangelicals may know it (Anderson 2007:3). In most churches one could argue that one man, the pastor, does all of the talking, while all the congregation does is listen. This does not follow the biblical pattern we have seen emerge where God's people are involved in the teaching, reading, and encouraging from the scriptures. Testimonies are a valuable way for the believers to teach and encourage others in the body.

iii **There must be a time of praise and corporate worship** (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)

Because worship is important to God. We will apply this more fully in the subsequent chapters, but this can apply in many different ways. Not just through singing and music, but through prayer, testimonies, preaching, and communion. Music has become an easy language that helps us to express our praise in a corporate manner. Israel sang their praises to God. In the Psalms the people's praises were composed into music and sung together. It is biblical, and it is helpful to unite God's people in a way that can both quite our hearts and minds to focus on Jesus, as well as become an instrument of loud exuberant adoration and celebration.

iv **There must be regular opportunities to serve communion** (Mat 28; 1 Cor 11:23)

One often hears of some who insist that because communion is served so regularly that it makes the act of it less significant. This truly makes very little of the command of the Lord "to be regularly doing this in remembrance of Him," and we would be wise to see that communion is a very accurate measurement of our personal spirituality. Whenever there is a careless boredom and apathy to communion, it is usually more of an indictment on our spiritual relationship with Christ than on the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

v **There must be an opportunity to pray and meet with God** (Acts 1:14:2:44)

Vital communion with God was key in the early church meetings. At Pentecost in Acts 2, the believers were all together praying. At the birthplace of the church in the New Testament prayer preceded the coming of a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit. Sweet in his book, "Post-Modern Pilgrims" (2000) says; "Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by the gods of reason and observation. It is awakening in a post-modern world open to revelation and hungry for experience...It is one thing to talk about God. It is quite another thing to experience God" (Rognlien 2005:8). Church Gatherings that do not create opportunities where people can experience God have a very important element missing.

vi **There must be a reminder of the mission of the church** (Mat 28:18-20)

Whereas not every church service should be seeker-oriented, as we have discussed, it is wise that fairly regularly one presents the gospel in church gatherings. For one, there may have been new visitors that have not yet received Christ as Saviour, and two, it serves as a constant reminder the believers of our mission, which is to be disciples of all nations (Mat 28:18-20). The church is God's chosen messenger for the gospel. As such, the mission of the church must be constantly spoken about and build into the fabric of our church gatherings.

vii **There must be individual participation** (1 Cor 12:27; 14:26)

The church is a body. Each part has a function. In recent times the church has lost its participative qualities that it had in the books of Acts. It is now left to a few "professionals" to perform the services. The church needs to return to a biblical model where individuals are allowed to participate in the worship gatherings. As if to clearly encourage the body toward this end, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 12:27; "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." I doubt many believers would feel they are a part of their church gatherings. They are likely to describe themselves more as spectators than participants. This must change. 1 Corinthians 14:26 is proof that this participation was evident in the early church in Acts.

viii **There must be fellowship for the strengthening of the body** (Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42 tells the story of a biblical church that was strong on fellowship;

> "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (NIV).

This is not a model that can be implemented. It flows out of lives that have come to understand the immense power of fellowship. Fellowship should not merely be something we attach to the end of our church services, like a tea and coffee. Fellowship should become one of the keystones to our gatherings. To do this we must endeavour to design gatherings that are not cold, ritualistic and predictable, but warm, welcoming, and loving. In this atmosphere we are able to create opportunities wherein people develop relationships and take care of one another. This is the biblical mandate.

3.3   Summary

It is therefore my suggestion that the following model for church gatherings be used in churches that wish to follow a biblical pattern:

1) There must be clarity that Christ is central to why we gather.
2) There must be reading and preaching of scripture.
3) There must be a time of praise and corporate worship.
4) There must be regular opportunities to serve communion.
5) There must be an opportunity to pray and meet with God.
6) There must be a reminder of the mission of the church.
7) There must be individual participation.
8) There must be fellowship for the strengthening of the body.
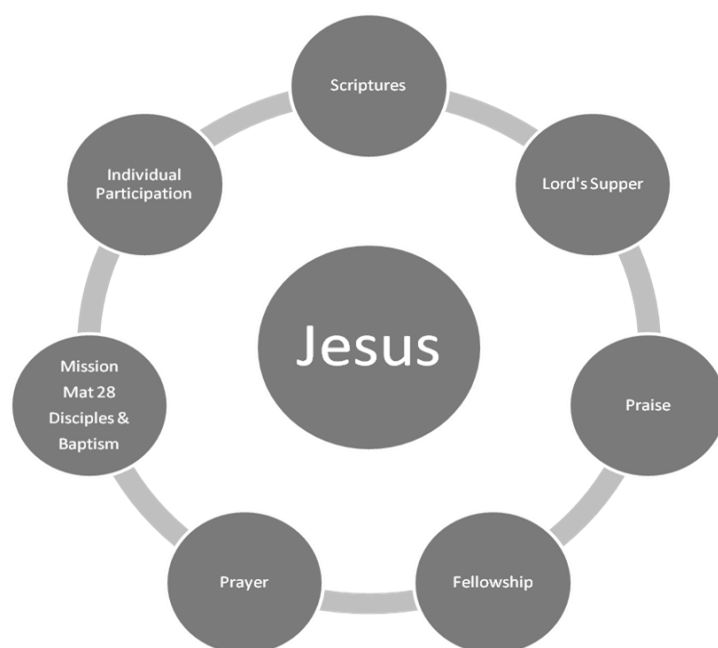
The following figure illustrates this:

Fig.3.1. *Diagram illustrating the biblical model for church services.*

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Chapter 4

IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

4.1 Introduction

For anyone who has travelled on London's underground, the phrase "mind the gap" is very familiar. When it comes to the way many churches in today's society do their church gatherings, there are many "gaps" that deserve equal warning. These are the missing elements of the biblical model (BCG) identified in the previous chapter, as well as essential values, elements and stylistic features that are missing, and they are so important that they literally do prove to be a danger that can cause a church to slip and fall away.

So far we have discussed the problem by briefly glimpsing into the past to see how the early church conducted their meetings, and looking at the present by studying our postmodern context. Then we identified a BCG model. This chapter is filled with my reflections on where we fall short from this standard, and the following chapter will then suggest what a church gathering should look like in order to fill or bridge these gaps to make us come into line with the BCG model.

Willow Creek Community Church, in a very honest and thought provoking book called "Reveal" (Hawkins 2007) identified what they believed to be the weaknesses of their church in keeping disillusioned postmoderns in their church. This is telling due to how this church is so widely regarded as one of the most "successful" churches in the world when it comes to reaching "seekers" (Which this thesis defines as postmodern unbelievers searching for truth). One of Willow Creeks many discoveries in this process, was that postmodern people had six attributes of church services which they regarded as very important to them (Hawkins 2007:105):

1. Compelling worship time
2. Help in developing a personal relationship with Christ
3. Challenge to take the next step in their spiritual lives
4. Help in understanding the bible in greater depth
5. Help in sense of belonging
6. Help in finding a mentor

Interestingly, when people were dissatisfied with these, they felt that their weekend church gatherings had failed in their most important function. And interestingly, they bear a marked resemblance to the BCG model. Although this survey was done in the church and does not give the views of those outside the church, it still reveals the postmodern values which are so often missing in today's church gatherings, and highlights the dissatisfaction of postmoderns who are already "churched."

In drawing from the previous chapter, here are the 'gaps' that I believe are prevalent in our church gatherings today and where we miss the BCG model. Note that the author of this thesis has a truly high regard for the Church of Jesus Christ and does not want anyone to misunderstand this chapter as being derogatory or over-critical. These are simply the gaps (problems) as identified which need to be addressed. There is often a condescending attitude towards traditional models of doing church by those who claim to be more contemporary in their approach, and I desire to avoid this at all costs. I have used the word "problem" to describe the various areas where I believe these gaps are, simply because that's what I think they are. Problems. Problems that can be fixed.

4.2   Specific Features of church gatherings

4.2.1   Problem with the Worship

As highlighted previously, music is the language of the postmodern generation, and as Willow Creek's survey revealed: "A compelling worship time" (Hawkins 2007:105) is extremely important to them. Biblically, church gatherings must have a time of corporate worship that enables the body of believers to express their love to God in Spirit and truth. The issue here is twofold; a church that has not yet recognized their need for relevance, and a church that has misunderstood relevance. Let's look at each individually.

i A church gathering that is simply not in keeping with the times and culture around it musically

Music has always been important to the younger generation. But with postmoderns music has become more than just important, it has become linked to their identity.

For many, music is their best friend; it is the way that they cope with life's problems. Hutchcraft says (1996:24):

> "After listening to some current songs, some adults might ask, "You call that music?" Much of it sounds like screaming. But music expresses what is in our souls...that screaming singer is screaming their scream. For contemporary young people, their music and their souls are tightly entwined. This understanding is important for the man of woman who wants to affect a teenagers life."

This is applicable not just to the teenager, but postmodern people in general. So, when you bring these truths into the context of a church gathering, and the music is a re-run only of hymns and popular choruses from the 1960's-1980's, one should not be surprised when postmoderns express their frustration and disinterest in church gatherings. As we saw in the biblical model however, I am not suggesting a mimicking of the world's style in the church. But if Afrikaans people are the dominant people of our community, then it stands to reason that we think carefully about using mostly Afrikaans songs with a style that is familiar to Afrikaans people. There are still many evangelical churches that have traded the next generation to hold on to their favourite classics. This gap is a big one. But secondly;

ii ***A church gathering which in its pursuit to be contemporary, has completely missed the heart of worship.***

There is a very large portion of churches worldwide which I believe have sacrificed the sanctity of worship, in order to keep up with the culture around them. The seeker service movement has some great dangers in its aim to primarily make the unchurched feel comfortable in church. This worship reform philosophy which was perhaps ushered in by Finney contains three aspects worth noting (Coralie 2009:1):

- He emphasised freedom and innovation over tradition arguing that the bible does not prescribe any particular styles
- He contextualized worship by adapting it to its surrounding culture while removing all "unnecessary" barriers to the audience.
- He reversed the relationship between worship and evangelism.

Many argue that this has led to the breakdown of the church as a family. Where there is no longer need for the whole body to worship together, but rather, one can

worship separately according to your own musical tastes. Coralie says: "The seeker service model assumes that the closer worship becomes to the immediate culture and the further away from traditional church trappings, the better. But the problem is that instead of creating something unique, it may end up identifying itself completely with the ambient culture" (2009:2).

I am convinced that there is a way to maintain balance and integrity in this issue. But many churches go too far. Contemporary worship has to be accompanied by clear, strong biblical teaching about what worship is.

A popular television show around the world is "Idols." It seems that when churches adopt the philosophy of identifying themselves completely with the music culture around them, "worship music" in church gatherings quickly leads to a resemblance of this show, as Kimball suggests (2004:34):

> "We can easily get caught up in trying new worship tricks and cool innovative things in our worship gatherings. We can easily desire to have the best technology, the best sound systems, and the best video's. We can try and impress and please those who sit and watch what we do. This Idol approach to "church" reduces us to performers and reduces church attendees to judges."

It's also valuable to note at this point that proponents of CCM can fall into the very same error as traditionalists. A charge that is often directed at traditional churches is that they lack spontaneity and are boring and predictable, but this can be the very same case with CCM. Contemporary churches can become the same week after week, with a contemporary music style. The worship sets can fall into the very same familiar (boring) order of service.

It is the author's opinion that these churches have slipped into a spectator type of worship where the audience is not there to engage with God, but to critique the music. Coralie sums up how one effectively fills this gap: "The primary point for worship leaders to realize is not how to make worship more appealing and relevant to seekers. But how to make believers engage more fully with their creator and redeemer" (2009:2). CS Lewis said: "A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice… The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God" (Hubbs 2008:i). Cultural adaptation should follow closely behind as a secondary interest. It is however important not to be ignored.

4.2.2   Problem with the Preaching

A few of the Willow Creek attributes of powerful church services touch on the aspect of preaching (Hawkins 2007:105):

- A help in developing a personal relationship with Christ
- A challenge to take the next step in their spiritual life
- A help in understanding the bible in greater depth

As with worship, once again there can be a twofold danger; an outdated ineffective mode of discourse, or an obsession with the notion of perfect relevance at the expense of a doctrinal belief system. Are churches finding the balance? Quoting McLaren, Kimball says: "The way we traditionally expressed Christianity may be in trouble but the future may hold new expressions of the Christian faith every bit as effective, faithful, meaningful, and world-transforming as those we've known so far" (Kimbal:2004:IX).

How we preach biblically to a postmodern generation is something which needs considerable thought and attention. This is of course very controversial. There are those of certain doctrinal persuasions who believe that one should be true to the scriptures by preaching in a traditional exegetical fashion as Robinson "Expository Preaching" (1980) and Braga "How to prepare bible messages" (1981) propose. I was present once when a group of Baptist church leaders were even challenged to repent for not preaching exegetical sermons.

Now although one can firmly hold to the scriptures as the focus of all church practice, I believe that biblically there is a lot of room to adjust ones style of delivery. Postmodern believers are not anti the bible, they want to grow in their knowledge of the scriptures and they are very open to being challenged with its truth. They are open to preaching through books of the bible in an exegetical fashion, if this is done in a way that is practical and applicable to their lives.

But why do so many church leaders still assume that the most effective way to communicate to people is to have one person preach in a manner that is only receptive via a person's ears? It has long been proved that the most effective way to communicate to postmoderns is to use a method that involves numerous learning styles, such as Auditory (Hearing), Visual (Sight) and Kinesthetic (Doing) methods. This AVK approach is multi-sensory. Whilst the Powerpoint® movement has done a

lot to improve on the above, one still feels that there is so much more that can be done to make preaching more interactive and to bring in elements of participation to aid learning.

It is absolutely essential to communicate creatively to postmoderns, Dorrel in a discussion on the usefulness of church gatherings states (2006:122):

> "Though experience, drama, and creativity do not automatically make worship worshipful, they do engage the senses and often create participatory worship that has much more meaning for the truth seeker. While this growing postmodern generation rejects meaningless rationale and routine liturgy, they gravitate to experiences that engage them through various art forms, discussion, and exploration of their faith. Movie clips, historic paintings, debate, skits, meditation, and reflection are finding new interest in churches that traditionally defined worship with a choir special, testimony, and sermon."

So it seems that although worship is widely regarded as being the "main" area that needs work in today's church, preaching is a gap that needs to be addressed in just as great a fashion.

4.2.3   Problem with the Lord's Supper

In preparing for this thesis, a small localized survey was done with postmoderns through the medium of Facebook® in order to find their views on various elements of church services. This comment was received which sums up postmoderns attitude toward communion well:

> "Communion...I don't really get the whole communion vibe. I understand it and what it's all about, I just think the little glasses and pre-cut bread make it a bit impersonal. I don't know what it is, but communion to me feels lifeless. Like a 'and then he took the bread and broke it yadda yadda yadda for our sins...okay, eat.' 'and then he took the cup and yadda yadda yadda...okay, drink...' There's no meaning, but I do it and I'm sincere and I believe in what the bible is saying, and every time I take it I do so with a proper understanding of what I am doing, and with a sincere appreciation to my God for what it means. But I've noticed it just feels 'cold.' I want warmth. I want intimacy. I want to see the leaders are sincere in a glowing kind of way. I want to see people at church glowing. I want it to burn."

That expresses the heart of this generation so accurately. They love the concept of communion, and the relational fellowship time that it represented in the biblical

model recorded in the early church, but they feel there is a disconnect from what it is meant to be. Many would be willing to do it far more regularly if it were not conducted in the routine manner in which it exists in most churches today. This comes back to the BCG model. There must be regular times of communion, but sadly in most churches it is conducted in such a routine ritualistic fashion that it is approached with indifference.

4.2.4   Problem with the Liturgy

In most contemporary churches, the historical manner of worshipping has basically been ignored. This is ironic, because among the youngest of the postmodern generation, there is an appreciation of the ancient heritage of the church. Perhaps this is a response against the church becoming like a modern business. Kimball says (2004:92):

> "A revival of liturgy and other ancient disciplines, when brought back with life and meaning, are a desired approach to worship in the emerging church. I'm not suggesting we abandon all contemporary forms of worship and music. I'm simply suggesting we don't ignore 2000 years of church history."

There are many biblical liturgies that focus on the centrality of Christ and teach solid doctrine. These can be revived in BCGs, bridging the gap that exists between the church of the past and the present.

4.2.5   Problem with the Announcements

It has long been my opinion that the church notices in a gathering are one of the most poorly planned items. Often they constitute fifteen minutes of monotone rambling which is often not being listened to, especially by postmoderns. This is because, once again, church leaders assume that the most effective way to communicate notices is to address one's ears alone and to keep doing them in exactly the same manner each week with little thought given to creativity, which is such an important trait to postmoderns. Announcements can be made to fit into the church's mission. They can be a reminder of the mission of the church. They can be an exciting dynamic way of expressing what is taking place within the body.

4.3   General features of church gatherings

4.3.1   Problem with the Strategy

When one looks at the healthiest churches today, one is almost always able to identify that they are churches that have clarity around their mission. Once again, do they line up with the BCG model? What is the church gatherings purpose, strategy, and process for making disciples? Do church gatherings fit into this overall biblical "plan?" Healthy BCGs are church gatherings that have been aligned to the purpose of the church, (hopefully a biblical one) and the people all understand what this purpose and strategy is, and they all work toward it.

Likewise, the unhealthy churches do not have a clearly defined mission (or purpose). Mission statements are pie in the sky ideals that do not truly connect with the members on the ground. In this, one notices that there is confusion around where the worship gatherings fit into the overarching purpose and mission of the church, and even the leaders cannot accurately convey their churches vision.

4.3.2   Problem with the Focus

Linked to the strategy is the focus. When thinking about biblical mission, one must know who is the church trying to reach. Knowing your strengths as a church, who you long to reach, and defining who your target is, strengthens your ability to reach them. There is much to say about the dangers of viewing the church as a business that "markets" itself and uses a marketing approach like this. But marketing in itself is not wrong; it's the motive behind it which is often at fault. Paul did this in his desire to reach the Gentiles. The church does want to represent Christ well; we want to represent Christianity well. This is the heartbeat of the church's missions thrust of Matthew 28. It is marketing in its purest form. Reising suggests the usefulness of marketing and strategy. Many churches have not got this right (BR 2009:iii):

> "We are fishers of men. Like good fishermen, we must start by understanding the type of fish we are going after. Then we determine if you need a net, a rubber worm or a fly lure. The target is found from being open to understand people and hear God's voice. He is crying out for all of them. He has equipped you for reaching certain ones with a unique gifting. Who are they? Is your church equipped to serve them? The method (how you actually "do church") follows the target. Get this. This is the most important thing. The

method follows the target. What colour should the carpet be? How long should we worship? What should we preach on? What should the logo look like? It all becomes easier. Who you are trying to reach? Once you know who you are pursuing, how to pursue them becomes much more clear."

Biblically, in his mission, Paul was a brilliant marketer. He targeted certain people and tried to be "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22 NIV). He would adapt his message to meet up with their culture. Reising uses a very telling example of two famous target marketers from the secular music world (BR 2009:iv):

"Eminen is a mid-thirties rapper who has a number of platinum albums. In America, if you asked anyone from age fifteen to thirty if they knew who Eminem was, you would get over a 90% familiarity rate. Eminen is extremely targeted and he has almost fully saturated his young, pop-culture target. As a result, everything that he does is extremely aimed at the values of a decade's culture and style. If you are 65 and know who he is, odds are, you do not like him. He does not care. You are not his target. He dresses young and angrily and he raps young and angrily. He appeals to the young and angry."

"Now lets look at Josh Groban. He is in his mid-twenties and sings with operatic undertones. A significant amount of you knows who he is, but, despite his youth, he is just as (if not more) likely to have sixty-year-old women listening to his music than he is a sixteen year old. He wears linen suits or nice jeans with a wool turtle-neck and a sports coat. He sings songs of love and inspiration. "You Lift Me Up…" His target audience is spread wide amongst ages and styles. He will never reach a 90% familiarity rate with any one group. He does well by spreading his style thin to reach a little of a lot. This is in juxtaposition to Eminem who reaches a lot of a little. They both sell millions of records, but they both have different target audiences."

So, a church that wants to be successful amidst the postmodern generation needs to know how to commit themselves to specific people groups (Targets). And linked to this, they will need to determine the appropriate styles by which they determine to pursue them. Those that determine to aim for a wider range, like Josh Groban, had better understand that it will require an extraordinary amount of skill to do it. But, those who like spiritual Eminen's focus on one group and develop an attractive style for that group can succeed in knowing the values of that specific group.

This is where one encounters the very difficult matter of the idea that "A blended service will please everyone." The author is not convinced that it can. This is something that many church leaders are still trying to work out. Does one attempt to keep the body of Christ together, and run the risk of having everyone becoming

disillusioned? Or does one create controlled divisions in the hopes that this will spare a runaway one? I am convinced that the answer lies somewhere in the middle where one is able to meet the spiritual needs and stylistic needs of each generation in their own gathering, but then still place emphasis and importance on the greater church body, where young and old can come together and be willing to compromise their specific preferences for a blended service. The problem comes in where too many churches do not have both. Either postmoderns are excluded, or the modern traditionalists will be. And sadly, often it is one or the other. Much wisdom is needed here.

4.3.3   Problem with the Venue

From the biblical model we have explored, we have come to understand that church services do not exist primarily for evangelism, but primarily for the people of God to come together to worship and fellowship (To love God and to love others). But one wonders how much more the church would be effective in its evangelistic calling if people who design church gatherings understood the true mission of the church and brought the church to the people, instead of trying to drag people into it. "Skatechurch" in the USA Pacific Northwest is one such example. They hold church inside an eleven thousand square foot skate park (Ashley 2005:32). They have brought the church to a postmodern skating subculture, and as a result they are reaching a generation in a creative way with their church gatherings that may never have happened without a willingness to rethink their venue.

From a postmodern outsiders' perspective, stepping through the doors of a church into a building that is unfamiliar and foreign can be very intimidating. This "ground" is not "neutral" to them. For social or business gatherings, everyone will tell you in today's world that a meeting place is always important. Outsiders are most likely attend something when it is held in a place that they feel comfortable with. I am not suggesting that every church goes and sells its land and buildings to meet in "neutral" local school halls, but if our church gatherings want to attract postmoderns the location should be more 'safe' for them. This is a significant gap in our churches today. Most Christians would not be willing to make themselves uncomfortable by meeting at a location that is more comfortable to others.

4.3.4   Problem with the Atmosphere and Aesthetic

Biblical worship is not about having the right props, but Kimball suggests that "Emerging generations in our churches today desire a very different kind and form of worship experience to express their worship to God" (2004:26). The atmosphere of a gathering is tremendously important. This would include such things as the way the room or auditorium is designed in which the church gathers to worship. In church history, a tremendous amount of trouble was taken to design church buildings that felt special and sacred. They were the artistic masterpieces of their day. In modern churches, there tends to be a focus on the practical more than the aesthetic. It's often the cheapest or the most practical which wins. Not that which is functional and aesthetic. So the atmosphere within the church gatherings of a modern church would be stark, plain, and practical. Aesthetic values are considered to be unnecessary because that money is better spent elsewhere.

The problem with this philosophy is that it whist it works for the moderns who fill our churches, it does not appeal at all to a postmodern who values the way something looks. For a modern church practicality would suffice. For a postmodern, it must be something that you can see and experience, it must feel good and look good, it must be a multi-sensory experience. Space, lighting, feel, and ambiance are all aesthetic details that are important to postmoderns, and are missing and ignored in most churches today. I am not suggesting that one must be petty here with decoration, but one must not downplay the role of what makes a room visually sacred and conducive to worship.

There is a caution though, as with many postmodern things, there is an odd counter that is seemingly contradictory. This generation is also quick to discern the genuine from false. There is a certain sense in which "looks don't matter" to them. They value looks, but if they do not fit, or feel right, if they are not genuine, authentic and real, they will be quick to reject looks, not on the basis of external appearance, but it's internal one not matching up. In terms of the BCG model, this gap is important as it can often be the life or death or corporate worship and individual participation of postmoderns.

4.4 Summary

These gaps are important to recognize. There is a discontentment among postmoderns that cannot be ignored. The disconnected generation has to become connected by dealing with these problems by building bridges of solution.

There will need to be a freshness in the pulpit, which may not involve a pulpit. There will need to be serious thought and freshness given to technology, worship, strategy, focus, venue, aesthetics, liturgy, preaching, announcements and the Lord's Supper. The church will have to find a new vision for its gatherings. And it won't be a case of "Church has never looked this way before," because it might have. It will need to look like a retro eclectic mix of elements that resembles a mosaic of sorts.

But the church that ignores these gaps will do so at the expense of reaching a generation, which makes it all the more difficult to reach the generations after this one.

WHAT DOES A RELEVANT BIBLICAL
CHURCH GATHERING LOOK LIKE TODAY?

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the gaps, the chasm of issues that exist in churches today. This chapter will explore how to bridge these gaps. The following metaphor from Hutchcraft describes this well (1996:38):

> "As we explore the heart condition of postmodern young people without Jesus, we, in essence, are looking at them from one bank of a broad river. On our side of the river are the men and woman "whose hearts God [has] touched" (1 Samuel 10:26)...The challenge is this: The young people who need us are on the other side of a great divide. Teenagers (And all postmoderns) today know almost nothing of the world of Christians – and Christians know almost nothing about the world of teenagers (And all postmoderns). They have never been further apart. So Christians...who want to make a difference for the lost must figure out how to build a bridge into the lives they have been called to rescue."

There are a few important principles to understand before we can suggest what a relevant biblical church gathering looks like.

5.1.1 Is new really better?

The danger here is that we begin to think only in stereotyped forms and assume that new is always better. In asking postmoderns about what they think of newness I came upon some surprising truths such as; "I often find myself longing for substance and tired of newness," and "I am tired of gimmicks and flash advertising." Once again, being new or old does not seem to be the issue, the issue is authenticity.

So when designing a relevant biblical church gathering, one must ensure that everything "old" that is good, does not get sacrificed on the altar of newness. One must try to become objective and true to scripture regardless of one's personal preferences. For example, as a worship leader I constantly battle against a notion in church services that spontaneity equals spirituality, and that everything new is good,

and that everything old is bad. This is no so. CS Lewis had a lot to say about the dangers of Novelty (Hubbs 2008:i):

> "Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they don't go to church to be entertained. They go to use the service, or, if you prefer, to enact it. Every service is a structure of act and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do those things best – if you like, it 'works' best – when, through long familiarity, we don't have to think about it...the perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but on the celebrant. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude it, the question "What on earth is he up to now?" will intrude. It lays one's devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was 'Feed my sheep, not try experiments on my rats, or even, teach my performing dogs new tricks."

The author is fully aware that as one tries to identify these gaps in church gatherings, that these suggestions may be viewed as novelty for novelties sake. A more apt view is to see it as adaptation, for the sake of the gospel reaching a new generation.

5.1.2   Is relevance the most important thing?

The simple answer is no. Relevance has been a buzz word for a while now in contemporary evangelical churches. It is often considered to be so important that all else follows in its wake. Many church leaders love what it embodies - reaching people where they are, understanding their world, beginning a relationship that leads them to Jesus Christ. But relevance can become a bad thing when studying the culture becomes less important that studying the scriptures. This is where the BCG models form and meaning principle is helpful to keep in mind.

A good thing becomes a bad thing when it's made into the main thing above God. Some churches have chased after relevance and ended up looking fancy and professional, full of glitzy programmes, but empty in terms of genuine life-change in their churches. Church leaders who want to make sure they get it right, must hold to the good biblical principles of relevance and not forget that ultimately, they are designing church gatherings for the purpose of spiritual growth for people.

Are people growing in Christ? Are people authentically meeting with God and being changed? Those are the most important things, not entertainment and pseudo spirituality. Rainer, in a very thought provoking book on the church states that: "Simple church leaders are designers. They design opportunities for spiritual growth. Complex church leaders are programmers. They run ministry programs." (Rainer 2006:26). The church of the 21st Century has to design church gatherings that create opportunities for spiritual growth, not simply entertain.

5.1.3 What this Model is not – "A Seeker Sensitive Model" or an "Emerging Church Model."

In recent years there has been a lot of discussion around seeker-sensitive church services, and now even more recently, the emerging church.

Seeker-sensitive services, and I use the word "service" to describe them deliberately, aim to design church services that are appealing and attractive to non-believers. Whilst these kinds of "services" can be effective for evangelistic purposes, some would argue that they create "shallow" believers, and that they do not adequately cater for mature Christians, which as we have ascertained in the earlier chapters, is one of the primary reasons why a church gathering exists.

The BCG model is not seeker sensitive in that it does not place the emphasis on "seekers" alone. One could say that in every church there are "Veterans" (Mature Christ Followers), "Beginners" (Immature Christ Followers) and "Seekers," (Non-Believers who are interested). A healthy biblical approach to church gatherings does not favour one group over the others. It recognizes that each person is valuable, and that each person has a role to play in the body.

The emerging church is a movement that is even newer. It is made up of a growing number of young pastors who are seeking to function as missionaries to postmodern culture. I applaud this aim. Smith (2005:49) believes that it rose out of Christian leaders who were carefully looking at issues of postmodernity and modernity and their impact on culture. Individuals such as McLaren and Jones are key leaders through a mass of literature that has sprung up on the topic. Through this literature, the emerging church has quickly developed its own identity. This movement has come under a lot of praise for its missional and thought provoking heart for ministry, but it has also come under heavy criticism for what many believe

to be its liberalism in the "selling-out" of the gospel and biblical doctrines rather than simply "reaching-out."

Because of the dangers of each of the above two approaches I want to draw from the strengths, and avoid the dangers. I want to be able to hold in tension the unchanging biblical truths of evangelical Christian theology, and be open to the many different ways of showing and speaking this truth to postmodern culture. As many new young Christian leaders have been saying; we must learn to reach out without selling out. There is no excuse for liberalism. There can be no rejection of fundamental biblical doctrines. When churches slide into this focus on culture alone, one quickly sees how doctrines, such as the death of Jesus Christ being a substitution for our sins becomes downplayed, and practices such as homosexuality become acceptable.

I would like to distance myself in terminology from both of the above approaches, but draw from both of their strengths. Added to this, as seen in the earlier chapters, worship is primarily the task of believers. Church gatherings need to be relevant however in "moving" believers of a previously un-Christian postmodern worldview, to a Christian worldview. The next point describes essentially what I mean.

5.1.4 Staying true to the biblical model, learning from the past, engaging the present, and looking to the future.

In our church gatherings, I believe that we should make sure that we are following the biblical imperatives, learning from the strengths and mistakes of the past, engage our present culture, and be aware of the ever changing future. So what is this relevant BCG model? What is its motivation? Reiner and Geiger suggest that the church is in need of an extreme makeover. They describe the story of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18 as a leader who brought God's people through an extreme makeover (Reiner 2006:79):

> "First he removed the high places and cut down the Asherah poles (2 Kings 18:4). Basically he threw out the altars that were set up to make-believe gods. He took out the godless clutter that had been competing for the attention and the affection of the people. Most church leaders are willing to do that. This move was surely understood by the nominal worshippers in Hezekiah's day. They would expect the leader to insist that the people worship God. Eliminating pagan idols is one thing, but what Hezekiah did

next was controversial. Many church leaders would struggle to emulate his next move. Surely, people in his day struggled with this next change. He broke the bronze snake that Moses had made – on purpose. He did not just drop it and claim it was an accident. He broke it to pieces...Yes, it was the special and sacred snake. The snake that was crafted and held by Moses. The snake that God had instructed Moses to make. The snake that was the source of the salvation for the people from their snakebites (Num 21:6-8). He got rid of it because...the people worshipped it. It took the attention away from the real saviour...What was once a good thing became an idol...The tool for worship became the object of worship."

It is not an exaggeration to say that many of today's church gatherings are in need of an extreme makeover. The original tools, programs and styles have become the problem in some cases. We are in need of 21st Century Hezekiah's who are not afraid to do the unpopular thing which may be viewed as radical to some, but pleasing to God.

This chapter shows how to implement the BCG model practically in the postmodern era. Contrary to what one might think, it is not as difficult and daunting as it seems. Take this story noted by Frost and Hirsch that bucks many of the sad trends we hear about around the world today, where we see businesses buying off church buildings for secular premises (Frost & Hirsch 2003:9):

> "Recently it was reported that a congregation in a small rural town in Australia had taken an innovative step toward reaching its community. A Melbourne newspaper announced, "Patrons of the Hamilton Hotel will soon be offered spirit of a different kind. In an unusual conversion, the town's Baptist congregation – who are teetotallers – have taken over one of the six pubs." The Hamilton community watched in amazement as the pub located on the main street opposite the local post office, was bought by the Baptists and renovated into a church and conference centre. Its front bar was turned into a recreation area for young people and its dance area was rebuilt into a chapel and meeting room. The bar was transformed into a coffee bar, the old pub now becoming an alcohol free building."

5.2   General Principles for a Relevant BCG

In order to negotiate the challenges of the postmodern culture flooding into our society, there are some general principles which can be the difference between the churches that sink, and those that swim and make bridges to the lost world.

5.2.1 A BCG aims to be relevant to Jesus and the scriptures before all else (Jesus is Central)

In the battle for this generation, we have to learn the simple truth that people need Jesus before all the fancy trappings. Give them Jesus. Focus on Jesus. This is what relevant BCGs look like. When you focus primarily on all the peripheral issues, you won't get anywhere with this generation. Paul says in 1 Cor 2:2: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (NIV). In the Church at Corinth, Paul could have given a wealth of advice on how to be relevant to the church in a city that pulsed with life and sin and new culture and practices. Yet he kept Christ central. His focus was on Jesus.

A Jesus focused BCG keeps the church from sinking into the culture around it. Naturally this emphasis on Christ must be doctrinally correct. (Such as; Jesus Christ is the son of God; he died as a penal substitution for the sin of mankind; and he rose again and overcame sin and death). There are many unbiblical ideas about Christ which need to be corrected. So one of the warnings one must heed in designing relevant BCGs is to keep Jesus clearly in focus, when he blurs, we slip into selling out completely to the culture around us.

Kimball states: "Many modern contemporary worship services are more anthropocentric (*Regarding humans as the central element) than christocentric (*Jesus as central element). Jesus' name is mentioned here and there, yet he is almost a side issue to the real focus: learning basic principles about living a better life." (2004:94). (*Authors explanation added). This is one of the ways we can see a distancing of this model from a seeker sensitive model.

Church leaders who want to design relevant BCGs need to keep Jesus at the centre of every aspect of the service. Worship leaders ought to ensure that they are not setting themselves up as contemporary 'idols,' as well as the preachers. A BCG makes sure that Jesus stands out over and above these individuals. They must be eager to see him increase and be willing to decrease through emphasising him and 'disappearing' behind him. One of the ways this might look, is to not have the worship team leading from the front stage area as is very commonly done, but from the side where the main focus can remain on something directing the congregations

attention to God. The preaching and prayers will also reflect this focus on Jesus, as well as the arts, which we will come to shortly in this chapter.

But a BCG is also relevant to the scriptures. I am interested in the significant growth of churches such as Mars Hill in Seattle where the emerging generations are being effectively reached and drawn into BCGs where no sermon by Pastor Mark Driscoll is ever shorter than an hour. This church has committed itself to holding fast to scripture, and yet still connects with the post-Christian urban culture around it. The church is reformed in doctrine, and radically contemporary in practice. This emphasis on the scriptures is crucial in a relevant BCG. One might argue, how is this different from a traditional evangelical service where there is also a strong emphasis on the Word of God? The primary difference is the manner in which a sermon is delivered. We will discuss this further when we cover the need to communicate creatively.

5.2.2 A BCG maintains a healthy balance between out-reach and in-reach

One can argue about the faults of seeker sensitive church models, but the truth is they have grasped a love for the doctrine of the mission of the church – evangelism and discipleship of new believers. Even in the challenges around the emerging church movement, one can still appreciate the fact that these approaches see church as mission. One can likewise criticise the error of a church that only focuses on the care of its members in ongoing equipping and fellowship, yet they have also grasped a valuable biblical truth. A healthy relevant church is one where the leaders design services in such a way that there is a healthy balance between their out-reach (Evangelism and discipleship) and their in-reach (Fellowship, care and mentoring).

This is a very difficult balance to maintain, and provides a leadership challenge of great proportions. But God has gifted individuals within the body who can wisely navigate this path. Churches need to identify those within their local congregations who are able to lead church gatherings in such a way, that mature Christians can grow and develop and fellowship, and that there are opportunities given for people to give their lives to Christ who may never have done so before.

It would appear that in the Pauline churches there were times when unbelievers were present with the believers at their gatherings (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Likewise, we never know when outsiders might possibly visit one of our church gatherings who do not know Christ.

5.2.3   A BCG makes use of an E.P.I.C approach (Multi-sensory / AVK)

The EPIC concept is an approach that Sweet suggests in order to maximise "presentation" to a postmodern church gathering. Carson (2005:40) sees this as the "mantra" of emerging leaders. Sweet suggests that when creating worship gatherings for this generation, that one needs to use the following methodology, summed up in the acronym EPIC (Sweet 1999:185):

> E - Experiential
> P - Participatory
> I – Image Rich
> C - Connected

I truly believe that the urban emerging South African generations are open the gospel. They are a "spiritual" generation that are looking for truth, community, and a way to express their faith. Our difficulty is not so much in reaching them, as it is in creating worship gatherings that enable them to worship God and encounter him. It's creating these environments that pose the challenge.

Do not misunderstand this to be saying that the essence of biblical worship needs to change, or the essence of preaching needs to change. Worship must be biblical worship. Preaching must be biblical preaching. But presentation is extremely important to postmoderns. Here again, some might argue that surely God can use someone whose presentation is lacking. Of this there is no doubt. When the Holy Spirit empowers a person in ministry it does not matter how well their presentation skills are, God is able to do what he wants, how he wants, and use whomever he wants to accomplish it. But this does not mean that those in leadership positions have the luxury of thinking they can skimp on hard planning and creativity. Leaders must make sure that they present in such a way that will connect with people in their church gatherings. AVK is an acronym which was mentioned earlier and is said to aid in learning:

A – Audio (Hearing)

V – Visual (Seeing)

K – Kinesthetic (Doing)

When one is able to communicate in A, V and K, it is far more effective to postmoderns than simply presenting an audio presentation.

This is where Sweet's suggestion on using an EPIC approach is valuable. Reich in an article on how to create worship gatherings, uses the example of a dance club he once visited, and looks at it through the lens of Sweet's EPIC approach (YS 2009:ii):

> "This club had EPIC written all over it. When you walked in the front door, there were palm trees overhead, sand under your feet, and waterfalls to give you the idea that you were really in Jamaica. The first area was the island room. It was right on the beach with tiki torches and more palm trees. The band was playing island music while people danced on the beach. If you walked further, you could walk out onto a pier and sit in little rafts in the ocean while talking to other people. As you continued down a hallway, there were several bars and tables where you could sit and talk. In the main room was the dance hall. The first thing you noticed when you walked into the room were the lights and the loud music. In the centre of the room was a bar with 10 large TV screens above it playing videos of the people in the room dancing, of the band and DJ, and of people surfing. In front of the room was a large stage with a movie screen above it. The night started with a DJ who played dance music and a band who played cover songs. They continued to switch back and forth. There were large balloons floating around the room that people were hitting when they came close to the ground."

Please note that neither Reich nor this thesis is saying that church should be like a dance club. The Church should not seek to mimic the world, Church is church – a gathering designed to meet with God, and the people of God. It is holy, sacred and set-aside. But the points Reich makes from Sweets approach are valuable. He points out how this club makes use of the EPIC approach.

i BCG's should be experiential.

The settings must be "sensory-rich." There should be music, images, and even smell, touch and taste. Postmoderns are tired of talking, they want to "experience."

They want something that is interactive, and experiential. They want to experience something they have never experienced before. Can it be said that when people come into church gatherings that they experience something different? This is something that is kinaesthetic (Participative or "doing"). Sweet says (1999:211):

> "Preachers must learn how to body forth their sermons. When reaching postmoderns, it's not enough to know how to "write sermons." One must now learn how to create experiences – or more accurately, work corroboratively with a team to construct spaces in which the Holy Spirit can create authentic experiences of God...if you can't go to church and pass briefly from this life into the next; then I can't see why anyone should go."

How do you deliver an experience in a church gathering? This is a good question; one cannot manufacture an experience for someone else with God. But one can create an environment that is conducive in helping someone open their hearts to God. God then has to do the rest. Sweet says: "I learnt in seminary how to craft sermons. I am learning now how to craft experiences" (1999:211). Preachers in services must become "visual poets," communicators that can use music to stimulate and inspire. BCG's must use communicators that can help postmoderns to "breathe", and to express their emotions to God.

One is amazed at the number of young people today who are diagnosed with attention-deficit-disorder (ADD). One can imagine how many of them are simply dying for a kinesthetic experience in church. They won't learn from the modernistic lectures from the pulpit. They require experiential worship to help them learn and grow in Christ. There is a great desire amongst postmoderns for an experiential faith. Is the church up to it?

ii BCGs should be participatory

At postmodern clubs there is movement and dancing, and you can sing along with the music played by the DJ or the band. In a church gathering that is too cautious to give the microphone to anyone other than the pastor, one cannot expect to have postmoderns growing, and learning in church gatherings. Interaction is extremely important in a BCG. We must allow postmoderns to participate in our services.

I was once completely shocked at hearing that one of the reasons for the growth of the religion of Wicca amongst postmoderns, was because it was a faith that allowed

so much participation. In evangelical Church gatherings, how can one justify the neglect of the biblical teaching on the priesthood of all believers? Postmoderns have a longing to be-long. One becomes aware of the challenges around this when a church grows, but it is still possible with careful creative planning. Postmoderns desire to feel like they are a part of something; they want to feel like they are making a difference at being at church gatherings. A BCG allows participation in many different ways in its services.

iii BCGs should be image rich

Picture and aesthetic are important. Visual features are critical. It is not surprising the way that Christ taught, using parables and metaphors to explain theological truths. In today's church, big screens, banners and great lighting are extremely important. If you look at a club you will see video screens mounted all over the room with images being presented. This means that along with our explanation of the doctrines that we present in an audio manner, we need to provide a picture to sum it up. This is why the use of metaphor and story is so powerful in communicating to postmoderns. We get our concepts and thoughts across so much better by using images (Photo's, videos, Powerpoint® slides). We live in an image-rich culture so we need image rich church gatherings.

iv BCGs should be connected

At clubs, opportunities are created for people to sit and talk with others and build community. When you are at a club, there is a sense of connection to the other people who are there. There are pictures of everyone shown dancing on the screen. There is a sense of unity and connection when everyone sings together. This is a challenge, because to some postmoderns, they place more importance on first "belonging," then "believing." In our churches we want to create places that are welcoming and loving, but be clear in our teaching that believing is very important.

Some churches use coffee shop style set ups to create this kind of atmosphere. After the services there are foyer type areas that are made to feel like a coffee shop with tables and chairs where people can listen to music, talk and connect with one another. There are many who are wary of this "cafeteria style" church. One should understand that principles such as reverence and awe are still important biblical truths which are taught in scripture. God does care how we do church, and we need

to be wise to design church services in a way that can still convey these important values, yet still provide an atmosphere in or around the gathering that can promote connection, which is a biblical principle.

5.2.4 A relevant BCG understands the value of utilizing marketing principles and professional design

Clothes date, so does decor, architecture, fonts, art, hairstyles, and a whole host of other things in life. All have noticed the poor individual who is unaware that they are proudly sporting a look that is not fashionable anymore. Many churches don't realize it, but they are still sporting a look and style of the past. So many postmoderns view the church by and large as outdated because of this. One must understand that although fashion dates, the gospel does not. The Word of God does not date, but churches that insist on not changing can date. The question is should we be concerned with this? In short, yes. One must be aware of the meaningless pursuit of being trendy, but one must also be aware of the foolishness of not keeping up with the times. Church leaders today would do well to heed the wisdom from the men of Issachar in scripture, who understood their times and therefore knew what Israel had to do (1 Chron 12:32). Reising (BR 2009:ii) shares some interesting thoughts and concepts here which I summarise:

BCG leaders are designers. They design opportunities for spiritual growth. But BCG's also recognize the importance of designers in terms of printed materials, visual arts, architecture and other aspects of church gatherings. Churches are not meant to be fashionable, but there is something scary about the church that is still sporting a look that is completely out of sync with its community. This is not about biblical values and morals, but stylistic features. If the primary leader does not know about these things, someone on the team needs to understand it and be talking to them about it.

Warren (Kimball 2003:7) gives the following advice: "Never attach your church to a single style; you'll soon be passé and outdated." The aim is not to be the "coolest" church on the block, the aim is to be a relevant BCG, but along with that, we don't want the community to be thinking that we are the church that have lost track of what century we are living in. An interesting trait of postmodernism young people is

that they purposefully try to buck the fashion system. They know how to stand out, or, how to blend in, and they are a generation that wants to stand out. Just look at fashion today and you will see what is meant here. Postmoderns understand how to get attention through style and design.

Many churches today sadly do not recognize the importance of good design and style. They still perceive those things to be insignificant features of church life. Yet when those same individuals become clients in the business world, or go shopping, they expect well presented design and signage. Reising (BR 2009:i) believes that when postmoderns see good signage and design their expectation levels go up. They become impressed. They ascribe value to that organization or company. Style and design and professional signage all speak volumes to a postmodern about the mind of your church. Subconsciously it tells visitors, "This church does things properly, it is financially organized and stable, and it is relevant to my time." Or it says; "This church does not understand what's important to me, the cheaply photocopied handouts reflect that they are probably not financially strong, and the style of the design implies that they were more relevant to individuals living in years gone by."

I have been amazed at how small inexpensive design changes that make the church look more contemporary and professional also boost the morale of the church members themselves. There is a pride and recognition to when something is done well.

Reising says this; ask yourself this question, "Does our signage attract and tell the story that we are a church for "today"—or does it indicate that we are the church from a time gone by?" (BR 2009:vi). I am not saying that marketing and design is the solution to church growth, but it does play a big role.

Before I went into the ministry I trained as a Graphic Designer. I have come to realize that the design of a church's bulletins, pamphlets, welcome packs, stationary, and decor, all sends a message about the identity of a church. Walking into many church gatherings today, you find that the artwork is all inconsistent. They have various logos and styles that are different for everything they do. Often, this is

a reflection of the fact that the church does not know who they are, and who they are trying to reach. As a designer, I know that another reason is because lots of churches are not willing to use a qualified designer, but jump around substandard ones in order to save on cost. When it comes to doing church in postmodern culture, design is not something to skimp on. Today's churches need a reality check: Every single church is marketing itself through its artwork, some are just doing much better than others.

5.2.5   A relevant BCG recognizes that Space Matters (Venue & Room)

Rognlien says (2005:78):

> "It has been said that we shape our worship space and then our worship space shapes us. From the time people enter the place where you are holding worship, the ambient characteristics of that space will affect their experience. There are pro's and con's to every kind of physical setting. Each of us has a worship space that works for or against our purposes to some degree at any given time. The size and shape of the room, it's configuration, the furniture, the lighting, the temperature, the colours, and even the texture of the surfaces all impact the experience of worshipping in that place."

In the same way that design matters with printed materials, it also matters with other stylistic features. Particularly the venue. A good thing to do in evaluating a venue is to see it from a visitor's perspective. Walk into the venue, sit in the seats the visitors would sit in. What is seen? Things might look good from the vantage point behind the pulpit, but what is it like in the seats "down below." Are they comfortable? Are they clean? Is there enough room? Is the feel of the venue warm and pleasant, or cold and dingy? For postmoderns who value aesthetics, experience and community. Does the venue ooze those kinds of characteristics?

Lighting is absolutely critical in this. Correct lighting creates an atmosphere that set's the scene for wonderful worship, or it can detract from this. Once again, this is not saying that one places so much emphasis on this that without good lighting no one can worship God. But using stark halogen style spotlights pointing straight down onto the congregation from the ceiling, lighting up every single crack and wrinkle in the entire venue with a bright luminous glare, might not be the most conducive to creating a special time of worship. Rather, one wants a setting that

creates a feeling of warmth, safety, privacy, peacefulness, and beauty. In this kind of environment it is just easier to worship.

Other features to consider are architecture, the way that the building is designed. The way that the platform area is designed. Some churches are abandoning the traditional design of having the "stage" area in the front, and are setting up tables and chairs around the room, with a raised platform in the middle. This allows for more interaction. The speaker or music team are able to interact in a far greater way. In many ways the people feel less like an audience and more like participants. It also fosters a better sense of community. A good venue and set up can strengthen and enhance relationships and community, or it can have the opposite effect. Whilst I love the "sacred sense" one gets in Cathedrals and traditional churches, and can think back to many wonderful memories worshipping seated in pews, I must concede that this format does not lend itself to community. Our gatherings should enhance our purpose, not work against it.

Once again, this is not a "new" idea. Throughout history church architecture has changed with culture. From the meetings of the early church in homes, to larger buildings such as the Roman Basilica's. Pews and pulpits were introduced as elements in use by concurrent Roman and Greek Cultures. Then Cathedrals were introduced to remain congruent with culture. Stained glass windows and Hymn books were all thought to be "emerging forms" of worship at the time.

In the 21st Century we have seen churches take on the form of theatre-like auditoriums with galleries, in keeping with cultural norms. In the USA we are now even finding multipurpose facilities, churches that are used as gyms and sporting facilities during the week, but are in actual fact church buildings that are trying to get outsiders "into the church." These multipurpose venues are then used for church gatherings on Sundays.

So it is to be expected, as we move into a postmodern era, that new architectural designs are to be found. I am expecting architecture to take on a greater natural world emphasis. With postmodernity's disappointment with what technology has brought – I predict that we will find secular architecture and church buildings that are more in touch and a part of the natural world around us. Sweet quotes a Wall Street Journal Cartoon, which says; "If your generation doesn't learn to save the

planet, it won't matter if my generation can't learn to read or write" (Sweet 1999:330).

In SA in many churches we do not have the luxury of creating a wonderful worship space – we have to make do with what we have. Perhaps that is not a bad thing. Sitting on a hill under a tree is about as postmodern as it gets. In many churches there are things that simply cannot be changed, but then there are many inexpensive things that can be changed with a little bit of creativity and work. These small changes can make a lot of difference. The addition of some colourful lights can work wonders, some new cleverly designed painting can change the way a room feels. A change to the seating plan can also completely recreate a room.

In an ideal financial situation, professionals will say soft tungsten™ lighting for the general seating area with focused and concentrated lighting on the platform area. Colour can be used on a backdrop to the platform as well. This gives a functional light for seating without highlighting the venues bad aesthetics and the concentration on the platform attracts the attention there.

5.2.6   A relevant BCG uses language that is understood by people in their community

Fortunately much has been said in recent years about the danger of "Christianese" in church gatherings. Unfortunately, for many church leaders it has not yet sunk in that words such as "anointing", "predestined" , "saved", "omniscience", "redeemed", "lost", "called", "sanctification", "iniquity", "sin", "apostle", "epistle", "consecrate", "transgression" and "intercession," are not understood by people who are not in the "Christian loop."

It creates a significant problem because it has an effect that is greater than individuals simply not knowing what a word means. It leads to confusion, a sense of exclusion and unimportance. Simply put, it creates walls between us and people that are completely unnecessary. Even the age old "God is good"... "All the time" mantra is totally unfamiliar to many people. I, for one, am not against teaching this generation the valuable meanings of words such as "justification" and "propitiation", the meanings of these words must not be lost to evangelical churches. But we need to make sure that we are explaining what they mean, in order to build bridges and

cut our Christianese down to a minimum. Reising says with good Christianese: "your church might be good at winning over other Christians, but you will leave a lost and dying world dying to know what you're talking about" (BR 2009:v).

5.2.7   A relevant BCG knows how to employ atmosphere to full effect

The atmosphere that a church gathering creates and sustains is very important. Once again, this does not devalue the power of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This sense that God is among his people and is working in power is the primary church atmosphere that we want to promote. Church leaders need to know how to maintain momentum in church gatherings by using testimonies of what God is doing. We must continually pass on this information of what God is doing. It comes through the announcements, the preaching, the door greeters, and those that leave the meetings with changed lives. The atmosphere of the churches culture must be attractive and promoted.

5.2.8   A relevant BCG revives liturgy, ancient disciplines, Christian seasons, and Jewish roots (Kimball 2004:92)

This is another seemingly blatant contradiction, but the eclectic nature of postmodern people makes them value certain things which the modern generation threw out and discarded from their church gatherings. The word "Liturgy" is often highly misunderstood. The following definition from YS (Youth Specialities) is helpful as it shows that in essence, liturgy is something that is done by all of us (YS 2006:i):

> "For most of us, the word liturgy evokes images of robes and rituals well beyond our mere mortal understanding. Some might even think that liturgy is the ball and chain that keeps the Church from really fulfilling the mission Jesus gave us -- to make disciples. In reality, liturgy is exactly the opposite. Liturgy is the structure through which our communities encounter the Living God. Liturgy is the plans we make and the procedures we take to prepare a service that insures a solid connection with God, each other and the family of faith. Even though we might be uncomfortable with the term, liturgy is what all of us do when we come together in a corporate setting to worship God."

So Liturgy is not the "bad thing" that many people think it is. If the church wants to create relevant BCG's, we need to be willing to try "new things" with "old things." Liturgies can be revived and be used in fresh and dynamic ways. BCGs welcome and embraces elements such as the Lord's Supper, in it the church follows the pattern of a great biblical heritage.

There is also great value to be found in using creeds in church services, when they are done with sincerity and life, they can be tremendously meaningful. Recited prayers can create a wonderful sense of unity and comm-unity. The Taizé gatherings in France are a perfect example of this (http://www.taize.fr/en), where every year hundreds of young adults flock to their gatherings to worship God with "old" music. Taizé is an international, church community that uses very easy to sing, scripture based meditive songs that are chant-like. They also use meditative prayers to encourage intimacy and devotion to God. One would assume that this "monk-like" liturgy and spiritual discipline would not appeal to 21[st] Century young adults, but they love it, and many flock there regularly every year.

Likewise, The Boiler Room Prayer Movement - BRP (http://www.boiler-rooms.com/cm/) part of the 24-7 prayer movement is another such example. These prayer gatherings which are much like church gatherings, use all sorts of liturgy, props, art, music, creative walls, to create an environment to foster prayer amongst a generation that is multi-sensory. Here is a quote from their website (BRP 2009:i):

> "One of the emerging and most creative aspects of the 24-7 Prayer movement has been the rediscovery of liturgy. Not only have people been returning to existing liturgies, but they've been writing them as well. The liturgical tradition links 24-7 directly with those mad punk monks, our forerunners, the Celts. A Benedictine monk once noted that liturgy is a means by which God can fill the space it creates in our lives with his glory."

There is also a growing practice to use special historical Christian seasons in church gatherings, such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. The secret is in "breathing new life" into what once became simple routine. A revival of the church's Jewish roots is also growing, with a focus on Passover and a Jewish Messianic perspective of the Scriptures.

5.2.9   A relevant BCG has a clear simple strategy and focus

Rainer and Geiger (2006) make a compelling argument based on their survey of all major denominations in the USA. In this survey they find (Survey Company:EDCOT©:www.edcot.com) that dynamic, healthy, growing churches stick to a very simple, clear, and defined purpose, strategy and focus. In no ways do they presume postmodern culture to be simple, but they are convinced that postmoderns want life to be simple, and church too. They use cultural secular "stylistic" examples of Apple™, Google™, Graphic Designers, and Interior Designers. They even show how Jesus was simple, clear, and succinct in his purpose and strategy. Their prime point is to show that churches that are "over-programmed", "complex", "multi-focused" with numerous strategies, are not usually the vibrant growing churches.

All have recognized that Nike™ used branding that was ahead of its time - "Just do it." It was crystal clear, it was aligned with their purpose, and it gave focus and movement to their company. All great individuals and organizations have been focused. These are some practical suggestions which may be necessary to implement if we are to create relevant BCGs.

- Eliminate unnecessary programs around your main church gathering.
- Stick to one main thing as a church.
- Remember what the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe said; "Less is more" (GB 2009:i)
- Cut the number of special events that you run around your church gatherings.
- Use your main worship gatherings to do your special events strategically if it fits your overall purpose. In other words, funnel new ideas and events into your existing church gathering rather than creating new meetings.
- Make sure that your church strategy is easily communicated and remembered.
- Be willing to say "no" to anything that would "complexify" and run contradictory to the primary focus of the church.
- Unite your various departments around your purpose and help them to see their connection to the weekend services.

5.2.10   A relevant BCG emphasizes prayer and intimacy with God

BCGs know how to incorporate prayer into their "services." The BRP movement has shown how passionate emerging generations are about prayer in church gatherings when it is done in a way that is more creative than a cold stark room with chairs placed in a circle. In many evangelical churches, each moment of the church gathering is taken up by some or other item. Each church has their own particular order of service, and often very little time is "planned in" for prayer and for opportunities to quiet ones heart before God, or to get on ones knees to confess sins. There is usually always something else filling up the time that is more important than free times of prayer. Why do so many churches not allow for extended times of prayer? BCGs factor this in and plan this important time into their gatherings, so that this time is redeemed and is not the first thing to be cut when the timing of the service becomes an issue.

5.3   Specific Attributes of a relevant BCG

It must be noted that by the term specific attributes, this does not meant that there is one specific approach to worship in a BCG. But there are certain values which are important and are common to most relevant BCGs.

5.3.1   A BCG Plans Extensively (Mid-Week Design Meetings)

The importance of planning cannot be over-emphasized if one wants to create BCGs. It is my opinion that one of the primary reasons that we do not see more churches flourishing in reaching emerging generations, is that in order to design church gatherings that are creative, dynamic and powerful, one needs to spend a tremendous amount of time planning, and putting in the effort to make those ideas a reality. New ideas often surface in planning meetings. When you get a passionate group of leaders together, you can truly come up with some great ideas. This is the great advantage of planning. There are two aspects I want to highlight here. Firstly, a leadership structure for planning BCGs, needs to rely on the gifting of the body. It is very difficult for a single pastor to plan for relevant BCGs when the church begins to grow. When the church is small, this is still possible, but even here the pastor needs to ensure that he is drawing from the gifting of the body in the planning process. In today's evangelical church it is typical for pastors to plan the church gatherings in isolation. They pray, and then decide what to preach on. This process

might be popular, and the easiest, but to me it is also the laziest, illogical and impractical method to prepare a worship gathering in its entirety.

As most evangelical churches base their entire "service" on the sermon, worship leaders generally have to wait for the pastor to tell them what he is going to preach on, which often is something which is only finalized close to the end of the week before the weekend worship gathering. As a result, songs are usually picked before the sermon is finalized. Therefore any ministry items or drama's or video clips are thrown in at the last minute if there has been enough time to do so. This allows no room for whatsoever for creative planning and an opportunity to design the church gathering as a holistic picture. Kimball offers this table of shifting values between a modern and emerging / postmodern church planning process (2004:104):

Table 5.1 *Shifting values in worship planning*

MODERN	EMERGING / POSTMODERN
The Senior Pastor determines what is taught in worship services.	The Lead Pastor involves both the church community and the staff in determining what is taught in worship gatherings.
The sermon is the centre of the worship service – music and anything else are "extra"	The combination of many creative elements experienced in community points to Jesus as the centrepiece.
The Senior Pastor gives the Worship leader direction for enhancing the sermon with music and other creative elements.	The Worship Team (Including the Lead Pastor) direct the design of the worship gatherings.
The weekend service team consists of the Senior Pastor and Worship Leader alone.	The Weekend Service Team includes the teacher, the musical leader, the artists, the photographers, the video and Powerpoint team, the sacred space team, etc.
Creativity causes stress to the Pastors who own it. They must always outdo what they did last time in order to please people.	Creativity causes relief and lack of stress as worship gatherings become more fluid, more naturally creative, thanks to the efforts of a team of people.

The one point that cannot be fully agreed with is Kimball's view that the sermon is only one of other equally important elements in a church gathering. Whilst I can agree that elements such as communion, dramas etc all convey biblical

"messages," there is still something special about the Word of God being opened and taught to God's people in a challenging and prophetic manner. This is arguably one of the greatest forms of worship when people submit themselves to hearing God's voice. However, the planning process, that Kimball highlights, is one that is tremendously valuable. And relevant BCGs draw on the combined prayer, gifting and creativity of a team of individuals to help set the preacher on his or her course. This team approach to planning should be evident in all other elements of a church gathering. Here is a diagram which serves as an example of a large church's structure through which they plan for their worship gatherings (Rognlien 2005: 223).

Fig.5.1. *Leadership planning teams for church gatherings*

Relevant BCGs implement teams and plan with the involvement of as many individuals as they can. This is also where the second point comes in; in most church gatherings too little time and attention is put into the planning of the "Order of Service." I have learnt it is best to over-plan, and allow for spontaneity, than under-plan, and fail.

In Appendix B, there is an example of an "order of worship" from a church gathering which is very relevant in terms of the model we have been discussing.

Practical planning meeting suggestions:

- Involve your congregation in the planning process for what you do in your church gatherings. Find out what their struggles are, their hurts, and their dreams. This will be a great help in planning church gatherings that are relevant to them. True, some might argue that in preaching through the bible all these aspects will come to light. But it is my opinion that we can get a very good idea of where our people are at, simply by asking them.

- Meet in a comfortable room where a big team is able to "brainstorm" and come up with good ideas. Props such as whiteboards are very helpful in this process. Ideally one would want leaders from the various teams that are involved in the gatherings to be present at this. See Fig.5.1 and Appendix C.

- The facilitators of this planning process should make every effort to use communication methods that allow the creativity of the entire group to come to the fore. For example, Participlan® is a planning method where one makes use of small pieces of paper to capture everyone's thoughts. These then get stuck onto a wall which everyone can see and engage with. The advantage of this process is that individuals on the team, who are usually less vocal, are also able to contribute to the planning process without being ignored due to the dominant individuals on the team.

5.3.2   A BCG Worships Experientially (Music & Arts)

In his book, "Experiential Worship," Rognlien (2005) sets out a profound thesis in terms of how to create worship gatherings that engage the "whole person." He works from the basis of Mark 12:30: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your Soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (NIV). Out of this he suggests that BCGs create worship gatherings that focus on a holistic perspective of a person – where there is a focus on the volitions (choice or will), emotions (emotive expression), cognitive (intellectual) and physical (concrete tangible expressions such as ritual or sacrament). Are we creating worship services that represent all of these various aspects? BCGs need to create worship

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opportunities that help people to become fully engaged. Rognlien uses the following table to illustrate how various emphases have been promoted by various historical movements (2005:22):

Table 7.2. *Worship emphasis of various historical movements*

HISTORICAL MOVEMENTS	ASPECT EMPHASISED	INTENDED RESULT
Orthodox/Catholic/Anglican	Physical	Specific Actions
Lutheran/Reformed/Bible Church	Intellectual	Clear Understanding
Methodist/Baptist/Evangelical	Volitional	Concrete Decisions
Pentecostal/Charismatic	Emotional	Powerful Feelings

Rognlien, aware that these are broad generalizations, suggests that when we gain this "bigger perspective" of biblical worship across traditions and throughout biblical history, we step towards experiential worship. The ideal being to offer a worship experience that encapsulates each of these various aspects of worship. One must never forget that the ultimate purpose of worship is to encounter God.

Postmoderns have grown weary of worship that is un-authentic, non-transforming, and non-powerful. A relevant BCG puts tremendous effort and planning into making sure we pour energy into doing our part to making worship meaningful and experiential.

Practical experiential worship suggestions:
- Designers of church gatherings should pick worship songs that emphasize a holistic approach. Songs should include aspects that require physical actions, intellectual understanding, concrete decisions, and encourage worshippers to respond emotionally. Church gatherings must engage people on all levels of human experience, heart, soul, mind and strength.
- Get people to move around during the worship gathering. In so many evangelical worship gatherings, people just come in and sit, they are not required to participate in any way, and they do not leave that spot until the gathering is over.
- Visual worship experiences are greatly under-emphasised in churches today. In ancient times believers were astounded by beautiful architecture, stunning paintings and frescoes lining the walls and ceiling. Stained glass windows

caused beautiful beams of light to flood the meeting places with strands of colour and contrast. A church gathering must saturate itself with compelling visuals if it wants to create a worship experience that is multi-sensory for the postmodern era.

5.3.3 A BCG Fellowships Authentically (Lord's Supper)

As we have seen, if we want to remain biblical, in touch with our heritage, and eclectically relevant to the emerging generations, we need to revive Communion as a central part of our worship gatherings. When we do, we must ensure that we do it in such a manner that it does not become a boring ritualistic routine. If we were to do an honest survey across evangelical churches, I am fairly certain that we would find that many feel that we have turned the Lord's Supper into a predictable act that has lost its beauty. Surely it is not the sacrifice of Jesus that has lost its beauty and power? BCGs in the postmodern culture know that we need to make sure that the Lord's Supper once again finds its central place in church gatherings.

The Lord's Supper suggestions:

- Use a table in the shape of a big cross. Set up candles on top so that the cross glows (Idea from Kimball 2004:94).
- Use it as a time for people to quiet their hearts.
- Use it as a time of reflection and prayer.
- Give opportunities for people to offer words of thanks to God.
- Set up the Communion so that people have to walk to receive it.
- Set up many round tables in the church venue where people can sit and eat like they would have dinner at home. They can serve one another and pray for one another.

5.3.4 A BCG Communicates Creatively (Preaching & Announcements)

A BCG has to communicate creatively or the message will not be received. Warren says; "The world changes, but the Word doesn't. To be effective in ministry, we must learn to live with the tension between those two" (Kimball 2003:8). In discussions with various emerging church leaders, it has become apparent that the

traditional format of one person preaching, and everybody else facing that individual is not the most effective means of ministry to postmoderns. To emerging generations this format feels like a class or a lecture. The question must be asked why would they want to come to a church gathering that does this and requires them to sit and statically listen for approximately forty five minutes? They run from this format because they get it every day of the week at School and University.

As to whether the Word of God needs to be brought and preached is not up for discussion. That is a given. But surely there are other ways that enable more participation, more creativity, in a way that is not associated with the boredom of the classroom? Harrington writes (YS 2009:i):

> "Reaching this new world isn't going to be done in the same old ways, because today's teens have no basis for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of how the world worked for the previous generations. It used to be that the main organ for working out what was true was the ear. Someone would stand up at a pulpit, four feet above contradiction, and tell us what we didn't know. Because our enlightened worldview meant that facts and rationality were everything, we would bow to their superiority if he could prove he was right. Hence the great reliance on book-based teaching and knowledge. Today, however, all that has been swept away. The new generation has a different organ for receptivity—and the eyes have it."

Postmoderns do not want to be "talked down to" anymore. In this consumerist society in which we live, people are exposed to thousands of advertising lines every day. They are receiving hundred of messages coming at them from all directions. What makes our message different? In essence, they are dying to see something that works. Our preaching needs to show this.

Another concern which is noteworthy is the style of presentation of sermons. Pastors are taught at seminaries in hermeneutics classes to use a certain tone and words which are often drawn out, and intended to create a "holy" or "powerful" effect. This tone is more likely to confuse postmoderns and cause them to think that the communicator is not authentic. For instance, when emphasis is placed on certain words, like, "We neeeeeed, to get baaaaaack to the Biiiiiiibbllllllllee!" The second half of the last word is lowered in tone and drawn out.

A preaching style that is going to be most effective with postmoderns is nothing simpler than normal conversation. As we have noted, postmoderns are looking for

authenticity, and this conveys that. Even the word "preaching" carries a lot of negative connotations for many younger people. None of them want to be "preached at." In a relevant BCG, "preaching" should be done in a normal conversational manner. Ideally you want those who have listened to the message to feel like they have had a normal one to one conversation with the preacher, and feeling like they too have interacted with them.

Another typical traditional sermon presentation is the three point sermon. For postmoderns, they are likely to be counting down the numbers once they know how many points have been introduced. Likewise, Powerpoint® is a great tool, but it cannot be the only measure of a "contemporary" sermon. Once again, preaching needs to be conversational and creative. Interestingly, we never really hear of Jesus preaching three-point or seven point sermons, he just spoke.

In a format that fits our world, Rob Bell has released a number of short "sermons" which are concise, portable, and powerful. These are a perfect example of how to communicate creatively to the postmodern generation. These video sermons are called Nooma® (See http://nooma.com/), a series of short films that explore the world from the perspective of Jesus. I am convinced that in our church gatherings we need to communicate in a new format. The message remains the same, but the method needs to be adapted. The same old gospel is still the power of God unto salvation, but the delivery needs to be reformatted. Video is one creative medium to communicate with emerging generations because it is a format that the screen generation is so familiar with. But there are many other ways to make communication creative and dynamic.

Then there are announcements. It may seem tremendously odd to discuss announcements. But church gatherings always have some form of announcements. Rainer and Geiger say this about these: "We have learned that the announcements given during worship services can tell a lot about the church. They are typically a good indication of the priorities of the church. During the announcements, people hear what is going on in the church. People are asked to participate in something else" (Rainer 2006:54).

Some churches give a lot of announcements. They can sometimes constitute about twenty minutes of time in a service. Churches need to think carefully about how to do announcements. For one, twenty announcements will never be remembered. They need to be short, sharp, to the point, and creatively presented in a way that it's interesting and remembered.

Practical creative communication suggestions:

- Church communicators need to learn the value of preparing with teams of individuals rather than trying to plan by themselves. Yes, it is true that as mature and trained leaders we often know what is best to teach from the scriptures, but spending time with others can give us an accurate view of our particular churches thoughts and needs.
- Using technology and social media to communicate with key leaders and staff via Facebook® Twitter® or email can be tremendously helpful in coming up with creative plans to determine what scriptures to preach on, or themes to address.
- Constantly be on the search for good teaching metaphors. Metaphors are powerful in conveying truths, just like stories and parables. Teachers of BCGs are always on the look out for metaphors which can aid in their teaching.

5.3.5   A BCG Evaluates Regularly (Mid-Week Debriefing)

There is an old cliché; "What gets evaluated, gets done." Measurement of how church gatherings are really going is very rare. The principle of an after program debriefing is incredibly important. Many times church leaders are aware of problems that they notice in a given gathering, but because they never have a "fresh in their mind" opportunity to raise these issues and deal with them, they quickly become forgotten and neglected, and the problems persist. Leaders need to take time on a regular basis to evaluate the church gatherings. Everything should be discussed.

Practical evaluation suggestions:

Arrange a regular meeting where you can get the various team leaders together and discuss the gathering and ask questions like the following:

- Did the gathering go according to the plan discussed at the planning meeting? If not, why not? In what areas can this be improved?
- Are we in line with the overall vision and purpose of our church gatherings?
- How did the time of worship go? Was the leader able to carry the congregation into a place where they truly praised the Lord? If any, what were the problem areas, and how can these be fixed?
- Was the sermon creative and to the point? Did the preacher "connect" with the congregation? Was the sermon free from Christianese language?
- Were all the various elements of the service streamlined into achieving the vision God gave the leaders for the church gathering?

Ultimately however, we must be asking deeper questions than simply; "How well did the preacher preach?" Or, "How nicely did the worship team play their music?" Ideally we should come back to the questions highlighted in the section on BCGs from Kimball (2004:10):

- Did we lift the name of Jesus up as the centrepiece of why we gathered? (See Rev 5:6; and 5:13-14; Col 3:17; Phil 2:9-11)
- Did we have a time in the scriptures learning the story of God and man? Did we invite everyone to be part of his story today in kingdom living (See 2 Tim 3:14-4:4)
- Did we pray together and have enough time to slow down and quiet our hearts to hear God's voice and yield to his spirit? (See Acts 1:14; Jn 4:23-24)
- Did we experience the joy, love and encouragement of being together as a church? (See Heb 10:25; Jn 13:34-35).
- Did we take the Lord's Supper together as a church regularly? (See 1 Cor 11:20-32).
- Did we somehow remind everyone of the mission of the church and why we exist? (See Mat 28:18-20).

- Did we enable people to individually contribute something as part of the body of Christ? (See 1 Cor 12:27; 14:26).

Here are the practical applications for how to implement an innovative, creative, and daring BCG.

5.4 To implement a relevant BCG a church must have the right leadership

In recent years the church has enjoyed a fresh new focus on leadership. There is a wealth of literature and training on leadership available for churches. Gaining and growing the skills for leadership is immensely important, but knowing in what direction to lead the church is exceedingly important. By now this thesis has identified a direction in moving the church towards relevant BCGs. But how do leaders implement these ideas in churches that may not be ready for the changes that are necessary? In short, through prayerful, wise, careful, risk-taking leaders.

5.4.1 The leadership must have vision from God

One of the greatest mistakes that many church leaders make is to copy a model that they see that was effective in another church context. Hoping that it will achieve the same results in their church, they harshly institute the structure, and practices that they saw evidenced in the other church, much to the shock of their church members.

It is the author's belief that each church needs to seek God for vision as to what He desires from their own particular congregation. A BCG in the postmodern era is not about following the trends that we see in other churches. Each church needs to seek God for what he desires for them and their local body. We seem to forget so quickly that each church has a very particular context, that is not always so easily labelled as simply postmodern.

Churches are made up of greatly diverse subcultures. Communities, especially in SA, are no longer made up of the same kinds of people, with the same kinds of backgrounds. Hence it is vital that a church does not allow itself to slip into "man made" plans for how to do church gatherings.

When approaching how to move towards relevant church services in the postmodern era, one must first seek God and find a vision from him for each particular unique local church.

5.4.2 The church must put young emerging leaders with potential into leadership service

An age survey of church boards is all that is needed to see this need. Often the elderly leaders are extremely wise and solid theologically, but they lack an understanding of the emerging culture around them. Churches need to ensure that they get young blood onto these leadership teams, and that these do not become token positions, but that their voices are taken seriously. The usefulness of youth pastors should not be underestimated in this role.

Church leaders should also find ways of including young people in decision making around issues of church gatherings. The older leaders must not distance themselves from this, but should also actively participate and bring their wisdom and experience. No one should be pushed to the sidelines.

5.4.3 The body must have APEPT leadership (Apostolic, Prophetic, Evangelic, Teaching)

APEPT, a term coined by Frost and Hirsh (2003:165) is essentially another term for the traditional "five-fold" ministry found in Ephesians 4:1-16. It summarizes these leadership functions with an acronym:

A – Apostolic
P – Prophetic
E – Evangelistic
P – Pastor
T – Teacher

Frost and Hirsh define each one as follows (2003:169):

"Apostolic Function: Usually conducted translocally, pioneers new missional works and oversees their development

Prophetic Function: Discerns the spiritual realities in a given situation and communicates them in a timely and appropriate way to further the mission of God's people.

Evangelistic Function: Communicates the gospel in such a way that people respond in faith and discipleship.

Pastoral Function: Shepherds the people of God by leading, nurturing, protecting, and caring for them.

Teaching Function: Communicates the revealed wisdom of God so that the people of God learn how to obey all that Christ has commanded them."

In meaning, I am completely agreed with Frost and Hirsh (2003:175) that this biblical model is genius in that it calls for church leadership teams that design church gatherings to be entrepreneurial (Apostle); questioning (Prophet); recruiting (Evangelist); humanizing (Pastor); and systematic (Teacher). A church that wants to practically apply a relevant BCG model must have these giftings represented on their leadership team.

5.4.4 The leaders need to have five important qualities

In addition to the biblical gifts mentioned above. There are five other practical qualities that are advantageous. In a SA context, the African bush gives some vivid leadership metaphors. Frost (2008) lists ten leadership metaphors of which I have identified five that are pertinent to practically applying the BCG model in churches today:

i BCG leaders must be like the Eagle and see the big picture

Leaders which apply BCG's must see the big picture of the church in the same way that an eagle has a birds-eye view of the world. They must have a unique perspective on incarnational missions to postmoderns and see the whole church gathering puzzle and how it fits together, rather than just the individual pieces that make up a gathering.

ii **BCG leaders must be like the Lion and work as a team**

Just as lions hunt in packs, so too should leaders work as a team in order to bring about church gatherings that are biblically grounded, and culturally relevant. Leaders that are not willing to work in a team context will not be able to create the creative gatherings that the postmodern generation so eagerly desires.

iii **BCG leaders must be like the Elephant and communicate well**

Elephants are known for their ability to communicate to one another in a deep manner that is not yet clearly understood. Likewise, church leaders need to have the proper attitude, one of genuine care, and a desire to nurture the people of God, that motivates genuine communication. Without this, the missional heart behind creating BCGs is misunderstood and seen as divisive.

iv **BCG leaders must be like the Spider and create a networking structure**

In a very interesting perspective on leadership structure, Frost uses the web configuration of a spider, to represent the way effective leadership functions in emerging generations. The constraints of this thesis do not allow for a study of Church leadership structures, but the traditional hierarchical models are not necessarily the most biblical. The following diagram illustrates Frost's suggested approach (Frost 2008:38):
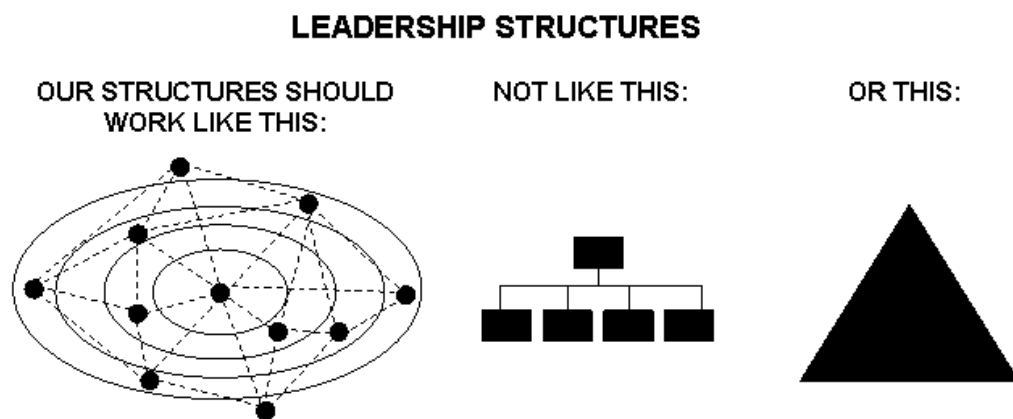
LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

OUR STRUCTURES SHOULD WORK LIKE THIS: NOT LIKE THIS: OR THIS:

Fig. 5.2. *Leadership structures appropriate for creating relevant BCG's*.

v **BCG leaders must be like the Leopard, able to strategize and implement plans**

Leopards spend a lot of time in the visioning, strategising and planning stages on a hunt. The speed at which they execute their "kill" or "plans" is comparatively very short. The Leopard teaches us the value of strategy. We must define our vision and plan our goals and activities to get us there (The stepping stones), but we must be aware that sometimes the goalposts move, just like prey. So we need to have the element of flexibility. We also need to constantly review. Frost says; "There is no point in creating a wonderful vision and plans to give effect to it if there is no process of review, refocus, correction and reimplementation" (Frost 2008:112).

5.5 How to get started

5.5.1 Evaluate your context.

Missionaries are trained to study the culture in which they are going to work. They need to know the language, spiritual beliefs, cultural values and demographics of that people group. The contemporary evangelical church needs to redefine its view of missions entirely and wake up to the fact that it needs to become a missionary movement into its own backyard. Churches that want to create relevant BCGs must study their local missions context and apply incarnational ecclesiology. A missional church must take postmodernism seriously.

5.5.2 Select a team

Churches need to put together teams that are functioning in their gifting and passion. They should display the characteristics mentioned earlier in this chapter. Kimball says: "The days of the solo leader are gone. We still need leadership. We still need decisions being made. But we need to approach all emerging worship gatherings and ministries with much more of a community approach. It can't be based on the gifts of one or two people" (Kimball 2004:68).

5.5.3 Think out of the "Christendom" box

Inner city churches in SA need to awake to the realization that people live in the suburbs over the weekends, and work in the cities during the week. Church gatherings do not only have to happen on Sundays. The biblical principle of Sabbath rest is not negated by holding church worship gatherings during business lunch hours in the cities. Churches can still hold to Sabbath teachings yet meet at other times.

Church venues are also something that requires a rethink. Frost and Hirsch encourage church leaders to "abandon the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world and to recognize that people today are looking searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption" (2003:10).

5.5.4 Decide on plan to execute in your church

Once this team of interested, gifted, and self-motivated leaders is drawn together and has sought God, understood their context, and God's biblical plan for church gatherings, they should decide on a plan of action to implement a relevant BCG in their community.

The way that each church will construct this may be different. Some may wish to transform an existing church gathering, others may desire to create a new gathering altogether. Perhaps it will become a church planting drive or some other ministry formation.

5.5.5 Communicate, communicate, communicate

But when there is consensus the leadership should ensure that they clearly communicate to the rest of the church. With the radical nature of emerging church gatherings, relevant BCGs are open to a lot of misunderstanding and criticism. The leaders should know exactly why they are pursuing their course of action and be willing to communicate this clearly to the body and seek their support and involvement.

5.5.6 Try it out.

Once planned, test it. It is unwise to speak of starting a new service when one is not sure of the interest that it will gain when tried. Numerous churches have started through a small group which initially would meet for prayer and bible study, or an event to reach the unsaved in a particular area. Test the harvest field.

5.5.7 It does not have to happen every week.

Creating multi-sensory, creative, dynamic church gatherings can become exhausting to organize and implement on a weekly basis. It can wear a team out. Many churches have opted to create these relevant gatherings only once a month. Every church gathering is well planned and creative and multi-sensory, but they give it their all to create a truly amazing gathering once a month. There are many different options here, and a decision must be made based on your local situation with staffing and volunteers.

5.6 Dealing with emotions and conflict along the way

There are some glaring opportunities for conflict to emerge around issues relating to change in attempting to be relevant to culture. Change often results in conflict. Even in churches where you have good people, tensions rise around issues of style. Music that is relevant to the culture has always been a hot potato, but being relevant involves rethinking even more than just the music, so one can imagine the possibilities for frustration to develop.

The following conflict issues will perhaps most clearly be evidenced in a scenario where a local church decides to turn one of its existing church services into a more culturally relevant gathering.

5.6.1 Relevant BCGs can produce conflict because of the familiar versus unfamiliar.

There is a strong sense of security with the familiar and when this is absent it just doesn't feel right to those who have grown close to the Lord through many special moments experienced through a particular style. One must know how to incorporate the right amount of new elements so as to not allow them to become distracting or

frustrating. CS Lewis wrote: "I can make do with almost any kind of service whatever, if only it will stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship" (Hubbs 2008:i).

Familiar music brings back good memories and experiences, unfamiliar, and it's a recipe for frustration.

5.6.2 Relevant BCGs can produce conflict because of a freedom and form clash

Conflict can arise because liturgy is constantly changing. From the birth of the church until now, the church has had to adapt to stay relevant to the context in which it finds itself. So any new method should never be seen as a "great hope" because soon that methodology may have to adjust to a new changing community. But some "sacred cows" need to be replaced at times. One of these interesting changes within the liturgy of worship services in the 21st century is that there is a desire to be free of form. Freedom is seen as being of the "Spirit." Form and structure is considered restricting and suppressive. Worship Services that are conducted with military like precision are frowned upon. I am of the opinion that both hold benefit, but the people of this new generation are restless for a freedom – and the previous generation cannot understand this. The two worlds collide and conflict erupts.

5.6.3 Cultural wariness of authority causes resistance to change

Our culture today is one that is very wary of authority. There is much resentment toward authority figures. The message out there is that if you dislike or disagree with authority, you can disrespect it. Pastors or leaders who try to bring a change to the church ministry find themselves up against a firm opposition with attitude.

5.6.4 Choosing of "popular" marketable leaders over Godly ones.

Within today's more "flashy" churches – a great worship leader is not necessarily one who can lead people into the presence of God; they simply need to market themselves well to the demographic group that the church wants them to reach. The big questions are; are they "sellable" to the young people? And do the old people

like them too? If yes, you have a winner. You have to admit, there is something very wrong with this picture. For the church to steer clear of worship wars they will have to learn to steer away from simply finding popular people and be more eager to seek God in worship, no matter who is leading the music. God does not always pick the popular to do his work.

5.6.5 Crashing existing church cultures

Culture crashing is when a pastor or a worship leader enters a new church that has got an established culture around their music and ways. If someone comes in and tries to radically change the culture – conflict is about to erupt. This is often seen when attempts to make very old churches very young, or to make a traditional church suddenly very contemporary. My personal view is the same as Susek's: "You have every right to develop any cultural style you want, provided you start your own church. But when you crash an established church, you seriously violate Christ, ripping the garments of his bride. That's sin" (1999:97). When this happens - conflict is inevitable.

5.6.6 Selfish ungodly personal preferences

When people cannot get what they want, people get nasty. Susek says (1999:105):

> "One thing clearly emerged that is common to human conflict: People deify their opinions, which results in throwing off moral and spiritual restraints, because their opinions feel right. And when the freedom of opinion leads people to believe they can have the right of judgment, they take wrongful liberty of expression. This leads to massive destruction."

5.6.7 Finding common ground

It is critical that as church leaders we find the common ground between those of various opinions within our congregations. This applies to traditional preaching methods and more contemporary preaching methods, to TWM and CWM. Marva Dawn is quoted by Frame (1997:157):

> "When we agree that God must be the subject and the object of our worship, we discover that the bitter war between "traditional" and "contemporary" styles misses the real issue. Both can become easily idolatrous. Enthusiasts for CWM are right in seeking to reach out to persons in the culture around us and in rejecting tradition that has grown stale. Those who value the church's

worship heritage are right to question the faithfulness and integrity of many CWM forms and to seek a noticeable difference in worship that underscores the church's countercultural emphasis. Only in a dialectical tension of tradition and reformation can we ask better questions to insure that worship is consistent with the nature of God as revealed in the scriptures and in the person of Jesus Christ."

5.6.8 Make wise practical decisions

Do not be afraid to make use of multiple services with different styles. Barna has pointed out that (2002:4):

"The churches most likely to have worship-related problems are those that utilize blended music, which is a questionable attempt to please everyone at once. It appears that the use of blended music merely reminds people of the fact that they have to share the music space with others who cannot tolerate their own preferences – just as they cannot tolerate those of others. The reliance on blended music seems to actually fuel rather than dampen the fires of discord. Other recent studies we have conducted even show that people are less likely to feel connected to God in a blended service than in one that uses a single style of music."

5.6.9 Teach the people about biblical worship gatherings

Believers who attend church gatherings must learn that they cannot demand that the entire worship service be for them – it's for God. Barna writes (2002:4):

"Many church people fight about music because they have yet to understand the purpose of music in the worship process. That lack of insight causes them to focus on and fight for their preferred sound, instruments, presentation techniques, or their desired order of service. To often, church leaders get caught up in the fuss."

Teach your church to participate in the worship gathering even if the style isn't their favourite. The message of unity that is sent out when young and old come together is an incredible witness to the postmodern culture.

5.7 How to know when the local church has become a relevant BCG

One can obviously see in many ways when a church gathering is relevant to the culture around it. But there is one measuring tool that stands out above the rest.

5.7.1 When your church members love to invite outsiders.

I am convinced that many people in our churches long for their friends to find God and to have their lives changed by him. But I am also convinced that many people in evangelical churches have never invited these friends to come with them to church. There are complex reasons for this, but surely one of the most obvious reasons is that the church people are worried about what their friends will think of the service. This is not a seeker-sensitive push, but an honest assessment. Reising says (BR 2009:vi):

> "All inviters put their reputations on the line every time they invite someone to church. You can rest assured that your church members will not invite someone if they do not expect a positive outcome. And most of the time, that's why one church isn't growing and the church around the corner is. It has led us to say that "People are not ashamed of Christ, they are ashamed of their church."

When our church members begin to invite people to our gatherings, then we know we are starting to do the right things. Perhaps they are embarrassed by the very old decor in the church foyer? Reising believes that pastors are loathe to realise that most often their congregations are "not intimidated about being Christians, they are intimidated about inviting people to their church" (BR 2009:i).

Here then is the telling sign. If a church has to plead with people and offer them all sorts of incentives to invite others, at the heart of it all, the people of that congregation do not truly believe that the worship gathering will make a connection with the people they invite. This then is how a church will know whether it is truly relevant or not. Even if the leaders think they are connecting with the culture around them, what really matters is if the congregation feels the same way.

Reising gives practical questions which, if answered positively by the congregation, should cause the church worship gathering to grow (BR 2009:vi):

1. Will my friend feel welcomed?

   Principle: Hospitality - The atmosphere, nomenclature, and style of service should be inviting and not intimidating to the unchurched.

2. Will my friend fit in?

   Principle: Comfort and compatibility - Like it or not, invitations and visitor comfort decrease when social or cultural gaps exist.

3. Can I feel confident that I know how the service will turn out?

   Principle: Consistency - People need to know what to expect, because they will invite accordingly.

4. Will my friend get something out of it?

   Principle: Relevance - The message should be relevant and powerful for people at all spiritual levels.

5. Will my friend understand it?

   Principle: Understanding - Jesus taught through practical illustrations. The songs and message should be understandable for people at all spiritual levels.

6. Will anything that could seem strange to the unchurched be explained through Scripture?

   Principle: Sensitivity - Scriptural actions should be carried out with clarity and considerate explanation.

5.8   Summary

In this chapter we explored what relevant BCGs look like. And to use McLaren's (2006) title, the "Church on the other side," is a congregation that is not afraid to explore new methods of doing church gatherings. Yet the core biblical injunctions for ecclesiology remain the same. Christ and the scriptures must be central. Relevant BCGs must keep a balance between their focus on the needs of the congregation, and on mission to those outside of the church. The gatherings are done with attention to engaging all of the senses, and eagerly encouraging congregational participation. These gatherings use design that is professional and attractive. Their venues reveal that they understand the importance of space in affecting ones experience of worship. Atmosphere and aesthetics are understood and cherished, and old liturgies are revived. There is a clear focus and strategy,

prayer, and intimacy with God is fostered. There is extensive creative planning, and the gathering is one that worships God experientially, and fellowships authentically. From the above, we are able to see how to apply a relevant BCG into a local church context. Leadership is vital in this process, as well as good solid strategising. It is also essential that BCG church leaders understand the opportunities for conflict to arise in creating these new kinds of gatherings, and that they know how to deal with this in a Godly way.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

From this thesis, it is the hope of the author that the evangelical church will begin to see that church gatherings are much like a vehicle. The medium does have a large impact on the message, but in the same way that a vehicle takes people from one point to another, so too, is the intended result of church gatherings an intention to move people closer to where God wants them to be. It is essential that we worship God, but the style in which we do that, although important as a biblically acceptable medium, is not the most important thing. Towns says (1996:1):

> "Worship is like a car to get us from where we are to where God wants us to be. Transportation and communication are imperative, the mode or vehicle is not imperative. While it is imperative that we worship God, how we do it has second importance. Worship is like a car that gets us into the presence of God. Some worship God in cathedrals with the rich traditional organ tones of Bach, Chopin and the classics of Europe. They travel in a Mercedes Benz. Some worship God in simple wooden churches with a steeple pointing heaven-ward and sing the gospel songs of Charles Wesley or Fanny Crosby. They travel in a Ford or Chevy. Some worship God with the contemporary sounds of praise music with a gentle beat. They travel in a convertible sports coupe. Some worship God to the whine of a guitar and the amplifiers to the max. They travel on a motorcycle, without a muffler."

The point is made that no one style is right and another wrong. What is important is that we worship ourselves into the presence of God in our church gatherings. No matter if the sermon is done with three points, ten points, or no points. As long as it is biblically sound and acceptable as a biblical medium, it does not matter if it makes use of big narratives and captivating images. No matter what the beat, no matter what the instrument, the important thing is that the people of God can come to offer sacrifices of praise to God in a holy manner. But it is undeniable that a church must help emerging generations cross the gap that exists between them and the evangelical church. And this may involve a stylistic change.

There is an abundance of talk in current literature around church services that are specifically intended for "emerging generations." However, one needs to constantly remind oneself that these are not the only individuals alive in SA. There are "other

generations" just as desperate and needy to be led to God. Morgenthaler says (Rognlien 2005:13):

> "It is not only twenty-somethings who have moved beyond the frontal lobe to encounter God; it is all of us. It is the forty-something dad, shattered and left for dead on the side of the marital road – he's way past bullet points and outlines. It is the eighty-something grandmother, her arthritic hands painting an Advent mural with her twenty-something granddaughter – she's way past liturgy-on-cruise-control. And it's thirteen-year-old Jessica at the controls of the LCD projector, showing a video version she and her friends created of the Apostles' Creed...If we want to talk about something that is emerging, let's talk about this: the human family, hungering en masse to bring their real selves – their unedited, whole selves – to a real God. Whether your congregation is seventy-something or twenty-something, give them the gift of complete access."

This thesis highlighted the postmodern and emerging generations in SA, but SA is a nation filled with many different age groups, even though it was identified in the opening chapters that there is a very large demographic of young South African's, there are also many older generations that need to be reached. SA likewise is a nation that is filled with diversity. It is distressing that not all of our evangelical churches reflect this rainbow nation. We need churches of multicultural diversity to spring up and show the world the unity that Christ can bring. For church leaders in this nation, the challenge is to grow people spiritually in Christ by creating biblical church gatherings that are relevant to their local contexts. Towns writes (1996:2):

> "A pastor must realize that the church belongs to the people, for it is the "Body of Christ" on earth, and because we belong to him, we are all members of one another. The people must realize that the Pastors task is to lead sheep, feed sheep, and protect sheep (Acts 20:28-30). If the worship service is dull and non-productive, it is the Pastors responsibility to revitalize the worship experiences that when worshippers enter the house of God; they touch God and God touches them."

True worship involves change and it also includes that which never changes. That in essence grasps the core of this thesis. It was to show how to create relevant church services in the postmodern era by holding fast to the unchanging biblical principles, and being free to change everything else that we are permitted to change. The author has sought to show how this can be done, by focusing firstly on the current problem, then the biblical model of how to do church services, then

reflecting on this in terms of where the gaps occur, and then making the applications thereof.

As has already been suggested, for the biblical model the following was concluded:

1) There must be clarity that Christ is central to church gatherings.
2) There must be reading and preaching of scripture.
3) There must be a time of praise and corporate worship.
4) There must be regular opportunities to serve communion.
5) There must be an opportunity to pray and meet with God.
6) There must be a reminder of the mission of the church.
7) There must be individual participation.
8) There must be fellowship for the strengthening of the body.

Accordingly, from this foundation, a study was made of how historically church gatherings could adapt themselves around these core biblical principles. We saw this in the way that the Jewish church gradually contextualized itself to reach Gentiles. In an examination of postmodern culture, it was established that this was the new cultural hurdle that the church would need to contextualize it's ministry into. Like all cultures, with postmodern unbelievers, they have the difficult challenge of crossing two divides before they can become a Christian. This is illustrated in the following diagram by Frost and Hirsch (2003:52):

THE UNBELIEVERS
CHALLENGE

CULTURE
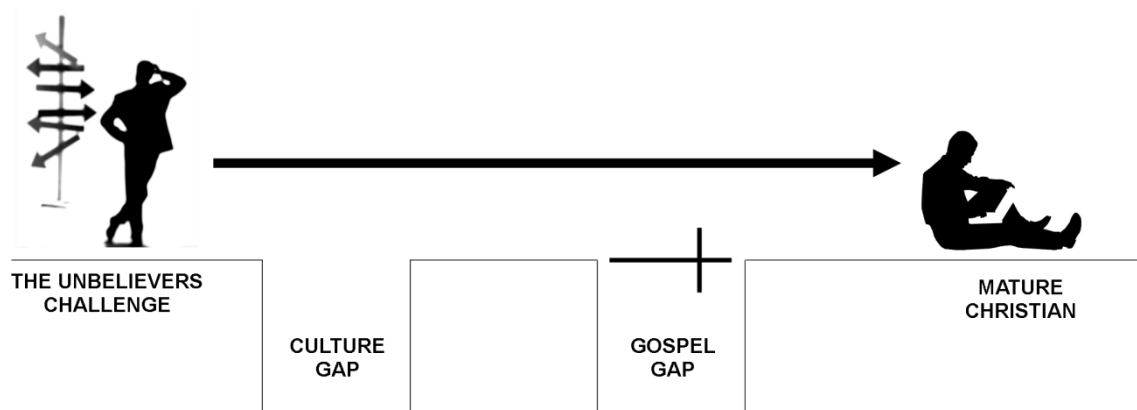GAP

GOSPEL
GAP

MATURE
CHRISTIAN

Fig. 6.1. *Two gaps that unbelievers need to cross*

The suggestion then of this thesis is that in order to reach postmoderns, the mature believer one must make every endeavour, in every way that he or she can, to make

this crossing easier. For others the gospel gap is by nature offensive to the sinner, but this cannot be diluted. This gap is only crossed with a recognition of sin, and acceptance of Christ as Lord and Saviour. This is not something that humanity can achieve alone. But when it comes to the cultural gap that exists, the onus is on the believers to make this crossing easier for the unbeliever and the young postmodern Christian. This does not include blatant immoral or sinful cultural practices and beliefs, such as postmodernity's issues with absolute truth. Not all of postmodernity's cultural characteristics can be pandered to by the church. But as this thesis ascertained, a relevant biblical church gathering could be designed in such a way, that it was not only attractive to postmoderns, but also incarnational into their world.

Finally the look of this relevant BCG was determined. It was intentionally decided that these gatherings needed to be EPIC. They needed to maintain the balance between reaching in, and reaching out. Jesus and the scriptures must always receive the highest recognition. The atmosphere, space, and aesthetic appeal of the venue all contributed toward making a church gathering relevant to the era in which we live.

Moreover, worship, communication, and fellowship all require high levels of planning and creative energy. These are not intended to be easy answers to very difficult questions. Yes, there are large concerns, and looming challenges for the evangelical church. But there are also tremendous positives and enormous opportunities. If the local church can awake to its mission in its own backyard, and have the courage to craft the changes necessary to captivate this generation. We will see a glorious harvest won for Christ, and an up-and-coming Christian generation that worships in full colour. It will be hard for the world to fail to spot that sight.

I close with this thought. In SA there is a well known allegory of an Ostrich. The evangelical church in this rapidly changing post-Christian, postmodern world has two choices: We can bury our head in the sand like the ostrich who is intimidated by the problems it sees, and hope and pray that the issues will pass away, or we can stand tall as the people of God and face the challenges of this postmodern world head on.

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TABLE OF COMPARISONS BETWEEN MODERN VALUES AND POSTMODERN VALUES

The following table by Jones (Smith 2005:67) is a comparison between modern and postmodern values. It is insightful and helpful for anyone who desires to learn about the transition between these two mind-sets:

MODERN VALUES	POSTMODERN VALUES
Rational: A key to the enlightenment emphasis was on the adequacy of human reason to comprehend universal truths, and this primarily is achieved through science and the scientific method.	**Experiential:** Postmoderns want to experience things rather than just read or hear about them. For example, they want to experience interactive video games, or high adventure vacations.
Scientific: So strong has been the belief in the superiority of science to any other discipline that scientism (The belief that only what science tells us is true and reasonable) has become deeply embedded in our cultural mindset. Scientists have been the high priests of this worldview. Even God can and should be studied scientifically.	**Spiritual:** While popular interest in spiritual things waned under the influence of modern science, today spirituality is in! And people are willing to use innovative means to try to be spiritual.
Unanimity: Communities tended to be homogenous, not multicultural. Religious options were few, even for dating (certainly not Catholics with Protestants).	**Pluralistic:** Spirituality takes on many forms, some of which have nothing to do with believing in God. Others will want to know who or what you mean by "God." As Jones wisely observes, technology has made "everything available to everyone," and religiously the "Choices are overwhelming."
Exclusive: Most Americans agreed with the Judeo-Christian worldview, at least in terms of morality.	**Relative:** The emphasis on pluralism leads people to think that "all faiths contain elements of truth and any religion is a perfectly good way to express your spirituality.
Egocentric: Modern philosophers stressed the importance of the self. In ethics, that stress focused on the autonomy of the self. Culturally, this view gave birth to the "me" generation for the Boomers, with an emphasis on self-fulfilment.	**Altruistic:** Here Jones notes an important paradox: Millennials seem to be even more "consumeristic" than their parents, yet they also highly value giving away their time and resources.
Individualistic: With the heavy emphasis on self-fulfilment, modern marketing efforts targeted the individual consumer.	**Communal:** In response to the emphasis on the self, postmoderns are returning to the family and community, but in "untraditional" ways such as cohousing. TV shows such as Survivor, Big Brother, and Friends capitalize on this interest.
Functional: The stress in modern architecture and technology has been on usefulness to serve a purpose. For instance, the "worship centre" replaced the "sanctuary."	**Creative:** Here Jones observes that Gen-Xers and Yers are known for their aesthetic sensibilities. Beauty for it's own sake is highly valued.

Industrial: The goals of the industrial age were "efficiency and material bounty," and machines were highly valued for their ability to contribute toward these goals.	**Environmental:** In response to exploitation of the Earth's resources, students are concerned about the environment and it's longer-term viability.
Local: Peoples interests were largely local, despite transportation improvements. Youth group overseas missionary trips were virtually unheard of, and communication with missionaries took place via "snail mail."	**Global:** Jones puts it best when he writes: "With no major wars or economic depressions to unite us, students believe they're citizens of the world, and their loyalties may be stronger to the entire human race than they are to nations. CNN and the internet only strengthen this conviction."
Compartmentalized: Ones life and character at work could be separated from life on Sundays at church. We could live segmented lives. People did not practice what they preached in all areas of life.	**Holistic:** Integrity in all aspects of life is very important. Postmoderns are rightly suspicious of those who live in segmented, compartmentalized lives.
Relevant: Make the gospel relevant to people's daily lives. Be seeker-sensitive.	**Authentic:** Be real. Be full of integrity in all areas of life. Jones puts it well: "Today, the younger generations respond [to appeals to relevance of the bible to our daily lives], "Don't tell me how to apply this passage to my life. You don't know anything about my life. Just tell me what it really means. I'll decide how to apply it."

EXAMPLE OF AN ORDER OF WORSHIP

The following sample of a worship gathering is from the Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz Florida USA (Kimball 2004:188). It is a very useful example as it captures the elements that have been referred to in the description in this thesis of a relevant BCG.

Theme for Gathering
Understanding how much God loves us: a look at what it means to be the bride of Christ.

Walk-In Music
We play a techno CD mix.

Scriptures on the Screens
As people walk in, the screens show the scriptures that will be taught during the meeting. The scripture has art background and loops on the screen until the gathering formally begins.

Worship Music
Band plays from side stage, out of direct view. Lyrics are on screens with art and stained glass backgrounds. Songs include: "Open the eyes of my heart Lord," "Lord let your glory fall," and "Revelation."

Scripture Reading
Someone reads Colossians 1:15-20.

Worship Music
We sing "The breastplate of St. Patrick Prayer" (a song the musical leader, Josh Fox, wrote using the St. Patrick Prayer).

Community Announcements

Welcome and various ways to become connected in the Vintage Faith community. Children are dismissed at this time to go to their classes.

Mingle Time

We give people a few minutes to greet one another.

Song

Josh Fox uses the song "I can only imagine," a song by Mercy Me, to set up the evenings theme. As we sing, scriptures and selected lyrics from the song appear on the screens.

Message

"What it means to be the bride of Christ." Seven tables are set up among the people, each one heavily decorated with various teaching props. These tables serve as interactive prayer stations for people to visit. The 30-minute message is given while standing next to each of the tables, pointing out the various props, and showing how metaphors from Jewish weddings relate to the church. Visuals on the screens show photographs of the things being talked about and the scriptures being used.

Table 1: The Selection of the Bride – John 15:16 and 1 Peter 1:8-9

This table has a mirror on it and the words "He loves you and He chose you" written all around the edges of the table. It tells of how a bride in the New Testament times would be chosen by the grooms father, in the same way that God the Father has chosen us and what an awesome honour that is. The mirror is for people to see themselves as they go to the table and read the truth that they are chosen by God the Father. Despite who they think they are, or how inadequate they feel, as they see themselves in the mirror they are reminded that they have been especially selected and chosen by the Father to be part of the church, the bride of Christ.

Table 2: The Bride Price (mohar) – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

This table has a cross standing in the centre of it as the main focus. Around the edges of the table are the words "He paid the price for you." Here we teach that after a bride was selected, the next step was to determine the price (mohar). The greater the price the groom's father paid, the greater the value placed on the bride. The metaphor here is that the ultimate price was paid to purchase the Bride of Christ, and that was the death of the groom. The passage about how we were bought for a price is read, reinforcing the truth that the father must consider us of great worth to have paid such a high price. A painting of the crucifixion is one the screens as this is being taught.

Table 3: The Engagement Contract (ketubah) Listing gifts for the bride – 1 Corinthians 12:8-9, Romans 12, Ephesians 4

The table is set up with several props, including communion cups, bread, a bible, and a contract listing a number of promised gifts: "eternal life, Holy Spirit, forgiveness, faith, mercy, service, teaching," etc. It teaches how in a Jewish wedding, after the price was determined, that the father would pay for the bride, a contract (ketubah) was drawn up. This contract listed the promises of gifts that the bride would receive. The bride then gave her consent, and they drank a glass of wine to seal this and set the bride apart. The deal was sealed when the wine was drunk and the contract was given to the bride, so she could hold the groom to the promises he made. As the Bride of Christ, we are promised many gifts when we trusted in Jesus Christ. We also remember we have been "set apart" as his bride, just as a bride was set apart in New Testament times. The groom and bride were not yet joined in marriage, but their engagement was considered as seriously as if they were already married.

Table 4: Cleansing Water (mikvah)

This table is set up with bowls of water and towels. When people visit this station they wash their hands as a remembrance. Along the edges of the table is written "Remember you baptism or be baptized if you haven't." There is also a basket with cards and pencils for people to write their names and phone numbers and leave in

the basket if they want to be baptised. This table teaches that after her engagement, a Jewish bride would take a ritual bath called a mikvah. We tie this into the Bride of Christ getting baptised in water as an outward sign of her commitment to Jesus Christ. On the screens we show archaeological ruins of mikvahs at the time of Jesus, as well as contemporary ones that look very much like our baptismals.

Table 5: The groom prepares the wedding chamber and we await His return – John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Matthew 25:13

This table has a ram's horn shofar in the centre and the rest of the table is flooded with candles. In New Testament times, a groom went to his father's house after he was engaged to build an additional room. It was up to the father to tell his son when he should go fetch his bride. The groom then marched into town and blew a shofar to let everyone know he was now fetching her from her house and bringing her back to the room he had built in his father's house. This ties into how Jesus taught that he was going to his fathers house to prepare a place for us, his bride, and that one day he would return to get us, but only his father knows the time and date. Jesus also told us to keep watch for his return, so the candles represent the bridesmaids' lamps kept trimmed and burning while awaiting the return of the groom. Around the table are the words "Are you ready to meet the groom?"

Table 6: The wedding of the groom and bride is finalized – 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1 Peter 5:4

On this table are little cups of juice that everyone can take and drink. This represents how when the groom finally fetched the bride, they returned to the fathers house. Sometimes a crown was placed on the bride for the final ceremony. They often also drank another cup of wine. This took place under and especially built canopy (chupah) built by the groom. They finalized the ceremony under this canopy. Sometime in ancient Jewish customs, the bride and groom smashed the glass they shared and drank from by stepping on it. This symbolised how their two lives were joined together. At this table we show Jesus will one day fetch his bride, the church, and they will go to the father's house together. When people come to this station they read around the edge of the table "He loves you and will commit to

you." There is a canopy built next to this station and underneath it people drink from a little plastic cup and then smash the cup beneath their feet (on a tarp!).

Table 7: The wedding supper – Revelation 19:6-9 and Revelation 3:20

This table is set up with chairs and elaborate place settings, plates, fruit, etc. It represents a great feast. Around this table are the words "He invites us to dine with him and be with him forever."

Worship and prayer station interaction

After the message, people are invited to get up and walk through the seven tables in sequence. It takes about 30 minutes. People stop at each table to read the scriptures, pray, read the words around the edge of the table, and interact in other ways set up for them at each table. People can also walk over to private prayer, journal and art spaces. The band leads community worship from a stage in the rear of the room during this time. We show images and lyrics on the screens for the songs "Wonderful King," "Steadfast love of the Lord," "Amazing Love (Hymn)," "You are so good to me," and "We will dance." The music begins very contemplatively, then builds toward the end.

Offering

Someone in the community prays for the offering and the bags are passed around as music plays in the background.

Closing community prayer and benediction

A few minutes of open sharing are set aside for people to say short sentence prayers of thanksgiving out loud, especially about being the bride of Christ. A prayer of benediction is offered after about three minutes. It commissions people for their mission to be the bride of Christ throughout the week.

Walk-out Music

We play an ambient CD with no lyrics.

APPENDIX C

TEAMS FOR RELEVANT CHURCH GATHERINGS

The following is an example of various teams that one would need to create a multi-sensory BCG. It is taken from Kimball (2004:108):

Sacred Space Team

This team plans what the space will look like to enhance the entire worship experience. They may design and set up special interactive prayer stations that correspond with that weekend's theme and teaching. They may set up water basins, clay tables, and other scripture based stations for people to worship God through creative expression. They may design certain entry experiences or have props and symbols in the hallways before people come in. They may create and build artistic props that are symbols on which people can write prayers. They might reconfigure the layout of the room for a particular night. They decorate the entry tables and set up candles and anything else to create a space for worship.

Artists Team

This team may paint artwork to display on the walls for a teaching series (Usually a teaching series in the gathering runs three to six weeks and the art remains up the whole time). They may paint creative backdrops for the stages. They may set up paint stations for people to come and paint or draw or write out prayers during a worship gathering. The artist's team may have someone share an actual painting and talk about its meaning during the worship gathering. The artist's team usually works closely with the Sacred Space Team.

Music Team

This team selects the songs to sing at each gathering. This team includes the band members and individuals who select what music is played as people enter and leave the sacred space. They plan any special songs, musical interludes during prayer etc.

Prayer Team

This team may search for ancient prayers or creeds to be read in the gathering. This team may creatively think of new prayer stations to use. The prayer team leader is an important member of this team, of course. He or she mobilizes prayer for what they do and has a prominent role in planning the worship gatherings.

Digital Arts Team

This team designs and selects the Powerpoint® slides, screen backgrounds, and other digital arts that need to be designed for music lyrics, prayers, creeds, scripture, etc. In the gathering, a volunteer works with the worship leader to prepare all the digital artwork each week.

Poetry, dance, drama, video Team (s)

The team(s) bring together those who have artistic gifts to contribute to the worship gathering. Some may write prayers or poetry to be read in the gatherings. Some may have a passion to incorporate dance, drama, or the usage of videos in some way. Video jockeys may be commonplace in worship gatherings in the future. They would be responsible for looping and showing images on screens as part of the worship gathering.

Tech Team

There is a lot involved in tech, sound, and lighting, so someone needs to oversee it. In a sense, a tech team is the nervous system of multi-sensory worship. They can allow a worship gathering to flow technically. This team's leader should always be included in planning meetings.

Teaching Team

The members of this team give the messages in the worship gathering. They should be in the main planning meetings, so they plan the messages as a part of the whole and not in isolation.