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AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BIBLICAL
COMMUNITY WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT OF DIGITAL
MEDIA: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Matthew Alan Vander Wiele
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AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BIBLICAL
COMMUNITY WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT OF DIGITAL
MEDIA: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To my best friend, Abby,
wife of my youth and mother of our children.

This is as much your sacrifice as mine.

To our awesome kids,
Molly, Maggie, Zeke, and Levi.

Thank you for helping me remember what really matters.

Thank you for making life
crazy and beautiful.

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PREFACE

This thesis represents much more than is covered in the following pages. Behind the work and research and formatting is a personal support system that has allowed me to be successful for the betterment of the family and the church. I am indebted to those who have carried me to this stage in my life and have helped disciple me as I continue to work out my salvation before God and man. I am thankful to God for His never-ending grace. For His glory, He has surrounded me with much stronger, wiser, kinder, and loving people that have made me who I am today.

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Finally, I thank Jesus Christ for pursuing me not only into a relationship with God, but also on a daily basis when I stray off the path.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Newer and newer forms of technology are a peculiar component of the current cultural moment. At the turn of the century Samuel Ebersole prophesied, “Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an increasingly important part of American society.”¹ People today, particularly young people, utilize digital media as a primary means for communication, relationships, and community.² The impact of the digital world is felt greatly in children’s and family ministries.³ The current reality of this unique environment, known as digital media, is that digital natives⁴ read blogs first instead of newspapers, meet friends online before meeting them in person, purchase music online rather than in stores, and plan activities via texting or through social networks.⁵ For any concerned Christian parent, there is a need to know whether or not their children’s faith is being developed or hindered in the environment of digital media. This brings up the issue of biblical community within digital media. What does biblical community look like

¹Samuel E. Ebersole and Robert H. Woods, “Virtual Community: Koinonia or Compromise? Theological Implications of Community In Cyberspace,” *The Journal of Education* 13, no. 10 (2003): 185, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://bcsi.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/09>.

²Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011), 1.

³Amy Dolan, “Digital Perspectives for Ministry and Education” (lecture given October 17-19, 2013, North American Professors of Christian Education Conference), accessed September 15, 2013, <http://www.napce.org/conference-papers.html>.

⁴Ibid. Digital natives are defined as anyone born after the year 1980.

⁵Ibid.

within the environment of digital media? Four out of ten practicing Christian Millennials say that they participate in online conversations about faith.⁶ The issue of whether or not the environment of digital media is being utilized for community is not the topic of conversation anymore. The *effectiveness of community*, rather, in the new environment of digital media is a much-traveled road today in both Christian and non-Christian writing. The amount of time adolescents spend using media⁷ is roughly six and one-half hours daily.⁸ Ninety-five percent of teens access the Internet.⁹ In short, digital media and the communities formed in them are here to stay.

Statement of the Problem

Within current literature there was a major concern that the new environment of digital media is having a negative influence on one's ability to practice proper and effective community with each other, while in an online environment. This includes both Christian and non-Christian literature. More so for Christians, the concern seems to be a

⁶Barna Group, "How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith," October 15, 2013, accessed September 25, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/640-how-technology-is-changing-millennial-faith#.UpN3pdl3uSo>.

⁷One could describe reading (books, magazines, and comics), radio, and realistic movies (Shirley Temple, etc.) as media. However, electronic conveyances such as television, movies, music, personal computers, and the internet are usually being researched when "media" and its impact on children is described. Cell phones and tablet computers, interactive gaming, videos and music are examples of items of interest to parents and educators. Dorothy G. Singer, "Handbook of Children and the Media" (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 207-08.

⁸Dolan, "Digital Perspectives for Ministry and Education."

⁹Ibid. Seventy-four percent of teens have mobile access, with 25 percent accessing mostly on cell phones. A report of teen usage over time (2000-2009 reports) describes how teens access and use media. For example, teens use media for getting news about current events (62 percent), social networking (73 percent), buying things online (46 percent), looking online for health, dieting or fitness information (31 percent), and sharing something online they have created (38 percent). PewInternet, "Trend-Data-(Teens)," accessed October 9, 2013, [http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-\(Teens\)/Whos-Online.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-(Teens)/Whos-Online.aspx); PewInternet, "Trend-Data-(Teens)," accessed October 9, 2013, [http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-\(Teens\)/Usage-Over-Time.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data-(Teens)/Usage-Over-Time.aspx).

lack of commitment to proper stewardship regarding this media.¹⁰ Specifically for the Christian, this includes the proper practice of biblical community within digital media. However, is it accurate, fair, or appropriate to saddle the environment of digital media with this problem of what seems to be a loss of traditional communal value? It seems that the perception of a lack of community is now heightened due to the environment of digital media. The ways that people, specifically high school students, define communal terminology forms perceptions that in turn result in practice. It is problematic to expect the effectiveness of biblical community within a past, more traditional environment (i.e., face-to-face community) to mirror that of biblical community within the environment of current digital media.¹¹ Should the effectiveness of biblical community within the environment of digital media be based on past effectiveness of biblical community in a totally different environment?

The real issue, rather, is a need to better understand what the key principles of biblical community actually entail *regardless of the environment of digital media – or any environment for that matter*. When the essence of biblical community is understood regardless of the typical contextual environment (face-to-face community), the potential for professing Christian teens to experience true biblical community in an environment such as digital media can be effectively determined. Christians who have explored these issues of biblical community within digital media have not taken this necessary step of isolating the essence of biblical community first, regardless of environment, in order to then explore its effectiveness in other environments such as digital media. In short, what are the theological presuppositions of biblical community that never change regardless of

¹⁰Barna Group, “How Technology Is Influencing Families,” May 23, 2011, accessed September 25, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/family-kids-articles/488-how-technology-is-influencing-families> ().

¹¹Thomas E. Boomershine, “Christian Community and Technologies of the World,” in *Communicating Faith in a Technological Age*, ed. J. McConnell and F. Trampiets (Middlegreen, England: Saint Paul, 1989), 95-96.

what environment they are placed in? By no means is there an assumption that biblical community has never been properly defined. The issue is, rather, defining biblical community within digital media without an expectation of what it should consist of due to past environmental inclusion.

Currently, there is much writing on integration, defining the new media itself, and pointing out its shortcomings in comparison to traditional communal environments. Yet, little is written on the specific characteristics of biblical community *regardless of or apart from a particular environment*, and then how those principles or characteristics, separate from environment, can effectively function in the unique environment of digital media. Current methodology, therefore, has stacked the deck against their research objects. Research immediately assumes the essentials of biblical community dependent on past environment. This is like attempting a comparison between apples and oranges or a football and a baseball. Rendering an orange useless when needing to make apple pie or a football subsequent to a baseball when attempting to utilize the football in a baseball game.

Current Status of Research Problem

Students Validate Digital Media as Means for Community

To offer some support to the problem, recent research conducted on high school students analyzed whether or not students validate their text messages to include the characteristics of communication that promote community. This subject is discussed more in chapter 2.¹² The research proved that students do validate the digital media of text messaging to indeed include the following characteristics:

¹²In chap. 2, students' definitions of terminology such as communication, community, and biblical community will be discussed to support the argument that students are basing what they consider to be proper characteristics of communication that promote community based on their own definitions. These definitions are much to be desired regarding what an expert panel and the literature has defined.

1. All members participate and freely express themselves.
2. Members are listened to and receive empathic responses.
3. Supporting and having respect for each other.
4. Treating everyone equally, while valuing difference eg. Gender.
5. Taking time to appreciate one another's point of view.
6. Aiming for mutual understanding.
7. Respecting the knowledge and experience each brings to the task.
8. Being non-judgmental/avoiding negative criticism.
9. Being open to learning.¹³

Although the above characteristics are broad and are not necessarily characteristics or principles of biblical community, the interesting part of the research revealed that students validate text messaging based on *their own interpretation and definitions of terminology*. Overall, their understanding of terminology such as community, communication, and biblical community fell short of including the proper principles that define these terms from an academic and traditional standpoint. Validation stems first and foremost from how terms are defined and what environment they are placed.¹⁴ The latter statement supports Ebersole's discussion on the new way people define community and communication. Over a decade ago people discussed the significance of community within new technology. Ebersole noted that

new online communities differed from past mass media and interpersonal relationships in that computer mediated communication can be both mass communication and interpersonal communication, therefore lines between mass and interpersonal communication can become blurred.¹⁵

This research attempted to clarify the blurred lines by directly connecting the principles or essentials of biblical community to the medium of digital media. Ebersole also noted that in this new technology, the way that one defines communication and community is

¹³D. Scheffert et al., *Facilitation Resources: Managing Group Interaction* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Extension, 2001), 4:15-16. M. Anderson, "Ground Rules for Teams" (class handout, Edith Cowan University, 1998), accessed September 15, 2013, http://www.psawa.com/Characteristics_of_a_community.html.

¹⁴For example, regarding "communication," many students simply defined this term as "two or more people talking or engaging," or "trying to connect with a person for a purpose or goal." One student defined communication as "two or more people talking, or exchanging texts, pictures or information."

¹⁵Ebersole and Woods, "Virtual Community," 187.

different than in the past. People online continue to meet face-to-face, but “meet” and “face” mean something different.¹⁶ It seems, therefore, presumptuous to judge the effectiveness of biblical community within one unique environment and then compare it to another. For the believer, it is important to observe the ways that the environment of digital media is a potential concern regarding the impact it has on children and teens.¹⁷ This concern, however, should not drive one’s belief that biblical community cannot thrive in a unique environment such as digital media.

Concerns of Digital Media

Today, there seems to be a lower view of face-to-face community that leads to a promotion of isolation¹⁸ and a separation of transportation and communication.¹⁹ Presently, space is not a constraint to the giving and receiving of information.²⁰ Regarding online learning, John Gresham notes that the adaptation of students to online environments is part of the new contemporary cultural context and theological learning must adapt as well.²¹ A clear definition of biblical community and how it functions best

¹⁶Ibid., 192-93.

¹⁷Gregory C. Carlson discusses the major concerns of the impact media has on children in Karen Miller, ed., *Children and the Entertainment Industry* (Detroit: Greenhaven, 2010), chaps. 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.3, 3.4; Steven J. Kirsh, *Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012); John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: Basic, 2008); and Patti M. Valkenburg, *Children’s Responses to the Screen: A Media Psychological Approach* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004).

¹⁸Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 58-59.

¹⁹An example of a lower view of face-to-face community would be a person enjoying a sermon preached by a pastor on a television screen. Another example is the increasing popularity of online learning.

²⁰Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Penguin, 1985), 64.

²¹John Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 24.

within the new environment of digital media is needed. Interestingly enough, non-believing authors reflect all of the previous concerns, although interpreted through the lens of community separate from a biblical worldview.

The problem of a lack of community within digital media is not an issue of primarily Christian concern, but a concern for mankind in general. This is noted in the beginning of chapter 2 as a brief history is provided of the journey that digital media has brought non-Christians and Christians alike. As Christ followers, however, believers hold the answer that is found in union with Christ. The potential for a lack of community fostered within the medium of digital media includes everyone due to the fact that everyone is made in the image of God. There is however, equally, the potential for a lack of community to be fostered within a traditional communal setting. Consider a man sitting in his living room with his mother. They are sitting apart; she is knitting and he is watching the game. There is no communication, yet they are in the same room. The man is texting his brother; he is encouraging his brother with prayer and Scripture—via the environment of digital media. Which environment, at that particular time, demonstrates a more biblical community—mother and son in the same room, or brother-to-brother texting?

In spite of the fall that is man's sin, mankind recognizes that there is a concern within online communities and many people are researching the difference in the way communication and communities are formed within the age of digital media. This change in communication and community, based on an environment such as digital media, is not an isolated issue, but is rather one of many changes in the process of how people as individuals and communities give and receive information.²² It is also problematic to

²²Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* includes much discussion on the progression of the loss of community and the way one communicates within his community. This is seen as a progression away from the community as the primary means of giving and receiving information to the individual obtaining information less and less from a community. An example is the movement from the oral to the written, to the printing press, to the telegraph, to the radio, to the television, to the World Wide Web. These different processes of media will be explored further in the precedent literature review.

simply make the primary distinction that the major difference in communities is that one is face-to-face and the other is not. Ebersole writes,

The new online communities being created differ from both mass and interpersonal mediated relationships in significant ways. Computer-mediated-communication can be at once both a mass and interpersonal mediated experience. In the process, lines between mass and interpersonal communication often become blurred. For instance, a web site may be designed for a mass audience and receive thousands of hits a day, but it may also facilitate personal, one-to-one exchanges between users, or between the author and the reader. New dynamics for interaction are facilitated by the new technological possibilities.²³

Neil Postman rightly discusses that God intentionally did not allow the Israelites to participate in making graven images in general, but also graven images of God Himself was prohibited: “It [a graven image of God] is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of culture.”²⁴ For the believer and the non-believer, it is evident that community within digital media is the new norm. As mentioned previously, it is not a matter of whether or not digital media is the primary means by which people, and particularly youth, are engaging, but a matter of determining the implications of this change in environment and how it affects life with one another.²⁵

Technology at the Expense of Relationship

The process of understanding the effects that digital media has on culture and community has moved from an excitement regarding what this new age will bring, to a concern of what has been sacrificed in the wake of new technology regarding relationship. The precedent literature explored in chapter 2 revealed much writing on this dilemma of sacrificed and misplaced relationship. The deficiency in literature is not

²³Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 4.

²⁴Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 9.

²⁵Turkle, *Alone Together*, 16.

found in the area of the progression of this problem from a media perspective; conversely it is noted and researched well.²⁶ There is also not a deficiency in the literature regarding writing on biblical community.

A lacuna in the literature was found in that although there is abundant writing and research explaining biblical community, the principles and characteristics of biblical community are explained within the context and environment of a traditional communal setting.²⁷ Moreover, the effectiveness of biblical community for that environment might be determined, but cannot be simply transposed onto a unique environment such as digital media—or any other environment for that matter.

Because of the previously mentioned point, it is less clear as to the positive effects the principles or essentials of biblical community have within the environment of digital media, and specifically with youth. The effectiveness of biblical community within digital media is currently judged based on the effectiveness of the characteristics of biblical community that is observed in more traditional forms of communal environments. It is unfair to judge one environment's effectiveness based on another environment's success. For Christ-followers, the enemy may not be the media itself, but the perception brought to the media of what biblical community should look like in this new environment.

In short, one can wrongfully blame the media of the digital age, as it can rightly move one away from true biblical community. Any environment, however, can move one away from the essentials or principles of biblical community. For the believer, it seems probable that biblical community can be and should be practiced anywhere—including the digital age within the medium of digital media. Is it getting a fair assessment? Also, it

²⁶Postman notes, “For example, it is noted that from the Roman alphabet through the telegraph, to the printing press, to radio, to television and now digital media, the path is quite clear.” Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 145.

²⁷See chapter 2, “Precedent Literature,” under “Theological Progression of Biblical Community.”

might be assumed that when the key principles and/or essentials of biblical community are determined regardless of and apart from environment, why would biblical community not appear and be practiced differently when functioning in various environments? Digital media can be a great instrument in allowing people to engage in biblical community that other communal environments do not allow.²⁸

The Need for Research

There was a need for research in the area of determining the principles of biblical community regardless of and apart from environment first in order to then appropriately implement these principles into the new environment of digital media. Then effectiveness and even perception was appropriately measured. There was a need for research in the area of perception among students defining and practicing biblical community within digital media. This research allows the believer to offer a solution that goes further than dismissing the medium of digital media as the culprit, and also making the mistake of measuring success—or lack thereof based on another environment. The hope is to move from the negative issues of community within digital media, to better understand what positive role this new environment can offer when the principles or characteristics of biblical community are applied. The essence of biblical community must be properly defined regardless of environment.

Particularly, teens and adults will benefit from observing the principles or essentials of biblical community regardless of and apart from environment to then move to understanding how these essentials can function in the exciting environment of digital media.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study was to better understand

²⁸Best practices of biblical community within digital media will be offered in the later chapters.

the validity of biblical community within digital media by professing Christian high school students in classical, closed enrollment non-denominational, and open enrollment non-denominational Christian schools. This thesis surveyed and synthesized the most recent literature related to biblical community within digital media. Before biblical community within digital media was evaluated, however, the principles of biblical community were defined clearly with recourse to relevant literature as well as validated and confirmed by a consensus from an expert panel. This was the qualitative portion of the work.

Once the essence of biblical community was reviewed and defined regardless of and apart from environment, this research then measured practices of biblical community within digital media by professing Christian high school students in classical, closed enrollment non-denominational, and open enrollment non-denominational Christian school settings. This was determined quantitatively, by measuring the perception that students had toward their present understanding of biblical community within digital media. Would students consider their online experiences to indeed contain the principles of biblical community reviewed in the literature and validated by the experts? Would skeptics, once shown the principles of biblical community apart from environment, observe that this unique media is capable of instituting genuine biblical community? Are Christian high school students properly practicing the key principles or essentials of biblical community in the environment of digital media? Do students even recognize the essentials of biblical community?

Research Methodology Design

This research considered the possibility that one's perception of biblical community through digital media is simply an extension (defined right or wrong) of how one already believes biblical community to function within another already established environment. How one practices the essence of biblical community within one particular environment should not influence how one practices biblical community within other

environments such as digital media. The essence or principles of biblical community needed to be defined first regardless of and apart from environment, in order to then function properly in an environment. When issues of isolation and lack of face-to-face interaction take place, digital media is deemed the culprit. This does not mean that there are no relevant issues surrounding the loss of face-to-face community within digital media experience. There seems to be, however, a perception of what biblical community should look like within digital media that falls short of traditional community. This perception might be based on a presupposition (right or wrong) of how people previously practiced biblical community in another environment. This perception of biblical community within digital media was explored in a three-fold process.

First, the intent of this research was not to reinvent principles of biblical community; it is not necessary. As the literature review exhibits in chapter 2, there is much rich writing on biblical community. The purpose was to first review the concerns surrounding community within the environment of digital media. Observations were made from secular and Christian writing. Second, the principles and essentials of biblical community are reviewed in current literature. Lastly, a list of the principles apart from the baggage and subjectivity of the environment was compiled.

In general, current literature revealed numerous potential and noteworthy traits of biblical community observed in traditional environments. Once a general list of numerous principles was reviewed, these principles were submitted to an expert panel for validation by consensus. Five experts reviewed the principles of biblical community regardless of and apart from the environment it is practiced.²⁹ The essence or theological presuppositions of biblical community were then determined. In short, present literature and writing regarding biblical community was explored in order to provide a working list

²⁹Experts, utilized for the panel, included professionals in the fields of digital media, biblical community, youth ministry, secondary education, and family and church ministries. See appendix I.

of principles of biblical community that were then utilized regardless of environment, sharpened, and validated by the panel.

After a consensus, regarding the list of general principles of biblical community regardless of environment, those principles and essentials became the objective by which questions for a student survey were developed. Through this survey, perception was measured (see appendix 6). Students were surveyed regarding whether or not they perceived their communal interaction online to include the principles or essentials of biblical community. This allowed perception to be judged fairly as the essentials of biblical community had been clearly defined regardless of any one environment.

There is much evidence that digital media is changing the way Millennials consider faith.³⁰ However, does the participation in digital media by Christian high school students clearly portray the principles and essentials of biblical community?

Finally, the results of the student survey allowed for observation and analysis of the perception of the student's understanding of biblical community within the environment of digital media. Results of the survey, a section of best practices, and areas for further study concluded the study.

Research Question

The gap in the research did not answer the following question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? The more commonly asked questions concerning the effects of digital media on one's face-to-face relationships cannot adequately be addressed until the above question is answered.

For teens today, every part of life is a part of the present technology and

³⁰Barna Group, "How Technology is Changing Millennial Faith."

functions within that environment. Barna research notes that the most common way Millennials are blending their faith and technology is through the digital reading of Scripture.³¹ As noted previously, the perception of the lack of biblical community experienced within digital media is not necessarily due to the unique medium of digital media. Rather, the unique medium of digital media potentially heightens an already existing problem regarding biblical community. *Digital media reveals an already existing problem of an overall misunderstanding of the key principles of biblical community apart from any one particular environment.*

Summary

There is no longer argument regarding whether or not people are utilizing the environment of digital media for communal experiences. Nor is the argument today as much a *refusal* of this medium as being deemed useless in Christian circles. The debate currently, as this chapter touched on and the next chapter reveals, is determining the *effectiveness of biblical community within digital media and how this effectiveness compares to effectiveness in other environments*. For the Christian, it is not only community, but also specifically biblical community that are included. What is the effectiveness of biblical community within digital media? The majority of the literature reveals that although there is much discussion on biblical community, it is encompassed and practiced within already established environments (i.e., face-to-face communities). Also, a clear definition of biblical community was difficult to pin down. More so, the debate is a constant comparison of one environment to another. The principles of biblical community are clearly examined regardless of and apart from environment and then purely applied to the environment of digital media. This allowed for a fair assessment of effectiveness. Also, perception of the sample was then accurately measured.

³¹Ibid.

CHAPTER 2
PRECEDENT LITERATURE

Introduction

When one considers the broad spectrum of writing on both the topics of biblical community and the environment of digital media, a proper starting place must be reconciled. It was determined in chapter 1 that it is problematic to expect the effectiveness of biblical community within a past, more traditional environment (i.e. face-to-face community) to mirror that of biblical community within the environment of current digital media.¹ In order to solve this dilemma, the principles or theological presuppositions of biblical community needed review, considered regardless of environment, and then applied to the unique environment of digital media. There are many factors to consider.

Progression of Literature Review

The movement of the literature review begins with general moving to specific regarding biblical community within digital media. The discussion begins at the secular level, but quickly moves to the context of biblical thought. It is out of the scope of this work to attempt an exhaustive history of neither digital media nor biblical community. First, a brief history of digital media is covered to show the concern that secular writers, over the years, have with the lack of communal value allegedly seen in the environment of digital media. This section also includes current concerns Christian writers observe with digital media.

¹Thomas E. Boomershine, “Christian Community and Technologies of the World,” in *Communicating Faith in a Technological Age*, ed. J. McConnell and F. Trampiets (London: Saint Paul, 1989), 95-96.

Second, as the discussion specifies, the review reveals that although people in general participate in community, it does not mean that they participate in *biblical* community. There is a difference that needs to quickly be addressed. When community is not rooted in the gospel of Jesus, the result is an “individualistic approach that fails to appreciate the crucial role of community life.”² One’s relational need, based on the belief that a relationship created man (Gen 1:26-28), should not be susceptible to falter within the environment of digital media or any environment for that matter. Christians need to accurately define the principles of biblical community regardless of environment. Before one can expect to practice these principles in an environment, there must be clarity of essence.

The major portion of this section reviews current writing on the essentials or principles of what makes a community biblical. These principles are discussed within current environments. A theological progression of biblical community, as seen in God’s Word, is the foundation for determining the principles, along with current writing.

Once a list of the principles or essentials of biblical community was reviewed, they were compiled into a list regardless of and separate from environment. The list was validated and agreed upon by consensus, qualitatively, by an expert panel. In short, what are the general principles or essentials of biblical community, agreed upon by experts that can now be applied and observed in any environment? What makes a communal environment biblical? Once the essentials of biblical community were reviewed, compared, and validated upon by a panel of experts through consensus, the perceptions of people, specifically students, were measured. This leads the research to then address whether or not teens that attend Christian schools perceive their online communal experiences to include the principles or essentials of biblical community. The effectiveness of biblical community within the environment of digital media can be

²Lloyd W. Ratzlaff, “Salvation: Individualistic or Communal?” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 4, no. 1 (1976): 108-17.

appropriately assessed.

The gap in the research did not answer the following question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? The more commonly asked questions concerning the effects of digital media on one's face-to-face relationships cannot adequately be addressed until the above question is answered. This literature review tackles the first needed piece to the research: In essence, what is biblical community?

A Brief History and Current Concerns of Digital Media

The purpose of this general section is to briefly note the concerns observed in past and current writing regarding the unique communal environment of digital media. The point is to note that there is concern in not only Christian writing, but also in secular writing.

Twenty years ago, the research conducted on the Internet phenomenon of new technology and digital media held a very positive view regarding the new abilities and efficiencies that the medium of the Internet and digital media would bring to all people.³ Sherry Turkle, who years ago began a trilogy about the effects of the computer on people, painted a bright picture of what the new technology offered.⁴ However, in the present day

³Carr states, "The net has become my all purpose medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears and into my mind. The advantages of having immediate access to such an incredibly rich and easily searched store of data are many, and they've been widely described and duly applauded." Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 6. In the same paragraph Carr cautions that although the above is noted, he believes that "what the net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation."

⁴Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011), ix. Turkle, presently a professor at M.I.T., specifically studied how computers are changing people. Turkle explains in the opening that over thirty years ago "the intellectual buzz in the still young field of artificial intelligence was over programs that could recognize simple shapes and manipulate blocks." Years later Turkle notes that the use of a computer takes a little piece of your mind, and that "face-to-face" with a computer was a person reflecting on who he was in the mirror of the machine. Ibid. This concept prompted her to write *The Second*

and three books later, Turkle discusses the negative effects that the Internet is having on people and the concern of the rampant forging of identity in online spaces.⁵ The concern is that these online relationships not only *replace* traditional community, but also rob one of community that is experienced among real life interactions.

The Medium is the Message

In his book *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan notes, “A characteristic of every medium is that its content is always another (previous) medium.”⁶ For example, the Internet is a medium containing traces of various mediums that came before it: the printing press, radio, and the moving image.⁷ Similarly, the text message is quickly replacing talking on the phone.⁸

McLuhan’s 1964 seminal book coined the phrase “the medium is the message.”⁹ His thesis was that as one moves toward a human conscious, the extension of man and what he knows will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole human society.¹⁰ This idea sounds good on paper, however, the book addresses the negative aspects of the power of technology over people, and more importantly, that people misunderstand how this technology affects them. This prophecy can be seen today

Self in 1984, followed by *Life on the Screen* in 1995. *Alone Together*, her third book in the series, discusses people’s dependence on the computer for relationships *in place of* real face-to-face encounters. Much of her writing discusses the problem of replacing on line environment for traditional face-to-face relationship.

⁵Ibid., 2.

⁶Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: The MIT Press, 1964), 9.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Turkle, *Alone Together*, 1.

⁹McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 19.

¹⁰Ibid., 3.

in the way technology “brings us together,” whether it is through social or digital media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, virtual-online experiences, or communication via cell phones. McLuhan notes that most people believe that it is not the machine itself that influences them, but rather the content of the machine. McLuhan argues that the media or medium that is used is what actually has an influence over people and that “people become what they behold.”¹¹

In *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr discusses McLuhan’s thoughts:

McLuhan understood that whenever a new medium comes along, people naturally get caught up in the information—“the content”—it carries. They care about the news in the newspaper, the music on the radio, and the shows on the TV. . . . The technology of the medium however, as astonishing as it may be, disappears behind whatever flows through it—facts, entertainment, instruction, conversation. When people start to debate whether the medium’s effects are good or bad it is always the content that is discussed.¹²

Carr goes on to discuss that what both the enthusiast of technology and the skeptic of technology miss is what McLuhan argued. In the long run, a medium’s content matters less than the medium itself in influencing how one thinks or acts.¹³ Carr notes that in the end people pretend that the technology itself does not matter, but rather how they use the technology.¹⁴ McLuhan wrote, regarding media, that the content of the medium is just the “juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the dog.”¹⁵ If the content does matter, and in the case of digital media and the cell phone, is the use of text messaging or Instagram today another example of McLuhan’s point? Do people really think that the content in digital media is what is really important or rather, the way in

¹¹Ibid., 19.

¹²Carr, *The Shallows*, 3.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 31.

which the content is communicated? In short, the environment is where the activity becomes primary and the content secondary. The community becomes subservient to the environment.

The Medium is the Metaphor

Adding to the discussion, in 1985 Neil Postman revised and argued McLuhan's thought that the medium is actually the metaphor. In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Postman discusses that "the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation."¹⁶ Postman believes that the message of the medium was really a metaphor because a message promotes a concrete statement about the world, whereas media acts metaphorically as it utilizes symbols and implies reality.¹⁷ The point is that media-metaphors "classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, color it, and argue a case for what the world is like."¹⁸

Turkle argues that people have utilized technology to build relationships in substitution for the intimacy that they need. Thus, the virtual world is believed to allegedly be a place where one can love their bodies, love their families, and love their life.¹⁹ Her work focuses on the fact that what one truly needs—intimacy and relationship—is sought after in a media that offers *neither* intimacy nor relationship. Turkle notes that teens avoid making phone calls because they are "fearful that they reveal too much and that they would rather text message than talk."²⁰ When compared to

¹⁶Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Penguin, 1985), 8.

¹⁷Ibid., 10.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Turkle, *Alone Together*, 1.

²⁰Ibid., 11.

traditional environments of community, Turkle deems digital media neither a place for intimacy or relationship.

In *The Shallows*, by the evolutionist Nicholas Carr, there is much empirical research that highlights how science, over the last decade, has made leaps and bounds in understanding the brain. The brain, once thought to be hardwired only, is now understood to have the ability to rewire itself based on how it is being used. Carr discusses that the world wide web is different from other mass media in that the web is bi-directional, and not only are messages sent and received, but are done so at the same time. Regarding the radio, mass communication via the Web is able to connect people in a way that the radio and television cannot. His book explains how the Internet negatively affects the brain. This author also backtracks on his past belief that the Internet was beneficial to the brain.²¹ Carr cites and revisits McLuhan's predictions in his early work *Understanding Media*, where the famous quote, "the medium is the message," was first coined. The predominant recent research has shown interest in the idea that the medium—in this case the Internet and digital media—is being utilized to attempt to fabricate real life relationships at the expense of real life identity and face-to-face community.²²

Maggie Jackson states that people are "distracted," and asks, "How do you know if you have ADD or a severe case of modern life?"²³ Mark Bauerlein sums up the negative aspect of digital media on teens and young adults:

²¹Carr, *The Shallows*, 85.

²²Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2008), 29; Carr, *The Shallows*, 85; Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 16-17; Turkle, *Alone Together*, 2.

²³Jackson, *Distracted*, 17. Jackson notes the regression of even how people eat to be a direct relation to their need to be connected and interact in a fast paced life. She notes that "we are back to eating with our hands again . . . and do not even realize what our food tastes like until it is half way down our gullet." Ibid., 106-07. The need to be connected affects all aspects of life.

While teens and young adults have absorbed digital tools into their daily lives like no other age group, while they have grown up with more knowledge and information readily at hand and taken more classes . . . young Americans today are no more learned or skillful than their predecessors.²⁴

Concerns with Digital Media and Community in Christian Circles

Past and current Christian writers have equal concerns with the effects that digital media has on traditional communal environments. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, on the Christian front, Walter Wilson in his book entitled *The Internet Church*, discussed that online relationships within digital media should never take the place of one-to-one relationships, but predicts that there would come a time for the Internet to be utilized to bring an isolated person into the presence of the body of believers.²⁵

Samuel Ebersole on Digital Media and Community

For the last three decades, Samuel Ebersole has helped make a distinction between traditional community and virtual community. In 2000 he noted that “online communities are springing up in every corner of the Net, promising to restore the intimacy that was believed to have been lost through technological advance first introduced by writing and later print.”²⁶ Virtual community or computer-mediated community is defined as “interpersonal relationships founded and maintained by CMC

²⁴Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation*, 9-10. Bauerlein notes that “autonomy has a cost: the more teens attend to themselves, the less they remember the past and envision the future. Ibid.

²⁵Walter P. Wilson, *The Internet Church* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 23. Wilson notes that there will come a day when people will be able to carry a hand held computer in their pockets with access to the Internet and that the Internet becomes the global community and town square. Ibid., 98.

²⁶Samuel E. Ebersole and Robert H. Woods, “Virtual Community: Koinonia or Compromise? Theological Implications of Community in Cyberspace,” *The Journal of Education* 13, no. 10 (2003): 185, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://bsci.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/09>.

[computer mediated communities] in the place called Cyberspace.”²⁷ Students today describe community using terminology that actually describes virtual community or community experienced in the environment of digital media. In chapter 1, recent research was reviewed that observed students validating text messages to contain the characteristics of communication that promote community. The conclusion was that it became obvious that students would validate text messages to include characteristics of communication that promote community. The intriguing part of the study revealed that how students define definitions in turn promotes how they practice. The point is that

new communication media means that new social phenomena are going to arise that differ in significant ways from everything we’ve known and the word *community* is going to have to stretch to include groups of people who communicate socially and work together cooperatively and never meet in the real world.²⁸

Ebersole notes that virtual communities are then by definition “copies (in the Platonic sense) of the perfect or ideal community.”²⁹ In the same article it is noted, “virtual communities will never replace organic communities, but will be in addition to them, and possibly strengthen them.”³⁰ This is clearly explained in Ferdinand Tonnies’s example of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, community and society compared.³¹ Ebersole adds a distinction between community and virtual community that includes an observation of the word “cyber.” The word cyber means “to pilot” and suggests “a world through which we

²⁷Ibid., 192.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹In Samuel Ebersole’s landmark writing on computer-mediated communication (CMC), he discusses Tonnies’s example of the difference between community and society: “According to Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft* is community—private, lasting and genuine, while *Gesellschaft* is society—public, transitory and superficial. Tonnies argued that all relations in the *Gemeinschaft* are based upon comparison of possible and offered service, whereas *Gemeinschaft* is a bond of blood which expresses itself in deeds and words.” Ibid., 197.

navigate or steer.”³² When one surfs the web or cruises the Internet, Ebersole relates this to the idea of a society rather than a community.³³ Stability, permanence, and structure, which are used to describe traditional community, are no longer primary values.³⁴

To summarize, traditional community is *different* than virtual community in that virtual communities lack face-to-face encounters: “In most fields they [CMC] will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. Today, however, with the ability to “FaceTime” and “Skype,” people are able to have face-to-face time via on line environments. They will be communities not of common location, but of common interest.”³⁵ Traditionally, community is defined as “making things common,” which is found in not only the definition of community but also communication.³⁶ James Carey, reiterated by Samuel Ebersole, argues that community is not possible without communication and the only way one can understand community is to understand communication first.³⁷ Ebersole continues that “communication and hence community thus understood is not simply the passing of information from source to the public via the particular channel of communication, but is a dialogue.”³⁸

Ebersole notes,

The missing ontological linchpin for community loosened by radio and television and further stripped away by computer-mediated community (CPM) may be found

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 192-93

³⁶Ibid., 189.

³⁷Ibid., 191.

³⁸Ibid.

in an understanding of Christian community, which at once embraces as understanding of communication as ritual, ceremony, and dialogue.³⁹

Ebersole makes the connection that it is not appropriate to judge the effectiveness of a community within one environment to another: “We often differentiate between face-to-face and online or ‘computer mediated’ communication by evaluating the quality of the interaction.”⁴⁰ He describes the characteristics of community that can be experienced in any context or environment.⁴¹

Ebersole’s work is influential, as he notes,

Christian theological studies of community have focused on the *koinonia* or fellowship that results when believers, motivated by the agape love of God, join together in fellowship and unity . . . success of community is centered on *sharing in something with someone*, not merely an association.⁴²

Ebersole discusses Thomas Boomershine’s view that it is “problematic to use earlier communal structures as a norm for judging unique communities such as communities within digital media.”⁴³ He writes that although Israel and its foundation on kinship cannot be compared to early Christian communities, online communities seem to be deemed as “para-communities” or “secondary communities.”⁴⁴

³⁹Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 194. Ebersole admits that before one can explore the nature of online community one must consider the psychological dimensions that people experience as “community” regardless of the context in which it is experienced.

⁴⁰Ibid., 211. Ebersole notes on p. 193 that in social spaces people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of “meet” and “face.”

⁴¹In the same text, Ebersole discusses that membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection to be essentials of community. Like Ebersole the purpose of this research is to do similarly with the characteristics of biblical community. Ibid., 205-14.

⁴²Ibid., 187.

⁴³Ibid., 188. Boomershine, “Christian Community and Technologies,” 95-96.

⁴⁴Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 188. Ebersole goes on to define community, virtual community, and Christian community with the differing factors being based on environment. He makes the distinction that biblical community is communication as ritual, ceremony, and dialogue and differs from community in that all people are made in the image of God. All people are able to experience community with each other, but it is a broken relationship; it is an incomplete community lacking unity in

Secular writers such as Maggie Jackson argue that digital media promotes isolation within community.⁴⁵ Ebersole argued above that community could happen in online environments; it just appears different. This should be the case for biblical community. Christians should not fall victim to secular thinking that advocates the environment of digital media to be too great for biblical community to thrive. Consider again the example of a man sitting in his living room with his mother: they are sitting apart; she is knitting and he is watching the game. There is no communication, yet they are in the same room. The man is texting his brother and encouraging his brother with prayer and Scripture—via the environment of digital media. Which environment demonstrates a more biblical community—mother and son in the same room, or brother to brother?

Toward a Definition of Biblical Community

At this point in the review it is helpful to offer a potential definition of biblical community in general. According to Ebersole, a community is defined as “making things common”⁴⁶ and also embracing “ceremony, ritual and dialogue.”⁴⁷ Regarding biblical community, the making things common would be “in Christ” and the ceremony, ritual, and dialogue would be Spirit-led. Biblical community, thus, might be people with Christ in common that are participating in Spirit filled ceremonies, rituals, and dialogue between God and man, and man and man.⁴⁸

God through union with Jesus. This is where community and biblical community part. Ibid., 194-95.

⁴⁵Jackson, *Distracted*, 58-59.

⁴⁶Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community, 189.

⁴⁷Ibid., 194.

⁴⁸As the literature review continues, principles of biblical community are reviewed, but determining a clear-cut definition in any of the writing regarding biblical community was extremely difficult. This offered definition is simply toward a definition

Summary

So far it was reviewed that there is concern in both secular and Christian writing that community is being sacrificed or even replaced by the environment of digital media. Christian writing indicates that there must be a distinction between the effectiveness of one community compared to another, but still considers digital media to be inferior to a traditional environment. Samuel Ebersole greatly influences the conversation as he defines differences between community, virtual community, and biblical community. The literature definitely subjects digital media and online relationships to be subservient to traditional face-to-face environments. This is due to the fact that held up to traditional face-to-face environments digital media falls short every time. The following section begins the conversation of what indeed are the principles or essentials of biblical community. The review compiled the major principles observed by writers within environments such as biblical narrative and traditional environments. What are the theological presuppositions, principles, or essentials that make a community “biblical?”

Principles of Biblical Community

The Epistle to Diognetus (c. A.D. 120-200) is a letter that responded to propaganda circulating in the Roman Empire. False rumors were spread about Christians. Allegations were fostered in the empire of dangerous lifestyles and a secret society that demonstrated bizarre behavior.⁴⁹ The following excerpt from *The Epistle* points out that the context and environment in which the early Christians functioned was not what differentiated them from others—it was their ethic of “as God is, so shall their people be.”⁵⁰

that might be better defined later. Obviously, this definition is utilizing Ebersole’s definition of community and is not original in essence.

⁴⁹James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 28.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 32.

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practice any eccentric way of life. . . . Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like transients. . . . Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh. They obey the laws, but in their private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men—and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened in to life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance.⁵¹

An exhaustive review of all literature found in Scripture and present writing on biblical community is not the point of this review. The focus, rather, is to review current writing that describes the general and basic principles of biblical community and list them so that they can be observed apart from or regardless of any one environment. Also, a starting point for biblical community must be determined as originating with the triune God, offered to man, broken by man, and restored by Christ. Within this biblical framework the principles or essentials of biblical community exist—the theological presuppositions are noted. The progression is simply moving through the meta-narrative of the Bible. It becomes obvious that there is a biblical progression starting with God Himself—the Trinity—to the creation of man, the fall of man, the redemption of Christ, and the consummation of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Within these categories the essence of biblical community is observed.

This review collects the current principles of biblical community observed in traditional environments by experts and also in the biblical meta-narrative. This review is simply to reinforce the reader what current writing agrees on and defines as the principles of biblical community. The goal of biblical community is not primarily based on the community itself, but something that is found in the theological presuppositions of God Himself and His Word and is recognized through behaviors. This would push back

⁵¹Cited from Athenagoras, *Epistle to Diognetus in Early Christian Writings* (London: Penguin, 1968), 244-45. James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 28.

against McLuhan's prophecy that the medium is primary and the content secondary. For the Christian, *the message should drive the environment*. For the Christian, this message is Jesus and His gospel. The medium should not control the success of biblical community. The purpose is not to diminish the need to respond in obedience to the gospel, however, the success of one's biblical community or spiritual formation is not primarily based on how people act in any given environment. There is a need for a proper understanding of the principles or essentials of biblical community and what the essence of biblical community entails apart from or regardless of any one environment.

Theological Progression of Biblical Community

Paul Pettit explains that in order for one to understand the theological implications for spiritual formation, four peaks need to be climbed: the Trinity, humanity in the image of God, the God-man Jesus Christ, and salvation.⁵² The valley, of course, is sin and the depravity of man that dwell between the mountaintops.⁵³ Pettit's model is helpful for the discussion at hand. Although Pettit's model is utilized with spiritual formation in the context of biblical community, both spiritual formation and biblical community have their origin and essence in the same theological presuppositions.⁵⁴

⁵²Paul Pettit, ed., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 37.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 37, 45. Pettit's compilation of foundations of spiritual formation focuses on the characteristics of spiritual formation within biblical community, but the essentials of biblical community are observed within certain environments such as the Old Testament, New Testament, and the church. Areas like the soul, love, and character are also discussed. The point is that there is not a clear list of theological presuppositions of what makes a community biblical, it is assumed that the reader already possesses a definition of biblical community regardless of environment. The closest he comes seems to be the Trinity. There is also not a clear-cut definition for biblical community. For example, biblical community can be defined as . . . is difficult to review.

The Trinity as the Origin and Model of Community

The first essential principle of biblical community is the Trinity as the *origin and model* that all community must imitate. In short, in spite of environment or context, biblical community is only possible when it is recognized as having its origin in God Himself—and specifically the Trinity. The success of biblical community or goal is based on something external that must first *be known and then experienced*.

First, one must realize that community is not an experience that people primarily and desperately crave, but rather is “a truth that can [and must] be defined.”⁵⁵ If the success of the community is primarily based on the people in the community and the environment, it is destined for failure. If biblical community is to be effectively experienced, then the origin of true community must be defined properly and understood. The origin of biblical community is found in the Godhead of the Trinity and ultimately in Christ for the believer, who is led by the Spirit. The teachings of the Trinity are a foundational doctrine that advocates God as relationship. Although one God, He is three equal persons. Wayne Grudem defines the Trinity with three statements that summarize the biblical teaching about the plural, yet singular nature of God: “God is three persons. Each person is fully God. There is one God.”⁵⁶ John Metzger explains the relationship and community of the Trinity as a “plurality of oneness.”⁵⁷ This plurality of oneness is seen in Genesis 1 where Moses uses the plural noun form of “God” with the singular verb form “created.”⁵⁸ In short, God is a plurality of oneness functioning in perfect

⁵⁵David Read, “Trinity as a Clue to Community,” *Living Pulpit* 3, no. 4 (1994): ii-1. Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 37; Christopher Mwoleka, “Trinity and Community,” *Afer* 17, no. 4 (July 1975); Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 204.

⁵⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1994), 231.

⁵⁷John Metzger, *Discovering the Mystery of the Unity of God* (London: SPCK and Sheldon, 2010), 15.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 59.

relationship with Himself throughout all of eternity. Ebersole agrees that community is “clothed in an understanding of the Trinity itself and is understood best when it is understood ontologically.”⁵⁹ At the core essence of biblical community, for the believer, there is a God to be known first, experienced second, and then third, experienced with each other. Relationship and community are found in the triune God because God is a relationship.⁶⁰ God is a truth that can be known first and then experienced. The first human experience with God was God Himself in the garden having relationship with man. This relationship was ruined by sin, but is made available again through Jesus.

The Origin Becomes the Model of Biblical Community

The *origin* of biblical community, found in the Trinity, becomes a *model* for Christians to imitate no matter what the environment. Before one can imitate something appropriately they must believe in it and recognize specific behaviors that can be imitated. Then, this is tangibly observed by sharing in everything. These concepts are discussed in more detail when the New Testament Church is reviewed. No matter what the environment or context, a principle of biblical community is having all things in

⁵⁹Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 185. Ebersole cites Walter Kasper, who states, “The communion of the church is prefigured, made possible, and sustained by the communion of the Trinity . . . [in essence], the Church is, as it were, the icon of the Trinitarian fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the sign of salvation for the world. Klaus Kienzler, “The Church as Communion and Communication,” in *The Church and Communication*, ed. P. Granfield (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 80-96.

⁶⁰Read, “Trinity as a Clue to Community,” ii-1. Read cites Jurgen Moltmann’s *The Spirit of Life* and notes that if it is a “characteristic of the divine Spirit not merely to communicate this or that particular thing, but actually to enter in to fellowship with believing men and women—if indeed he himself becomes their fellowship—then fellowship cannot be merely a “gift” of the Spirit. It must be the eternal, essential nature of the Spirit himself. . . . The Spirit does not merely bring about fellowship with himself. He himself issues from his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the fellowship into which he enters with believers corresponds to his fellowship with the Father and the Son and is therefore a Trinitarian fellowship.” Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: First Fortress, 2001), 217-20.

common because this community has Christ in common. How does a believer attempt to observe the Trinitarian relationship as the origin of biblical community and begin to model this relationship to one another in a community? Attempting this feat academically proves impossible.

Christopher Mwoleka notes that the “three Divine Persons share everything in such a way that they are not three gods, but only one . . . Christ’s wish is: that they (his followers) may be one as we were one, with me in them and you in me, may they be completely one.”⁶¹ Mwoleka continues to note that theologians make the mistake of attempting to understand the Trinity academically. This has proven problematic. “The right approach to the mystery of the Trinity is to imitate the Trinity.”⁶² The Trinity is not someone to only believe in, but also something that is revealed to believers as a model for community: “If we would once begin to share in life in all its aspects, we would soon understand what the Trinity is all about and rejoice.”⁶³

Hierarchy and Submission to Authority within the Trinity

There is one last key principle of biblical community found in the Trinity. There is a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in God and then modeled among believers in any environment. God is often described as relational only; therefore people are relational. However, God is also a relationship—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This community allows God to create man in his image and then allows man to experience the truth of community, not only with God, but also with each other. A

⁶¹Mwoleka, “Trinity and Community,” 203.

⁶²Ibid. Mwoleka notes that people keep making the mistake Philip made by asking, “Rabbi, show us the Father.” Christ rebuked Philip and said, “Philip, have I been with you for so long and yet you do not know me? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say: show us the Father?” Then Christ continued, “He who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do.”

⁶³Ibid., 204.

helpful definition for biblical community is that this type of life, “involves a deepening trust and friendship with God for those who are in Christ Jesus. More specifically, it is an ever growing, experientially dynamic relationship with our Trinitarian God.”⁶⁴ Moreover, there is also the behavior of submission to authority within the relationship of the Trinity. Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ In all biblical environments where community is practiced, there is chain of command. Relationship does not exist apart from authority in the Bible.

The community of God is equal, but functions within a hierarchy. Nona Verna Harrison notes,

The Father, who is the source of hierarchy, is simultaneously the source of humility, self-offering, and *kenosis*, of conciliarity, relationality, and *perichoresis*. He eternally begets the Son and breathes forth the Spirit so as to endow them with all he is, all his divinity, glory, creative power, and authority. He lets them act on his behalf to create, sustain, and perfect the universe; he allows them to represent him and make him known in the world. He does not keep anything for himself alone but shares everything he is and everything he has with them.⁶⁶

This hierarchy, within the community of the Trinity, can be observed in many ways throughout Scripture. Regarding the gospel of Christ, James Montgomery Boice writes that Paul’s theme in Romans 1:1-7 first and foremost establishes a hierarchy of the gospel in connection with the Trinity. In the first few verses it notes that the gospel is God the Father’s gospel, the message of the gospel is Jesus (v. 3), and that the work of the Son of God is applied to a person by the power of the Spirit (v. 4).⁶⁷

Another example of the hierarchy in the community of the Trinity is observed

⁶⁴Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2001), 25-26.

⁶⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 21, 24.

⁶⁶Nona Verna Harrison, “Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2002): 347-64.

⁶⁷James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 1:29-52.

by the “sending” of God. God the Father sends the Son; the Son does not send the Father anywhere (John 3:17; Luke 20:13; John 3:16). Both the Father and the Son send the Spirit; the Spirit of God does not send either the Father or the Son (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7).

The Son, moreover, submits to the Father in obedience to the cross (Phil 2:8), regarding his ministry (Mark 1:35-39; Luke 6:12-13), in accordance to God’s Word (Luke 4:21; John 17:12, 19:24, 28), and regarding his actions of miracles (John 6:38, 12:50). The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Son; the Son does not glorify the Spirit (John 16:13-14).⁶⁸

Finally, God creates in a hierarchy. God created mankind equally; He created both male and female, but with different roles (Gen 1:26-28). Although all Christians are to submit to one another (Eph 5:21), the husband is called to submit to God and the wife to her own husband (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:22), and children are to obey their parents (Eph 6:1). This concept of submission to authority is modeled by God in the Trinity and also instituted in the Old and New Testaments.⁶⁹

The Image of God in Man

Recognizing that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made

⁶⁸Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware advocate a hierarchal relationship between the triune God. They reference support that biblical community between man was first and foremost practiced at the level of God. Due to this truth, man can experience proper biblical community not only with each other, but also with God through Jesus. Wayne Grudem, “Trinity Debate: Does the Son Eternally Submit to the Father in the Trinity,” accessed September 15, 2013, <http://www.waynegrudem.com/debate/>. The issue of authority within the Trinity is not centered on the submission of Jesus to the Father while incarnate (imminent), but rather the debate is whether there is submission in the economic Trinity. Courtney Reissig, “SBTS Profs Examine Relationship between Trinity and Gender,” September 16, 2009, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://news.sbts.edu/2009/09/16/sbts-profs-examine-relationship-between-trinity-and-gender/>.

⁶⁹Lev 4 explains the hierarchy regarding the severity of sin and the need for sacrifice. The order is as follows: High Priest brings guilt on to the people (4:3), the sin of the whole community (4:13), the sin of the tribal leader (4:22), the sin of the common person (5:1-6). The New Testament church developed hierarchy in relationship with each other in community. Acts 6 discusses the need to elect not only spiritual leaders, but also leaders that will focus specifically on the physical needs of the person.

in the image of a relational God is a principle of biblical community. If God experienced perfect relationship and community with Himself, then why did he choose to create? It seems that God created to invite a community of “image bearers in Christ to participate in the eternal love relationship that the Trinity enjoys, thus displaying his glory.”⁷⁰ Genesis 1:26-28 explains that God made man in His own image and then allowed man to experience this community as male and female, husband and wife—within a hierarchy. Metzger explains that the plurality of oneness that the Trinity shares is to some extent given to man to model. There is one God with three persons and there is one “man” with two parts, male and female.⁷¹ Metzger writes, “The picture becomes clear that *Elohim*, in the context of plurality, creates singular a plural being known as humanity—mankind—that is both male and female.”⁷² Man also experiences the truth of community and relationship by working together to bring God glory. Genesis 1:26-28 is commonly called the Dominion Mandate. God allows his creation to experience community by ruling over the earth and pro-creating. Bruce Ware affirms the Dominion Mandate when he discusses that it is wrong to assume that male and female are made in the image of God simply on a spiritual level. Human beings are composed of both material (body) and immaterial (soul) aspects functioning as unified entities (holistic dualism).⁷³ The point is to not make light of the spiritual characteristic of the image of God in man, but rather hold at a higher level the tangible aspects of functioning community as the image of God in man. This is important as people practice “community” in front of a screen today, yet people are not physically there. The question that really needs to be addressed then is whether or not face-to-face

⁷⁰Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 38.

⁷¹Metzger, *Discovering the Mystery*, 42-43.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Bruce Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 79.

interaction is required in order for biblical community to be present. This debate is wide spread and encompasses the online education conversation as well. Does an essential component of community need to be physical presence? Mary Hess points out that physical presence is not necessary for community to take place.⁷⁴ In a recent discussion with an online Chairman from a large Christian University, John Cartwright notes,

Although on-line education has the potential for promoting isolation, I walk down the halls of the brick and mortar institution everyday and observe students who are physically together, yet socially apart. I often engage more with students in my online class than I see other students engaging in a traditional school setting.⁷⁵

The point is this, what is the principle of biblical community found in man being made in the image of God? It seems that the essential component is that a person is inherently relational and behaves a certain way because he is made in the image of a relational God and man alone bears the image of God (Gen 1:27; Jas 3:9).⁷⁶ Man is special and unique from all other creation. Pettit calls this “endowment of personality.” Man’s endowment of personality includes emotional capacity, self-determination or freedom, moral nature, and original righteousness.⁷⁷

Traditionally, theological interest in community is grounded in the role of the church in the world. Ebersole and Woods write,

Called to be a community of believers, the Church is defined by its relationship first with God and then with one another. Christian theological studies have focused on koinonia or fellowship that results when believers, motivated by the agape love of God, join together in fellowship and unity. The term fellowship, partnership,

⁷⁴Mary Hess, “Attending to Embodiedness in Online, Theologically Focused Learning,” accessed September 18, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/666289/Attending_to_embodiedness_in_online_theologically_focused_learning.

⁷⁵John Cartwright, Chairman, Liberty University School of Religion, discussed some of the issues with stereotypes brought against online education within the environment of digital media. John Cartwright, interview by author, Louisville, January 15, 2014.

⁷⁶Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 39.

⁷⁷Ibid.

communion, community and sharing originate from a root that means to share in something with someone.⁷⁸

Man is also made specifically in the image and likeness of God spiritually.⁷⁹

Bruce Ware notes,

The image of God in man as functional holism means that God made human beings, both male and female, to be created and finite representations (images of God) of God's own nature, that in relationship with Him and each other they might be His representatives (imaging God) in carrying out the responsibilities He has given to them. In this sense, we are images of God in ordering our lives and the carrying out of our God-given responsibilities.⁸⁰

Pettit adds that the obvious inference is that humans are “distinct from all of the animal creation in that we alone bear the image of God (Gen 1:27; Jas 3:9).”⁸¹

Individualism at the Expense of Community

For the believer, a principle and essential of biblical community apart from or regardless of environment is recognizing that the community is primary to the individual. Individualism, that is so commonly accepted in the western culture, is in direct opposition to God's plan for community.⁸² Biblical community is a social experience that is first and foremost to primarily benefit the community. The purpose of the community is not to primarily benefit the individual—rather it the opposite.

The sin of man plays an integral role in the disruption of community. Man sinned and separated himself from the community of the Trinity directly after he was made in the image of God when he hid in the trees (Gen 3:8). The payment for sin is

⁷⁸Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 187.

⁷⁹An exhaustive review of the words “image and likeness” are out of the scope of this review. For further information, see Metzger, *Discovering the Mystery*, and Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity.”

⁸⁰Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity,” 81.

⁸¹Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 39.

⁸²Ibid.

death (Rom 3:23).⁸³ It is worth noting, however, that the image of God in man, followed by sin, is where biblical community and community part way according to Scripture.

Secular writing also indicates that isolation and individualism—specifically observed in the medium of digital media—lose the value and purpose of community.⁸⁴ Isolation and individualism are apparent when people do not experience true biblical community that is union in Christ. Even community apart from biblical community is defined in part by “spatial relations that is now facilitated by a technology that demolishes space and alters time. CMC (computer mediated communities) is in essence socially produced or constructed space.”⁸⁵ Individualism is an obstacle to community. Non-believers are made in the image of God, as are believers. The difference is that people who are not rooted in the gospel and experiencing union with Jesus cannot experience God properly, nor can they properly experience others. Particularly, lack of community is heightened when isolation and individualism are primary components of one’s view of life. Digital media heightens this issue. For the non-believer, the issue of digital media is to blame. For the believer, it is an issue of malpractice regarding biblical community, not a medium issue. An example is noted in the book of Hebrews where the body of Christ is forsaking the fellowship of believers (Heb 10:25). A Christian may claim to love Jesus, but not want anything to do with His bride. This issue has nothing to do with environment, but rather a heart issue and misunderstanding of the principles and essentials of biblical community, and more so what God specifically teaches about fellowship. The malpractice of biblical community not only affects community but also virtual community where the issue of isolation is heightened. A high view of community

⁸³The fall of man will be discussed in the section “Man’s Sin: Community with God is Lost,” in this chap.

⁸⁴Turkle, *Alone Together*, 12-13; Carr, *The Shallows*, 196.

⁸⁵Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 198.

is commonplace in Scripture. The sin of the individual affects the community (Lev 4:3).⁸⁶ Dallas Willard notes that spiritual formation, “good or bad, is always profoundly social. You cannot keep it to yourself and anyone that thinks of it merely as a private matter has misunderstood it.”⁸⁷ Biblical community, as part of one’s Christian formation, can only exist when believers utilize each other to become more conformed to the image of Christ.⁸⁸ To know God “more fully cannot be accomplished without the larger community of believers.”⁸⁹ Isolation is not a place where biblical community thrives. The medium of digital media is indeed a place where isolation is heightened, but should not be a place that is void of biblical community.

Man’s Sin: Community with God is Lost

A principle of biblical community, regardless of environment, is one’s recognition of sin and how sin affects biblical community. Sin exists in both biblical community and community even though there is a great difference between experiencing community apart from union with Jesus Christ and community that is rooted in the gospel. For this brief discussion, sin within biblical community is addressed. Effective biblical community must not ignore sin, but also not make the goal of biblical community “sin management.”

A great fall happened in Genesis 3 when man sins against the very relationship that created him. The focus of biblical community and how to experience it should not be contingent on how one manages sin. Rather, true biblical community can now only be

⁸⁶Lev 4:12, 21; 6:11; 8:17; and 9:11 all represent the need for the community to be spared at the expense of an individual. Acts 5 describes the need to keep the community safe from sin by eliminating two individuals.

⁸⁷Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 182.

⁸⁸Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 46.

⁸⁹Ibid., 47.

accessible through the gospel of Jesus Christ and union with Jesus Christ.

Man, both male and female, were created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). The relationship of the triune God created man to experience God and each other. Sadly, sin broke this relationship, both with Creator and created (Gen 3:23). Therefore, the payment for this sin is death (Gen 3:19; Rom 3:23). However, before God judges the man and woman, He provides a promise that will one day redeem male and female and give mankind an opportunity to enjoy community with God again, through Jesus (Gen 3:15). Before one can enter into real spiritual formation or sanctification, God must justify one setting him free from sin through Jesus. Pettit notes, “What has been deformed by the ugliness of sin [the whole person] must now be reformed according to the ideal image of perfect humanity found in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁰

Sin within Biblical Community

A principle of biblical community, regardless of any environment, is therefore recognizing that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community. Regarding digital media, a believer must be aware that due to the nature of the environment of digital media, sin might draw one toward utilizing this environment for sin. Believers should not ignore sin; sin affects a person’s sanctification. However, the focus of experiencing biblical community must be centered on what *Christ completed* for people through his death, burial, and resurrection. Biblical community should not be based on *what people try to do for Christ out of obligation or how well they attempt to manage their sin*.

Dallas Willard notes, “We must see the soul and the person in its ruined condition, with its malformed and dysfunctional mind, feelings, body, and social relations, before we can understand that it must be delivered and reformed and how that can be

⁹⁰Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 42.

done.”⁹¹ *Understanding sin* starts with a recognition of a person’s *sinfulness*, but does not end with *sin management*. Sin and the consequences of sin for man is not what God intended. The non-believer would not admit that sin is the culprit regarding why community appears the way it does in culture. Therefore, when a medium, such as digital media, becomes a primary means for communication and community, the problem of sin becomes heightened. Yet, is blaming sin as the primary culprit for poor community an option for the believer? Also, is blaming the medium for the problem of sin legitimate? Should the focus of any study on determining the principles or essentials of biblical community apart from or regardless of environment focus on the negative side of sin within the believer’s life? Clearly the Bible shows that, for the Christian, sin is a dethroned king in our lives (Rom 6:12) and that although one’s sin is positionally forgiven in Christ, sin is not extinct in the believer’s life.

Sin in the Old Testament

Sin affects biblical community in the Old Testament because *sin isolates man from God*. This results in man being secondarily isolated from other people. The truth of biblical community rests in the Trinity. God makes man in his image (Gen 1:26-31), man sins and isolates himself from God, and God’s program of redemptive covenants restore community between the faithful God and with one another.⁹² God pursues a man named Abram, who becomes the father of the nation of Israel (Gen 12:1; 15). When God makes a covenant with Abram a new community is born. A covenant is typically a conditional or unconditional agreement based on a promise made from a higher power to a subordinate. God pursued mankind in order to restore community lost (Gen 15). Community can happen where a person least expects it to happen. Ruth Padilla DeBorst notes that much of Hebrew community that occurred in the Old Testament functioned in

⁹¹Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 45.

⁹²Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 75.

an environment that was not ideal. Specifically Egypt and Babylon to name a few:

For all of their illusion of separateness, of uniqueness and privileged status as God's special nation, the Israelites had to learn that they were inextricably bound not only to those within their inner circle and to the God they had so blatantly disobeyed, but also to others and to the land where God had put them.⁹³

The focus of biblical community is not on a *place or even primarily on a people* but residing in the presence of God.

The fall of man is where one begins the process of recognizing what happened to community. For the human, sin takes a community of trust and obedience and turns it into fear and shame (Gen 3:10).⁹⁴ For the non-believer, sin is not even an afterthought; sin is not a possible culprit of the issues surrounding ineffective community in any environment.

Willard notes that the rejection of the issue of sin is like a farmer who is unwilling to notice the weeds in his crop, but wonders why his crop is not healthy.⁹⁵ For the believer, sin is a hindrance and affects sanctification, but should not be the focus of the success or non-success of community in God. On the other hand, true biblical community is not based on what one does not do right (sin), but rather what Christ did right. One must cling to the gospel of Jesus Christ and union with Jesus. For believers, sin is recognized as a definite obstacle in one's journey of sanctification, but should not be the focus of whether or not one is experiencing true biblical community. This is measured by the completed work of Christ and the union believers can have with God in spite of their sin. Experiencing biblical community is based on the response of a believer

⁹³Ruth Padilla DeBorst, "Living Creation-Community in God's World Today," *Journal of Latin American Theology* 5, no. 1 (2010): 56-72.

⁹⁴Zac Niringiye, "In The Garden of Eden-II: Creation-Community Distorted, Torn Apart," *Latin American Theology* 5, no. 1 (2010): 32-42.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 46.

to Christ's completed work, but the goal of biblical community has already been completed in Christ's work on the cross.

Dallas Willard notes that often people focus too much on the vessel (themselves) as the treasure, and forget that the treasure is the life and power of Jesus Christ.⁹⁶ In fact, Willard goes on to correct false thinking that biblical community only happens when one attends "church": "The Church of Jesus Christ is not necessarily present when there is a correct administration of the sacraments and faithful preaching of God's Word. The church of God is present where people gather together in the power of the resurrected life of Christ."⁹⁷ Willard's statement helps expose a problem when one considers exactly what biblical community entails. The goal is not perfecting the vessel, but rather is found in the life and power of Jesus. Further, although sin continues in the life of the believer, obedience is at the heart of spirituality and experiencing true biblical community. For the believer, when he sins, it is a reminder of exactly why Jesus needed to die in the first place. Often sin, or lack thereof, is advocated as the measuring stick for successful biblical community. This seems good in theory until failure happens. Then the goal—holiness or something a person attempts to achieve—seems unattainable.

Union with Jesus Christ

A principle of biblical community regardless of and apart from any environment is accepting the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment and provision for salvation and experiencing union in Christ. One's new identity is in Christ first, not an environment or community. This is unity with Jesus, in order that unity with others can take place. Paul constantly reminds believers in local communities that they are "in

⁹⁶Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006), 50.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 51.

Christ” and everything else stems from that truth.⁹⁸ Paul commends the church in Rome not due to their environment, but rather because it is their faith that is proclaimed throughout the world in spite of their environment—Rome (Rom 1:8). A community demonstrates a sense of interconnectedness, social bonding, sharing, and fellowship.⁹⁹ What do Christians share in? They share in the completed work of Jesus first, that leads them to share this truth with each other and the world.¹⁰⁰ People cannot commune with God because of sin. God’s wrath is revealed to man due to sin. This makes man an enemy of God (Rom 1:18). Therefore, the payment for this sin is death (Rom 3:23). God’s righteousness is revealed again to man, in spite of the fact that man ruined his community with God (Rom 1:16-17). In spite of man’s rejection, moreover, God decides to allow his wrath to turn into grace toward mankind and offers another opportunity to have community with God. God’s wrath does not disappear, but rather is redirected to His Son (Isa 53:10). The truth of God’s new community is available to experience, as Jesus is the expression of the triune God in human form.¹⁰¹

Adam Johnston poses, “What is the relationship between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christian formation?”¹⁰² Norbert Cummins writes,

The pure doctrine of the gospel, that is to say, it is “primarily a matter of being drawn into the Triune Life of Our Loving God” through the person and work of

⁹⁸Rom 3:24, 5:21, 6:11, 8:1, 2, 8:10, 9:1, 12:5; 1 Cor 1:2, 4, 30, 4:10, Gal 2:4, 16, 17; 3:22; and Eph 12 to name a few

⁹⁹Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 72.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 42. Petit notes that Jesus is able to save a person from their sin because he is both God and man (Heb 4:15). Jesus is the “expression of the triune God, in human flesh, in whom God was well pleased to all the fullness of deity to dwell” (Col 1:19; 2:9).

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

¹⁰²Adam Johnson, “The Crucified Bridegroom: Christ’s Atoning Death in St. John of the Cross and Spiritual Formation Today,” *Pro Ecclesia* 22, no. 4 (2012): 392-408.

Jesus Christ. It is a process involving the “reordering of self . . . towards the eternal freedom and love that is life in peace with Christ.”¹⁰³

Due to the fall, people must be drawn into a relationship with God through another means. People need a new identity. Christ gives a sinner this new identity through salvation. Experiencing union with Christ is the life of salvation in Jesus.¹⁰⁴ In other words, biblical community is grounded in living life in response to the completed work of Christ in the hearts of the people within the community.

Interestingly enough, Romans is one of the most powerful books in the Bible regarding the process of salvation to a community. Paul never actually visits this church; he never actually sees them face-to-face. Yet, there is doubt anyone would argue that Paul did not participate in biblical community with this group of people, even though he never met them.

In short, although one’s salvation functions in the context or environment where biblical community is experienced, the principles, essentials or the theological presuppositions of biblical community is not the “environment.” The essential of union with Jesus allows believers to respond and live life together first in Christ and secondly with each other.

One Body, One Spirit—Obedience to God’s Word

A principle of biblical community that is observed regardless of and apart from any environment is *obedience to God’s Word through the power of the Spirit*. In a community obedience manifests itself when the fruit of the Spirit is practiced. No matter what environment believers participate in, obedience is commanded and displays love for Jesus (John 14:15). This is the call of the church. Union with Jesus is made possible for

¹⁰³Norbert Cummins, *Freedom to Rejoice: Understanding St. John of the Cross* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 10.

¹⁰⁴J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 1.

the believer through the power of the Spirit. God's Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, brings one into fellowship with God first, and then others. This allows the community to have all things in common.

Obedience to God is a key characteristic of communal living in the Old Testament. Briefly, obedience to God is seen in Genesis as perfect submission to God. The Creator ultimately fulfills the created. By this, the created brings God glory or weight:

The Garden of Eden was the space for the celebration of creation-community, where humankind exercised its freedom and, in obedience to God, "worked it" and "took care of it" (Gen 2:15). There can be no obedience where there is no freedom and there can be no freedom where there is no choice. . . . The human being that was defined by a relationship of trust and obedience with the Creator is now defined by fear and shame (Gen 3:10). It is no wonder that the immediate result is brokenness in the human community of male and female.¹⁰⁵

Biblical community in the Old Testament is not what people had in common with each other but what they shared in regard to obedience and worship to *YHWH*—their union to God.¹⁰⁶

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit of God is the means through which one receives the work of Christ in his life. The Spirit produces "fruit" in the life of the believer, allowing the believer to experience biblical community with God and man. God's Spirit brings a once isolated person into a community, where people are one in Christ. Jesus explains the new work of the Spirit in John's gospel. The Spirit cannot be experienced by the world because the world does not know Him (John 14:17). The Spirit dwells in the believer (John 14:17). Jesus says that the Spirit is sent by the Father in His name and will teach the believer all things (John 14:26). He also sends the Spirit and the

¹⁰⁵Niringiye, "In the Garden of Eden-II," 36, 37.

¹⁰⁶There are differences, however, between Old and New Testament community. Most importantly, Christians respond to the completed work of Jesus because He is the propitiation, or satisfaction, for sin. Christ's sacrifice is better than animal sacrifices (Rom 3:23; Heb 2:17, 9:13-14, 1 John 2:2). Christ removes sin forever, whereas in the Old Testament the blood of the animal only covers sin. In other words, the blood of the animal does not satisfy God the Father's wrath toward sin. Animal sacrifice covers sin, allowing people to be in God's presence until the work of Christ, but cannot take away sin (Heb 10:4, 12-15).

Spirit will bear witness about Jesus (John 15:26). The primary function of the Spirit is to bring Jesus glory (John 16:14).

Paul discusses the Spirit and the believer in Ephesians:

There is one body, and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph 4:4-7)

This unity in the Spirit, with God and man, is illustrated as a human body that is made up of different members, yet function together (1 Cor 12:12). Christ is the head and the church is the body. Individual body-parts are not crawling around that are not attached to the body. For example, a body cannot function without a head.

Paul contrasts the sins of isolation with the communal fruit of the Spirit in Colossians to add to the idea of biblical community in Christ. Colossians 3 makes a distinction between the external and internal struggle of sin. One cannot put to death internal sin and replace it with external works. Only the *internal* fruit of the Spirit can replace *internal* sin (Col 3:5-17). The fruit of humility or meekness replaces the sin of lust. In short, one cannot lust after another person in their heart and love them with compassion at the same time.

The fruit of the Spirit is only practiced in community to one another; however, the essence itself is obedience to the Spirit in any environment. The Spirit can indeed be quenched when disobeyed (1 Thess 5:19). One cannot practice patience to himself, nor can one practice gentleness or meekness to himself. The community of believers is unique in that biblical community thrives when each person is practicing the communal fruit of the Spirit toward each other in response to the goal that is union with Jesus. This community can be practiced in any culture or environment, because the effectiveness of the relationship is not dependent on the environment or medium, but the common interest

the people share. In this case it is the Spirit of God. When God's Word is obeyed and the fruit of the Spirit practiced, sin cannot coincide at the same time.¹⁰⁷

Obedience to God's Word is also seen specifically in the "One Another" passages in the Bible.¹⁰⁸ Obeying God's Word is something that must be practiced in whatever environment a believer is experiencing community.

Summary

Upon review of the current literature and writing regarding biblical community, general principles were observed that define the essence of biblical community regardless of or apart from any particular environment. These principles that make up the general essence of biblical community are not reviewed as stand alone or all-inclusive essentials. The list is general, and by no means does the researcher advocate that this list is exhaustive by any means. Rather, simply, this list encompasses a general theological progression that is clearly observed in the current literature and specifically regarded in Scripture. The following is the list of reviewed general principles.

Trinity:

1. The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.
2. The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a willing submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

Mankind:

3. The essence of biblical community recognizes that humans are relational and crave relationship because they are made in the image of a relational God.

¹⁰⁷The concept of biblical community within digital media is considered in chaps. 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁸Pray for one another (Jas 5:16), encourage one another (Heb 3:12-13), bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), build one another up (1 Thess 5:9-11), edify one another (Rom 14:19), confess to one another (Jas 5:16), love one another (John 13:34-35), honor and be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10), serve one another (Gal 5:13), bear with one another (Col 3:12-13), submit to one another (Eph 5:19-20), spur on one another (Heb 10:24), be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:8-9), greet one another (Rom 16:16).

4. The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual.

Sin:

5. The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.
6. The essence of biblical community recognizes that although sin is forgiven, sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

Jesus Christ:

7. The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

The Holy Spirit and the Church:

8. The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God's Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., are by-products of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

Conclusion

This writing briefly reviewed current concerns surrounding community within the environment of digital media. The review noted that it is not appropriate to measure the effectiveness of community in one environment against past effectiveness of community in another environment. The writing also reviewed principles that define biblical community regardless of environment. Natural theological progression is the foundation for the order of the writing. This was not, by any means, an exhaustive review. Surely there are other potential principles that were overlooked. This review is also not intended to attempt a reinvention of the wheel regarding biblical community. It is, however, the intent of the review to extract a list of general principles or essentials of biblical community from the writing that are the core principles, essentials, theological presuppositions, etc., that are required to make a community "biblical." Regardless of environment, these principles were applied to the unique environment of digital media. The list compiled in the summary was turned over to an expert panel for review and validated by consensus. Then the perception of effectiveness regarding these principles within the environment of digital media was appropriately measured. Do teens that

attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? This chapter accommodates chapter 3 in that methodology can be explained in more detail as the list of principles from the review move to a qualitative expert for validation by consensus.

Definitions

Biblical community. Biblical community might be people with Christ in common that are participating in Spirit-filled ceremonies, rituals, and dialogue between God and man, and man and man.¹⁰⁹ Biblical community might include community that moves past an experience with other people and begins with a truth that must be known first (God) and then experienced with people. The believer understands that the community encountered is not free from sin, but that the success of this community is not based on how one performs in the community, but rather that one knows the truth. The goal of *biblical community* is not the person living out the by-products of the gospel such as leadership, character, obedience, etc.; the goal, rather, is union with Jesus Christ and relationship rooted in the completed work of the gospel of Jesus. *Biblical community* takes place as part of one's sanctification.

Classical Christian school. Robert Kennedy notes,

A classical Christian school embraces the Christian faith and classical educational principles. From a religious point of view these are schools that declare that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. The teachings of Jesus are fundamental and immutable. Flowing from that belief is the adoption of a classical curriculum rooted solidly in great literature of the western civilization. Parents and students enroll in a classical school because they too embrace the mission and teachings of the school.

Technology takes a back seat in classical Christian schools. The emphasis is on old-fashioned but proven teaching subjects such as reading and writing and arithmetic.

¹⁰⁹Determining a clear-cut definition in any of the writing, regarding biblical community, was extremely difficult. This offered definition is simply toward a definition that might be better defined later. This definition utilizes Ebersole's definition of community and is not original in essence.

The aim is to produce students who are as well-schooled in their faith as they are in their academics.¹¹⁰

Community. For this research, the term *community*, separate from “biblical,” refers to a group of people interacting and experiencing life apart from union with Jesus and relationship rooted in the gospel of Jesus. This term describes the environment of the non-believer that observes interaction with others primarily based on their own experiences with people. Non-believers share in the *imago dei* as believers, but do not view community as first being a relationship to be known and then secondarily experienced with man.¹¹¹

Covenantal closed enrollment schools. Also known as “discipleship-oriented schools,” Covenant Christian schools typically practice a closed enrollment for Christians only.¹¹² In some cases, a closed non-denominational Christian school exists (as is the school utilized in the survey) which practices closed enrollment, is a discipleship school, yet is independent from denomination. Therefore, when covenant traditionally refers to “Christian” only, a non-denominational closed enrollment might include Catholics and many other denominations, yet require a statement or testimony of salvation from both student and parent. Closed enrollment Christian school is argued to have a tighter biblical structure. In other words, there is a like-mindedness that is lacking in an open enrollment school setting. There is more biblical structure implemented.¹¹³

Digital media. A type of new media. Logan notes, “The ‘new media’ permit a great more participation of its users who are no longer just passive recipients of

¹¹⁰Robert Kennedy, “What is a Classical Christian School,” accessed January 20, 2014, <http://privateschool.about.com/od/schools/f/classicalxtn.htm>.

¹¹¹Read, “Trinity as a Form of Community,” ii.

¹¹²Ibid., 60.

¹¹³Ibid.

information but are active producers of content and information.”¹¹⁴

Media. “Any technology that creates extensions of the human body and senses, from clothing to the computer.”¹¹⁵ Eric McLuhan writes,

In the past, the effects of media were experienced more gradually, allowing an individual and society to absorb and cushion their impact to some degree. Today, in the electronic age of instantaneous communication, I believe that our survival, and at the very least our comfort and happiness, is predicated on understanding the nature of our new environment because unlike previous environmental changes, the electric media constitute a total and near instantaneous transformation of culture, values and attitudes.¹¹⁶

Medium. McLuhan writes that *medium* is “an extension of ourselves.”¹¹⁷

Classically, McLuhan suggests that a hammer extends an arm and that the wheel extends legs and feet.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴Robert K. Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 4-5. There is a difference between digital media and digital mass media—although the World Wide Web and the Internet are considered “mass media,” they differ from TV as true mass media because people can utilize the computer doing many different individual things and participating in community. “The Web and the Net also differ from mass media such as TV and radio because they incorporate two-way communication. It is therefore a safe bet to regard the old media as passive mass media and the ‘new media’ as individually accessed interactive media.” *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan* (Ontario: Anasi, 1995), 238-39. “McLuhan's definition helps to show just how submersed we are in the culture that we live in since everything human-made is included in McLuhan's definition of media. This definition is easier to believe if it is thought of in terms of the clothes that people wear. A man in a suit and tie is often defined as a businessperson whereas a person in raggedy clothes is often defined as homeless. The clothes that the two different people are wearing communicated to the audience (in this case people passing in the street) what would seem to be the likely vocation of the person wearing the clothes. Using this definition of media it is easier to understand why the media should be studied. The fact that it envelops every facet of today's society suggests that media have a profound effect on a person's life.” Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone, “Marshall McLuhan: What Is Media and Why should they Be Studied,” accessed September 10, 2013, <http://dantapley.com/webpags/mcluhan/media.htm> .

¹¹⁶McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential Luhan*, 238-39

¹¹⁷McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.* “Each enables us to do more than our bodies could do on their own. Similarly, the medium of language extends our thoughts from within our mind out to others. Indeed, since our thoughts are the result of our individual sensory experience, speech is an ‘outering’ of our senses—we could consider it as a form of reversing

New media. Logan explains, “The term ‘new media’ will in general refer to those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to ‘old media’ such as the telephone, radio, and TV.”¹¹⁹ In other words, new media is media that is native to computers.¹²⁰

Open enrollment Christian school. An open enrollment Christian school allows non-believing parents and students to attend. However there seems to be strict requirements to ensure the success of the school: “An open enrollment school works most effectively when a committee enrolls with the best interest of the school at heart.”¹²¹ Fischer lists three tasks and then three keys that define an open enrollment school and allow the school to be successful. The committee “must be clear as to what is in the school’s best interest, has a clear mission statement, and finally needs sufficient information to make the best decision.”¹²² The author notes that the family must be comfortable with the schools expectations, the school needs to maintain a wise balance of Christian and non-Christian, and can the student succeed?¹²³

Virtual community or computer-mediated-community (CMC). A distinction between traditional communities was given by Samuel Ebersole to include a community that is computer-mediated. Virtual community may be defined as interpersonal

senses—whereas usually our senses bring the world into our minds, speech takes our sensorially-shaped minds out to the world.” Mark Federman, “What Is the Meaning of the Medium is the Message?” accessed August 10, 2013, http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.htm.

¹¹⁹Logan, *Understanding New Media*, 4

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹G. Tyler Fischer, “Christian School for Everyone: How Opened Admission Christian Schools Impact the World,” in *Perspectives on Your Child’s Education: Four Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B and H, 2009), 32.

¹²²Ibid., 33.

¹²³Ibid., 35-36.

relationships founded and maintained by CMC in the place called Cyberspace. The Internet, or Information Superhighway 36, is unique among mass media because of the way that it facilitates two-way interactive communication—an essential component for community building.¹²⁴ It is important to note that although virtual community helps define differences between traditional community and CMC, today’s students would consider the term “community” to also include the new technologies associated with digital media.

Sanctification and spiritual formation. The process known as *sanctification* or *spiritual formation* entails the believer becoming more like Jesus after he is justified, through the power of the Spirit.¹²⁵ *Spiritual formation* can be defined as “a composite term not found in the Bible that refers to all God undertakes and undergoes for us to bring us to maturity.”¹²⁶ For the research, *sanctification* and *spiritual formation* are interchangeable, but *spiritual formation* specifically deals with three essential resources: God’s Word, God’s Spirit, and the people of God.¹²⁷ Wayne Grudem notes that this process of *sanctification* begins at regeneration and that justification and *sanctification* go hand in hand.¹²⁸ Grudem continues, “Sanctification increases throughout life; it is completed at death, and it is never completed in this life. . . . God and man cooperate in sanctification, but it is primarily the work of God.”¹²⁹ Paul writes in Philippians, “I am sure of this that he [God] who has began a good work in you, will complete it at the Day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

¹²⁴Ebersole and Woods, “Virtual Community,” 192.

¹²⁵Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 20.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 105.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 746-47.

Research Question

The gap in the research does not answer the following question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? The more commonly asked questions concerning the effects of digital media on one's face-to-face relationships cannot adequately be answered until the above question is answered.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

After review and examination of the general principles of biblical community found in current writing and Scripture and also validated by an expert panel, an instrument was created that measured the perception of teens that attend Christian high schools regarding their online communities.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this sequential mixed-method study was to analyze students' perceptions as to whether or not their communal experiences, within the unique environment of digital media, facilitate the general essentials or principles of biblical community.

Research Question

The research question asked: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community? The study, initially, revealed that there is a concern in both secular and Christian writing regarding the effectiveness of community practice within the environment of digital media. In order, therefore, to properly measure the perception of teens, the essentials or principles of biblical community were observed regardless of and apart from any environment and then were directly applied to the unique environment of digital media.

Summary of Literature Review and Principles of Biblical Community

The literature review revealed that although there is much writing analyzing

the principles of biblical community, the principles were always discussed within another environment. The literature revealed that when digital media is held up to other environments, such as face-to-face community, communal relationships within digital media lack in comparison to relationships that are more traditional. However, there was a consensus in the literature that it is not befitting to measure the effectiveness of community within one environment (i.e., digital media) with the effectiveness of community within another, different environment (i.e., face-to-face). There is also a void in the literature as to what the clear essentials or principles of biblical community are regardless of or apart from environment, and how these essentials help measure perception in a unique environment such as digital media.

Borrowing from Samuel Ebersole's definition of community, a possible definition for biblical community was achieved. According to Ebersole, a community is defined as "making things common"¹ and also embracing "ceremony, ritual and dialogue."² Regarding biblical community, the making things common would be "in Christ" and the ceremony, ritual, and dialogue would be Spirit-led. Biblical community, thus, might be people with Christ in common that are participating in Spirit filled ceremonies, rituals, and dialogue between God and man, and man and man.

In order to determine fairly the effectiveness of biblical community within the environment of digital media, the essentials or essence of biblical community were observed regardless of and apart from any one environment. Once reviewed, analyzed and validated by an expert panel, these essentials were applied to the environment of digital media and student's perception was measured. For each principle listed, scriptural examples were given and behaviors seen in the examples became evident. These

¹Samuel E. Ebersole and Robert H. Woods, "Virtual Community: Koinonia or Compromise? Theological Implications of Community in Cyberspace," *The Journal of Education* 13, no. 10 (2003): 189, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://bsci.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/09>.

²Ibid., 194.

behaviors were used to create an instrument that was able to measure perception.

Chapter 2 concludes with a list of general principles that according to the literature review and expert panel deem a community “biblical” and can be applied to any environment. In other words, the essence of biblical community is able to function in any environment and surmise that environment a community that is “biblical.” It is important to note that the list is by no means new and surely not original. Moreover, the list is not inclusive of all essentials regarding biblical community, but only note general principles observed from a theological progression. It is also important to note that the expert panel sought a consensus. Most of the panel agreed with all of the principles put forth, but some had certain concerns regarding terminology and sought clarification. The panel, however, reached over 95 percent consensus regarding the principles. Details of the expert panel development are discussed under the section on expert panel.

The purpose of the literature review, simply, is to note what others have already agreed on regarding principles of biblical community and what experts validated as indeed being principles of biblical community through a consensus of over 95 percent. The clarity, however, and order of the principles is shown as these general principles or essentials are veritably based not only on current writing but also a theological progression that is clear in Scripture. Lastly, these principles are observed regardless of any specific environment.

Principles or Essentials of Biblical Community

The Trinity

1. The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.
2. The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a willing submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

Mankind

3. The essence of biblical community recognizes that humans are relational and crave relationship because they are made in the image of a relational God.
4. The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual

Sin

5. The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.
6. The essence of biblical community recognizes that although sin is forgiven, sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

Jesus Christ

7. The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

The Holy Spirit and the Church

8. The essence of biblical community includes corporate and personal obedience to God's Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit are by-products of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

To summarize, the gap in the research did not answer the following question:

Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? The more commonly asked questions concerning the effects of digital media on one's face-to-face relationships cannot adequately be addressed until the above question is answered. This is due to the lack of a proper discussion with reference to defining biblical community *apart from any one particular environment*. In short, before the research question can be addressed, defining terminology such as "biblical community" and its essentials were sought.

Research Design Overview

This thesis was a mixed-methods study sequential in design. Creswell describes this design as "qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis that builds on the results of the first

phase.”³ The main goal, however, was to develop an instrument as “an intermediate step between the phases that builds on the qualitative results and is then used in the subsequent data collection.”⁴ This design is also referred to as “the instrument development design.”⁵

The analysis and findings from the first phase (Literature Review and Expert Panel) allowed for an instrument to be created that measured student’s perception in the second phase of research. Creswell notes that the primary purpose of the exploratory design is to “generalize qualitative findings based on a few individuals from the first phase [expert panel] to a larger sample gathered during the second phase [student survey.]”⁶ This research warrants this design, as it is most useful when one “wants to generalize, assess, or test qualitative exploratory results to see if they can be generalized to a sample and a population.”⁷ Regarding this particular research, qualitative exploratory assessment of the essentials or principles of biblical community by current writing and validation of experts through consensus allowed for the results to be generalized to a student sample and population. The goal was to measure students’ perceptions regarding their online communal relationships and whether students consider their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community.

Population

Since the research question for this study sought to analyze student’s perceptions with reference to online communities, the population in this study was high

³John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 210-11.

⁴John W. Creswell, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE), 86-87.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

school students that attend Christian schools to whom the survey was administered. The population from which the sample was drawn was 481 students. Three types of Christian schools were included in the population. The survey was administered to students who attend classical, closed enrollment non-denominational, and open enrollment non-denominational Christian school settings. High school students included all four grades: freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors—male and female.

I made a formal request to use human subjects by submitting the Assessment of Risk to Human Subjects in Research form to the Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After approval, an electronic “agreement to participate” document was sent to students’ parents from the three schools (see appendix 4). The parental consent form was approved by Troy Temple. Out of the combined three schools, 517 consent forms were signed and submitted by parents permitting their child to participate in the anonymous survey if they chose to. The population for the research was 481 students. The population includes the number of students that were actually administered the survey, but not necessarily completed it.

Sample

The sample of the population used in this study was 425 students. The sample was based on the number of students that completed the survey in full or were verified respondents. According to Creative Research Systems online Sample Size Calculator, a sample size of 389 is needed for a confidence level 95 percent, and a sample size of 423 is needed for a confidence level of 99 percent. I was advised by empirical research expert Daniel Snively to utilize a 99 percent level of confidence, if possible, with the sample size of 425 (see appendix 5). Using the sample size of 425 students and the population size of 481 students, the confidence interval is +/- 2.14. Fifty-eight of the 481 surveys were not completed; therefore, the sample utilized was of 425 completed surveys.

Delimitations

Due to the nature of the exploratory design, several delimitations were applied. First, only high school students who attend Christian schools were selected from the schools listed, including freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students. The population only included students that participated in the survey, but did not necessarily complete the survey. This population included students that attended classical, open enrollment non-denominational, and closed enrollment non-denominational school settings. The research specifically aimed at measuring perception of high school students who attend Christian school. Also, due to student's high usage of digital media, although valuable, adult opinions in the second phase of the design were not sought.

Second, the narrow focus of the research was to analyze perception, which means that the study aimed to determine from the sample whether teens who attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community.

Finally, the research was limited to the nature of the topic that was found in the research question.

Limitations of Generalization

Given the intentional delimitations of this research, there were three primary areas to which the results of the research may not generalize. First, student understanding might be limited. The second phase of the research is a survey that intended to utilize the essentials of biblical community regardless of and apart from environment in order to measure perception. The essentials or principles were observed in specific scriptural examples through which behaviors were noted. Once behaviors were observed, specific questions were created that measured perception. A Likert-type scale was utilized in the quantitative survey to measure perception. There were two behaviors noted per principle and two questions asked per behavior (one positive and one negative) for a total of 32 questions. The information was formulated in eighth-grade language to help ensure

understanding of the questions that led to an effective outcome of answers. The obvious issues, however, are that students might misunderstand the questions or not accurately complete the survey. As mentioned previously, out of the population of 481 students, 58 surveys were not utilized in the sample due to the fact that they were incomplete.

Second, students might answer dishonestly or may not take the survey seriously. Last, there is quite a difference between a freshman boy and a senior girl or vice versa, which is addressed in the variables in chapter 4. There was an overall measurement of perception, but then also categories were addressed that revealed patterns that are age, gender and school related. The specific findings regarding students' perception are noted in chapter 4.

Instrumentation

The exploratory sequential design was warranted, due to the nature of the study. The first phase, or expert panel, of qualitative exploration, with respect to the validation of what the essentials of biblical community entail, were used to create an instrument that measured perception. The instrument was a quantitative survey in the form of a weighted Likert scale that measured student's perception (see appendix 6). Overall the goal of the instrument was to determine whether or not, based on the questions given in the survey, students perceive their online communal experiences to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community. Development of the expert panel and student survey is discussed below.

Expert Panel

The qualitative portion of the research utilized an expert panel that validated by consensus the previously listed essentials and principles in order to support the findings in the literature review.⁸ Before the field-testing was conducted, the principles

⁸Experts, utilized for the panel, included professionals in the fields of digital media, biblical community, youth ministry, secondary education, and family and church

were sent to my supervisor Troy Temple for review. Upon review and approval from Temple, I progressed to the field test.

A pilot test, which included three people, was conducted in order to tighten the validation document and eliminate issues such as bias and lack of clarity. After the pilot test, the list was tightened, and letters of invitation were sent to the expert panel (see appendices 1 and 2). Again, revisions were sent to Temple for examination and approval.

After an email confirmation from experts communicating their willingness to participate, I presented the principles to the panel for validation through consensus and also received feedback on clarity regarding the proposed list of principles. The panel separately completed the validation and returned the signed document with suggestions. This first phase of the panel allowed me to observe clarifications needed in the validation document. I reviewed the validation, observed feedback, and then sought clarification with some of the experts. Although, most experts validated the majority of the principles, one expert only validated seven of the eight principles. From this validation, with the help of an empirical research and assessment expert, an instrument was created that measured student perception.

Specifics of Qualitative Analysis

An expert panel validated the principles utilized for the quantitative student survey. The panel validated a consensus of over 95 percent.⁹ Using an expert panel to “scrutinize an instrument to ascertain its validity for measuring the characteristics in

ministries. See appendix 1.

⁹A second phase was utilized that included personally discussing the principles with experts that asked for clarification and further understanding. The point of phase 2 was not to force validation, but to work with the panel to simplify or communicate parts of the principles that were unclear. This phase strengthened the overall quantitative survey as the experts professionally guided in presenting the principles in the clearest way possible.

question increases the likelihood of face validity of the measurement instrument.”¹⁰

Experts were identified and enlisted to participate on the panel (see appendix 1).

The expertise of Dan Snively, in the field of research and assessment, was sought to assist in the development of the instrument (see appendix 5).

Student Survey

The quantitative portion of the research was a survey that measured the perception of students that attend Christian schools. The survey was created utilizing the general principles observed from the literature review and validated by the expert panel. Once experts validated the principles, scriptural examples were noted from the principles that in turn displayed behaviors. Once behaviors were analyzed, questions were formulated from the behaviors and utilized to measure student perception. Based on the reviewed and validated essentials of biblical community, apart from environment, the following question was analyzed: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community?

For each objective essential determined by the expert panel, there are two scriptural examples through which behaviors were observed. For each example noted, one behavior was observed. Two questions were formulated from each behavior—one positive and one negative. A mixed methods study for this design was warranted as it allowed for a more complete understanding of data. The student survey included a Likert survey specifically designed for measuring perception. A total of 32 questions made up the survey (see appendix 6).

Development of the Student Survey: Specifics of Quantitative Analysis

The instrumentation that was used in this study was developed from not only

¹⁰Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormond, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 8th ed. (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 93.

careful review of both current writing and Scripture, but also a validation by consensus of over 95 percent by a panel of experts in the field of biblical community, youth ministry, Christian education, and digital media (see appendix 1). The survey development began by reviewing the principles of biblical community found in Scripture and the precedent literature. The survey was created from the validation of an expert panel that reviewed the list of principles or essentials. The survey was created from the essentials validated by the experts and then developed in to questions that could be used for measuring perception. Each principle was observed throughout Scripture in different examples. Two scriptural examples were chosen for each principle or essential. From the examples, behaviors were easily noted. For each example, one behavior was chosen, and two questions were created to measure perception. Both a positive and negative type question was created to measure perception. An example of the progression is shown in table 1.¹¹ A complete review of the process may be observed in appendix 7.

Table 1. Progression and development of student survey

Category	Trinity
Principle	The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.
Example	Garden of Gethsemane: (Matt 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46)
Behavior	Willingness to submit to others
Question +	Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships
Question -	I have to always have the last word in my online relationships.

¹¹Although the content is my own work, the progression of the template, category, principle, example, behavior, and +/- questions are credited to Dan Snively.

Field Testing of Instrument

Daniel Snively helped in the compilation of the survey and specifically instructed that the questions for the student survey be written in eighth grade level grammar. This allowed for the students to best understand the questions in the survey. Upon completion of the survey, I sent the questions to Troy Temple and Michael Wilder for approval. The survey was sent back with minimal corrections needed that dealt specifically with minor grammatical changes. After corrections and revisions, the survey was approved. The survey questions were then put in random order (see appendix 6).

Once the revised instrument was approved, I conducted a pilot test on 14 students that were not included in the later survey. The test included ninth grade students that participated in the survey online. The purpose of the field test was to allow students to not only participate in the function of the survey, but also, and most importantly, to discuss difficulties that they experienced when taking the survey. The field test group discussed a few questions that were confusing, and I employed their input to change some of the wording to allow the question (s) to be easier to read. The pilot survey was administered through the use of Survey Monkey.

Triangulation was utilized that brought support to the findings. The triangulation process was (1) current writing and scriptural support found in the literature review, (2) validation by consensus from an expert panel based on the findings within current writing and Scripture, and (3) an instrument created from the literature review and the expert validation. Before perception was measured, the general principles of biblical community, regardless of environment, were clearly researched and agreed upon. The expert panel validated, with comments and concerns, the findings from the Literature Review and Scripture.

Survey Administration

After parental consent was received the web-based survey was administered through www.surveymonkey.com. The data was collected from the web-based survey

was exported and compiled to allow for descriptive statistics. Specifically, comma-delimited text and displays allowed for findings to be easily observed. The data was then analyzed to its relevancy to the research question.

The data was analyzed in relation to the research question regarding (1) basic demographics, (2) findings specific to the validated essentials of biblical community among students' online relationships, (3) students' perception or lack of perception regarding their online relationships, and (4) specific areas of biblical community within the findings that were not understood.

Following the analysis of the data, the research highlighted points of application for the family and church regarding the need to understand the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment. The purpose of the insights was to better equip parents and the church regarding what biblical community is and how the essentials can be practiced in any environment. Also, although students strive for interpersonal relationships, the research was clear that students do not understand what the essentials of biblical community entail, let alone what they might appear to include in the environment of digital media.

Procedures

In order to conduct the appropriate methodology for this research, the following procedures were followed:

1. General principles of biblical community were reviewed within Scripture and current writing. A theological progression was noted in the current writing on biblical community. This list was sent to Troy Temple, Chairperson, for approval. After approval the list was sent for field-testing.
2. Before the experts began their portion of the qualitative validation by consensus, the list was field-tested to determine problematic issues such as subjectivity and biases, and possible need for improved communication in the writing.
3. Once principles were pilot tested, the experts were invited to participate in the study. The purposes of the procedure were discussed either by phone or email with the participant.
4. Participants read and signed an informed consent indicating understanding of the nature of the research, voluntary participation, the ability to withdraw at any time,

anonymous responses during the study, and any concerns could be addressed directly to the researcher. Experts could also indicate approval of participation by agreeing via email confirmation.

5. A phase 2 was implemented for experts that requested further explanation and communication regarding the study before validation was given. This second phase strengthened the research, as the experts were able to provide advice on issues such as clarity and terminology.
6. Once the expert panel validated the principles to which at least 95 percent agreed, the principles were utilized to create an instrument that measures perception. If an expert chose to validate only a few essentials—explanation and concerns were noted. Over 95 percent consensus was met.
7. A quantitative weighted Likert-scale survey was developed utilizing the literature review and scripture, and also the validation from the expert panel. For each of the essentials or principles listed, scriptural examples were listed with noted behaviors for each example. Once behaviors were noted, two questions per behavior were created—a positive and negative question. There were a total of 32 questions. The survey was submitted to Troy Temple and Michael Wilder for approval, along with the risk assessment form for conducting research on minors. Upon approval, the survey was field-tested.
8. Only after parental consent was received, the survey was administered through www.surveymonkey.com. The second phase consisted of distributing the survey to the previously mentioned schools for students to complete via computer.
9. Once all findings were analyzed, conclusions were drawn with reference to answering the research question, the contribution of the research to the literature, and recommendations for the application of the research in practice.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain in detail the methodology employed in order to successfully address the research question. This chapter explained design, overview, population, sample, delimitations, limitations of generalization, instrumentation and procedures. The research provided contributions to the question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community?

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings gathered using the methodology explained in the previous chapter. The data being displayed and discussed are the descriptive statistical findings from the participants' responses provided on the student survey administered to high school students. The findings were evaluated based on the current study that measured students' perceptions regarding their online communal relationships and whether students considered these online relationships to include or facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community. This chapter explores the descriptive data and provides displays in the form of tables, appendices, and/or charts directly taken from the survey website. Evaluations are made regarding how the data directly addresses the research question. These figures, tables, and charts also assist to interpret the conclusions to be covered in the next chapter. The final section of the chapter analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the research design and provides recommendations for improving the accuracy of methodology.

Compilation Protocol

After a risk-assessment and student survey were approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary office of doctoral studies, a parental consent form was sent to parents of minors attending the three schools within the population.¹ The researcher utilized a web-based resource, www.surveymonkey.com, to host and administer the survey to students. Each student could only participate in the survey if parental consent

¹See appendix 4 for a sample of the Google document that was used.

was received and the survey could only be taken once.² The data was collected and descriptive charts and tables allow for percentages to be observed easily.³

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the student survey was developed from analyzing current literature regarding the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment. The noted principles or theological presuppositions were taken from Scripture and current writing and then approved by consensus from an expert panel. See appendices 1, 2, and 3 to review the process explained in chapter 3 regarding the expert panel.

From Scripture and current literature, there were five categories and eight basic essentials or principles of biblical community observed that progressed theologically. As mentioned in chapter 2, the list is by no means exhaustive, but merely a general list found in the current writing and observed clearly in Scripture. The list of principles merely assisted as a starting point where biblical community is defined regardless of environment. Before student perception was measured regarding biblical community, essentials were observed and conceded upon by experts.⁴

In order to effectively address the research question, the essentials of biblical community were observed regardless of environment. Principles revealed examples in Scripture and examples yielded behaviors. For each principle observed, two biblical examples were given that revealed a specific behavior. Overall, for each principle there were two biblical examples revealing two behaviors. For each behavior observed, a positive and negative question was created and used in the student survey to measure perception.⁵ A total of 32 questions specific to biblical community were used in the survey.

²See appendix 6 for a sample of the survey that was used.

³See appendix 8 for an example of a graph and charted data from Question 2.

⁴The categories are listed with their principles in table 2.

⁵See appendix 7 for the progression of development regarding the student survey and appendix 6 for the student survey.

Michael Wilder and Troy Temple approved the survey before the survey was administered for field-testing and then to the sample. Questions were placed in random order in the survey, and all questions were written in eighth grade language (recommended by Daniel Snively and Troy Temple). The research assisted in addressing the question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community?

Table 2. Theological progression of the categories and the essentials of biblical community found in current writing

Category or Theological Progression	Principle (s) or Essentials of Biblical Community
Trinity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind. 2. The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a willing submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.
Mankind	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The essence of biblical community recognizes that humans are relational and crave relationship because they are made in the image of a relational God. 4. The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual.
Sin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin. 6. The essence of biblical community recognizes that although sin is forgiven, sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.
Jesus Christ	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.
Holy Spirit (and the Church)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God's Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., are by-products of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

I used the student survey to identify whether students do indeed perceive their online relationships to include the essentials of biblical community. In other words, the survey assisted in recognizing whether or not students believe that they are actively

participating in true biblical community. The survey also revealed many weaknesses in student understanding and lack of knowledge regarding the essentials of biblical community. The researcher gathered data from three schools including a population that consisted of classical, open enrollment non-denominational, and closed enrollment non-denominational schools. Demographic information was gathered as well. Gender, year in school, school attended, and personal relationship with Christ was part of the demographic section of the survey. Each question specifically relating to the principles of biblical community were weighted based on whether or not the question was positive or negative. Also, questions specific to perception were not only weighted, but five choices were given: (1) Always, (2) Generally, (3) Frequently, (4) Occasionally, and (5) Never. Participants could only choose one of the choices per question.⁶

Scoring Protocols and Inclusion Criteria

A total of 517 parental consent forms were received, and 481 students were administered the survey. The population was 481 administered surveys, and out of those surveys 425 students completed the survey in full. Fifty-eight surveys were incomplete and eliminated from the final data collection. Therefore, the sample was 425 completed surveys.⁷

⁶See appendix 6 for an example of the survey questions.

⁷The survey was completed by 425 students. However, 2 students skipped question 4 that asked which school the student attended. When schools are being compared the sample utilized is 423. When the schools are combined, the 425 sample is utilized. Both samples (423 and 425) fit within the required sample size for not only a 95 percent confidence level, but also a confidence level of 99 percent. A completed survey does not necessarily mean that every single question was answered; rather the survey was completed and submitted accurately. In other words the survey was free from error in the process of completing and submitting and is considered usable data. See table 3 for the specific number of students who completed the survey from each of the three schools

Table 3. Sample of respondents

Heritage Christian School	267
Trinity Classical Academy	71
Silverdale Baptist Academy	85
Total Respondents	423

The descriptive statistics displayed in this chapter were gathered from the completed surveys, comprising 87.94 percent of the population. This falls well within the acceptable sample size according to Creative Research Systems online Sample Calculator. According to Creative Research Systems online Sample Size Calculator, a sample size of 389 out of 481 is needed for a confidence level 95 percent and a sample size of 423 is needed for a confidence level of 99 percent. As mentioned in chapter 3, I was advised by empirical research expert Daniel Snively to utilize a 99 percent level of confidence, if possible, with the sample size of 425 (see appendix 5). Using the sample size of 425 students and the population size of 481 students, the confidence interval is +/- 2.14 percent.⁸

The student survey instructed the participants to rank each question based on importance. Students' choices were given based on their understanding and perception of whether they considered their online relationships to include the essentials of biblical community found in the survey questions.

Findings and Displays

This portion of this chapter presents the main results of the survey pertinent to the research question. The data is organized by two main categories. The first category is

⁸Statistics retrieved from <http://www.surveymonkey.com/sscalc.htm> on July 19, 2014.

demographic information and offers insight into the perception of individual school samples. The first section evaluates the data based on the five categories (Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Christ, Holy Spirit) that include the eight essentials or principles of biblical community by comparing the three schools. The purpose of the demographic section is to demonstrate that although there were three different schools surveyed, containing three different philosophies of Christian education from across the United States, the findings from the three schools were very similar. In other words, differences in denomination, closed enrollment vs. open enrollment, discipleship based, etc., were not factors in revealing different data. Overall, students from the three different schools perceive their online relationships similarly and more so, equally misunderstand (to some extent) what the essentials of biblical community entail and the need for these essentials to be central to their online relationships. This demographic section precedes and supports the next section that begins to show comparisons as the categories containing the essentials of biblical community are examined.

The second category evaluates the data of the schools combined based on the five categories (Trinity, mankind, Sin, Christ, Holy Spirit) that include the eight essentials or principles of biblical community. The purpose of this second section is to note how the combined sample (425 students) responded in general to the specific categories. Both sections are primarily statistics with reference appendices and tables that correlate with each category. Chapter 5 addresses some of the specific findings, dealing with an overall misunderstanding and lack of knowledge regarding the essentials of biblical community. Moreover, while students in general seem to have a high view of the need for relationships while online, fostering them *biblically* does not “always” seem to be a primary concern. Or, as the data reveals, there is misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of what essentials a biblical community (regardless of environment) must include.

Summary of Findings

This section evaluates the demographic descriptive statistics that assist in addressing the research question: Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community?

There was a purposeful comparison of three types of Christian schools, all holding various philosophies of Christian education. As mentioned, the sample utilized 423 students, rather than 425. Two students skipped question 4 that asked students which school they attend.⁹ Heritage Christian School (closed enrollment non-denominational with a discipleship model), Trinity Classical Academy (classical), and Silverdale Baptist Academy (open enrollment non-denominational) were utilized.¹⁰ Overall, the statistics and data reveal that despite the differences in size of enrollment, philosophy of Christian education, denomination, and classical style education, students from all three schools responded similarly regarding perception.

Although Heritage Christian School students made up 63 percent of completed responses, all three schools, based on gender, perceive their online relationships in a similar fashion. In order to understand findings based on demographic, and later specifically the categories that include the essentials of biblical community, the survey questions are listed together with their suited category (see appendix 7). For this demographic section, table 4 displays the five categories, eight principles, and +/- questions.

⁹Review table 3 above for exact numbers of students from each school.

¹⁰See appendix 18 for full sample information.

Table 4. Categories with principles and questions (+/-)

Category	Principle	Question (+/-)
Trinity	<p>1. The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.</p> <p>2. The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.</p>	<p>15. I am intentional about respecting my friends within my online relationships. (+)</p> <p>18. Respecting people online is not as important as getting my point across and being heard. (-)</p> <p>22. I am purposeful about making others feel good about themselves in my online relationships. (+)</p> <p>13. Feeling good about myself is important to me when I am online with friends. (-)</p> <p>24. Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships (+)</p> <p>27. I have to always have the last word in my online relationships. (-)</p> <p>6. I will take responsibility for my actions in my online relationships, even if it hurts my reputation. (+)</p> <p>26. I will blame and ignore others in order to avoid taking the blame for my actions online. (-)</p>
Mankind	<p>3. The essence of biblical community recognizes that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made in the image of a relational God.</p> <p>4. The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual</p>	<p>29. My online relationships with people are very important to me (+)</p> <p>32. I am more interested in people knowing about me than I am interested in knowing about them. (-)</p> <p>33. Being loyal and trustworthy to my friends online is very important to me. (+)</p> <p>25. I will be disloyal online to find out information about others and myself. (-)</p> <p>30. I care about proper online etiquette. (+)</p> <p>10. I will gossip and do what it takes get my way even if it hurts my online friends. (-)</p> <p>28. If I am pressured into doing something that disobeys and dishonors God online I will stand up for what is right (+)</p> <p>8. I am uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online (-)</p>

Table 4 continued

Sin	<p>5. The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.</p> <p>6. The essence of biblical community recognizes that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.</p>	<p>19. I will stand up for others when they are being hurt and sinned against online. (+)</p> <p>9. I ignore other's sin online. (-)</p> <p>11. I use my online relationships to talk about real life issues like my struggles with sin (+)</p> <p>14. Talking about sin is something that I am uncomfortable doing when I am online with my friends. (-)</p> <p>16. I confess my struggles with sin when I am online to my friends. (+)</p> <p>21. Confessing sin online to my friends is challenging for me. (-)</p> <p>7. I often ask for help from friends while online about my sin struggles. (+)</p> <p>12. I avoid trying to have victory over my sin when I am online. (-)</p>
Jesus Christ	<p>7. The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.</p>	<p>23. It is important for me to identify with Jesus in my online relationships (+)</p> <p>34. I have very little interest in identifying with Jesus when I am online. (-)</p> <p>36. I believe my online relationships should be an act of worship to God. (+)</p> <p>35. Worship and my online experiences are two separate things. (-)</p>
Holy Spirit	<p>8. The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God's Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., must be evident in the life of the believer.</p>	<p>31. It is important to me that I obey God and his Word while interacting in online relationships. (+)</p> <p>17. I forget to think about God when I am online. (-)</p> <p>37. I intentionally practice the Fruit of the Spirit in my online relationships (The Fruit of the Spirit are: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control) (+)</p> <p>20. My spiritual life is secondary to me when I am online. (-)</p>

Demographic Descriptive Statistics—Gender

The purpose of the demographic section is to reveal statistics that show, although there were three different schools with three different philosophies of Christian

education, there was little variance in how all the students answered the overall survey. This is true for gender as well. In other words, all three schools revealed the same underlining issues and generally the same perception regarding online relationships whether they were male or female. Students from all three schools have a high view of relationship and perceive that they are indeed participating in community. However, students from all three schools scored similar on specific questions revealing a low view of many of the essentials of biblical community, and an overall lack of understanding of what biblical community must entail. This section simply notes the similarities observed in all three schools from the survey, regardless of denominational, philosophical and pedagogical background. Table 5 notes the gender demographic.¹¹

Table 5. Gender demographic from all three schools

School	Male	Female
Heritage Christian School	126 (46%)	149 (54%)
Trinity	37 (49%)	38 (51%)
Silverdale	44 (41%)	63 (59%)

Demographic Statistics— Schools compared

The following section is the descriptive data that is compared based on school demographic and category percentages. The purpose is to show that despite the demographic elements, all three of the school samples answered similarly. Table 6 lists the categories with the proper appendices for review.

¹¹See appendix 9 for demographic of year in school.

Table 6. Categories with appendices for review regarding schools compared

Category	Appendices
Trinity	10 & 11
Mankind	12 & 13
Sin	14 & 15
Jesus Christ	16
Holy Spirit	17

Data of Schools Combined

The purpose of the demographic school comparisons were to evaluate the similarity in the student's responses. It is interesting to consider that in spite of demographic, denominational, philosophical, and educational differences, the data was very similar. Students from the three different school backgrounds answered with similar understanding or perception regarding their online relationships.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the school samples combined. Now that it is apparent that students from the different schools answered similarly, the overall sample of the three schools combined are evaluated. Observing the sample as a whole allows some general findings to become apparent. Below, the data of the combined sample is observed by category and principles. The five categories (Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit) and eight principles are charted in a similar manner as the above compared schools. However, the sample is 425 students combined, regardless of school background or gender. The following tables are utilized in chapter 5 to evaluate and answer specifics regarding the research question.

Findings for Category 1: Trinity Principle 1, Questions: 15, 22 (+)

Principle 1: The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.

Table 7. Trinity principle 1, positive questions 15, 22

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 15: I am intentional about respecting my friends within my online relationships.						
43.74% 185	38.30% 162	10.64% 45	6.15% 26	1.18% 5	423	4.17
Question 22: I am purposeful about making others feel good about themselves in my online relationships.						
19.48% 82	39.43% 166	22.33% 94	16.63% 70	2.14% 9	421	3.57

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Student perception showed that it is important to respect friends while interacting online, as well as making others feel good about themselves. Students claimed to be intentional, for the most part, about respecting others while online. The data for the positive questions revealed a perception that students indeed value experiencing respect. In short it seems like students want others to feel good about themselves while online. Although, the terms intentional and purposeful were not defined, overall, students had a high view of the need to respect and be respected while online.

Findings for Category 1: Trinity Principle 1, Questions: 18, 13 (-)

Principle 1: The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.

Table 8. Trinity principle 1, negative questions 18, 13

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 18: Respecting people online is not as important as getting my point across and being heard.						
2.61% 11	8.79% 37	14.25% 60	40.14% 169	34.20% 144	421	3.95
Question 13: Feeling good about myself is important to me when I am online with friends.						
10.64% 45	33.33% 141	24.59% 104	25.30% 107	6.15% 26	423	2.83

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 18 and 13 are the negative questions asked that pertain to category 1, Trinity, principle 1. For each principle, positive and negative questions were created to maximize observing perception. This data supported and was consistent with the positive questions. In other words, students generally answered the opposite of the positive questions when asked in a negative way. Overall, students perceived that respecting others superseded getting their point across to others while online. Moreover, students agreed that it was somewhat important for them to also feel good about themselves while online with friends.

**Findings for Category 1: Trinity
Principle 2, Questions: 24, 6 (+)**

Principle 2: The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

Table 9. Trinity principle 2, positive questions 24, 6

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 24: Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships.						
2.13% 9	16.11% 68	23.70% 100	43.84% 185	14.22% 60	422	2.48
Question 6: I will take responsibility for my actions in my online relationships, even if it hurts my reputation.						
35.39% 149	46.32% 195	9.26% 39	8.31 35	0.71% 3	421	4.07

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Students claimed to “generally” have a high view of respecting others while online, however, a more specific question (24) pertaining to hierarchy, authority, and submission revealed that when called to action, 43.84 percent of students would only occasionally give in to others. The data revealed a misunderstanding of biblical respect including submission to others. This may have been due to students detaching respect

from submission as being one in the same. Students liked the idea of what respecting friends online and making each other feel good might entail, however, if it included submission and giving in online—students scored lower.

Question 6 revealed that students “always” and “generally” perceived that they will take responsibility for their actions when online, even if it hurts their reputation.

**Findings for Category 1: Trinity
Principle 2, Questions: 27, 26 (-)**

Principle 2: The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

Table 10. Trinity principle 2, negative questions 27, 26

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 27: I have to always have the last word in my online relationships						
4.76% 20	10.48% 44	18.10% 76	41.90% 176	24.76% 104	420	3.71
Question 26: I will blame and ignore others in order to avoid taking the blame for my actions online.						
0.95% 4	4.98% 21	13.03% 55	42.89% 181	38.15% 161	422	4.12

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 27 and 26 are the negative questions asked that pertain to category 1, Trinity, principle 2. Again, the negative form of the questions supported students’ responses to questions 24 and 6 (+). “Occasionally” (41.9 percent, 42.89 percent) and “never” (24.76 percent, 38.15 percent) were primarily chosen as students admitted that they do not need to have the last word, and do not blame and ignore others to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions while online.

**Findings for Category 2: Mankind
Principle 3, Questions: 29, 33 (+)**

Principle 3: The essence of biblical community recognizes that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made in the image of a relational God.

Table 11. Mankind principle 3, positive questions 29, 33

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 29: My online relationships with people are very important to me						
14.93% 63	27.25% 115	21.80% 92	25.12% 106	10.90% 46	422	3.10
Question 33: Being loyal and trustworthy to my friends online is very important to me.						
49.40% 207	33.17% 139	10.26% 43	6.21% 26	0.95% 4	419	4.24

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

The data revealed that students are split, to some extent, on how they perceive the importance of their online relationships. “Generally,” “frequently” and “occasionally” are practically equal. What is interesting is that question 29 is a much more general question than question 33. The data reveals that 49.40 percent of students “always” considered being loyal and trustworthy very important in their online relationships. There seemed to be confusion among students regarding questions 29 and 33. Realistically, in order for loyal and trustworthy relationships to be fostered online, a high view of relationships overall is potentially needed.

**Findings for Category 2: Mankind
Principle 3, Questions: 32, 25 (-)**

Principle 3: The essence of biblical community recognizes that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made in the image of a relational God.

Table 12. Mankind principle 3, negative questions, 32, 25

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 32: I am more interested in people knowing about me then I am interested in knowing about them						
2.63% 11	10.02% 42	20.53% 86	48.45% 203	18.38% 77	419	3.70
Question 25: I will be disloyal online to find out information about others and myself.						
1.89% 8	4.73% 20	10.17% 43	39.24% 166	43.97% 186	423	4.19

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 32 and 25 are the negative questions that coincide with questions 29 and 33. Combined, 48.45 percent of students stated that they are only “occasionally” more concerned with others knowing about them, than their interest in their friends online. 20.53 percent of students chose “frequently.” 43.97 percent of the sample noted that they would “never” be disloyal online to find out information about others or themselves. This supported the data observed regarding the positive questions asked about the same principle.

Findings for Category 2: Mankind Principle 4, Questions: 30, 28 (+)

Principle 4: The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual.

Table 13. Mankind principle 4, positive questions 30, 28

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 30: I care about proper online etiquette.						
26.00% 110	32.62% 138	17.02% 72	18.91% 80	5.44% 23	423	3.55
Question 28: If I am pressured into doing something that disobeys and dishonors God online I will stand up for what is right.						
16.86% 71	34.68% 146	19.24% 81	23.28% 98	5.94% 25	421	3.33

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Students seemed convinced of the importance of practicing proper online etiquette. Although online etiquette is not defined, students agreed that whatever they perceived this to mean was indeed important (“always” 26 percent and “generally” 32.62 percent). Interestingly enough, when a more specific example of a potential proper practice was asked (question 28), only 34.68 percent of students “generally” stated that they would stand up for what is right while online. Only 16.86 percent of the sample said they would “always” stand up for what is right. This presents the possibility that students perceived online etiquette to be something other than the biblical essential of choosing to do right if a practice online dishonored God.

**Findings for Category 2: Mankind
Principle 4, Questions: 10, 8 (-)**

Principle 4: The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual.

Table 14. Mankind principle 4, negative questions 10, 8

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 10: I will gossip and do what it takes get my way even if it hurts my online friends.						
0.48% 2	1.92% 8	4.81% 20	34.86% 145	57.93% 241	416	4.48
Question 8: I am uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online						
2.84% 12	11.11% 47	14.42% 61	50.83% 215	20.80% 88	423	3.76

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

More than half of the sample (57.93 percent) stated that they would “never” gossip to get their own way while online. 50.83 percent of the sample admitted to “occasionally” being uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online. This seemed consistent with the opposite, positive questions. In short, students perceived that they have a potentially higher view for the overall community in general than the individual.

**Findings for Category 3: Sin Principle 5,
Questions: 19, 11 (+)**

Principle 5: The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.

Table 15. Sin principle 5, positive questions 19, 11

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 19: I will stand up for others when they are being hurt and sinned against online						
13.57% 57	32.86% 138	20.48% 86	29.52% 124	3.57% 15	420	3.23
Question 11: I use my online relationships to talk about real life issues like my struggles with sin						
0.95% 4	8.77% 37	13.74% 58	38.39% 162	38.15% 161	422	1.96

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Students perceived the need for their online relationships to be respectful and inclusive. Students also believed that online relationships should have a high view of community and also “proper online etiquette” is significant. However, the specifics of questions 19 and 11 began to raise issues of whether or not students truly understood what a biblical community must include. When asked if students would stand up for others being hurt online, only 32.86 percent said “generally,” 20.48 percent noted “frequently,” and 29.52 percent stated “occasionally.” Only 13.57 percent said “always.” Yet question 8 (see table 14) noted that 50.83 percent of students “occasionally” struggled to take a stand for what is right. The difference is that questions 19 and 11 are specific to sin and include a specific call to action. As noted in chapter 5, students scored higher on general, more objective questions that did not specifically call them to action, and rather really only asked their opinion or what they thought was important. Yet, they scored lower regarding questions such as 19 and 11 where they were called to make a choice and act.

A huge disconnect was observed in question 11 where students did not regard their online relationships to include talking about real life issues, like sin struggles. This begs the question, if students did not utilize online relationships for real life issues that include confession of sin, what were they utilizing these relationships for?

**Findings for Category 3: Sin Principle 5,
Questions: 9, 14 (-)**

Principle 5: The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.

Table 16. Sin principle 5, negative questions 9, 14

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 9: I ignore other's sin online						
6.86% 29	34.75% 147	21.99% 93	30.26% 128	6.15% 26	423	2.94
Question 14: Talking about sin is something that I am uncomfortable doing when I am online with my friends						
10.40% 44	24.35% 103	16.08% 68	35.46% 150	13.71% 58	423	3.18

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 9 and 14 are asked negatively and coincide with questions 19 and 11. 34.75 percent and 30.26 percent of the sample admitted to “generally” and “occasionally” ignoring other’s sin online. 35.46 percent of students noted that “occasionally” they were uncomfortable talking about sin with friends while online. The category of sin, with its principles, revealed the sample to have a low view of the importance of utilizing online relationships for issues like sin struggles, confession of sin, and ignoring sin while online. This is addressed more in chapter 5 conclusions.

**Findings for Category 3: Sin Principle 6,
Questions: 16, 7 (+)**

Principle 6: The essence of biblical community recognizes that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

Table 17. Sin principle 6, positive questions 16, 7

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 16: I confess my struggles with sin when I am online to my friends.						
1.90% 8	5.00% 21	11.43% 48	38.10% 160	43.57% 183	420	1.84
Question 7: I often ask for help from friends while online about my sin struggles.						
1.68% 7	8.39% 35	9.59% 40	30.94% 129	49.40% 206	417	1.82

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Students also did not believe that their online relationships were a place for personal confession of sin. Along with a low score of pointing out sin, whether in others or themselves, 43.57 percent of the sample said that they “never” utilized their online relationships for confession of sin. 38.10 percent of the sample admitted to “occasional” confession of personal sin within the venue of an online environment. Even more personal, question 7 received almost 50 percent (49.4 percent) of the sample stating that they would not ask a friend for help regarding sin struggles.

Findings for Category 3: Sin Principle 6, Questions: 21, 12 (-)

Principle 6: The essence of biblical community recognizes that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

Table 18. Sin principle 6, negative questions 21, 12

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 21: Confessing sin online to my friends is challenging for me.						
20.38% 86	24.64% 104	17.06% 72	29.86% 126	8.06% 34	422	2.81
Question 12: I avoid trying to have victory over my sin when I am online.						
3.11% 13	14.11% 59	20.57% 86	40.19% 168	22.01% 92	418	3.64

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 21 and 12 are the negative scores that coincide with questions 16 and 7. 20.38 percent of students claimed that confessing sin to friends online was challenging. 24.64 percent of the sample noted that “generally” it was challenging to confess sin online, and almost 30 percent (29.86 percent) of the sample admitted that “occasionally” it was challenging for them to confess sin to friends in an online environment. Students, however, seemed to have a higher view of the need to have victory over their sin while online. 22.01 percent of the sample said that they “never” tried to avoid having victory over sin and 40.19 percent admitted to “occasionally” trying to avoid victory over sin.

**Findings for Category 4: Jesus Christ
Principle 7, Questions: 23, 36 (+)**

Principle 7: The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

Table 19. Jesus Christ principle 7, positive questions 23, 36

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 23: It is important for me to identify with Jesus in my online relationships						
17.81%	20.43%	23.52%	30.17%	8.08%		
75	86	99	127	34	421	3.10
Question 36: I believe my online relationships should be an act of worship to God						
17.90%	21.24%	19.09%	32.22%	9.55%		
75	89	80	135	40	419	3.06

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Regarding identification with Jesus while online, over 30 percent (30.17 percent) of students stated that only “occasionally” was it important for them to identify with Jesus while online. This data revealed another disconnect between perception and reality of a misunderstanding of the essentials needed to experience biblical community. Only 17.81 percent admitted that they “always” identified with Jesus while online. 20.43

percent of students said that in general, identifying with Jesus was important while interacting online. Question 36 revealed more interesting data in that the sample overall did not believe that their online relationships should necessarily be considered an act of worship to God. Over 50 percent of the sample chose “frequently” or “occasionally” for question 36.

**Findings for Category 4: Jesus Christ
Principle 7, Questions: 34, 35 (-)**

Principle 7: The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

Table 20. Jesus Christ principle 7, negative questions 34, 35

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 34: I have very little interest in identifying with Jesus when I am online.						
3.35% 14	11.48% 48	18.66% 78	38.28% 160	28.23% 118	418	3.77
Question 35: Worship and my online experiences are two separate things.						
11.69% 49	26.73% 112	24.58% 103	29.12% 122	7.88% 33	419	2.95

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Questions 34 and 35 are the negative data connected to questions 23 and 26. Students seemed to score higher when responding to the question written in the negative. Based on the data, students claimed that they are indeed very interested in identifying with Jesus while online. Questions 36(+) and 35(-) revealed that students did consider their online experiences and worship to be two separate things. There was a misunderstanding regarding where worship can happen and why worship could not be taking place online. This might not be limited to an online issue, but as chapter 5 submits for consideration, possibly an overall misunderstanding of the essentials of biblical

community in any environment and not just limited to digital media. Only 7.8 percent of the entire sample agreed that their online relationships and their worship were the same.

**Findings for Category 5: Holy Spirit
Principle 8, Questions: 31, 37 (+)**

Principle 8: The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God’s Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., must be evident in the life of the believer.

Table 21. Holy Spirit principle 8, positive questions 31, 37

Always	Generally	Frequently	Occasionally	Never	Total	Average Rating
Question 31: It is important to me that I obey God and his Word while interacting in online relationships.						
26.25% 110	31.74% 133	22.43% 94	17.42% 73	2.15% 9	419	3.63
Question 37: I intentionally practice the Fruit of the Spirit in my online relationships (The Fruit of the Spirit are: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control)						
8.87% 37	35.01% 146	24.70% 103	27.10% 113	4.32% 18	417	3.17

Note. Confidence interval = +/- 2.14%

Question 31 generally asked students if it was indeed important to obey God and His Word while online. Overall, the sample admitted that it is important. Over 50 percent (26.25 percent “always” and 31.74 percent “generally”) of the sample noted the significance of general obedience. However, only 43 percent (8.87 percent “always” and 35.01 percent “generally”) of the sample agreed that they intentionally actually practiced. Again, the data revealed that when called to action, the students scored lower than when only asked objectively. Similar responses were observed regarding the negative questions 17 and 20 listed in appendix 17.

The purpose of this descriptive section was to first note all of the combined data as it pertained to the specific categories and principles taken from the literature review and agreed upon by the expert panel. Second, the data can be observed with the

research question in mind. The data revealed while there were many positive student perceptions regarding how they viewed their online relationships, there were also concerning issues. The explored data showed that while students place a high value on relationships, and to some extent even the essentials of biblical community, there was a misunderstanding, inconsistency, and lack of knowledge of some of the major essentials needed to deem a community biblical. Generally the data noted that students were committed to interpersonally relating. This was evenly distributed throughout the responses to the positive and negative questions. However, there was a marked difference between a sense of interpersonal relationship and actually experiencing biblical community through an understanding of the essentials. Chapter 5 notes the observations, patterns, and practices taken from the data. The point is not to analyze every nuance of the data, but rather briefly address the general issues that are glaring in the research and offer some application and best practices that might benefit the family and the church.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The final section of the chapter is an evaluation of the research design. Strengths and weaknesses of the methodology are addressed in order to allow future researchers to improve the present work and better the beginning of an interesting and beneficial study.

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study was to better understand the validity of biblical community within digital media by professing Christian high school students in classical, closed enrollment non-denominational, and open enrollment non-denominational Christian schools. This thesis surveyed and synthesized the most recent literature related to biblical community within digital media. Before perception of biblical community within digital media was evaluated, however, the principles of biblical community were defined clearly with recourse to relevant literature as well as validated and confirmed by a consensus from an expert panel.

Moreover, the study clearly defined the essentials of biblical community

regardless of environment in order for a survey to be created that specifically addressed perception of students in the unique environment of digital media. This was accomplished through data collected from a sample of students who attend Christian schools with various demographic backgrounds. The perceptions of students were measured regarding whether or not students perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials of biblical community. Some significant items emerged relating to student perception including a desire for interpersonal relationships while online, understanding and misunderstanding the essentials of biblical community, and an overall low view of some specific essentials of biblical community.

Strengths of the Research Design

The population size represented three different schools with different backgrounds. When the data revealed similar answers despite denominational, demographic, philosophical, and educational differences, it became clear that the issues were across the board and not limited to one type of Christian school. This was intentional and allowed for more of an objective study.

The sample size proved to be successful, as a 99 percent confidence level was attained. A confidence interval of +/- 2.14 percent was achieved. These confidences were well within acceptable guidelines and assist in the validity of the study.

Triangulation was effectively utilized, that brought support to the findings. The triangulation process was (1) current writing and scriptural support found in the literature review, (2) validation by consensus from an expert panel based on the findings within current writing and Scripture, and (3) an instrument created from the literature review and the expert validation. Before perception was measured, the general principles of biblical community, regardless of environment, were clearly researched and agreed upon. The expert panel validated, with comments and concerns, the findings from the literature review and Scripture.

The internet-based survey created on SurveyMonkey.com allowed for accurate

and easy to follow charts and graphs. The web-based survey allowed me to customize the survey to observe the results through numerous filters and comparisons. Only the completed surveys were utilized for the data analysis. This was easily seen through the website software. The graphs utilized were accurate and easily downloaded in order for proper descriptive statistics to be viewed.

The Google doc created by Matt Dixon, in order to receive parental consent, was very helpful. This allowed the team to receive consent for minors to take a survey, but also still allowed for an anonymous survey to be administered. In other words, if students had to put personal information on the survey, they may not have been as honest with their responses. In short, the Google doc allowed for proper risk assessment to be followed and still administer an anonymous survey.

Weaknesses of the Research Design

An initial weakness of the research design might be the 58 surveys that were invalid and not used in the final data. While I was able to monitor the surveys administered in my own school, one school in particular skipped some of the questions. The surveys were completed and usable, but a more precise percentage might have been attained if the sample was monitored more closely. One potential improvement might be to not allow students to have the option to skip questions (whether unintentional or intentional). The web-based survey provider easily manages this by not allowing students to move on to the next question unless the previous question is answered.

Five categories (Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit) progressed theologically, and yielded eight principles. All but two categories had two principles. Category 4 (Jesus Christ) and category 5 (Holy Spirit) had only one principle each, which meant that categories 4 and 5 only had four questions each (2 positive and 2 negative). It may have improved the research to have an equal number of principles per category (2 principles per category for a total of 10 principles rather than 8).

It would have been preferable to possibly have a more balanced sample. Heritage Christian School made up over 60 percent of the sample. However, based on the sizes, the majority of all three schools participated in the survey.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research analyzed students' perceptions regarding biblical community within their online relationships. Using an exploratory, mixed methods approach a survey focused on evaluating biblical community within digital media was utilized, which included questions formed from a general list of essentials of biblical community reviewed in the literature and Scripture. This chapter seeks to answer the research question posed by the thesis, provide an evaluation of the contribution of the research to the precedent literature, and offer recommendations for practical implementation related to the research, most importantly the family and church.

Analysis of Results

Research Question and Methodology

The purpose of this mixed-methods exploratory sequential design was to answer the question "Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community?" In order to answer this question, terminology needed defining. Before a quantitative survey could be created to measure student perception (see appendix 6), a qualitative section utilized an expert panel that approved a general list of the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment (see appendix 1 and table 1). In order to accurately analyze biblical community within digital media, principles of biblical community were agreed upon by a panel of experts in various fields of youth ministry, biblical community, digital media, and education. After the list of principles or essentials was agreed upon, a survey was developed from the 5 categories: Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, and the Holy

Spirit. The list of principles merely assisted as a starting point where biblical community was defined regardless of environment. Eight principles were observed from the five categories with two scriptural examples. Each example also revealed two behaviors. Then a positive and negative question was crafted in eighth grade language for a total of 32 questions (see appendix 7).

The singular question this thesis sought to answer was “Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community?” It was determined that, for the purpose of this thesis, the research question would be addressed by first defining what the essentials are that indeed deem a community biblical. This was accomplished regardless of the environment. An expert panel reviewed the categories and principles that lead to a consensus of over 95 percent (see table 2). Five categories including the eight principles were determined to be general essentials of a biblical community. The essentials are also grounded in categories that progress theologically from Scripture.

Additionally, the survey questions were purposely created from the principles of biblical community regardless of environment and then asked in relation to the specific environment of digital media. This allowed for the environment of digital media to receive a fair assessment without the expectations of being compared to other more common environments such as face-to-face interaction. A new set of criteria was created, resulting in a biblical community survey specific to digital media. The student survey instructed participants to rank each question based on importance. Students’ choices were given based on their understanding and perception of whether they considered their online relationships to include the essentials of biblical community found in the survey questions. Therefore, the survey assisted in recognizing whether or not students believe that they are actively participating in true biblical community while online. The criteria was based on beginning with the essence of biblical community, linking the essentials to examples in Scripture, and then examining the behaviors revealed that were apparent

from the examples. From these criteria, a biblical community survey was created and student perception was measured. The findings were organized into two groups: demographic data and combined data of students. Both groups reveal interesting findings that help address the research question.

Demographic Findings

The first evaluation focused on demographic. Three schools were surveyed that included diverse enrollment options and size, location in the country, denomination, and philosophy of Christian education (see appendix 18 and table 3). Data was gathered from three schools, including a population that consisted of classical, open enrollment non-denominational, and closed enrollment non-denominational schools. Other demographic information was gathered as well. Gender, year in school, school attended, and personal relationship with Christ were part of the demographic section of the survey. I was curious to purposely compare the perceptions of students from the different demographic first, before observing the entire sample. If students from the different schools answered diversely in even a few of the categories, the research might point toward issues of perception and lack of understanding of biblical community being due to denominational differences or varying philosophies of Christian education. This was not the case.

Chapter 4 discussed the similarity of the three schools regarding their compared and similar perception and provides the data as support. Interestingly, this portion of the research clearly shows that the way students perceive themselves online and their understanding of what biblical community entails has little to do with their denomination, enrollment policy, school philosophy, gender, or class.¹ The research revealed that the way students perceive their online communities is not primarily due to demographic, denomination, and philosophical differences.

¹See appendices 9 through 17 for specific data that reveals the similarity of the schools compared rather than combined.

From a practical standpoint, the issues addressed under the section “Compared Sample Findings” have hardly anything in relationship to denomination or Christian philosophy of education. The research might advocate a deeper universal issue regarding students and their perceptions about their online relationships. Granted this is a small sample with only three schools involved, however, Christian schools in general can usually fit into the demographic of the three schools chosen. It is also interesting to note that there was not a great overall difference in data of students who attended a closed enrollment Christian school versus an open enrollment school. Naturally, there might be an assumption that an open enrollment Christian school would allow more non-believers to attend than a closed enrollment Christian school leading to different perceptions. Enrollment policy, however, was not a factor of variance in the research.

Compared Sample Findings

Once the research data was compared based on the different school demographics, the overall sample of students was evaluated. This second category evaluated the data of the schools combined based on the five categories (Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Christ, Holy Spirit), which included eight essentials or principles of biblical community. This is the second portion of the findings and much more detail is observed regarding the specifics of student perception.

Overall, the research suggests that generally students perceive that their online relationships and communities do indeed facilitate what they understand and interpret biblical community to include. Moreover, while students in general seem to have a high view of the need for relationships while online, fostering them *biblically* does not “always” or “generally” seem to be a primary concern. Or, as the data reveals, there is misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, and an overall inconsistency of what essentials a biblical community (regardless of environment) must include. The research revealed that although students consider their online communities to be biblical, this is conditional at best.

Students' perception was dependent on how they defined or even understood (or misunderstood) the essentials explained in the questions. There is an overall similar inconsistency with certain sections of the survey regarding the categories and questions posed, despite demographic. Students, overall, have a high view of interpersonal relationships and the need to relate to others online. The following paragraphs discuss the findings related to the perception of students and how it relates to a proper or improper understanding of the essentials of biblical community. The comparison is observed based on the categories from which the principles were taken (Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit). Students from all three schools have a high view of relationship and perceive that they are indeed participating in community. However, students from all three schools scored similar on specific questions revealing a low view of many of the essentials of biblical community, and a noticeable lack of understanding of what biblical community must entail.

It is worth noting that as the categories are reviewed in the following section, the research reveals a differentiation between student responses to questions that are objective and only seek opinion versus more specific questions that actually call a student to action and use specific biblical terminology. Overall the data revealed that when general terminology is utilized promoting acknowledgment of the importance of relationships, respect, and communication, students are eager to agree. Also, with certain categories, general terminology was used that is not primarily biblical, such as "relationship and respect." Students were much more eager to agree with terminology that to them might seem less biblical and more relational. Also, regarding questions where students were only asked their opinion, students were much more eager to agree.

What becomes evident later in the analysis was that when questions specifically utilize more biblical terminology, such as sin, Jesus Christ, fruit of the Spirit, and worship, students are less apt to agree. Finally, the research revealed that when questions are more specific and call a student to action online, they were less eager to participate,

take a stand, and incorporate those principles into their online communities through action. To summarize, students were overall more willing to agree and had a higher view of community when terminology was general and there was not an actual opportunity for students to take a stand online. The willingness of students to agree to the importance of relationship seems to indicate that students perceive their online relationships to be relational, but may not necessarily be biblical. Moreover, the principles of biblical community put forth require action rather than just agreement and acknowledgment. The research also revealed that there is a disconnection between someone making a claim or giving an opinion, but not willing to act or take a stand. More on this is discussed in the recommendations for practice.

Findings from Category 1—Trinity

Specifically, regarding the Trinity (tables 4, and 7 to 10), questions were geared toward relationship and the importance of respect, affirmation, and the chance to submit one to another while online, if the opportunity arose. These questions were based on the examples of the Trinity in Scripture and how the examples reveal behaviors such as affirmation, respect, relationship, and submission (see appendix 7). Overall, students agreed that they should be intentional about respecting friends and that generally they want others to feel affirmed by them while engaging in online relationships. However, when students were asked if they would be willing to submit to others online, even if they were misunderstood, less agreed. What is interesting is that students may or may not perceive this to be an actual essential of biblical community, because “Trinity” or “God” was not mentioned in the questions, and to some extent, words like respect, relationship, and submission are used in general community language. This category revealed students’ high view of the need for interpersonal relationships that take place online.

In summary, students agreed that others should be treated well and respected while online participating in communities and relationships. When questions were worded in an objective way with terminology such as relationship and respect, and

students were only asked their opinion, students were eager to agree. However, as shown in table 8 respecting people seems to be more important than feeling good about oneself while participating in online relationships.

The overall positive response to these questions might be due to the relational terminology that is utilized in the questions, not necessarily because students perceive the questions to be biblical. The responses might also be directly related to what seemed to be a great desire for students to be relational while online.

Findings from Category 2—Mankind

The category entitled mankind (tables 4, and 11 to 14) contained questions that also dealt with relational elements but included specific issues of loyalty and unselfishness (see appendix 7). The category also included questions about the individual submitting to the needs of the community, rather than the person utilizing the community for individual gain. Conjointly, the data revealed that students believe that their online relationships must include loyalty and unselfishness. Proper online etiquette was important to students, even though “online etiquette” was not clearly defined in the survey. Whatever students’ perceived “online etiquette” to entail was important. Students agreed that it was unacceptable to gossip and talk badly about others online (see table 14). It seems that students have a high view of community as a whole.

The first two categories (Trinity and Mankind) demonstrated what seemed to be a high view of relationship and the need to respect others in many areas while engaging in digital media. Overall, students collectively agreed that these principles were important. Possibly, students agreed to these categories due to the general terminology that was both communal and biblically communal.

Findings from Category 3—Sin

Unlike the first two categories, biblical terms were utilized in this section of questions. The terms “sin” and “confession” were used frequently in the questions (both

positive and negative—see tables 4 and 15 to 18). Sin and confession are more biblically specific terms, unlike relationship, respect, communication, etc. This category specifically addressed the issue of sin in biblical community and one’s need to acknowledge this truth as an essential of biblical community. The category observed the truth that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and should not be ignored, however, sin management is not to be the goal of one’s communal experience.

The results were similar in that there was a drop in the perception that this category was viewed as important or equal with the categories that advocate relationship and respect. The research revealed that there is a high view of the need for interpersonal relationships, but a lower view of the need to acknowledge, confess, or deal with sin in the online environment. Not only was there a lower perception of the need to stand up for others when being hurt or sinned against online (see table 15, question 19), over 76 percent of students occasionally and never talked about real life issues, including struggles with sin. Table 15 question 19 specifically asked students to take a stand for someone being hurt while online. Only 13.57 percent said that they would “always” do this and over 75 percent of students “generally, frequently, or occasionally” agreed. A large and consistent disconnect was observed in table 15, question 11, where students from the entire sample did not regard their online relationships to include talking about real life issues, like sin struggles. This begs the question, if students did not utilize online relationships for real life issues that include confession of sin, what are they utilizing these relationships for?

Overall, students admitted to ignoring other’s sin while online, which would also support that students who ignore sin online, surely would not take a stand to point out sin in others, let alone talk about sin struggles. Almost 50 percent of all students never ask for help with sin when participating in digital media (table 17, question 7).

The research clearly points to a wrong perception that has little to do with what seems like a medium issue and is rather an issue of understanding the essentials of what

makes community biblical. Almost 50 percent of students admit that confessing sin online is challenging for them, yet almost 50 percent would like to have victory over their sin when they are engaging in digital media (see table 18). This is clearly an inconsistency as logically the fruit of confession of sin within an online environment would possibly bring more victory in a particular area, and at least some form of accountability. Either students separate these two connected issues—confession of sin and victory over sin—or they quite simply do not understand the importance of recognition of sin and the confession of it in any environment. It may be that students do feel that confession of sin is easier in a face-to-face environment, rather than in a digital environment, but further research is needed to prove this. It is doubtful, however, that students are more comfortable confessing sin one to another through face-to-face interaction. Statistics are clear that students are more comfortable in an online environment, as it has become a primary means of communication.² Again, there may be a more important issue to consider in that this perception of students is not based on a medium or any one environment, but a lack of understanding and practice of the essentials of biblical community in any environment. If this is the case, the more important issue may be educating the family and church about what a community must include to properly function biblically.

Findings from Category 4—Jesus Christ

This section specifically dealt with student's perception regarding identity with Jesus while online and whether or not students consider their online relationships to be an act of worship (see table 4, 19, and 20). Again there was an overall inconsistency with student perception and what was considered important regarding this category. Surprisingly, less than 18 percent of students overall agreed that it was important for

²Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011), 11.

them to always identify with Jesus while online (see table 19, question 23). Interestingly, less than 18 percent of students also believed that their online relationships should be an act of worship to God. The data revealed that overall students consider their online relationships and worship to be two separate things. The data reveals that there is an overall disconnect regarding student understanding of two important essentials—the importance of not only having union with Jesus (salvation), but also identifying with Him on a daily basis and considering one’s online relationships to be an act of worship.

Findings from Category 5—Holy Spirit

This category and principles specifically dealt with student’s perception regarding being obedient to God’s Word through the power of the Spirit while online (see table 4 and 21). It might be assumed that students who claimed to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (all but 14) would have a high view of obedience to God’s Word regardless of the environment, but that was not necessarily the case. Over 50 percent of students admitted that they “generally” and “frequently” obey God and His Word while participating in online relationships. This might support the earlier findings of turning a blind eye to sin, yet claiming a high view of overall relationship while online. The same was true for intentionally practicing the fruit of the Spirit while interacting in a digital media environment. Almost identical percentages were recorded even though the questions (31 and 37) were random within the survey. Overall, students seem to have a lower view of the need to obey God’s Word and practice the fruit of the Spirit while online. For both questions, over 30 percent of students said that in general they think obedience and fruit production is important.

Clearly the first two categories (Trinity and mankind) were collectively perceived by students to be primary in their understanding of biblical community. As mentioned previously this seems to be due to the high view of relationship and the focus of the questions being on relationship and respect. The last three categories, with much more specific biblical terminology, were less of a priority according to the data.

Contribution of Research to the Precedent Literature

The literature review of this thesis explored two primary categories related to the research question “Do teens that attend Christian high schools perceive their online relationships to facilitate the essentials or principles of biblical community?” The first category was an overview of the history of digital media and its influence on community from a secular and biblical perspective. The second category was that of biblical thought regarding what biblical community is and biblical community within different environments (face-to-face and digital media). Theological progression of the Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit was reviewed from writers and Scripture.

It was clear from the literature that secular writers as well as Christian writers recognize the potential problem of the medium of digital media fostering an environment of community that may not be genuine community in essence. The difference is that secular writers seem ready to completely discredit digital media and deem it false community.³ Whereas Christian writers, such as Samuel Ebersole, seem to have a higher view of the potential of biblical community utilized in digital media and seem to be well aware of the issue of sin. It also seems evident that digital media heightens an already existing problem of sin within community. However, the literature was clear that biblical community within digital media is constantly compared to biblical community in a more traditional environment, such as face-to-face interaction. Digital media seems to lack in comparison, and when measured with a more traditional environment is deemed inadequate or at least inferior. The literature revealed a potential problem in that the success of biblical community within one environment (face-to-face) was used as the litmus test or standard for the effectiveness of biblical community within another

³Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2008), 29; Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. and Norton, 2011), 85; Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 16-7; Turkle, *Alone Together*, 2.

environment (digital media).⁴ Also, there was not a clear definition of biblical community found in the literature review within or without a particular environment.

There was much rich discussion of biblical community within particular environments, however, this research sought to examine the essence of biblical community *regardless of* environment in order to properly and fairly incorporate these essentials into the environment of digital media so that perception could be accurately measured. Rather than comparing effectiveness of environments, this research analyzed the essence of biblical community that then can be utilized in any environment. This research utilized Ebersole’s work, but focused on clearly defining the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment.⁵ The research supports Ebersole’s work in that effectiveness of one environment should not be assessed based on the effectiveness of another different environment.⁶ Figure 1 illustrates the primary view of the literature review bar Ebersole. It is not fair to attempt to measure the effectiveness of biblical community in one environment based on the effectiveness of biblical community in another environment.

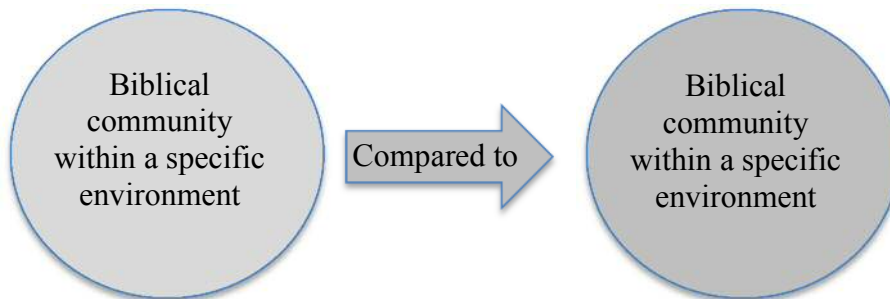


Figure 1. Effectiveness of biblical community based on environment

⁴Samuel E. Ebersole and Robert H. Woods, “Virtual Community: Koinonia or Compromise? Theological Implications of Community in Cyberspace, *The Journal of Education* 13, no. 10 (2003): 194, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://bcsi.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/09>.

⁵Ibid., 192.

⁶Ibid. 205-14.

Figure 2 illustrates this research in that in order to measure the effectiveness of biblical community in a particular environment, the essentials of biblical community were observed regardless of environment and then directly applied to the specific environment under review—digital media. This eliminated the mistake of comparing the effectiveness of one environment to another. This model is also effective for other environments, not only digital media.

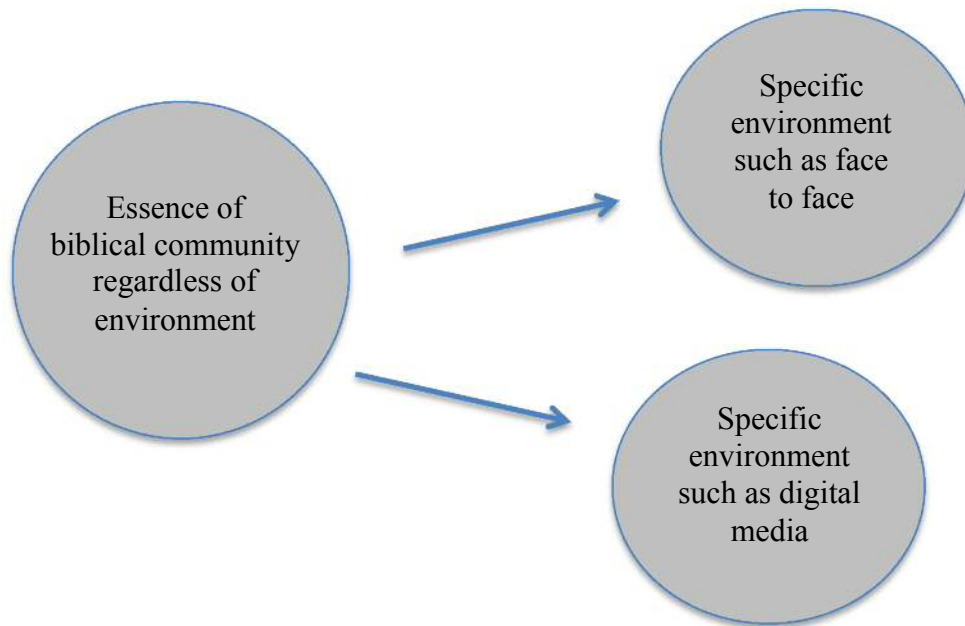


Figure 2. Essentials of biblical community regardless of environment

This research reviewed the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment first, in order to then properly measure students' perception regarding the unique environment of digital media. This research contributed a consensus from experts in the field regarding the essentials needed to deem any community biblical regardless of environment. The experts met a consensus regarding the principles of over 95 percent.

The instrument created was based on the essentials of biblical community regardless of any one particular environment. The instrument itself could be utilized to measure perception in relation to any environment. For example, the survey could be re-

worded to favor a different environment such as face-to-face, but in its essence include the same key principles of biblical community observed regardless of environment. This research established a clearer and more accurate starting point for the measurement of effectiveness of biblical community within a particular environment—specifically digital media.

The research worked toward the difficult task of defining the phrase “biblical community,” as the phrase was utilized in the literature, but not clearly defined (see in chapter 2, “Toward a Definition of Biblical Community”). This research effectively defined the essence of biblical community from a theological standpoint, and practical progression. Five categories with eight principles were observed. This research supports Paul Pettit’s model and others for theological implication regarding spiritual formation, but went further in defining specific principles that could be observed from the five categories of Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁷ The research extended to include biblical examples where behaviors were observed. These behaviors allowed for the survey to be created that measured student perception.

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this research, recommendations for practice can be made with regard to two major categories. The first category addresses what seems to be a universal issue of an overall misunderstanding of the essentials of biblical community versus an overemphasis of environment. The second category addresses some practical thoughts on how this research might benefit the family and church.

Considerations of Praxis

There is a cloudy and inconsistent view of students’ ability to understand and articulate the importance of biblical community within the environment of digital media.

⁷Paul Pettit, ed., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 37.

Recognizing the important essentials of many of the principles within the survey was also difficult for students. The students' inconsistent perception is not necessarily a media issue. Naturally, people can only function within their own culture and environment. It is extremely difficult to step back from one's environment and evaluate. However, this research showed that rather than trying to measure effectiveness of one environment compared to another, a higher emphasis must be placed on the theological presuppositions found in Scripture that are the essentials of what makes a community biblical. True biblical community begins, regardless of environment, with the Trinity—with God Himself. Truth found in God and His Word should be primary to any one specific environment. The medium should not be the message for the believer. The gospel should be the message—and the gospel is found in God Himself. It might prove beneficial to begin to think about communities in their essence as opposed to their environment. Maybe communities that are deemed "biblical" may not be biblical at all, or may not be biblical in essence. Maybe some communities include some of the essentials of biblical community like relationship and respect, but have no understanding of the need to confess sin and restore within those relationships. Misunderstanding biblical community is an issue of education and a reorientation of one's thinking to consider the deeper more biblical principles that are surely required and beneficial to any community in any environment. How is the community lacking in biblical understanding that leads to biblical practice?

Further research might reveal that not only would students answer the way that they did regarding biblical community within digital media, but also similar answers would surface when face-to-face environments were evaluated. Is it possible that the issue is not only limited to one environment? The universal issue does not seem to be environment based, but rather a misplaced understanding of what the Bible clearly teaches about community. Moreover, the issue revealed is one of a lack of practice possibly due to ignorance of the subject. Children are by-products of their parents. It

would be interesting to survey parents to analyze how they indeed consider their online relationships to include the essentials of biblical community. Or, survey parents regarding their face-to-face relationships. My opinion however, is that adults are not clear on what the essentials of biblical community are either—regardless of environment. Further research is needed to prove this assumption.

In addition to this section, research revealed that students separate acknowledgement and recognition from action. James 1:22 communicates that believers are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Clearly, students were hearers of the needs articulated in the questions and even acknowledged their agreement. However, when students were called to action, there was less willingness to agree, let alone commit to practice. This issue was also evident in students' low view of obeying God and practicing the fruit of the Spirit while online. Family and church must connect *hearing* the Word and then progressing to *obeying* the Word. Even secular community consists of not only giving opinion and acknowledging issues, but also living out the core values of a particular culture.⁸

Second, the research may reveal a bigger problem. Christians may not truly encompass what biblical community should include in order to be experienced at its fullest. Christian education must work toward educating children and parents. The family and the church must take responsibility for fostering effective biblical community in any environment. A recommendation is for parents, pastors, and youth pastors to consider a higher need of educating each other regarding what the biblical progression is of the essentials of biblical community, and in turn teach this to children. This education should then result in obedience. It would help to reverse the mindset of comparing one environment to another, but rather hold each separate environment up to the essentials of biblical community. A suggestion is not to dismiss the environment of digital media due

⁸Ebersole and Woods, "Virtual Community," 194.

to its environmental differences and how it is compared to a more traditional environment such as face-to-face. Rather, focus less on environment and more on what essentials are needed for a community to be biblical. If parents do not acknowledge their teen's media usage, it could prove problematic, as teens today utilize digital media as a primary means of communication and relationships. Observing the essentials of biblical community seems to be beneficial to the family and church in two ways.

First, environment *would not* be primary. One environment would not be the litmus test of measuring successful biblical community within another environment. Parents could explore the potential of children's digital media relationships not based on the environment, but rather how biblical principles are utilized in this unique environment. Second, the content *would* be primary, rather than the medium (face-to-face or digital media). Keeping the content primary would push back on McLuhan's famous phrase, "the medium is the message."⁹ The focus would be for believers to remember that the gospel is the message making the content primary, not the environment it functions in. No matter what technology surfaces next—the gospel is never subservient or ineffective in a particular environment. Rather than parents fearing one environment over another, the emphasis would be on educating children on the overall essentials of what makes any environment biblical, and then discussing what that might look like in the unique environment of digital media. A higher view of the gospel would prompt students to consider holding their online relationships up to the gospel and proper principles of biblical community, rather than trying to squeeze biblical principles into an environment. It might be helpful to allow the essence to be understood first and then influence the environment. Emphasizing the essentials of biblical community may help students begin to consider the benefits of worship and confession of sin to be commonplace within digital media. It might also help teens understand that they need to identify with Jesus in every environment.

⁹Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko, 2003), 9.

Considerations of Theology

Finally, while environments change, the essentials of biblical community do not. A better focus and understanding of the meta-narrative of the Bible clearly demonstrates that maybe students are too focused on themselves and not the big picture of God's redemptive work. A recommendation for practice is to re-evaluate Christian school and church curriculums to follow a more natural theological progression of the "creation, fall, redemption, consummation" model. I remember learning all of the stories of the Bible in Sunday school. God bless those teachers who put up with my antics. Although I was taught about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, the Tower of Babel, David and Goliath, etc., I was never shown the bigger picture of how they all went together, nor was I aware of the big picture and natural progression of the essentials of biblical community throughout all the different environments of the Bible, let alone the redemptive plan of the gospel observed in the entire Bible. The progression used in the research simply followed the natural narrative of the Bible—Trinity, Mankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit. A recommendation is to utilize curriculum that follows the metanarrative of God's redemptive plan for mankind. A better understanding of the theological progression of God's Word might help the family and church observe not only true biblical community regardless of environment, but also the outworking of the gospel transcending environment and never changing.

APPENDIX 1
EXPERT PANEL

Troy Temple, Ph.D.
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Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Ministries
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Jeff McMaster, Ph.D.
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Carlos Hidalgo
C.E.O Annuitas Group
Colorado Springs, Colorado
719-464-8015

APPENDIX 2

LETTER REQUESTING EXPERT PANEL PARTICIPATION

February 1, 2014

Dear [Expert Panel]

I am conducting a research study that seeks to analyze student perception regarding their understanding of whether or not their online communities and relationships include or facilitate the principles and essentials of biblical community. The study also seeks to review the principles of biblical community regardless of environment. As a part of this process, I am inviting you to participate in this study as an expert panelist due to your leadership, training, and research in the field of ministry and occupational expertise. If you accept this invitation, I will send you a list of principles that represent the essentials of biblical community regardless of environment. Your expertise is requested to validate the reviewed principles of biblical community found in the precedent literature of my research. Your validation of the principles through consensus will be utilized to create the instrument used to measure student perception and of course lend much credibility to the research.

I do not expect this to require a significant portion of your time, but I know that time is valuable. I realize time is something that we seem to run out of daily; therefore, I express my deepest gratitude for even considering this request. Please send me any questions that you may have before you respond to the invitation.

Once again, thank you for your time and your continued investment in the lives of adolescents worldwide. It is a privilege to partner in training future leaders.

Blessings,

Matthew A. Vander Wiele
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
High School Bible Instructor
Heritage Christian School
6401 E 75th St, Indianapolis, IN 46250

APPENDIX 3

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXPERT PANEL

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a contributor on this expert panel. Your investment will allow continued development in the training of leaders for the local church. Please evaluate and complete the attached survey.

1. Read the list of principles in its entirety.
2. Do the principles within each heading or section appear to be clear?
3. If you agree that list rightly defines the principles or essentials of biblical community regardless of environment please validate the document with your signature and the date in the proper space.
4. Please make any recommendations concerning the wording of the principles/essentials
5. If further clarification is needed, please feel free to contact the researcher for further clarification. This would be called phase two.
6. Upon completion of this review, please return the document with comments and signed validation if you concur with the findings. Please return to researcher via email (listed below).

Your help is much appreciated
Blessings,

Matthew A. Vander Wiele

APPENDIX 4

PARENTAL PERMISSION: AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

You are being requested to give permission for a minor or member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a study designed to understand the impact that the use of digital media has on both the Christian formation of adolescents as well as promoting biblical community. This research is being conducted by Matthew Dixon, Bekah Mason, and Matthew Vander Wiele for the purpose of the empirical research and doctoral studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, a person will be asked to complete two surveys in which they will answer questions related to their Christian faith, digital media use, and biblical community. Any information provided will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will a person's name be reported or a person's name identified with his or her responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and the person for whom you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By entering your E-mail address below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in this research if he or she desires.

Participant/Student name: required

Participant/Student grade: required

School affiliation: required

Parent/Guardian name: required

Parent/Guardian E-mail: required

APPENDIX 5

DAN SNIVELY VITA

Daniel M. Snively, Ed.D.
Leadership Advisor

Dr. Daniel Snively
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Dr. Dan Snively has extensive executive and management experience within churches, faith based ministries, nonprofit organizations and business. For over 27 years, Dr. Snively held executive leadership positions at Grace College and Grace Theological Seminary and at Prison Fellowship Ministries, a large international not-for-profit ministry based in Washington D.C. He has advised and coached pastors, lay Christian leaders, executives and senior teams of churches, faith based and non-profit organizations and businesses. Dan is specifically recognized for his effectiveness in helping Christian leaders understand and live out biblical leadership principles for eternal impact. He uses these insights to build biblically-driven teams, to help churches and faith based organizations develop their leadership pipeline and to rebuild effectiveness of leaders in crisis.

Dr. Snively uses his unique integration of biblical and professional insights and experiences to amplify the importance of leadership, character, values, and principles. This focus brings clarity to key issues that shape a church's or faith based organization's culture, climate and outcomes. Dan's innovative work in leadership evaluation helps validate the strengths and weaknesses of leaders so that they can become the leaders they were meant to be. He is noted for helping individuals and their teams develop dynamics that accelerate their harmony and achievement.

Dr. Snively has over 30 years of experience in the assessment field. He has specialized expertise in understanding and evaluating leadership and management behaviors and has authored 12 multi-assessment reports and eight instruments. In addition, he is recognized for his skill in customizing benchmarks based on biblical leadership and the needs of church and faith based organizations. These organizations in turn are able to hire the best equipped leaders the first time which helps churches and organizations realize their plans under God's wisdom

Dr. Snively earned his Ed.D. in Leadership and Management from Ball State University, his M.A. in Student Personnel Administration in Higher Education from Ball State University, post graduate studies in theology, Hebrew and Greek from Grace Theological Seminary and his B.A. in History and General Science from Grace College.

APPENDIX 6
STUDENT SURVEY

By your completion of this online survey and entering your e-mail address, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name _____

E-mail _____

Date _____

Demographics

1. Gender: M/F
2. Year in School: 9th 10th 11th 12th
3. What school do you attend?
Heritage Christian School
Trinity Classical Academy
Silverdale Baptist Academy
4. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Yes/No

Quantitative Questionnaire: Please complete the following survey. Please indicate how true the statement is for your online relationships, not what you would really want the answer to be. Be honest.

Note that in the survey the phrase, “online relationships” or “online” refers to all digital media including: social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, texting and talking on the phone.

1. I will take responsibility for my actions in my online relationships, even if it hurts my reputation.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
2. I often seek accountability from friends while online about sin struggles.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
3. I am uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
4. I don’t really care if others are sinning on line.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)

5. I will gossip and do what it takes to get my way even if it hurts the online community.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
6. I use my online relationships to talk about real life issues like struggles with sin
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
7. I do not really think about having victory over sin when I am online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
8. Feeling good about myself is important to me when I am online with friends.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
9. Talking about sin is not something I do online with my friends.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
10. I am intentional about respecting my friends within my online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
11. I confess my struggles with sin online to my close friends.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
12. I do not really think about God that much when I am online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
13. Respecting people online is not as important as getting my point across and being heard.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
14. I do not participate in hurtful or sinful actions toward others online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
15. My spiritual life is not really important to me when I am online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
16. Confessing sin online to my friends is not very important to me.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
17. I am purposeful about making others feel good about themselves in my online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
18. It is important for me to identify with Jesus in my online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
19. Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
20. I will be disloyal online to find out information about others or myself.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)

21. I will blame or ignore others in order to avoid taking the blame for my actions online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
22. I have to always have the last word in my online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
23. If I am pressured into doing something that disobeys and dishonors God online I will stand up for what is right.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
24. My online relationships with people are very important to me.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
25. I care about proper online etiquette.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
26. It is important to me that I obey God and his Word while interacting in online relationships.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
27. I am more interested in people knowing about me, then I am interested in knowing about them.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
28. Being loyal and trustworthy to my friends online is very important to me.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
29. I do not think it is important to identify with Jesus when I am online.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
30. Worship and my online experiences are two separate things.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
31. I believe my online relationships should be a form of worship to God.
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)
32. I willingly practice the Fruit of the Spirit in my online relationships (The Fruit of the Spirit are: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control).
(Always Generally Frequently Occasionally Never)

APPENDIX 7
STUDENT SURVEY:
PROGRESSION OF DEVELOPMENT

KEY:

+ = Positive statement
- = Negative statement
T = Trinity
M = Man
S = Sin
JC = Jesus Christ
HS = Holy Spirit
a,b,c,d

Category 1: TRINITY

PRINCIPLE 1

The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.

EXAMPLE 1

A. Transfiguration – Respect, approval, positive recognition, ownership (Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, Luke 9:28-36)

BEHAVIOR 1

God the Father shows respect to Jesus

QUESTIONS

- 1.+T1a I am intentional about respecting my friends within my online relationships.
- 2.–T1b Respecting people online is not as important as getting my point across and being heard.

EXAMPLE 2

B. Baptism of Jesus – Affirmation, Positive Recognition, loving others, kindness (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22)

BEHAVIOR 2

God the Father affirms Jesus

QUESTIONS

1. +T1c I am purposeful about making others feel good about themselves in my online relationships.
2. –T1d Feeling good about myself is important to me when I am online with friends.

PRINCIPLE 2

The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

EXAMPLE 1

- A. Garden of Gethsemane – willingness to submit, obedience (Jesus to the Father), positive communication (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46)

BEHAVIOR 1

Willing to submit to others – Jesus is willing to submit to the Father

QUESTIONS

3. +T2a Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships
4. –T2b I have to always have the last word in my online relationships.

EXAMPLE 2

- B. The Sending of the Spirit and the sending of the Son– Responsible, submission to authority, edification
 - a. Father sends the Son – (John 3:17; Luke 20:13; John 3:16).
 - b. Father and the Son send the Spirit – (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7).
 - c. Son submits to the Father to the cross – (Philippians 2:8).
 - d. Holy Spirit's purpose is to bring glory to the Son (John 16:13-14).

BEHAVIOR 2

Recognizes specific purpose and takes responsibility

QUESTIONS

7. +T2c I will take responsibility for my actions in my online relationships, even if it hurts my reputation.
8. –T2d I will blame and ignore others in order to avoid taking the blame for my actions online or on my phone.

Category 2: MANKIND

PRINCIPLE 3

The essence of biblical community recognizes that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made in the image of a relational God.

EXAMPLE 1

A. God makes Eve for Adam/Adam sings when Eve is presented to him – relational, happiness, joy, unity (Genesis 2:22-24)

BEHAVIOR 1

Seeks relationships with other people

QUESTIONS

9. +M1a My online relationships with people are very important to me
10. –M1b I am more interested in people knowing about me, then I am interested in knowing about them.

EXAMPLE 2

C. David and Jonathan's Friendship – commitment, loyalty (I Samuel 20:16-17)

BEHAVIOR 2

Loyal to others

QUESTIONS

11. +M1c Being loyal and trustworthy to my friends online is very important to me.
12. –M1d I will be disloyal online to find out information about others and myself.

PRINCIPLE 4

The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual

EXAMPLE 1

A. Levitical Law - Submission of one to many for the sake of the community – Lev. Isolation from community. Lev 4:12, 21; 6:11; 8:17; and 9:11 all represent the need for the community to be spared at the expense of an individual. Obedience to the rules, Preservation of community

BEHAVIOR 1

Willing to obey the rules

QUESTIONS

13. +M2a I care about proper online etiquette.
14. -M2b I will gossip and do what it takes get my way even if it hurts my online friends.

EXAMPLE 2

- A. Daniel refuses to eat the King's food due to his connection to the community of God. (Daniel 1: 1-9)

BEHAVIOR 2

Standing up for what is right

QUESTIONS

15. +M2c If I am pressured into doing something that disobeys and dishonors God online I will stand up for what is right
16. -M2d I am uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online

Category 3: SIN

PRINCIPLE 5

The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.

EXAMPLE 1

- A. OT Community – Joshua 7:1-6 – Achan – Achan's individual sin effects the community of God.
- B. NT church - Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5 describes the need to keep the community safe from sin by eliminating two individuals – protecting one another from sin, paying the consequences for sin, Protection of the community.

BEHAVIOR 1

Protects others from sin/ points out sin to others

QUESTIONS

17. +S1a I will stand up for others when they are being hurt and sinned against online.
18. -S1b I ignore other's sin online.

EXAMPLE 2

- C. NT church - Honesty about sin – (I John 1:8 and 10)

BEHAVIOR 2

Willing to talk about sin

QUESTIONS

19. +S1c I use my online relationships to talk about real life issues like my struggles with sin
20. –S1d Talking about sin is something that I am uncomfortable doing when I am online with my friends.

PRINCIPLE 6

The essence of biblical community recognizes that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

EXAMPLES

- A. NT church - Transparency about sin– (I John 1:10)
- B. NT church - Battle Sin – Armor of God – (Ephesians 6:10-20)
- C. NT church - Confession – (I John 1:9)
- D. NT church - Reconciliation - (I John 1:9)
- E. NT church - Acknowledgment of sin– (Romans 6:12, Col. 3:1-11)

BEHAVIORS

Willing to confess sin to others and God, able to have victory over sin

QUESTIONS

21. +S2a I confess my struggles with sin when I am online to my friends.
22. –S2b Confessing sin online to my friends is challenging for me.
23. +S2c I often ask for help from friends while online about my sin struggles.
24. –S2d I avoid trying to have victory over my sin when I am on line.

Category 4: JESUS CHRIST

PRINCIPLE 7

The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

EXAMPLE 1

Identity in Christ – Identification (Psalm 139:13-16, I Peter, 2:9, Ephesians 1:4-5, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 2:13-14, John 1:12-13, Galatians 4:6-7, John 15:15, Romans 5:1-2)

BEHAVIOR 1

Longs to identify with Jesus

QUESTIONS

25. +JC1a It is important for me to identify with Jesus in my online relationships
26. –JC1b I have very little interest in identifying with Jesus when I am online.

EXAMPLE 2

A. NT and NT church Worship (John 4:24, Romans 12:1, Phil. 3:2-7, Rev. 4:10-11)

BEHAVIOR 2

Desires to worship God

QUESTIONS

27. +JC1c I believe my online relationships should be an act of worship to God.
28. -JC1d Worship and my online experiences are two separate things.

Category 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH**PRINCIPLE 8**

The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God's Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., must be evident in the life of the believer.

EXAMPLE 1

A. NT church – Obedience to God's Word – (Acts 5:29, Heb. 5:9, I John 5:3)

BEHAVIOR 1

Responds to the Gospel by obeying God's Word

QUESTIONS

29. +HS1a It is important to me that I obey God and his Word while interacting in online relationships.
30. -HS1b I forget to think about God when I am online.

EXAMPLE 2

D. NT church - Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23, Col. 3:12-17)

BEHAVIOR 2

Practices the Fruit of the Spirit to others

QUESTIONS

31. +HS1c I intentionally practice the Fruit of the Spirit in my online relationships (The Fruit of the Spirit are: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control)
32. -HS1d My spiritual life is secondary to me when I am online.

APPENDIX 8

DATA EXAMPLE: GRAPH AND SUMMARY

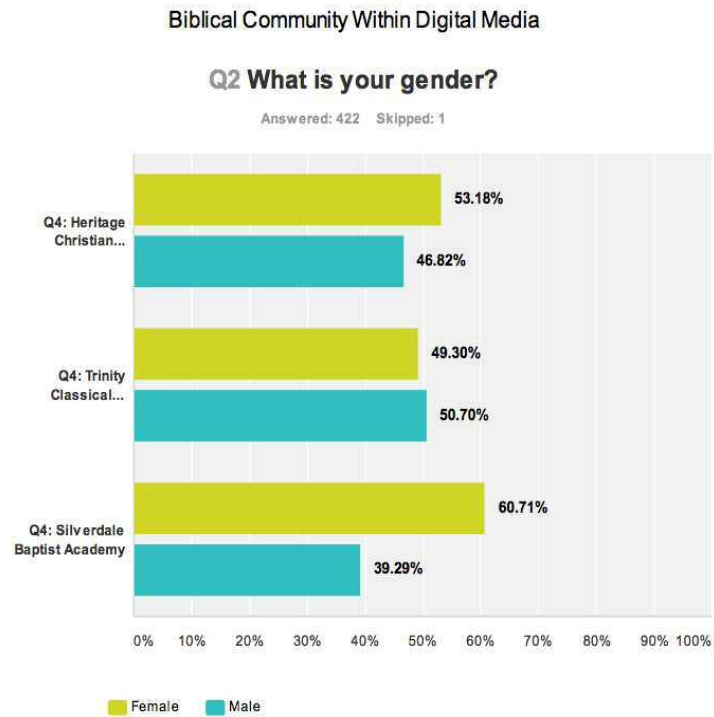


Figure A1. What is your gender?¹

Table A1. What is your gender?

	Female	Male	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	53.18% 142	46.82% 125	267
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	49.30% 35	50.70% 36	71
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	60.71% 51	39.29% 33	84
Total Respondents	228	194	422

¹Figures and tables in appendices 8 through 17 are taken directly from the survey results from surveymonkey.com.

APPENDIX 9
DEMOGRAPHIC OF YEAR IN SCHOOL

Table A2. Gender by school

Heritage Christian School

	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
Q2: Female	22.82% 34	39.60% 59	16.78% 25	20.81% 31	149
Q2: Male	25.40% 32	27.78% 35	11.90% 15	34.92% 44	126
Total Respondents	66	94	40	75	275

Trinity Classical

	Female	Male	Total
Q2: Female	100.00% 38	0.00% 0	38
Q2: Male	0.00% 0	100.00% 37	37
Total Respondents	38	37	75

Silverdale Academy

	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
Q2: Female	42.86% 27	23.81% 15	12.70% 8	20.63% 13	63
Q2: Male	27.27% 12	29.55% 13	15.91% 7	27.27% 12	44
Total Respondents	39	28	15	25	107

APPENDIX 10

CATEGORY 1: TRINITY—PRINCIPLE 1

Questions: 15, 22, 18, 13

Principle 1: The essence of biblical community finds its origin and model for practice in the Trinity. The origin of relationship is found in the Godhead of the Trinity, and is able to be modeled by mankind.

Table A3. Question 15: I am intentional about respecting my friends within my online relationships (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	43.70% 118	39.26% 106	10.00% 27	6.30% 17	0.74% 2	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	35.62% 26	39.73% 29	15.07% 11	5.48% 4	4.11% 3	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	52.81% 47	33.71% 30	7.87% 7	5.62% 5	0.00% 0	89

Table A4. Question 22: I am purposeful about making others feel good about themselves in my online relationships (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	17.47% 47	42.01% 113	21.19% 57	17.84% 48	1.49% 4	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	18.06% 13	30.56% 22	30.56% 22	16.67% 12	4.17% 3	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	26.97% 24	37.08% 33	20.22% 18	12.36% 11	3.37% 3	89

Table A5. Question 18: Respecting people online is not as important as getting my point across and being heard (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.12% 3	7.84% 21	14.93% 40	44.03% 118	32.09% 86	268
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	4.11% 3	13.70% 10	15.07% 11	32.88% 24	34.25% 25	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	5.62% 5	6.74% 6	10.11% 9	37.08% 33	40.45% 36	89

Table A6. Question 13: Feeling good about myself is important to me when I am online with friends (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	12.22% 33	37.04% 100	24.81% 67	22.59% 61	3.33% 9	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	6.85% 5	31.51% 23	23.29% 17	24.66% 18	13.70% 10	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	8.16% 8	26.53% 26	25.51% 25	32.65% 32	7.14% 7	98

APPENDIX 11

CATEGORY 1: TRINITY—PRINCIPLE 2

Questions: 24, 27, 6, 26

Principle 2 The essence of biblical community functions within a hierarchy and a submission to authority that can be observed in the Trinity and then modeled among believers in any environment.

Table A7. Question 24: Even when I do not get my way and I am misunderstood, I am willing to give in to others in my online relationships (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.86% 5	17.47% 47	24.16% 65	46.10% 124	10.41% 28	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	2.74% 2	12.33% 9	21.92% 16	41.10% 30	21.92% 16	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	2.25% 2	15.73% 14	24.72% 22	39.33% 35	17.98% 16	89

Table A8. Question 27: I have to always have the last word in my online relationships (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	4.49% 12	11.61% 31	17.23% 46	45.69% 122	20.97% 56	267
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	2.78% 2	6.94% 5	22.22% 16	33.33% 24	34.72% 25	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	6.90% 6	9.20% 8	19.54% 17	35.63% 31	28.74% 25	87

Table A9. Question 6: I will take responsibility for my actions in my online relationships, even if it hurts my reputation (+)

percentages						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	32.96% 89	47.04% 127	8.52% 23	11.48% 31	0.00% 0	270
percentages						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	38.89% 28	41.67% 30	13.89% 10	2.78% 2	2.78% 2	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	40.96% 34	30.12% 25	16.87% 14	10.84% 9	1.20% 1	83

Table A10. Question 26: I will blame and ignore others in order to avoid taking the blame for my actions online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.12% 3	5.97% 16	13.43% 36	45.90% 123	33.58% 90	268
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	4.11% 3	12.33% 9	39.73% 29	43.84% 32	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	1.16% 1	2.33% 2	11.63% 10	37.21% 32	47.67% 41	86

APPENDIX 12

CATEGORY 2: MANKIND—PRINCIPLE 3

Questions: 29, 33, 32, 25

Principle 3 The essence of biblical community recognizes that man is relational and craves relationship because he is made in the image of a relational God.

Table A11. Question 29: My online relationships with people are very important to me (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	14.50% 39	27.14% 73	22.30% 60	26.77% 72	9.29% 25	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	12.50% 9	27.78% 20	18.06% 13	22.22% 16	19.44% 14	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	19.54% 17	27.59% 24	22.99% 20	21.84% 19	8.05% 7	87

Table A12. Question 33: Being loyal and trustworthy to my friends online is very important to me (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	49.06% 130	32.45% 86	10.57% 28	6.42% 17	1.51% 4	265
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	40.85% 29	42.25% 30	9.86% 7	7.04% 5	0.00% 0	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	57.83% 48	27.71% 23	9.64% 8	4.82% 4	0.00% 0	83

Table A13. Question 32: I am more interested in people knowing about me, than I am interested in knowing about them (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.89% 5	10.57% 28	20.75% 55	50.94% 135	15.85% 42	265
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	4.23% 3	8.45% 6	23.94% 17	45.07% 32	18.31% 13	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	3.61% 3	9.64% 8	16.87% 14	43.37% 36	26.51% 22	83

Table A14. Question 25: I will be disloyal online to find out information about others and myself (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	2.23% 6	5.95% 16	11.15% 30	41.64% 112	39.03% 105	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	4.11% 3	5.48% 4	39.73% 29	50.68% 37	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	2.30% 2	1.15% 1	10.34% 9	33.33% 29	52.87% 46	87

APPENDIX 13

CATEGORY 2: MANKIND—PRINCIPLE 4

Questions: 30, 28, 10, 8

Principle 4 The essence of biblical community submits the individual to the community, not the community to the individual

Table A15. Question 30: I care about proper online etiquette (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	23.42% 63	35.32% 95	15.24% 41	20.45% 55	5.58% 15	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	24.66% 18	30.14% 22	16.44% 12	21.92% 16	6.85% 5	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	24.66% 18	30.14% 22	16.44% 12	21.92% 16	6.85% 5	73

Table A16. Question 28: If I am pressured into doing something that disobeys and dishonors God online I will stand up for what is right (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	13.86% 37	34.46% 92	20.22% 54	24.34% 65	7.12% 19	267
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	16.44% 12	34.25% 25	16.44% 12	26.03% 19	6.85% 5	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	27.59% 24	34.48% 30	17.24% 15	17.24% 15	3.45% 3	87

Table A17. Question 10: I will gossip and do what it takes get my way even if it hurts my online friends (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	0.38% 1	1.88% 5	6.02% 16	39.47% 105	52.26% 139	266
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	2.78% 2	1.39% 1	29.17% 21	66.67% 48	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	1.04% 1	1.04% 1	5.21% 5	26.04% 25	66.67% 64	96

Table A18. Question 8: I am uncomfortable taking a stand for what is right online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	2.96% 8	12.22% 33	15.19% 41	55.19% 149	14.44% 39	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	1.37% 1	9.59% 7	12.33% 9	54.79% 40	21.92% 16	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	4.08% 4	8.16% 8	12.24% 12	35.71% 35	39.80% 39	98

APPENDIX 14

CATEGORY 3: SIN—PRINCIPLE 5

Questions: 19, 11, 9, 14

Principle 5 The essence of biblical community acknowledges sin.

Table A19. Question 19: I will stand up for others when they are being hurt and sinned against online (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	10.41% 28	30.86% 83	19.33% 52	34.57% 93	4.83% 13	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	14.08% 10	33.80% 24	22.54% 16	28.17% 20	1.41% 1	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	22.47% 20	41.57% 37	20.22% 18	14.61% 13	1.12% 1	89

Table A20. Question 11: I use my online relationships to talk about real life issues like my struggles with sin (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	0.74% 2	9.26% 25	12.96% 35	40.37% 109	36.67% 99	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	2.78% 2	15.28% 11	37.50% 27	44.44% 32	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	2.06% 2	12.37% 12	13.40% 13	35.05% 34	37.11% 36	97

Table A21. Question 9: I ignore other's sin online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	7.04% 19	37.78% 102	21.48% 58	29.26% 79	4.44% 12	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	8.22% 6	32.88% 24	21.92% 16	30.14% 22	6.85% 5	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	6.12% 6	25.51% 25	23.47% 23	34.69% 34	10.20% 10	98

Table A22. Question 14: Talking about sin is something that I am uncomfortable doing when I am online with my friends (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	11.11% 30	26.67% 72	15.93% 43	35.19% 95	11.11% 30	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	6.85% 5	24.66% 18	15.07% 11	39.73% 29	13.70% 10	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	11.22% 11	16.33% 16	17.35% 17	31.63% 31	23.47% 23	98

APPENDIX 15

CATEGORY 3: SIN—PRINCIPLE 6

Questions: 16, 7, 21, 12

Principle 6 The essence of biblical community recognizes that sin is still problematic in the life of the believer and biblical community.

Table A23. Question 16: I confess my struggles with sin when I am online to my friends (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.48% 4	4.44% 12	12.22% 33	40.74% 110	41.11% 111	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	2.82% 2	9.86% 7	32.39% 23	54.93% 39	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	4.55% 4	9.09% 8	12.50% 11	35.23% 31	38.64% 34	88

Table A24. Question 7: I often ask for help from friends while online about my sin struggles (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.50% 4	7.12% 19	8.61% 23	30.71% 82	52.06% 139	267
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	0.00% 0	11.27% 8	4.23% 3	28.17% 20	56.34% 40	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	3.09% 3	12.37% 12	16.49% 16	34.02% 33	34.02% 33	97

Table A25. Question 21: Confessing sin online to my friends is challenging for me (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	20.82% 56	25.65% 69	14.87% 40	29.74% 80	8.92% 24	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	23.29% 17	20.55% 15	27.40% 20	20.55% 15	8.22% 6	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	14.61% 13	24.72% 22	14.61% 13	39.33% 35	6.74% 6	89

Table A26. Question 12: I avoid trying to have victory over my sin when I am on line (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	1.87% 5	14.55% 39	23.51% 63	41.79% 112	18.28% 49	268
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	7.14% 5	12.86% 9	18.57% 13	40.00% 28	21.43% 15	70
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	5.10% 5	14.29% 14	14.29% 14	31.63% 31	34.69% 34	98

APPENDIX 16

CATEGORY 4: JESUS CHRIST—PRINCIPLE 7

Questions: 23, 36, 34, 35

Principle 7 The essence of biblical community includes union with Jesus Christ. Union with Jesus for the believer is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and provision for salvation.

Table A27. Question 23: It is important for me to identify with Jesus in my online relationships (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	15.61% 42	17.84% 48	23.79% 64	33.09% 89	9.67% 26	269
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	13.89% 10	16.67% 12	33.33% 24	29.17% 21	6.94% 5	72
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	28.09% 25	30.34% 27	15.73% 14	21.35% 19	4.49% 4	89

Table A28. Question 36: I believe my online relationships should be an act of worship to God (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	15.79% 42	19.17% 51	17.67% 47	36.09% 96	11.28% 30	266
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	14.29% 10	27.14% 19	21.43% 15	25.71% 18	11.43% 8	70
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	27.71% 23	22.89% 19	21.69% 18	25.30% 21	2.41% 2	83

Table A29. Question 34: I have very little interest in identifying with Jesus when I am online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	4.55% 12	12.50% 33	19.32% 51	40.53% 107	23.11% 61	264
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	2.86% 2	11.43% 8	22.86% 16	37.14% 26	25.71% 18	70
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	0.00% 0	8.33% 7	13.10% 11	32.14% 27	46.43% 39	84

Table A30. Question 35: Worship and my online experiences are two separate things (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	13.16% 35	31.20% 83	26.69% 71	23.68% 63	5.26% 14	266
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	14.49% 10	30.43% 21	17.39% 12	27.54% 19	10.14% 7	69
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	4.76% 4	9.52% 8	23.81% 20	47.62% 40	14.29% 12	84

APPENDIX 17

CATEGORY 5: HOLY SPIRIT—PRINCIPLE 8

Questions: 31, 37, 17, 20

Principle 8 The essence of biblical community includes obedience to God’s Word through the power of the Spirit. Worship, obedience, demonstration of the Fruit of the Spirit, etc., must be evident in the life of the believer.

Table A31. Question 31: It is important to me that I obey God and his Word, while interacting in online relationships (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	21.51% 57	31.32% 83	23.02% 61	21.51% 57	2.64% 7	265
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	26.76% 19	35.21% 25	26.76% 19	9.86% 7	1.41% 1	71
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	40.96% 34	30.12% 25	16.87% 14	10.84% 9	1.20% 1	83

Table A32. Question 37: I intentionally practice the fruit of the spirit in my online relationships (the fruit of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) (+)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	7.20% 19	35.98% 95	23.86% 63	28.03% 74	4.92% 13	264
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	8.57% 6	28.57% 20	30.00% 21	27.14% 19	5.71% 4	70
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	14.46% 12	37.35% 31	22.89% 19	24.10% 20	1.20% 1	83

Table A33. Question 17: I forget to think about God when I am online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	2.59% 7	18.52% 50	32.22% 87	43.33% 117	3.33% 9	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	1.37% 1	15.07% 11	19.18% 14	54.79% 40	9.59% 7	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	2.27% 2	9.09% 8	15.91% 14	50.00% 44	22.73% 20	88

Table A34. Question 20: My spiritual life is secondary to me when I am online (-)

(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Heritage Christian School	3.33% 9	16.30% 44	27.04% 73	38.15% 103	15.19% 41	270
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Trinity Classical Academy	2.74% 2	9.59% 7	23.29% 17	36.99% 27	27.40% 20	73
(no label)						
	always	generally	frequently	occasionally	never	Total
Q4: Silverdale Baptist Academy	3.45% 3	8.05% 7	13.79% 12	42.53% 37	32.18% 28	87

APPENDIX 18
SCHOOL SAMPLE INFORMATION

Heritage Christian School
Indianapolis, Indiana
6401 E 75th St., Indianapolis, IN 46250

Trinity Classical Academy
28310 Kelly Johnson Dr., Valencia, CA 91355

Silverdale Baptist Academy
7236 Bonny Oaks Dr., Chattanooga, TN 37421

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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT OF DIGITAL MEDIA: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
Chair: Dr. Troy W. Temple

This study is an examination of teen perception regarding their understanding of biblical community within the environment of digital media. The study also examines the principles, essentials, or characteristics of biblical community regardless of environment.

The researcher surveyed a sample of teens that attend classical, open enrollment, and closed enrollment Christian schools of various denominations as well as no denomination. A survey presenting a list of the essential principles of biblical community, regardless of environment, including questions for each objective was sent to the sample. The respondents were asked to participate in a quantitative Lickert-scale survey. An expert panel was utilized to validate and approve the principles of biblical community that were used in the student survey. The validation by the experts regarding the literature review was then used to form objective questions regarding the principles or characteristics of biblical community regardless of environment. Triangulation was utilized as the principles reviewed in the literature review, validated by the expert panel, were formulated into a survey to measure perception.

The researcher analyzed the data in light of the principles or essentials of biblical community reviewed in the literature review and validated upon by the experts to demonstrate a need to better measure the effectiveness of biblical community within a particular environment. Also, the research demonstrated a need to educate parents and

students alike as to what makes a community biblical. The benefit of the expert panel allowed for the findings to be validated in order to then create an instrument that measures student perception. The researcher sought to answer the question: Do teens, that attend Christian high schools, perceive their online relationships to facilitate the principles or essentials of biblical community? The more commonly asked questions concerning the effects of digital media on one's face-to-face relationships cannot adequately be answered until the above question is answered.

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