

4-2010

Creating New Expressions of Worship Gatherings within Existing Churches

Eric K. Baker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CREATING NEW EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP GATHERINGS WITHIN EXISTING
CHURCHES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ERIC K. BAKER

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

APRIL 2010

PORTLAND CENTER LIBRARY
GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY
PORTLAND, OR. 97223

Copyright © 2010 by Eric K. Baker
All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New International Version Bible, copyright © 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

ERIC K. BAKER

DATE: MARCH 10, 2010

TITLE:

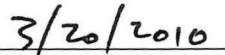
**CREATING NEW EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP GATHERINGS
WITHIN EXISTING CHURCHES**

***WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE***


SIGNATURE


DATE


SIGNATURE


DATE



GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

CONTENTS

SECTION 1. ABSTRACT.....	7
SECTION 2. THE PROBLEM.....	8
A Personal Ministry Journey.	12
SECTION 3. OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS.....	15
SECTION 4. THE THESIS.....	18
Moving from Consuming to Gathering	
Gathering to express and experience the Great Commandment	
Gathering to Love God	
Worship Experiences of the Heart and Mind	
Worship Experience of the Soul	
Gathering to Love People	
Gathering and Scattering	
SECTION 5. PROJECT.	40
SECTION 6. PROJECT SPECIFICATION.	41
POSTSCRIPT.....	47
REFERENCE LIST.....	49
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51
APPENDIX.....	63

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the past three years I have had the opportunity to further my education with some amazing fellow students at George Fox University's Leadership in the Emerging Culture Doctor of Ministry. The first time we met we were strangers, but now we are family. I want to thank each of my brothers and sisters who have challenged me and illuminated many reflections of Jesus. A special thanks to Dr. Phillip Carnes, a fellow classmate, who sharpened, challenged, and encouraged me during this experience. Thanks to my advisors, Loren Kerns, Dr. Clifford Berger, Dr. David McDonald for navigating me through a difficult but blessing filled journey. This experience has made me a better person, pastor, and follower of Jesus.

Thank you Dr. Leonard Sweet for the information, insight, stories, and images that are forever inscribed into my heart and ministry. Thank you Dr. Sweet for challenging me to weep for the city I serve in as Jesus wept for Jerusalem.

Thank you Dr. Stephen L. Ayers for believing a 23-year-old young man with zero experience and zero seminary completed was called by God to be a pastor at Hillvue 9 years ago. Since that time you have given me many opportunities to succeed and have shown me grace when I have failed. Your passion to see people connect to Jesus has kept the importance of evangelism as one of the pillars of my ministry. Also, thank you Dr. Mark B. Hale, for helping to make many gravel roads into pavement, both personally and professionally. Thanks to my colleagues at Hillvue Heights Church, Dr. Jamie Ward, Pastor Keith Scarbarough, Pastor Jeff Reynolds, Pastor Shane Blankenship, Pastor David Tooley, Pastor Andrew Eaton, Pastor Beth Ann Ayers, and Pastor Angela Lasley, for serving at Hillvue with me. As Pastor Mark often says, "Hillvue is not always an easy place to serve, but it is a blessed place." Thank you Pastor

Ben Brewster for partnering with me in prayer, dedication, and perseverance as we have worked together to see God use the Gathering to transform our lives as well as the lives of others.

My education would not have been possible if not for the men and women of Hillvue Heights Church who work hour after hour and give faithfully to the church. Without your tithes and offerings this opportunity would not be awarded to me. I do not take the gift of furthering my education lightly and cannot express my appreciation enough.

To the people who have faithfully embraced the Gathering for the past 3 years, I must express my deep appreciation. Garrett, Jacquelyn, Joe, Darrick, Todd, Jen, Jason, and Jennifer, thank you for your weekly dedication since the Gatherings beginning and for being in the trenches with me. I love you.

Thank you to all of the set up crew, greeters, nursery workers, tech guys, lead worshippers, prayer partners, and servants. Through times of struggle and celebration Jesus continues to do amazing things in our lives. Not only have we grown numerically but most importantly our love for God and our love for people has increased tremendously. May Jesus continue to transform us to look more and more like Him. The number of hours spent in serving and prayer are a testimony of your heart for this ministry and your heart for God. Thank you for allowing me to grow as a person, forgiving me when I fail, crying with me, and celebrating what Jesus has done.

Thank you to my in-laws, Larry and Kathy Spencer, for giving me your blessing to marry your daughter, being terrific grandparents, and editors of this project, I am a very blessed man.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Stan and Joyce Baker who raised me in a Christian home and gave me every opportunity in life to succeed. Thank you holding me back in

the first grade (though at the time I cried) because I could not read. Not only can I now read, but am being read by others. I love you...always.

To my son Cash and my daughter Ava for being some of my greatest teachers. Your smiles and hugs remove a world of burdens and provided the motivation to complete this when many times I wanted to quit.

Most importantly I want to thank my beautiful wife Laura. You are an amazing woman and my best friend. I thank Jesus everyday that I met you on the campus of Western Kentucky University. Thank you for your patience as I have completed this process. You have been the spark of my life and have believed in me when no one else did. You are a phenomenal special education teacher, mother, wife, and Christian. I look forward growing old with you.

Finally, my heart is eternally thankful to the one who has shown me unmerited favor- Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for taking upon the curse of my sin and the hell that I deserve. Through the power of a bloody cross and an empty tomb I have been given eternal life. May my life song be one of love and thanksgiving to you. I pray for your swift return, but until then may I be used for your glory and your glory alone.

SECTION ONE

ABSTRACT

It is my claim that multiple expressions of worship gatherings must be created to connect generations to Jesus. Worship “services” are the face of many churches, but according to recent studies many people are leaving the American church at a rapid rate.¹ Many issues surrounding the decline of the American church exist, but my claim is that many young adults feel disconnected from many Sunday morning worship experiences. Many have attempted to fix this problem by creating evangelistic ministry teams, by moving churches from the mega church model to the house church model, and even by removing the mass gathering of members from the church experience altogether. I claim, in a fast-changing culture, churches must constantly create or provide fresh worship experiences, rooted in Biblical truth, to reach each succeeding generation. A one-dimensional church typically reaches one generation or target audience. In an attempt to create a solution, I was given permission to create a new worship experience under the umbrella of Hillvue Heights Church called the Gathering. This paper and project will explore the Gathering’s purpose and provide resources for the local community as well as resources for pastors who desire to create new expressions of worship within their existing churches. The project portion of this dissertation is a website providing information about the Gathering and resources for spiritual formation of those who attend. The website provides sermons, resources, and a calendar, etc., for community growth.

¹ Jon Meacham, “The End of Christian America,” *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009, 34-38.

SECTION TWO

THE PROBLEM: WHY DO WE NEED TO GATHER

Culture is changing, and so is the church. Throughout America there are churches that were once alive and thriving who are now declining or closing. Countless numbers of churches that had passionate preaching, powerful worship, great attendance, big budgets and buildings are now declining in attendance. In Bowling Green and the surrounding areas we have seen this take place in many First Baptist Churches. Traditionally, First Baptist Churches have been the most attended, most vibrant, wealthiest, churches in the south. These large brick buildings and steeples seem to peer over the landscape as a symbol of God's provision much like the bronze serpent of Numbers 21:4-9. However, centuries later, King Hezekiah decreed the bronze serpent had to be destroyed because the Israelites began to worship the symbol of God's provision instead of worshipping God.² Many churches are tempted to turn their buildings, denominations, and traditions into idols instead of worshipping Jesus. Jesus proclaims in John 3:14-15, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." What has taken place in these local First Baptist Churches is possible for all congregations if they fail to lift high the name of Jesus to all generations.

In April of 2009, *Newsweek* magazines cover declared the words, "The Decline and Fall of Christian America" poetically in the shape of a cross. The magazines main article was titled "The End of Christian America," written by Jon Meacham. The article expounded on the recent statistics taken by the American Religious Identification Survey. The survey conveyed "the percentage of self-identified Christians has fallen 10 percentage points since 1990, from 86

² 2 Kings 18

to 76 percent.”³ As the number of Christians in America appears to be decreasing “the number of people willing to describe themselves as atheist or agnostic has increased about fourfold from 1990 to 2009, from 1 million to 3.6 million.”⁴

If these trends continue over the next 20 years then this is a serious issue for the future of the church. The church must not become alarmist claiming that the sky is always falling because Jesus declared, “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”⁵ We must remember that God is still in control, but He calls Christians to obedience and in many ways it appears that the church is struggling to imitate Christ to the culture. In 3 John 1:11, John writes to the church, “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good.” The church does not need to look like the culture to connect to the culture, it needs to reflect the person and work of Jesus.

The 1950’s approach to ministry connected to a generation; unfortunately many churches have remained there. In the 50’s, the image of the church was favorable. Both those who attended church and those who did not had respect for the church and its clergy. Being a pastor was something to be proud of and appreciated. Since this time the image of the church has slowly declined, along with the image of the pastor. Many unchurched people now have an unfavorable image of the church. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons surveyed a group of young adults on the image they had of Christianity and this is what they discovered:⁶

³ Meacham, “The End of Christian America,” *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009, 34.

⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁵ Matthew 16:17-19

⁶ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 2007), 28.

Unfavorable Image	Outside Church (ages 16-19)	
	a lot	a lot or some
Anti-homosexual	66%	91%
Judgmental	57	87
Hypocritical-saying one thing, doing another	54	85
Too involved in politics	46	75
Out of touch with reality	37	72
Old-fashioned	28	78
Insensitive to others	27	70
Boring	27	68
Not accepting of other faiths	22	64
Confusing	19	61

This illustration paints a true picture of what many non-Christian people have seen on television, read in books, and witnessed firsthand. Christians need to begin gathering with lost people in bars, coffee houses, and in church buildings to begin destroying this corrupted image of the body of Christ. Christians need a renewed vision of a world of people who do not need to be judged, but gathered with the love and forgiveness of Christ. If people can reconnect to the church, they will often connect to Jesus.

LifeWay Research Groups reveal that “more than two-thirds of young adults who attended a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.”⁷ If this many young adults are dropping out of the church, then the church must begin to evaluate how it is expressing the love of Jesus to this generation.

Hillvue is a thriving church with a dynamic children and youth ministry. The youth of the church are exposed to numerous Bible studies, worship experiences, baptisms, mission trips, and youth camps. Every year a transition event occurs when seniors from the High School

⁷*Lifeway Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year-olds Drop out of Church*, Accessed December 9, 2007, available from www.lifeway.com/lwc/article; Internet.

Ministry begin attending the University Ministry. This is always an exciting experience of sharing new adventures and meeting new people. On the night of this transition, a buzz of excitement and anticipation fills the room, yet from that night on very few of those young people ever return. One consistent flow with 18-25 year olds that have grown up at Hillvue is clear: they tend to put Jesus on a shelf for this era in their lives. For 5 years I served as the High School Pastor of Hillvue Heights Church. At the climax of those years our High School worship experience had 200 in weekly attendance, a servant adult team of 25 people, went on multiple mission trips both locally and globally, and a student leadership team of 12. The student leadership team consisted of students who were hand-picked based on their heart for Jesus, their influence at school, their leadership ability, and their overall willingness to serve. During this time our middle school and high school ministry was in the top 10 in the country for the number of youth baptisms we had experienced. It appeared we were making impact in the lives of a generation that many had declared unreachable.

Today about half of those students involved on the student leadership team are not following Jesus and even more students who attended our weekly worship experience are nowhere to be found. There are many variables for why these students have disappeared, however many of them not only transitioned from high school into young adulthood they have transitioned out of their faith. If *facebook* has any credibility as a witness of these students lives then many of them are addicts, wounded, relationally scared, and in need of an encounter with Jesus.

The Bible is very clear on what is taking place in the lives of many people. In 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul encourages his readers to “flee youthful passions.” Not a lot has changed in

2000 years. The “folly” of youth and the desire to pursue passions of the world imprison many young people today as it has in the past.⁸

In Luke 15, Jesus tells a parable about a father and two sons. The younger son, like many young adults today, had his own agenda.

...the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (Luke 15:13-16)

When teenagers graduate from high school, many of them also graduate from their faith. The “prodigal” stage of life tends to affect everyone, even students who regularly attended youth group and went on mission trips. When a student enters the university setting or the work force they are bombarded by intellectual and cultural tsunamis that crash into the “good ole gospel ship” that many of them have been riding on. For the first time in many of these students lives they are given freedom, freedom to go and come as they please, eat unhealthy food, explore additive substances, have sexual encounters with random people, and believe whatever they want to believe. The university campus is one of the most diverse places a person can visit and there is seemingly a “hall pass” given to each of them. This hall pass convinces them of the idea they can do whatever they want to over the next 4-6 years with little to no consequence. During this season of life many of them want to move away to “far and distant” places neglecting responsibilities and past relationships. Like the younger son in Luke 15, this out-of-control lifestyle typically leaves them wallowing with the pigs.

⁸ Proverbs 5:23, Proverbs 9:13, Proverbs 12:23, Proverbs 13:16, Proverbs 14, Proverbs 22

One difference between this generation and earlier generations is their response after coming to their senses.⁹ Formally, young people would return to Jesus and the church as the young man in Luke 15 returned to his father's house. Today, however, many of these young adults are not returning home. The answer to this mystery also lies within the parable.

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20-24)

Unfortunately, many American churches appear no longer to be "filled with compassion" nor do they "run" to those who have gone astray when they begin to return home. People who have lost their way need to know that they are going to be embraced and cared for no matter what they have done. Sadly, the church pushes many of them further away. Many times the church is the last place for people to return because they have not been welcomed or celebrated. For the father to accept his son, he had to break traditions and patterns and extend grace to the broken. Some traditions and patterns may need to be adjusted in order to connect an emerging culture. The church must learn to be more like the father and not like the older son who refused to connect to his wayward brother. A place to welcome people home and embrace them in love and grace. The church must remember, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."¹⁰ This approach may be beneficial in reconnecting the de-churched, but something must be done about those who have never had a relationship with Jesus.

⁹ Luke 15:17

¹⁰ Romans 3:23

Recently George Barna reported that over “100 million people in the U.S. are unchurched.”¹¹ Salvation is not determined by church attendance, it is determined by having faith in Christ alone.¹² Throughout the Bible we see characteristics of those who have had an encounter with Jesus, they gathered.¹³ If there are 100 million people unchurched, then there are 100 million people who could fall in love with Jesus and become a valuable part of our churches. The tendency of the church is to care only about those who are inside the flock. If there are a 100 million people who are heading for destruction then there are 100 million people who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Unfortunately, what most of the world calls “church” is more concerned about polity, politics, and potlucks than it is about those who are disconnected from the living God. “We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than what we are for.”¹⁵ This needs to change, and Hillvue Heights Church is attempting to do just that.

A Personal Story

Over the past 17 years, Hillvue Heights Church has been at the forefront of ministry for Southern Baptists in Kentucky. Thousands of people have professed their faith in Jesus and have entered the baptismal waters as an outward expression of this faith. Built on a strong vision and pastoral leadership, the church has grown from a faithful 30 to over 3000 people participating in weekly services. Placing Jesus at the center of the church has been the life source for reaching the community with a message of love and grace. Hillvue is known throughout the community

¹¹George Barna, *Unchurched Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S.*, Accessed December 8, 2007, available from www.barna.org; Internet.

¹² Ephesians 2:7-9

¹³ Acts 2

¹⁴ Romans 10:13-15

¹⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 2007), 26.

for its benevolence and compassion on the poor and the oppressed. With four services, a growing children's ministry, a leading youth ministry, and expanding Bible study numbers, Hillvue would be deemed "successful" by many outsiders.

Even though Hillvue has been successful, some new expressions of its creative God may need to be painted to reach even more people. The leadership of the church realizes that culture is always shifting and that the church must also change. Unfortunately, many churches wait until they are dead or dying before they make changes or try new methods of ministry. The best time, however, to try new ideas and integrate them into the life of the church is when the church is healthy, not when it is dying or being revived. Hillvue does not want to become a one-generational church, but a church that thrives for years and years to come.

In 1991 Pastor Steven L. Ayers led the congregation in a traditional form of worship, but with one major difference--passionate preaching and a vision to see people connect to Jesus. In the mid 90's, Hillvue began to explore new expressions of worship. This was uncharted territory not only for Hillvue as a church, but also for Bowling Green as a community. Praise teams, bands, dance, drama, and lighting slowly made their way into the Sunday morning worship service. The marriage of creative and contemporary worship, powerful preaching, and a strong vision revolutionized church culture in the small town of Bowling Green. With praise of these methods also came many adversaries, but Hillvue remained authentic to who she was--a place for all people to connect to Jesus. The church went from 30 people, \$500,000 in debt, to a

church of over 3000, over 4,000 baptisms, and over 3 successful building programs in the last 17 years.¹⁶

Indeed, Hillvue is an organic church, a living-breathing organism. It desires to bring life to the surrounding community and not a stagnant institution of religion. Hillvue is willing to explore new expressions of worship and community life to reflect the person of Jesus Christ to Bowling Green and the surrounding areas. For the past few years, Hillvue has continued to see growth both in numbers and in spiritual health. Maybe it is time for Hillvue to once again step into uncharted territory--not to change what is working, but to give new opportunities for people to encounter Jesus.

With a willingness to explore new methods of ministry and a heart to continue to reach the unchurched and prodigal dechurched of Bowling Green, the leadership of Hillvue Heights Church empowered a group of young adults and pastors to design, create, and implement a new worship experience at Hillvue. After months of prayer, creative design, meetings, and strategic planning, Hillvue stepped out of the boat and into new uncharted waters. September 16, 2007, Hillvue launched a new worship experience called the *Gathering*.

¹⁶ Steve Ayers. *Igniting Passion in Your Church: Becoming Intimate with Christ*. (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003).

SECTION THREE

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Over the past 10 years many pastors, scholars, futurists, and church growth gurus have attempted to develop different strategies to address the decline of emerging generations from connecting to the church. A number of possible solutions might address this problem some of these are as follows:

1. *Develop, train, and create new methods of evangelism.* Evangelism in the church is a foundation that must continue within the life of the church. With the birth of movements like Campus Crusade for Christ, evangelism became a systematic explanation of points and scripture showing people God's plan, their problem (sin), God's provision (salvation in Christ alone), and their need to respond in repentance and faith. This method of evangelism is powerful, and God used it to connect many people to himself and to the church during the Modern Era. However, times have changed. This, door-to-door salesman approach of sharing the gospel now appears plastic, propositional, and non-relational. While church members need to have a Biblical understanding of the gospel centered in Jesus, they must learn they need to invest relationally into people. New evangelism training and design must explain to people the need for lifelong commitments to Jesus and to the unsaved.

According to Southern Baptist, 70% of Southern Baptist Churches are plateaued or declining.¹⁷ To combat this monumental problem, the Southern Baptist Convention has created *The Great Commission Resurgence* along with *Great*

¹⁷ <http://www.pray4gcr.com>. The Great Commission Declaration is a declaration consisting of ten commitments revolving around the Great Commission. Southern Baptist Churches are encouraged to participate in the declaration by signing it and committing to prayer and action.

*Commission Declaration.*¹⁸ A task force was created to “for His glory, the building up of our churches and Convention, and the good of the nations as we faithfully and passionately pursue the fulfilling of the Great Commission until the Lord Jesus returns.”¹⁹ The task force is going to present their recommendations at the next Southern Baptist Convention in 2010. The Southern Baptist Convention will then take these recommendations and translate them into a campaign to evangelistically reach emerging generations. According to the Western Recorder at Kentucky’s Evangelism Conference held in February of 2010 there are, “258-340 million residents estimated to be lost and the entire world where 4 billion of 6.8 billion have little to no access to the gospel. Penetrating such massiveness requires each of the 50,000-plus Southern Baptist churches to become its own missional strategy center.”²⁰ The Southern Baptist need to repent and develop a missional agenda for their churches, but many of these terms and systems they are attempting to use are outdated and repackaging of past attempts.

2. *Move from the mega-church model to the house church model.* Traditionally, the church has been thought of as a large building for mass gatherings of worship. In recent years the method of worship has been scrutinized carefully. Pastors and scholars are suggesting that emerging generations are searching for relationships and a sense of belonging. Often in large massive gatherings of Christians, the church can

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mark Kelly, Great Commission Resurgence group unveils progress report, *Western Recorder*, March 2, 2010.

become a revolving door where people sneak in, sneak out and never really be a part of the church community. In the house church model, however, hundreds if not thousands of Christians meet in houses reaching out to their neighborhoods. Dr. Leonard Sweet believes in the future churches may move from “parking lots to sidewalks,” implying that neighborhood churches where people can walk to and from the worship gatherings will become more and more popular.²¹ In either case, the idea is to create smaller, intimate, missional communities in homes and neighborhoods instead of the mega-mall type church. In southern California there is a network of small house churches called *Matthew's House*²² who have created such an expression of what it means to not be centered around a church being a large gathering of people at a specific location, but a small group of people meeting throughout the city and being Jesus to the city. Providing different options for people is a positive experience. It is important that the church does not create an arrogant structure that all churches must follow. Both the mega-church and the house church have their place and in the future they will both continue to connect to people.

3. *Create tolerant conversations and movements such as the emerging church movement.* Over the past 15 years there has been much debate over how the church is to engage emerging generations. In recent years authors such as Brain McLaren, Toney Jones, Doug Pagitt, Frank Viola and others have been behind many changes in ideas concerning the local church and how the church functions in

²¹ Dr. Leonard Sweet, class lecture May, 2009.

²² <http://www.matthewshouse.com>.

the world. The *Leadership Network* and *The Emergent Village* have help to formulate “conversations” regarding these issues. Many of them began to meet in these think tanks because they “were disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late 20th century.”²³ Pastors who agree or are willing to explore these new concepts are filling up conferences, advances, and reading books hoping these ideas will help them connect to the emerging culture. Instead of having one set of ideas, beliefs, mission, and core values the emergent church has been built on a generous orthodoxy.

The emergent movements theology and pragmatism are borderline heretical. The “emergents” are able to connect to the culture because it is more reflective of the culture than the Bible. In Galatians 1:6-10 the apostle Paul appears to be expressing righteous anger when he states, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” The gospel is centered in and through the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

²³ www.emergentvillage.com

These types of groups preach tolerance however in function appear to be protesting the very core of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The church should have relationships with non-believers, other religions. It should be creative in its expressions of worship, however none of these things should come at the cost of sound doctrine.²⁴

²⁴ 1 Timothy 6:2-4

SECTION FOUR

THE THESIS: MOVING FROM CONSUMING TO GATHERING

Weighing all of these proposed solutions, Hillvue knew that it was important to redefine to church members what “church” really is. Hillvue determined that most of the people who would first come to this new service “The Gathering” would be people who were already a part of the Hillvue community. The leadership realized it was important to begin building a core group of people that would take the vision of the church and see it in a way that affected their everyday lives and to understand that each one of them would be missionaries at their jobs, schools, and homes. Mark Driscoll states, “God’s mission is not to create a team of moral and decent people but rather to create a movement of holy loving missionaries who are comfortable and truthful around lost sinners and who, in this way, look more like Jesus than most of His pastors do.”²⁵ This is Hillvue’s prayer for all of her worship experiences, including the Gathering.

Many church people would define “church” the same way--as a building with some name on the outside of it they say, “I go to Hillvue Heights Church” and refer to church as being a place where like-minded Christians meet for worship service. But what do they mean by “worship service”? First, what is worship?²⁶ In most churches people would respond with the same answer, “Music.” When they think of worship or a worship pastor, they think of songs, praise teams, praise bands, etc. They automatically connect worship to music. Worship through music is a powerful opportunity for us to connect to Jesus through song. This is illustrated throughout scripture, especially in the Psalms. David in Psalm 40:1-3 sings, “I waited patiently

²⁵ Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 35.

²⁶ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 2.

for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.” This is one of hundreds of verses that reflect how singing is an act of worship, but worship is more than this. We were made to worship not only through song but with our lives. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul encourages us, “brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” True worship is dedicating everything in our lives to God in response to His redeeming love.

Second, what is service? Originally the term “worship service” was used to refer to the saints (or Christians) meeting together to offer their service to God and their service to others. Dan Kimball puts it best, “The weekend ‘worship service’ has become the time of the week when we go to a church building much like a car goes to an automobile service station.”²⁷ It appears most people go to worship service to get their “tanks filled up.”²⁸ It is increasingly easier to be caught up in a moment of time in our own euphoria and aesthetic pleasure. Often the church appears to be more moved to the grading of a performance rather than to be challenged to become gathers who are missional with the gospel. The congregation listens to the worship music and make comments like, “That was awesome,” “I really got something out of that solo,” or the opposite, “That praise team was terrible,” “I really like that other team better.” Unfortunately, for many church people the “worship service” is more like a visit to the local

²⁷Ibid, 2.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.

convenient store than it is to the throne of God. Typical worship services have become more about what people got out of the experience, how they were entertained, or how well the sermon was preached than they are about how God was glorified.

Most people in America view the church as a place where they come to be fed. The American churches have developed many entertaining programs, built mega-mall facilities, have put Starbucks in their atriums, but have forgotten the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Hillvue is constantly being criticized for this as well. Hillvue is known for being an evangelistic community whose soul purpose is to see people connect to Jesus. For years Hillvue has consistently seen people profess their faith in Christ and be baptized. The problem within the mega-church is the revolving door. People can come in and out of the worship experiences for years and know one know. Assimilation from the baptistery to living a missional life has been a weakness of Hillvue.

In recent years under the care and direction of Pastor Jeff Reynolds the church has been attempting to address this issue. A mentoring program has been established that has seen significant results. When a person is baptized a mentor greets them immediately. This mentor gives them his/her information along with a Bible. These mentors have been through a training program and are personally responsible to disciple the new believer. The mentors participate in follow-up and build a relationship with them. Eventually the new convert will become the mentor of someone else in the years to come. Our greatest evangelists in the church are typically new believers.²⁹ The church must have a constant flow of new believers being disciplined and who are discipling others.

²⁹ John 4, Jesus and the Samaritan women.

People must learn the difference between going to church and being the church.

Going to church implies a taking in while *being the church* implies giving. Biblical church gives out its money, its prayers, its praise, its confessions, its talents, and its lives to “making disciples of all the nations.”³⁰ The only problem with this is the American church has made the “Great Commission” about sending missionaries to foreign countries, forgetting that many people in America are lost, especially this generation. Dan Kimball proclaims, “We need to think of missionaries not only as those we send overseas somewhere but also as ourselves here in our emerging culture in our own town and cities.”³¹

The American Church is surrounded and deeply influenced by a consumer mindset. Many people use consuming to briefly satisfy depression or a feeling of happiness much like a person addicted to drugs. This mentality is brought into the church distorting Christ community and forces pastors to submit to the desires of the congregation instead of giving them what they truly need. Pastors tend to evaluate Sunday morning worship service as good or bad, successful or unsuccessful based on worldly criteria. How many people attended the service? Did people raised their hands in worship? How high was the offering? Did they receive compliments from the congregation? Mark Dever, in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, concludes, “We must realize that the size of what our eyes see is rarely a good way to estimate the greatness of something in the eyes of God.”³²

Also big and small churches with consumer mindsets are always looking for something bigger and better or for the next Christian fad, believing that this will make their

³⁰ Matthew 28:19

³¹ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus, But Not the Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 12.

³² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Rev. and expanded ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 27.

church grow. A mega-church, like Hillvue, can have U2 lead worship, charismatic preaching, a \$100,000 offering, and spectacular pyrotechnics, yet God not be pleased with what took place. Most pastors spend their time critiquing the music and the sermon, instead of participating in it. Maybe when pastors get together to discuss the worship gathering, they need to ask, “What pleased God?” The more pastors fall in love with Jesus, fall in love in people, and practice this love daily, the healthier churches will be.³³

Traditions and styles are not all bad, but when these gifts become gods the church is heading toward dangerous waters. Jesus speaking to the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 15 quotes Isaiah 29:13, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Consequently, God does not like “worship services” that are concerned about entertaining in place of exalting the name of God. God is not pleased when “we reach out while at the same time sell out”³⁴ to our core beliefs.

The apostle Paul had a set of core beliefs about the person and work of Jesus that he was willing to die for. Paul was not a stranger to the culture but he did not allow the culture to control his message. Paul was constantly reminding the church to not stray from the simple but penetrating message of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul states, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in

³³ 1 Timothy 4:6-16

³⁴ Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*.

accordance with the Scripture. To Paul the gospel was the most important conversation he could have with anyone and he communicated it in accordance with the scripture. This is the core of the gospel and of the church. The church must keep this at the forefront of its worship experiences.

The Gathering needs to be attractive to people, but not at the cost of losing its mission. This is difficult to accomplish. Finding a balance in being both attractive and missional is difficult when society is consumed with entertainment. Mark Driscoll, in *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*, gives some practical understanding to this balance:

Attractional churches need to transform their people from being consumers in the church to being missionaries outside of the church. Missional churches need to gather crowds to their church so that hard words of repentance can be preached in an effort to expose people's hearts. Those whom God saves can then be trained to go back out into the culture as missionaries to gather more people to repeat the process. Simply, the goal of a church that is both missional and attractional is to continually follow Jesus' example so that more people are saved for God's mission and more influence is spread for God's Kingdom, without rejecting one aspect of Jesus' ministry in favor of another.³⁵

The Gathering is both about us as a congregation and about those who are yet to believe. Dr. Leonard Sweet recently visited Hillvue and spoke to our pastoral leadership. In his sermon he explained how the church is like a football game. "Like all good football teams we must take time to huddle. Our worship experiences are these moments when we discuss the plays and listen to the coach, however our temptation is to stay huddled instead of move forward."³⁶ At the Gathering we have fought this mentality. The "huddle" is amazing and by nature we do not want people from the opposing team to join our huddle. Jesus states in John 10:16, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to

³⁵ Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 27.

³⁶ Len Sweet, sermon at Hillvue Heights Church, February, 7th 2010

my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” We must allow and invite all people into this huddle called the church. What would happen, however, if even more of the church population would catch this Biblical mindset? When people begin to understand that their jobs, schools, and families are mission fields, it changes their everyday lives. Many begin to enjoy what they do. They begin to see a greater purpose for being in school or at work than getting an education or a paycheck. They begin to realize that God has them in those places to love as Jesus loved, and to share His message in both action and with words.

To some people this does not make sense; however, by tilling, planting, and watering the spiritual ground of this generation, we will begin to see fruit develop. Over the past two years, The Gathering has not exploded in attendance, but many people’s roots have begun to grow deep. A young couple who made the Gathering an essential part of their lives made this comment:

The Gathering is unlike any church service we have ever experienced. Its casualness lends itself to comfortableness, while at the same time reverence seems ever more important. With the cross standing center stage, you are constantly reminded of why we "gather." It has been a growing experience for our family. We have taken the teachings of The Gathering and applied them in our family relationships and in our relationship with Jesus. There is a true sense of community, service and passion for Jesus Christ within the congregation of The Gathering.

-Todd and Jennifer Hazel, Dec. 2007

It is important for Christians to understand that their daily lives communicate the gospel, not just the Sunday worship experience. Many people feel that an hour or two throughout the week is enough spiritual food to feed them, but they are mistaken. If people are going to follow Jesus, then every thought, decision, and event in their lives should be taken through the person of Jesus. The Gathering is for bringing glory to God, through proclaiming the

gospel to the lost, and equipping the saints to share this same message with their neighbors, family members, and co-workers. If there is no implementation of the preaching at The Gathering, then it is pointless. People must be motivated through the Holy Spirit not to “do” more but “be” more. “Worship is a lifestyle of being in love with God and in awe of him all week long.”³⁷ When Jesus is incarnated into lives, then people desire to give their complete allegiance to Him.

The Gatherings first baby steps, created great joy and frustrations. It is important for those in the ministry to be patient with people and with God. If this generation is disconnected from the church and thus disconnected from God, then some drastic measures need to be taken. The Gathering service is not the end all to this process; it is a spiritual experiment for now. The hearts of the leaders of The Gathering are burdened for all people who do not have a relationship with Jesus, and they are willing to be used by Him in any way He desires. The prayer is that The Gathering can be used as a model for other churches to manipulate and integrate into their structure in order to close this great chasm. The research for this Module has revealed a deadly illness within the body of Christ, and the prayer is that God will use The Gathering to begin the healing process for many hurting people.

³⁷Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 4.

Gathering to Express and Experience the Great Commandment

Many people in churches are sitting around year after year going through the motions of church, wondering what they are supposed to do as a follower of Jesus. In a world of extreme liberalism and dogmatic fundamentalism, Jesus' followers are drowning in a sea of programs and products that are supposed to tell them their purpose, but often fail to do so. At the Gathering the desire is for the people of that community to understand and to live out the purpose that God has given to all those who follow Him. Many times what God calls His followers to do is very simple, but often Christians make it difficult for others to experience. Following Jesus is very spontaneous, and if Christians fail to be this way, then what He wants to be in their lives and the lives of others will be missed. The purpose is not to "do" anything, but it is to "be" something.

Salvation is not centered in external morality but by justification from God through Jesus. If we are justified by what we do then Jesus would be contradicting himself when He declares in Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" External works do not always reflect a regenerated heart. Salvation has transformed us into new creations.³⁸ These new creations are not created by works of man, but through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our works of obedience are not what declares us forgiven; obedience is the external response of those who are forgiven

Jesus speaking to His disciples warned them, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard for those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17

clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”³⁹ The list Paul gives in Galatians 5:22 of the fruits of the Spirit begins with the fruit of love. To remain clear of becoming ravenous wolves the church must continue to love God and love people. Love is a powerful weapon. The active, reckless, unstoppable love of God is what must be evident in the lives of the people involved in the church. This power is so strong that nothing on earth can compare, and the powers of the universe bow to it. This incarnate love transforms the rich to sell their possessions, the poor to become rich in spirit, the homeless to be sheltered, the hungry to be fed, and for the gospel to be preached.⁴⁰ At the Gathering we are trying to teach people this type of daily expression of love toward God and toward others. We simply are trying to teach people to love not at the world defines love but of how Jesus defines love. J.I. Packer reveals in his book, *Concise Theology*, a powerful statement of this love.

New Testament Christianity is essentially response to the revelation of the Creator as a God of love. God is a tripersonal Being who so loves ungodly humans that the Father has given the Son, the Son has given his life, and Father and Son together now give the Spirit to save sinners from unimaginable misery and lead them into unimaginable glory. Believing in and being overwhelmed by this amazing reality of divine love generates and sustains the love to God and neighbor that Christ's two great commandments require.⁴¹

True love will cause the church to love all people, people of different social classes, races, sexual preferences, religions and agnostics and atheists.⁴² It will cause people to defend the least of these in the world and to become undignified, foolish, and fearless with love.

³⁹ Matthew 7:15

⁴⁰ Matthew 25

⁴¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 181.

⁴² Acts 17

Jesus gave the Church its purpose long before Rick Warren wrote the books *Purpose Driven Church*⁴³ and *Purpose Driven Life*.⁴⁴ Both are resourceful books and helpful to believers who read them. Many of them are searching so desperately to figure out what God wants them to do, that they in frustration fail to do anything. In their haste to find their purpose-what to do-they miss the admonition found in 2 Corinthians...whatever you do, do in love. The people of The Gathering are no different-they are in need of direction. The core of Jesus' ministry is love. 1 John 4:7-9 states this very clearly:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love**. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

At the beginning of 2010, Hillvue's food pantry became empty. The largest Southern Baptist Church in the state of Kentucky was not able to keep its food pantry open to supply food for those who had none. After hearing of this we created a campaign for the Gathering called *Fill the Foyer*. The strategy of this campaign was to explain the need and give people and opportunity to respond in love by filling the foyer of our chapel (where the Gathering meets) with canned food items. We had no idea how the church would respond, but on the following Sunday after the first announcement this small group of 100 people began to bring in canned foods by the trunk load. It was amazing to watch people practically loving others. The people of the Gathering have not arrived, God is not finished with them, but they are making steps in the right direction-the direction of love.

⁴³ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Warren's book are credible and useful in defining purpose. Warren has helped the church in many ways and I think his books are beneficial for the church and for individuals. The Bible should be our starting primary source followed by credible secondary sources such as these.

⁴⁴ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

Love God

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has this same conversation that Christians are still having today, yet ignoring His answer. In Mark 12:28-34, the author shares this dialogue between Jesus and a teacher of the law.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Jesus states in the Word of God the most important thing that one can do is love. Jesus is not making a suggestion or a request; Jesus is stating a command and a requirement. In Mark 12:30, Jesus answers, "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength*." Now what is interesting is that Jesus is talking to a teacher of the Law. This teacher would have known and understood the Law, so Jesus' answer is from the Law. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 reads, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" Jesus is quoting a very familiar portion of the law found in the Old Testament.

Jews call Deuteronomy 6:4,5 the “Shema” which means to “hear,” “listen,” and “obey.”⁴⁵ In the Western Church words do not have much action, but this would not have been true for the Jewish people. When they said something or believed something, then it had action; it was not just a mental activity, but directed their daily lives. An observant Jew during that time and today would say the “Shema” twice a day, usually quoted the first thing in the morning and the last thing before bed. Like many who grew up going to public school would recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States, the Jewish Nation recites the Shema as a “pledge of alliance” to God.⁴⁶ The Shema “is the first ‘prayer’ that (Jewish) children are taught to say.”⁴⁷ This would be a daily reminder of their complete dedication to following God and God’s will for their lives. It was a verbal tattoo that remained with them throughout the day, in order to help them reflect on the teachings of the Word of God. This allegiance to God ordered every choice, decision, and action was based on their allegiance to God. To quote the Shema daily was to remember who was on the throne of their lives, and to make sure He remained there.

The premise of the Shema, Jesus states that believers are to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” (Mark 12:30) Again Jesus is referring back to the Deuteronomy 6 passage. At first glance the terms heart, soul, mind, and strength seem easily grasped by modern Christians. However, a deeper understanding into Hebrew helps to break this down and shows the passion behind its meaning.

⁴⁵ Lois Tverberg and Bruce Okkema, (Holland, Michigan: En-Gedi Resource Center, 2006), 3,4.

⁴⁶ Lois Tverberg, *How to Love the Lord*, Accessed January 25, 2008, available from www.egrc.net/gdex.html: internet.

⁴⁷ Scot McKnight, *Loving God, Loving Others: The Jesus Creed*. (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2007.), 7.

Heart and Mind

To clarify this Biblical relationship between heart, soul, mind, and strength, one must start with the Hebrew word for heart, *levav*⁴⁸. The modern church reads this through an emotional lens, giving them a warm feeling, thinking about Jesus living in their heart which allows them to become emotional in their view of God. This is a nice thought, but not completely accurate. This word not only indicates to love God with the heart, but also the mind. It is important that the followers of Jesus and members of the Body of Christ shrink the distance between the heart and the mind. The Apostle Paul states in Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The church must learn to love God with both the heart and mind. Left alone, the heart cannot truly love God and neither can the mind. The connection between heart and mind must be fused together for “true love” to be established. Westernized Christians need to have their hearts and minds reprogrammed together. A lot of what is preached to the emerging culture is not the message of Jesus. Jesus is concerned with feeding the poor and social justice however He is more concerned with the condition of ones soul. Jesus in Matthew 16:26 reminds us, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

⁴⁸ *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1990).

Soul

*Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love.*⁴⁹

Jesus requires that Christians also love God with their soul. The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*.⁵⁰ *Nephesh* is interchangeable with the word “life.” Jesus commands His people to love God with all of their existence. Everything they think, say, experience, and do should reflect the love they have for God. Many people in the world and in the church only want to follow Jesus to a point. They are trying to serve two masters, Jesus and self. For Jesus, “love of God, love of others is the core.”⁵¹

Sacrifice is a difficult concept for us to understand in the Western Church. To reach the emerging culture, Christians must show them real dedication and commitment to Jesus with their lives. In a plastic world the culture is in need of authentic Christians. Christians must ask themselves if they are “willing to sacrifice our lives for Him.”

At the Gathering we have a young couple that has been dating for several years. Both of them grew up in difficult family situations and practically raised themselves. In college they met and began dating. Like the gospel of the culture tells couples to do they began to have sex and eventually moved in with each other. For years they “played house.” Though they were not legally married in all practical senses they were. They shared an apartment, bought cars together, paid bills, had sex, and went on vacations.

⁴⁹ Thomas Merton, http://quotes.gaia.com/Thomas_Merton.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ McKnight, *The Jesus Creed*, 8.

About 5 years ago some friends invited them to visit Hillvue. Immediately they fell in love with the church and eventually professed their faith in Jesus and were baptized. Their baptisms were beautiful. When she was raised out of the water the young women shined with excitement and joy. It was beautiful to watch the joy of their salvation visibly filling the worship center. However, not much changed in their daily lives. They continued to live together and continued to have sex.

As they began to grow in their relationship with Jesus they started attending a young adult Bible study and the Gathering. God has given me the opportunity to build a strong personal relationship with them. As our relationship continued to grow and they became even more involved at the Gathering, I began to have lunch meetings with the young man. At one of these times he asked me my thoughts on the couple living together. When he asked me this I wanted to run out of the restaurant because it is much easier to ignore sin then it is to confront it. The young man was devastated by the standard and sacrifice God calls us to as followers of Him. In Luke 9:23-27 Jesus reminds the disciples:

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

That night he went home and began to discuss this with his girlfriend. She did not take this challenge very well. As months went by Jesus began to soften their hearts and they stopped having sex and eventually he moved out and starting sleeping on the couches of his friends. It has been a difficult road for them but the sacrifices they have made for the cause of

Christ in their daily lives has drawn them closer to Him and to each other. Recently we received this letter in the mail.

I've wanted to write you for quite some time now to simply thank you for how you have drastically changed my life. Never have I met a more caring and loving role model in my life. I was always in search of that spiritual mentor and you became that person in my eyes. I am grateful for all of the time and love you willingly invested into us. Since the first day we met you in Bible Study, it was apparent that you wanted to pour into our lives immediately. As busy as you are, you never acted like you didn't have the time. When something goes wrong, you are one of the first people that comes to mind that I know I can lean on. Anytime I've ever needed to meet with you, you've made time.

To be honest, I went through a phase in which I resented you for quite some time. You told me thing I didn't want to hear out of love, but I would blame you in my mind when things weren't going the way I wanted them to. This is why it has taken me so long to thank you for everything. We have been through the hardest times thus far, and I started to feel like you were responsible sometimes instead of my sin that got me in this situation.

I'm telling you all this because I know you could care less if I was kicking and screaming through this process. That is why I look up to you in so many ways. I was still far from being a Godly man. There were many times that I would avoid you because I didn't want to make any more sacrifices. There were times when I wanted to give up, but it was only because I expected nothing but rewards from God for my new lifestyle. I couldn't understand why so many things were going wrong.

I already let you know that I was ashamed for the stat of mind I was in for being angry with God, but you helped show me that I can use this to humble myself. My relationship with Jesus has been transformed to a new stage. From the way I speak to my girlfriend to the way I hand tough situations, my life is becoming more reflective of Jesus. I now feel like I have the tools to disciple others and help those who have been persuaded by our culture. I know that it is all because of the grace of Jesus.

Now, I'm getting married and can't wait another minute for it! My views on marriage are nothing like they use to be. What I use to think was important no longer is because it was based on my sinful wants. You have helped open my eyes to a whole new life. Now that we are on the "home stretch" to get married, I have more respect an love for you every week that goes by. I can't believe how persistent you were with me and how deeply you cared. I have an excitement that I have never experienced. All I can think about is how blessed our marriage will be and that everything was worth it. It takes a real man to tell other people things they don't want to hear for God's greater good.

I can't really explain it but I look at her so differently. I had someone that stuck by me and was willing to sacrifice so many things for God's glory. Having someone right there beside you trying to undo the sin in your lives is the most attractive quality that I now know of. I can't imagine things being too tough for us in our marriage because of the sacrifices we have made in the past two years.

Thank you again for the times where your heart broke for what sin was doing to us. With your help, I feel equipped to have a Godly marriage and family. I can't wait to see what God has in store for our marriage, because you helped me discover a new and powerful love for the woman of my dreams; the love of Christ.

On Saturday June 26, 2010 I am going to be preaching a worship experience where this beautiful couple is going to be married. The powerful thread that runs through this story is the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives and calling them to sacrifice their own wants and lustful desire for the sake of the gospel. This couple has the opportunity to witness to many of their friends about following Jesus through personal sacrifice.

Throughout Jewish history, many Jews would quote the Shema as they were being killed.⁵² Do the people of the Gathering have this same commitment to Jesus? As of now, no one from the Gathering has sacrificed to the point of physical death, but prayerfully we die small deaths daily-the death of self. Along this journey of the past few years, the community of the Gathering has been exploring some difficult passages of scriptures dealing with this. It appears that in the American Church, a false gospel has been created of convincing people to say a little prayer, fill out a white card, get baptized, live like hell, and everything will turn out alright in the end. Is this what Jesus was saying in the gospels? Where is the sacrifice? Where is the perseverance of the saints?

⁵²Tverberg, *How to Love the Lord*, 2.

A call to self-sacrifice changes both the answers and actions. In John 6:60-70 the call to love God with all of themselves and their lives can be seen. Before fully exploring this passage, what has just taken place must be recognized. Jesus has just fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. The people who have partaken of this have fallen in love with the miracles that Jesus performs. They literally begin to stalk Jesus in hopes to get another “blessing” or “miracle.” Jesus attempts to get away from them and leaves to go pray in the mountains. His disciples get in a boat and Jesus walks on water to meet them. When Jesus and the disciples return to the shore, the crowd is waiting on him. Jesus, speaking to the crowd, states:

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood; you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.⁵³

The crowd begins to grumble and complain...they had fallen in love with the free meal, not Jesus. In today’s culture, a term called “*friends with benefits*,” is used to describe two close friends that are not dating, are not boyfriend and girlfriend, and are not married, but hook up, make out, and have sex with each other without the commitment of a relationship. This “no strings attached” experience is very popular among teens and college students. This term describes the relationship many people in the crowd had with Jesus.

How many of modern-day Christians and churches have a relationship with Jesus like this: *Jesus with benefits*. They follow Jesus because they believe they will have some type of personal gain by this experience. That is why the prosperity gospel is so popular among the American church. Many people attend church so they can be a part of the “church club.” Some

⁵³ John 6:53-56

people even pay a membership, and everyone reaps the benefits. Think about how many politicians show up to church during an election year. It is as though people can come to church, connect to people, hear some great music, be entertained, and not have a covenant relationship with Jesus. At the Gathering, the leadership has been trying to help people realize the problem with this mentality. The church is not about what they can get from it, but what they can give to it. Fewer who have gotten married and have stayed married because of the benefits package. Yet this is the way many Christians “love” God with their lives.

Jesus challenges their devotion. “Do not follow me to get more bread...I don’t want you to follow me so that you can get something, I want you to follow me because you love me.” Jesus continues the conversation in John 6:60-70:

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.’ *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* You do not want to leave too, do you?’ Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’ Then Jesus replied, ‘Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!’

After these statements many of Jesus’ followers no longer followed Him. Jesus’ call of discipleship is a difficult one. The people who were in love with Jesus when they were receiving the benefits are the same ones who have now deserted Him. Following and loving Jesus is the most difficult way to live...yet it is the best way. It is difficult because everything in sinful flesh contradicts what Jesus says to be true. It is difficult because it goes against

everything the world says about living. According to the Mishnah, the life of a disciple is a “painful existence.”⁵⁴

In January of 2010 we did a sermon series on the book of James. James reminds his readers, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”⁵⁵ In this series we discussed the importance of the church taking care of both orphans and widows. God has used this experience to spark the calling of several of our families at the Gathering to seek out adopting children. Being a parent causes both joy and pain in life. Taking on an additional child is offering your home, money, time, and life as a sacrifice for another. Over the next couple of years, the Gathering will see children of all different races running through our church that were once orphans but are now given new last names by followers of Jesus who have taken this verse very literally.

The American church is trying to love with as little amount of pain as possible. Truly following Jesus is extreme dedication to love. It is a foolishness that many are not willing to follow. Many all to follow Jesus to certain point; however, when the commitment level is raised, people will begin to back away. This is when a person “falls out of love” and divorces him or herself from the relationship. People don’t have a problem with the WORD becoming an idea, spirituality, a religion, a feeling, or an experience.⁵⁶ We have a problem with WORD becoming

⁵⁴ Jerusalem Perspective, www.jerusalemerspective.com.

⁵⁵ James 1:26-27

⁵⁶ N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone: Part One*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). 90.

flesh. The church does not have a problem with making statements about love. We have a problem with the incarnation of those words. Ask anyone in the South if they “love God” and most them would say “yes.” Does their life reflect that? No. One of fundamental truths that has been coming out in the Gathering has been the importance of practically living love. When Jesus raises the standard, many people give up and quit. Churchgoers will only follow Jesus to a point because of these great expectations, yet all of us expect grace. This happens daily on the road throughout the world. We are quick to yell, scream, and curse when others pull out in front of us or fail to use a turning single, but we are the guilty one we all want grace. Similarly, in the church we are constantly bringing condemnation of the sinfulness of others but are pleading and expecting grace and forgiveness when we are the ones caught in sin.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Matthew 7:2-4

Strength

The Hebrew word for *strength* is *me'od*. This is a difficult word to communicate in English. The word actually means “much” or “very.” A better translation for the passage may be to love God with all of your “much-ness.”⁵⁸ The interpretation that is given is to say that Christians should love God with everything they have. Everything that is within their possession or grasp should be used to show their love for God. Loving God requires that they give it all. So many times they are content to give God a percentage of their lives when God demands we give Him their whole life.

This is difficult to teach to the people of The Gathering. Western culture is consumed with self-interest and desires. The thought of giving themselves to one cause completely is not something we grasp. In Acts, people who loved God contributed generously to the cause of Christ with their money, time, and resources. Today, Christians are often content with giving smaller and smaller portions of their lives. If the Jesus and His church fit into our calendars and around our schedules then we will commit. What would a christian community look like if it gave generously of these things? As the great hymn *Jesus Paid it All* poetically states, “Jesus Paid it all, and all to Him I owe.”⁵⁹ The more the church realizes how much Jesus endured for our sin and the divine wrath He experienced the more we will worship Him with the giving of our lives.

⁵⁸ Tverberg, *How to Love the Lord*, 2.

⁵⁹ Elvina M. Hall, *Jesus Paid it All*, 1865.

Love People

*Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone—we find it with another.*⁶⁰

Now the second part of Jesus' greatest commandment or demand is even more interesting. The second part of Mark 12:28-34 is "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these." Again Jesus is pulling from Old Testament text to communicate to the teacher of the Law. Jesus attaches Leviticus 19:18, which reads, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself."

"Love your neighbor."

Jesus meant much more than loving people we like; he took this love even further. Leviticus 19:34 explores this concept even deeper. "The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God." According to God's Word and according to Jesus, Christians are to love everyone they come in contact with as if they are part of their family. This means they are to love everyone, even people they do not naturally connect with. They are to befriend people who do and say things that irritate them. A.W. Tozer writes poetically, "This love content is more than a thing; it is God Himself in the midst of His church singing over His people. True Christian joy is the heart's harmonious response to the Lord's song of love."⁶¹

People who are completely opposites of each other are not only to love each other from a distance, but also from the very depths of their being. Whatever they have, they are to

⁶⁰ Thomas Merton, http://quotes.gaia.com/Thomas_Merton.

⁶¹ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperSanFrancisco 1961). 102.

share with others. At the Gathering, a challenge has been presented to people in the faith community to share--even to share with difficult people and people they do not “like.” If it is going to be a place for all people to connect to Jesus, then the people who attend must live that out at all cost. So many times the church loves those who can benefit the church more than they love the man or woman who gives the widow’s mite.⁶²

Many times the last part of Mark 12:31 is read as an insurance clause. Jesus continues, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A better understanding of this verse is “Love your neighbor who is like yourself.”⁶³ Everyone is in the same boat whether rich, poor, black, or white, one thing people have in common is their sinful nature and their desperate need for a savior. Understanding this changes things...it changes who and how we love. The church must learn to love people, all people, as Jesus has commanded. J.I. Packer explains:

The hallmark of Christian life is thus Christian love. The measure and test of love to God is wholehearted and unqualified obedience; the measure and test of love to our neighbors is laying down our lives for them. This sacrificial love involves giving, spending, and impoverishing ourselves up to the limit for their well-being. Jesus’ story of the Samaritan’s kindness to the hated Jew stands as his model definition of neighbor-love.⁶⁴

No one has an exempt clause from sin in their lives. Christians tend to forget this as they “mature” in faith. Christians must learn to show grace, because they need grace. They must learn to show mercy, because they need mercy. They must show love, because they need love.

These two loves are fused together and dependent on each other. A person or a church cannot truly love God if it does not love all people. At Hillvue the desire is to see this type of

⁶² Mark 12:41-44.

⁶³ Lois Tverberg, Accessed January 25, 2008, available from www.egrc.net internet.

⁶⁴ Packer, Concise Theology, 181-182

church in Bowling Green, Kentucky. The Gathering is a place for “all” people to come and connect to Jesus. Throughout scripture Jesus is found with people that everyone else left out of the Kingdom of God and Jesus welcomes them to the table, the table of His abounding love. He commands His people to live such love.

From Gathering to Scattering

*Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is nobody's business. What we are asked to do is to love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbors worthy if anything can.*⁶⁵

Since the journey called the Gathering began two years ago, it has been filled with difficulty and beauty, tears and celebration. Many church people are so programmed that they have become ministry robots. Often times an event must be created in order for Christians to share the gospel, show acts of kindness, or worship God.

The leaders of the Gathering are praying the Holy Spirit will show the church the truth of living this simple way—the way of love. Addition comes through subtraction in the walk with Jesus. The church is in constant need to be remolded and shaped. Michelangelo and his statue of David is a great reminder.

...a massive, solid piece of Carrara marble lying unused in a field for 40 years. The marble had been abandoned and forgotten. A large gash scarred its side.

Today, that same piece of marble is visited by millions of people all over the world. The abandoned and scarred stone was transformed into one of the world's greatest masterpieces.

In 1501, Michelangelo Buonarroti won a commission from the Florentine elders to work on the flawed block of marble. Other sculptors assumed the block would break under the strain of the huge gouge in its side. Yet Michelangelo was able to see behind the ruined surface something that no one else could see.

⁶⁵ Thomas Merton, http://quotes.gaia.com/Thomas_Merton.

With chisel and mallet, he worked around the flaw. Weeks, months and years passed, as the master hammered and sculpted the scarred stone. Finally, there emerged from under his skillful hands the figure of a man which was said to be so perfect that it lacked only life itself.

After 4 years of painstaking carving, Michelangelo was able to release the beautiful image of “David” from flawed marble. In doing so, he transformed the block rejected by others into the most striking sculpture in Florence. David’s eyes are watchful...the veins in his hands and arms reveal his strength...a stone rests in his right hand, his body, seems a reservoir of energy, standing poised for action.

When asked how he accomplished such an incredible transformation, Michelangelo said that David was already in the piece of marble...*he merely removed everything that wasn’t David, including the flaw.*⁶⁶

This is a powerful image of the love of God in Christians. People often feel as though they are too “flawed” to be loved or used by God. From Genesis to Revelation, we read stories about Christian’s spiritual ancestors and how they were flawed, but moldable by love. God is in the sculpting business. The prophet Isaiah proclaims, “O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of you hand.”⁶⁷ God is the creator, Jesus is the sculptor, and His followers are the clay. Tracy (not her real name) is a short, quiet lady and would not be considered attractive by the standards of *Cosmo* or *Victoria’s Secret*. She began to attend the Gathering a few months after the kickoff. At the conclusion of the worship experience, Tracy would often find the pastors at the back of the worship center. With a sweet innocent voice she would encourage, cry, share a truth she gained, or a struggle in her week.

One day Tracy showed up at Hillvue for some guidance. After praying with Tracy she began to expose her heart. Tracy began to share how she grew up in the traditional southern home, where mom and dad are happily married and church was never an option. “Every time the doors were open to the church, we were there,” she said with a smile. Tracy’s father was an

⁶⁶ www.inspiringjourneytofinancialfreedom.com

⁶⁷ Isaiah 64:8

active member of the church and served in many different veins of ministry. From there Tracy began to share how from the ages of 4-12 her father, this seemingly Christian man, sexually abused her. She told me of the pain and sorrow this caused in her life and wondered to this very day if her mother even knew. Needless to say, it was difficult for her to grasp how a person who “followed Jesus” and a “father” could do something like this to a little girl. With this haunting nightmare in her life and difficulty trusting men, at the age of 18 Tracy began living a homosexual lifestyle.

By appearance one could not have guessed that Tracy was a victim of such a horrific event. Sitting on a couch in the church was a 45-year-old woman who from the time she was 18 years old had been living a homosexual lifestyle due, impart, to the sexual abuse of a “godly” man. Moving from sorrow and pain to rejoicing, Tracy could not contain it any longer.

“Jesus has changed me.”

Tracy began to share that until coming to Hillvue and participating in The Gathering she had been living this way; however Jesus had healed her of her brokenness. She told how she had experienced such love, grace, and mercy from Jesus and the people, the church. Tracy told me that she no longer desired to be a homosexual, but prayed that God would give her the opportunity to share His love with homosexuals in such a way that they would experience a relationship with Jesus as well. She told me how she is praying that God would send her a man who truly loves Jesus and loves her. Tracy also wanted guidance on how to reconcile and talk with her earthly father about the past.

She wants to forgive him. This is the incarnation of love.

In the postmodern culture many people are looking for love. Magazines, movies, television, music, and websites are all dedicated to people falling in and out of love and hoping

to find it in another.

The problem with the world is sin has completely distorted what love means. Due to sin, people have become children of God's wrath. Humanity hates God, it hates others, and none of us seek Him. But God does the unimaginable in Romans 5:8 Paul proclaims, "He demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In 1 John 4:8-10, John writes, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

As Jesus became all of humanities sin, as He became humanities curse, He experienced death by love.

At any moment the God of all creation, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Prince of Peace, the Great I Am, could have called down legions of angels to rescue Him from the brunt of God's divine fury. Yet He remained. Hate may have nailed Jesus to the cross, but it was love that kept Him there.

Gatherings must continue to take new forms as the culture organically changes, yet the message must remain the same. Peace is a person. Hope is a person. Joy is a person. Love is a person, and His name is Jesus. Love is a cross, love is an empty tomb, and love will come again. Therefore, until Jesus returns or calls the church home, may the church not forsake the gathering to worship Jesus, believing through Him the world will be redeemed.

SECTION FIVE

THE PROJECT

The Gathering Website

The prayer and desire of starting the Gathering was not only for the people of Bowling Green and the surrounding areas, but also for others who are experiencing holy discontentment and desiring to create new expressions of worship within their local communities. Instead of a philosophical understanding, the Gathering has become a laboratory for Hillvue to explore providing different opportunities for people but under the same vision-to connect people to Jesus. The leadership of Hillvue Heights Church has learned a great deal about starting a new worship experience. Many of the concepts are transferable to other pastors and congregations as long as the freedom to create, fail, re-create, and succeed are allowed within the congregation. The Gathering is “a model” not “the model” for establishing these new expressions of worship gatherings. It is simply Hillvue’s attempt at making a difference. In order to communicate to the local congregation of Hillvue Heights Church and the surrounding areas, I have created a website to communicate information about the experience and resources for spiritual formation.

This project is an ongoing project with portions of it being completed for the doctoral project and future additions made as need and creativity emerges. The primary evaluation of success of the project will be determined once the website is uploaded and people who are attending the Gathering or are considering attending the Gathering begin to use the webpage to gather information about the worship experience or spiritual formation.

SECTION SIX

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The homepage of the Gathering website will be attached to the Hillvue.com website as an option for people to click. On the Gathering's homepage it will provide the following information:

- Image: Provided by flickr.com or by local photographers (these images will changes periodically with season or sermon series).
- Tag Line: *A missional Gathering of Hillvue Heights Church*
- Gathering Vision Statement: The Gathering is one of the five worship experiences at Hillvue Heights Church. Our hearts desire is to be faithful to the Word of God by following Him daily and being missionaries in our culture. By loving God and loving people we want to see people connect to Jesus, connect to the community of believers, connect to the truth of God's Word, so that they can experience healing, and be developed.

Goals and Strategies

Goal One: To create and maintain an interactive website that provides information about The Gathering and resources for spiritual formation for those who are involved in the experience or those considering attending.

The first goal of creating a website for the Gathering to provide information about the worship experience and resources for growth. If an Internet user logs onto Hillvue.com he or she can find out a lot of information about the church and the hundreds of opportunities provided by the church for spiritual development and reaching the unchurched and dechurched. Though the

site is very beneficial, there is currently no information about the Gathering worship experience on Sunday afternoons at the church. Out of 4000 people who attend church at Hillvue many of them still do not realize we have a Sunday night experience. The Internet provides an opportunity to massively communicate to those who attend to the Gathering already or who may be considering doing so in the near future.

Goal Two: To provide information and resources for spiritual formation to those who are attending the Gathering

Many people who attend church and have a relationship with Jesus want to grow deeper in their relationship with Him, but many of them do not know how. This section of the website is dedicated to helping people navigate daily prayer, bible study, and worship experiences.

Budget

The production of this website has not required any purchases or outside resources for design or publishing. It was created at Hillvue using iWeb, a free website creating software created by Apple Computers.

Promotion and Long Term Market Strategy

1. Local Marketing

- In the first stage of promotion, the focus would be on those who attend Hillvue Heights Church. Immediately we have a target audience of 4000 plus who can begin to explore and navigate through the site. Again many people locally do not realize this option is available to them. By creating banners, posters, screen shots, and creating a link on

Hillvue.com the congregation of Hillvue can become more aware of what is taking place and build excitement.

2. Global Marketing

- To connect to the local and global market a Facebook account about The Gathering, and a Twitter account has been created. From these two social networking sites they can be redirected to The Gathering website.

General Website Information

The website is divided into two sections for easy navigation. Section one of the website is dedicated to the local population of people who attend the Gathering or are considering attending and need more information about this experience or Hillvue. The following links are available for locals interested in the Gathering.

The Gathering Worship Experience

- *I am New Here:* One of the clearest forms of communication that can be given to those who are attending the Gathering for the first time is explaining to them the experience and what they can expect upon visiting. This link is a glance into the Gathering through a video testimonial and through explanations of our vision, childcare, and more.
- *About Hillvue* (the Gospel, Baptism, Membership, Big Five, Giving): It is important for people to understand different components of our beliefs, membership, spiritual formation, and giving. This section of the site provides information regarding these areas and more.
- *The Gathering Pastors:* This section provides the biographical information of the pastors who serve and teach at the Gathering.

- *News and Events:* In worship experiences we do not want the people to be overwhelmed with announcements and news about the church. At the Gathering participants are given a bulletin with information however; these are often lost. This link provides people with important weekly information, news, and announcements they can check from their personal computers or cell phones.
- *Bible Studies:* Pastor Jeff Reynolds is the Pastor of Christian Education at Hillvue Heights Church. Pastor Jeff and his team have created multiple opportunities for the members of Hillvue Heights Church to be involved in corporate Bible Study. Members have the opportunity to attend Sunday morning Bible studies, Wednesday night Bible studies, and lunch time Bible studies. In 2009, a Bible study was created at 4:00 pm on Sundays so people who attended the Gathering would have an option of joining this Bible Study. This provides an alternative option for people to attend corporate worship and Bible study on Sunday evenings instead of the traditional Sunday morning (Sunday school followed by Sunday morning worship)
- *Resources for Growth:* Spiritual formation is crucial to the development of a person and of the church. The Resources for Growth link will provide members with an opportunity to continue learning throughout the week. Through conversations at the Gathering and in meetings we have discovered peoples desire to mature in their relationship with Jesus, yet do not know where to begin.

POSTSCRIPT

This experience of completing my doctorate of ministry has been transformational for the community of Hillvue Heights Church and for me personally. Not only have I made friends for life through George Fox University but have been a part of a grassroots ministry for our church. More than a philosophical research paper, my dissertation and project has given me the tools and the encouragement to put my ideas into practical ministry.

Most churches in South Central Kentucky do not have a Sunday evening service and for the past 17 years Hillvue has not provided this option for the community of Bowling Green. Hillvue has three Sunday morning worship experiences and one on Wednesday nights with many other opportunities for Bible studies and serving in a variety of ministries. Even for me as one of the pastors Sunday mornings were already very full and tiring. Taking away my Sunday afternoons with my wife and kids has been difficult, and to convince others to do the same would also be a challenge.

Through this process there have been moments of great celebration and there have been nights when I have gotten into my car after the Gathering and said to myself, “Why do I keep doing this.” I only live about 2 ½ miles from Hillvue and typically by the time I have pulled into my driveway, God has already given me the answer, the Gathering is not about “me” but it is about Him.

The Gathering has been a life changing experience even through its humble beginnings. Many people at Hillvue do not understand or even know what is taking place on Sunday nights in the old Chapel of Hillvue Heights Church, but God does. As God slowly reveals himself to others through the Gathering it has become of the joy of my ministry experience so far. Sure we still have the occasional sound difficulty, illustration that does not go

as planned, or joke that only causes people to laugh at me and not my humor, but all in all God is doing a mighty work in people's lives. Recently a friend of mine who just started attending, and gets a kick out of calling Bishop Baker for some reason said, "The Gathering is Bowling Green's best kept secret on Sunday nights!"

As we continue I pray that the Gathering will no longer be a "secret" but that God would use the Gathering to change hundreds if not thousands of people. This experience has only increased my desire to one day be a lead pastor. I pray that when God gives me this opportunity to lead a congregation that I will remember what I have learned through Jesus and through the people of the Gathering. In doing so I pray that I will allow many expressions of worship, deeply rooted in Biblical truth, to be experienced through the church.

It is the testimonies of the people that have made the Gathering worth every moment. From the powerful experiences of worship through music, the baptisms, the preaching of the Word, and the stories of lives radically changed and healed has been irreplaceable. I appreciate the opportunity that Hillvue has given me to create and lead this experience, and as an under-shepherd to the Shepherd may this paper and project only be a glimpse of what is to come.

REFERENCE LIST

- Ayers, Steve. *Igniting Passion in Your Church: Becoming Intimate with Christ*. Loveland, CO: Group, 2003.
- Campolo, Tony, *Let Me Tell You a Story: Life Lessons from Unexpected places and unlikely People* (W Publishing Group, 2000) pg. 48-49.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Rev. and expanded ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.
- Driscoll, Mark. *The Radical Reformation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). p.35.
- Driscoll, Mark. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20051123]. Zondervan, 2006.
- Rainer, Thom S. *The Bridger Generation: America's Second Largest Generation, What They Believe, How to Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997).
- Kelly, Mark, Great Commission Resurgence group unveils progress report, *Western Recorder*, March 2, 2010.
- Kimball, Dan. *They Like Jesus, But Not the Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). p.12.
- Kimball, Dan. *Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). p.95.
- Kimball, Dan. *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p.2.
- Kinnaman, David and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerBooks, 2007), p28.
- Lifeway Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year-olds Drop out of Church*, Accessed December 9, 2007, available from www.lifeway.com/lwc/article; Internet
- McKnight, Scot, *Loving God, Loving Others: The Jesus Creed*. (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2007).pg 7.
- Meacham, Jon, "The End of Christian America," *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009, 34-38.
- Merton, Thomas, http://quotes.gaia.com/Thomas_Merton.

Packer, J.I., *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 181.

Tozer, A.W., *Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperSanFrancisco 1961). 102.

Tyerberg, Lois and Bruce Okkema, (Holland, Michigan: En-Gedi Resource Center, 2006) pg.3,4.

_____, *How to Love the Lord*, Accessed January 25, 2008, available from www.egrc.net/gdex.html; internet.

Warren, Rick, *Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

_____, *Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan , 2002).

Wright, N.T., *John for Everyone: Part One*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). 90.

www.inspiringjourneytofinancialfreedom.com, Story about Michelangelo and the statue of David.

www.emergentvillage.com

All Bible References quoted from New International Version Bible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

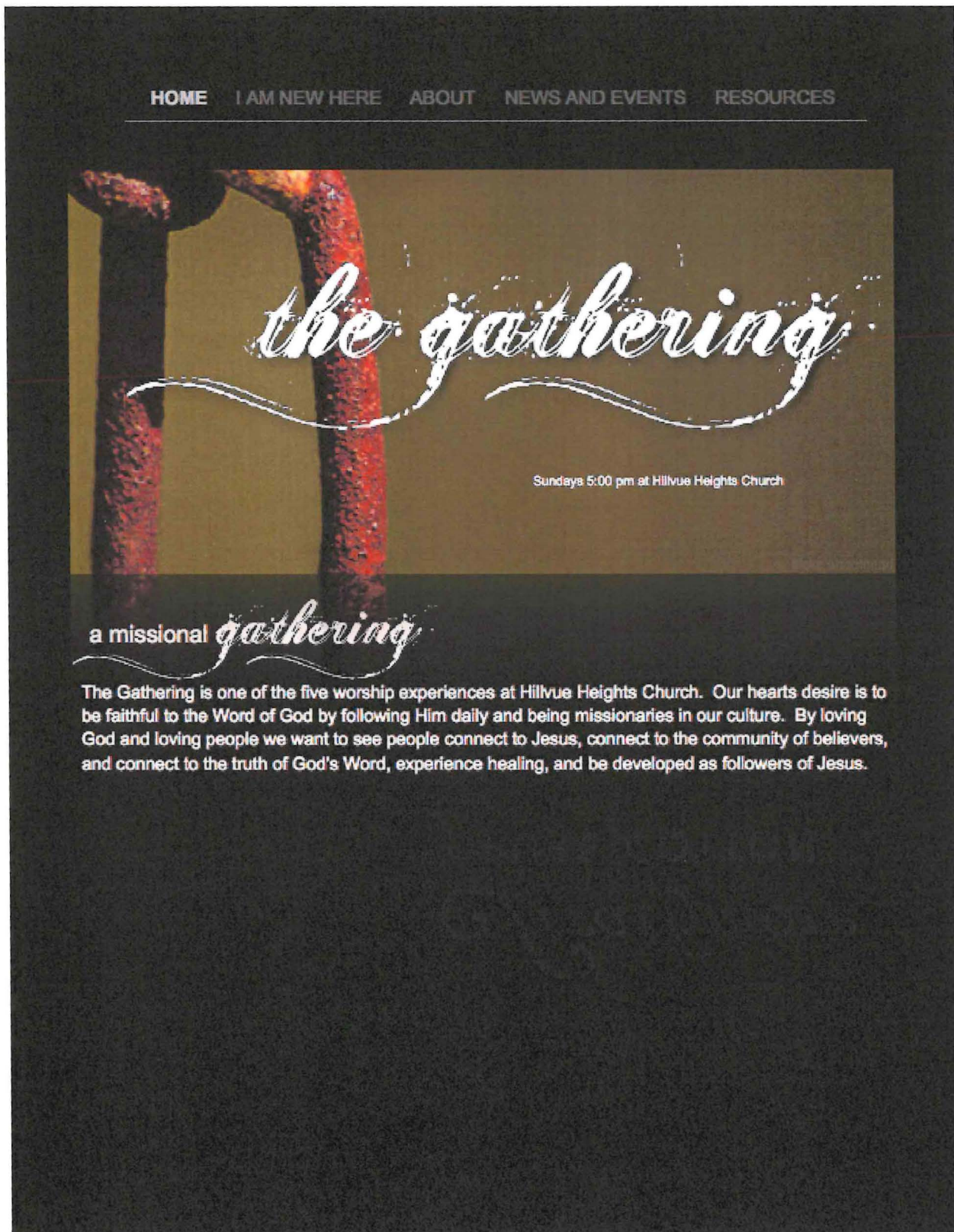
- Ayers, Steve. *Igniting Passion in Your Church : Becoming Intimate with Christ*. Loveland, CO: Group, 2003.
- Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Zondervan, 2005.
- Bell, Rob. *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20061102]. Zondervan, 2007.
- Campolo, Anthony. *It's Friday, but Sunday's Comin'*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984.
- Campolo, Anthony. *You Can Make a Difference!* Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984.
- Campolo, Anthony. *20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch*. Dallas: Word Pub. 1988.
- Campolo, Anthony. *Carpe Diem: Seize the Day*. Dallas: Word Pub. 1994.
- Campolo, Anthony. *Following Jesus without Embarrassing God*. Dallas, Tex.: Word Pub., 1997.
- Campolo, Anthony. *Let Me Tell You a Story*. Nashville: Word Pub., 2000.
- Campolo, Anthony. *Speaking My Mind* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20040316]. W Pub. Group, 2004.
- Campolo, Anthony. *Letters to a Young Evangelical Art of Mentoring; Variation: Art of Mentoring Series*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.
- Campolo, Anthony Darling Mary Albert. *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20070312]. Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Rev. and expanded ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.
- Driscoll, Mark. *The Radical Reformation: Reaching out without Selling Out* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20040428]. Zondervan, 2004.
- Driscoll, Mark. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20051123]. Zondervan, 2006.
- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20060511]. Brazos Press, 2006.

- Jones, Tony. *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2001.
- Jones, Tony. *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry*. El Cajon, Calif.: Youth Specialties: Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005.
- Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003.
- Kimball, Dan. *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004.
- Kimball, Dan. *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20061019]. Zondervan, 2007.
- McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20001115]. Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- McLaren, Brian. *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20010801]. Zondervan, 2002.
- McLaren, Brian. *A Generous orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20040413]. Emergent YS; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.
- McLaren, Brian. *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth That Could Change Everything* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20051123]. W Pub., 2006.
- McLaren, Brian D. Campolo Anthony. *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20021226]. EmergentYS, 2003.
- Nouwen, Henri. *The Wounded Healer; Ministry in Contemporary Society*. [1st]. ed. Garden City: N.Y., Doubleday, 1972.
- Nouwen, Henri. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

- Nouwen, Henri. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. 1st Image Books ed. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Can You Drink the Cup?* Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1996.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Adam, God's Beloved*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Nouwen, Henri. Bosch Ron P. van den, and Theo Robert. *With Open Hands*. Notre Dame: Ind., Ave Maria Press, 1972.
- Pagitt, Doug, and Tony Jones. *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20061023]. Baker Books, 2007.
- Rainer, Thom S. *The Bridger Generation: America's Second Largest Generation, What They Believe, How to Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997).
- Sjogren, Steve. *Seeing Beyond Church Walls: Action Plans for Touching Your Community*. Loveland, CO: Flagship Church Resources from Group, 2002.
- Stanley, Andy Jones Lane. *Communicating for a Change*. Sisters, Or: Multnomah Publishers, 2006.
- Stanley, Andy Willits Bill. *Creating Community* [Book; Internet Resource Date of Entry: 20040823]. Multnomah Publishers, 2005.
- Sweet, Leonard I. Crouch Andy. *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives / Leonard Sweet, General Editor; Andy Crouch ... [Et Al.]*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2003.

APPENDIX

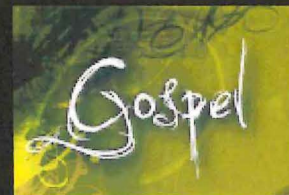
WEBPAGE LAYOUT



HOME I AM NEW HERE ABOUT NEWS AND EVENTS RESOURCES

I AM NEW HERE

flickr: truffes



Information on current Sermon Series



Information on current Bible Studies



Welcome to Hillvue Heights Church and the 5:00 p.m. Sunday worship experience called The Gathering. We offer five worship experiences 8:00/9:30/11:00 on Sunday mornings, 5:00 The Gathering on Sunday afternoons, and 6:30 on Wednesday nights. For more information about our other four worship experiences ([click here](#)).

WHO IS THE GATHERING FOR

Just like our all of our worship experiences at Hillvue the Gathering is a place for all people to encounter Jesus. Specifically, the Gathering is a multi-generational, multi-cultural, and multi-sensory worship experience deeply centered in Jesus and based on Biblical truths. Our desire is create a Christ centered missional community that seeks to glorify God while sharing the gospel with Bowling Green and the surrounding areas.

The Gathering is for all people of all ages seeking to worship God, grow in their relationship with Jesus,

[HOME](#) [I AM NEW HERE](#) **[ABOUT](#)** [NEWS AND EVENTS](#) [RESOURCES](#)

ABOUT

[THE GOSPEL](#)

[BAPTISM](#)

[MEMBERSHIP](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[BIG FIVE](#)

[GIVING](#)



OUR MISSION

The Gathering is a missional community in Bowling Green Kentucky and the surrounding area. Our mission is to see people connect to Jesus, connect to the truth of God's Word, and connect to the community of believers, so they can experience healing and be developed into followers of Jesus.

We participate in this mission by engaging in the life of the church and being missional in our community. This mission is fulfilled by us loving God and loving people in our culture.

WE ARE THE CHURCH...not a building

The church has and will never be a building, it is a people. From Genesis to Revelation the church has consisted of people who have been chosen by God through the work of Jesus.

[HOME](#) [I AM NEW HERE](#) [ABOUT](#) [NEWS AND EVENTS](#) [RESOURCES](#)

NEWS AND EVENTS

Hillvue Heights Church is a large community of believers. Though this is a blessing it can also be difficult to navigate. The news and events page is an attempt to provide you with information regarding announcements and events that may help you become an active member of this community.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

(HILLVUE HEIGHTS CHURCH'S CALENDER OF EVENTS)

ANNOUNCEMENTS SPECIFIC TO THE GATHERING

We are in need of people to serve in childcare, technology, setting up, public relations, marketing, and much more. If you are interested in serving at the Gathering or in any other ministry at Hillvue please contact the church office at 270.842.0012.

[HOME](#) [I AM NEW HERE](#) [ABOUT](#) [NEWS AND EVENTS](#) [RESOURCES](#)

RESOURCES



[SERMON SERIES](#)

[RECOMMENDED BOOKS](#)

[WEBSITES FOR GROWTH](#)

[BLOG](#)
