Cultivating Christian Community in a Post-COVID Era

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The world doesn’t need more influencers, social media posts, and websites generating content with the same underlying theme behind them. However, society is lacking ways for people to feel genuinely and authentically connected. This holds true despite the countless ways people can physically and virtually connect in modern-day society. The problem is not connecting with each other, but how we connect with each other. A prevalent example of this is social media—it feeds the desire for instant gratification but does not meet our deep inherent need for authentic connection. The research question I plan on answering through this project is how young adults can most effectively cultivate a Christian community both online and in person. I want to accomplish this by creating a website that connects people with other Christians and gives them the option for how they want to authentically connect. Young adults are typically busy, so giving the option to connect either online or in-person allows them freedom and flexibility for how they want to cultivate community amidst a busy schedule. The purpose of connecting will be for mutual encouragement, mentorship/discipleship, or accountability in specific areas, and people will be connected based on their common interests and demographics with others after filling out a survey that is posted on the website. The title of the website, Stewards of Hope, represents how Christians are called to take care of the hope that is in us, which is Jesus Christ. This idea is represented in 1 Peter 3:15, which reads “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”
Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on how to meet the needs of young adult Christians through community and resources, all of which aim to help them live more like Jesus. There are many online resources for Christians, but society lacks a “one-stop shop” website that has every resource a young adult following Jesus could need. These resources include an online community where people can choose what mode of community they need, whether that be one-on-one discipleship or mentorship, consistent group meetings with people their own age, an accountability partner, or just a friend who shares similar beliefs and values. In an era that leaves young adults as the loneliest age group, it is crucial to give this demographic outlets to create genuine connections that prevails common trends in young adulthood such as busy schedules or living in a new city with no friends. Stewards of Hope aims to fix the problem of young adults lacking daily, encouraging conversations with other Christians that leaves them filled up and ready to live more like Christ.

Background of the Problem:

Christian community is not only an enjoyable part of following Jesus but cultivating this is also a biblical command. John 13:34 says “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” No human is meant to go through life alone, and the Bible lays out God’s design for doing life with other Christians. In an ideal world, there would be ample time to spend with other people while also being enough time to take care of personal responsibilities such as work, school, children, pets, etc. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic transitioning in-person gatherings to online meetings and changing the structure of society as a whole, and with the busy schedules that Christian young adults have, it is almost impossible to fit
in everything community-related that is beneficial for one’s spiritual life. In addition, even though there are more ways than ever in history to connect with others, a *Washington Post* article revealed that young adults ages 18 to 22 are the loneliest generation of Americans. The article mentioned that 69% of 18-22-year-olds felt that when they were with others, they felt the people around them were “not really with them.” These statistics speak volumes about the correlation between technology and loneliness. This also points to the need for young adults to have genuine conversations with others more frequently, which can make a big impact on mental health. A *University of Texas at Austin* study found that people who talked on the phone for 10 minutes multiple times a week felt 16% less lonely. This shows that in terms of loneliness, being online is not the root of the issue—rather, it is a lack of genuine conversation in whichever form that takes. Social media presents a paradox that makes it easy for people to connect with others but leaves people feeling lonely because it does not give room for quality interactions.

**Purpose of the Study:**

- Create and develop a website that features a blog, multimedia resources, and a community group all aimed to give young adults a “one-stop shop” platform with resources they can use in their daily lives, in addition to providing an easy way to connect with other Christians in their age range.

- Research Christian community from a biblical perspective as well as how current online communities operate in order to develop a website that aligns with both the Bible and the needs of the target demographic.
My main goal for this project is for young adults to leave the Stewards of Hope website feeling more encouraged and more prepared to take on their current life circumstances in a way that aligns with following Jesus. The website’s resources have been set up based on the needs people expressed through the survey in order to ensure there is at least one resource that someone can relate to and use to help them grow in their faith. Users can choose how they want to be encouraged—whether that be reading a blog post, interacting with other young adults through the Stewards of Hope community, or listening to a sermon or podcast linked in the resources section.

**Setting for the Study**

This study will take place as a qualitative data collection, ethnography, and literature research-driven effort for a senior project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California. Informal interviews will be conducted with active members of churches in San Luis Obispo county, including Grace Central Coast, Berean Bible Church, Calvary SLO, and Grace Bible Church. Interview participants will be selected based on their willingness to share their testimonies and their opinions on what resources they think would be helpful in their faith journey. Data will also be collected through a Google survey, in addition to a form posted to the website. For the protection of its members and in order to abide by confidentiality codes, the names of the interview participants will be omitted or changed. Those willing to share their identity have done so on their own accord.

**Research Questions**

The research questions I am using to help accomplish my goals for this project are based on how people use online resources in order to figure out the most effective way to set up the website.
1. Why is community important for Christians?

2. Which resources do Christians most connect with?

3. What does the Bible say about the design of the Christian community?

4. Is communication through technology an asset or a burden during in a post-COVID world?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms need to be defined in order to provide the reader with more context to the study.

- **Accountable**: (of a person, organization, or institution) required or expected to justify actions or decisions; responsible.
- **Steward**: a person whose responsibility is to take care of something
- **Community**: a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.
- **Fellowship**: communion, between members of the same church.
- **Mentorship**: the position or services of a wise and trusted counselor or senior sponsor, often in a particular field
- **Discipleship**: the condition or situation of being a disciple, a follower, or a student of some philosophy, especially a follower of Christ.
- **Online community (OC)**: A collective space of knowledge flows characterized by a continuous morphing and is mutually constituted by digital technologies and participants.
Organization of the Study

The study will be organized into five chapters to help guide the reader through background information on the topic. Chapter One states the problem of the study and provides information on the overall topic such as the main research topics to be explored, as well as the study’s general methodology. Chapter Two is a literature review evaluating how professional websites are created, how online communities are developed, how to create a successful blog, and how websites make a profit from the traffic. Chapter Three explains the ethnographic methodology used for the primary data collection. Chapter Four includes the research questions and the data that was collected for each research question. Chapter Five summarizes the results of the study and suggests whether projects such as this are sustainable and able to grow in the future.

Concept Map:
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on qualitative data from academic journals and articles on how society best communicates with others, and whether technology is an asset or burden in communication. This review looks specifically at a biblical perspective of how the Christian community was designed, and where technology’s role is in the Christian community in modern society. The review looks at successful online communities to further understand the factors that go into fostering effective and authentic online connections. Lastly, the review talks about the impacts of the Christian community on students and young adults, and why it is valuable to this age group.

A Psychological and Biblical Perspective of Our Modern World and Christian Community

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the narrative of how humans interact with technology, which was the groundwork for changing how humans interact with each other. Isolation forced people to rely more on technology to carry out daily actions such as going to school, working, and interacting with loved ones. Some of the habits that were developed during that time have continued on into the post-pandemic era, such as people embedding a hybrid or work-from-home model into their lives, as well as using virtual meetings and classrooms.

The Christian community was also affected by the pandemic, as church services were moved online, and people used Zoom and other online platforms for Bible studies, community groups, and fellowship. The pandemic leaves Christians wondering whether the narrative of the community will change due to the pandemic, just as our secular society has changed. And if a more technological approach to the Christian community is adopted, another question that arises
is whether the main principles of community that are laid out in the Bible are able to be applied in an online setting. The four major principles of community psychology are neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation (Eccleston, et al., 2018). These principles are not only relevant in community psychology but also in the application of the Christian community. A biblical command is to love your neighbor as Jesus loves you (John 13:34). Christians are called to worship, celebrate and eat together, confess sins to each other and rebuke one another, which can be translated to doing life together. Christians are also called to be active citizens of their churches and communities (Macy, 2011). Some of these biblical commands were forced to be put on pause during the pandemic, showing how not every aspect of the Christian life is transferrable to an online platform. However, some crosspoints exist between our modern world’s technological implications and the Christian community.

Non-verbal communication has been argued to be both an effective and ineffective communication method. The benefits of texting and online messaging through apps such as Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Instagram are that it allows people who are not in the same physical space to communicate. For Christians, texting can be used for encouraging others, making plans for in-person community events, and even sharing the gospel, a huge missional part of being a Christian. However, just communicating both virtually and non-verbally with others has drawbacks because of the lack of non-verbal and expressive cues that are usually present when in the physical presence of another person (Okdiea, Guadagnoa, et al., 2010).

Technology also provides ways for people to communicate verbally, such as through video and phone calls. For Christians, an online community can be achieved through Zoom meetings, phone calls, and virtual counseling or discipleship meetings. BetterHelp, an online mental health platform, has over 2.5 million clients as of February 2022 (Coward, 2022). This
platform has options for people who want to see a therapist with specific religious views, including Christianity. This resource is helpful for people who are isolated and do not have access to an in-person therapist, or for those whose schedules do not allow for in-person counseling services. However, the difference between in-person and virtual face-to-face interactions is still significant and shows again how the entirety of the Christian community is not meant to be lived in a virtual setting. Psychologically, face-to-face interactions require more attention from both participants. This results in a more positive impression of the other person because of focusing greater attention on the other person rather than themselves. (Okdiea, et al., 2010). In addition, face-to-face interactions promote less self-awareness, leading to more authentic conversations.

Overall, there is a time and place for Christians to engage with an online community, but it has a means to an end: The Bible describes community to be lived in a familial way, enabling people to “lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). This is an act that can only be done in person, which is ultimately represented by Jesus physically laying down his life for sinners on a cross.

**Fostering Authentic Communication through Online Communities**

There are online communities that have been successful at fostering genuine and authentic connections between users. If the claim is that God can use anything in creation for His glory, then it is true that He can use technology to bring people together to advance his kingdom. Online communities are unique in the way that what is posted is saved in a thread and can be looked back on. This can be helpful for users that are searching for specific answers that were a topic of online discussion in past times. Examples of online communities are Quora and Reddit, which both help people find answers and look at a variety of perspectives on a certain topic. The
internet is an outlet for people to collect a stream of information that can be edited and added to over time, resulting in an abundance of available knowledge for users. For Christians, this aspect of technology can be beneficial when one doesn’t have access to an in-person resource that can answer these questions. This method can also serve to advance the gospel by equipping people with knowledge in order to answer others’ questions in the future. “We conjecture that OCs [Online Communities] create value for their participants by embedding them in the process of establishing, nurturing, and shaping spaces for knowledge flows” (Faraj, et al., 2016). This is based on the following definition of an OC, which is a “collective space of knowledge flows characterized by a continuous morphing and are mutually constituted by digital technologies and participants.” This research supports that OCs can be used to aid the process of sanctification in a Christian’s life by providing them with continuous and ever-changing knowledge flows. One important difference to note is the difference between OCs and social media, and how social media can support OCs but is not an essential component. OCs are built based on a group of people’s shared hobbies, interests, or beliefs, whereas social media connects people in a way that is not based on one common binding factor. OCs can be used in the Christian community to promote genuine in-person conversation by equipping people with knowledge that is helpful for creating authentic connections with others. When we read and learn about others, we are more empathetic to others’ perspectives and life situations because this knowledge broadens our viewpoints and shapes them into something that is not strictly based on our limited life experiences.

**The Powerful Impact of the Christian Community**

An analysis of Chinese international students at American Universities revealed how important the Christian church community is for these students’ well-being. It showed how
community and fellowship within the church body gave these students a place where they felt welcomed and loved, which is especially important for those whose home is in another country. This study talked about how students were able to build friendships with others through the church community, and how these friendships are different than those outside the church. “Church, especially the fellowship, is like a family, and people in church or fellowship are family members” (Li et al., 2019). The church community is not limited to just weekly gatherings, and this study shows an example of how the Christian community flows into the daily lives of students. Students found encouragement from other members of the Christian community in areas that went beyond their spiritual lives. Cultivating an inclusive environment allowed space for students to encourage each other socially, academically, and personally.

The impacts of a Christian community are greater when one commits to one community, as this allows for spiritual formation to take place (Hellerman, 2014). The book When the Church Was a Family talks about how growth takes place within a community, and self-destruction only happens when one chooses to follow a path created on their own terms, without the presence of wisdom or counsel from the church body. Having a community nearby when one is going through a challenging time is crucial because it gives the person resources of hope and accountability— in other words, encouragement and “tough love” in order to help get that person on their feet again. This belief of being able to rely on other Christians goes against American societal standards, which puts precedence on being independent and not asking for help. However, the Bible makes a case that we need other people in our lives during the good and bad times alike. God is able to use His followers to help brothers and sisters in Christ during times of need. This Christian value is represented by Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, we will present the methods used to develop the project, and collect data for this study including the collection of data and any delimitations.

Data Sources

For this study, 50 individuals from San Luis Obispo who identify themselves as Christian were invited to participate by filling out a survey that included their perceptions of the Christian community, including the resources they engage with the most, the resources they think the community is lacking, and opinions on the difference between the online and in-person community.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was an anonymous Google survey. Survey respondents were required to complete all 10 questions, which some were open-ended and others were multiple choice or included a drop-down menu of choices. Young churchgoing adults ages 18-24 were asked to complete the form in order to provide data points to the original research questions while also giving new insights into common trends of the life of a young adult Christian in an era marked by technology.

Data Presentation

This data was presented in an excel spreadsheet, which was used to help create the Stewards of Hope website. The dependent variable of the study was young adult Christians, and
the independent variable was the resources available to them. The design of the website changed as more data was collected in order to fit the needs of the target audience, which is young adults ages 18-24. The first step to creating the website was putting in multiple tabs, including a home page, a join the community tab, a resources tab, and a blog. I chose the color palette I did (verdigris, turquoise green, tumbleweed, flame, and international orange golden gate bridge) because these colors are gender neutral while also being bright and bold. I thought the colors had both a welcoming and warm effect.

A big step in creating the website was formatting and layout design. I went through multiple iteration steps during this stage as new ideas developed. I simplified the home page by using a black-and-white image to contrast the bold colors and also cut down the words of the mission statement so the viewer was able to grasp the whole concept of the website in only a few sentences. I added hyperlinks to each section on the resources page so the viewer knows what to expect at first glance, and also so they don’t have to scroll through the entire page to find the desired section. I added resources based on personal research as well as through data collection, which was especially important for the section on external websites. The blog page will continue to be a work in progress as more posts are added. The original design was a new post per week, but I think I will cut back on the number of posts and rather try to make each one more quality. This blog design was inspired by Riley Sewell, a popular Christian influencer and blogger, who has a blog called “Riley with Courage.” Her new posts come with a wave of anticipation because of the quality of her work which is biblically sound, personal, and relatable.

The overall perspective of the website is warm and inviting, with the hopes of drawing in both Christians and non-Christians. The goal of the website is to be a place where everyone feels they can seek resources, community, and guidance, no matter their religious background. The
perspective used to deliver the messages was aimed to be welcoming and light-hearted in order to show that the website’s intention is to be a source of encouragement to the visitors.

The next step was to establish Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in order to optimize website views. Wix has seven steps to get a website ready for Google Search. The title tag I created for Google is “Young Adult Christians │ Stewards of Hope.” The second step was to add the homepage’s descriptions for search results. The text length had to be in between 50 and 300 characters and had to include at least one keyword and the business or site name. My description is the following: “The mission of Stewards of Hope is to connect young adult Christians with another person, depending on if they need mentorship, discipleship, or an accountability partner. It also is intended to be a source of encouragement and a “one-stop shop” for any resources a young adult Christian may need.” Next I updated my homepage text so it is optimized for SEO by including keywords and the site name. In order to climb the Google search engines, I need to increase viewership. I am anticipating that this is going to be a long-term goal that will take active work on updating the website’s content as well as continued reiteration as I continue to gain feedback from viewers.

**Delimitations**

Boundaries in this study include geographic barriers and time constraints, which led to a lack of the number of participants who fit into this survey category. Another barrier was the anonymity within the survey, so I was unable to analyze the difference between responses based on age, gender, or any other demographic factor other than the denomination of Christianity. The time frame of this study was about seven weeks which allowed me to critically analyze the data collected. In addition to formal data collection, I also had multiple conversations about the
Christian community with active church members around San Luis Obispo. The information collected during those interactions aligned with the formal data collection, which helped to validate the data collection.

The budget of the study was another limitation because I was unable to fully utilize the Wix premium features that would allow me to better market Stewards of Hope. My own skills were another limitation. I have very little previous experience with professional website design, in addition to data collection and analysis. These are both essential components of the study because these skills allow me to better fit the needs and wants of my target audience. Another limitation was the amount of time I had to complete this project. I learned that building a professional website is a slow process that cannot be expedited due to the need for reiteration and user feedback.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Chapter 4 will analyze the concrete data collected during the survey. This analysis will reveal the correlation between young adults and the need for the mission of Stewards of Hope, as well as the overall need for Christian community in young adults’ lives. The analysis was coded in jupyter notebook using the python language. It includes analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey results. The research questions answered in this section are why community is important for Christians, and the online resources Christians most connect with.

Christian Community Questionnaire

The following questions were asked in the Google survey sent out to 50 individuals.

1. What denomination of Christianity would you consider yourself?
2. What Christian-centered resources do you engage with? (Check all that apply)
3. Of the resources listed in the previous question, which one(s) do you not have that you feel you need the most in your life today?
4. In your opinion, what resources (if any) is the Christian community lacking?
5. Are there any Christian-centered websites that you frequently visit? If so, list the names here.
6. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you benefit in your spiritual walk from hearing others’ testimonies?
7. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you benefit in your spiritual walk from hearing others’ perspectives on Christian topics?
8. In your opinion, how effective would a Christian-centered online community be that
matches people based on age, personality, life circumstances, and the preference to either
be a mentor or mentee?

9. Other thoughts/ideas about an online community platform with the resources listed in the
question above.

10. Describe why the Christian community is important to you in one word.

**Initial Christian Community Survey Results**

Some general observations I had about how to cultivate an effective hybrid Christian
community based on the survey results were to group people by city so it is easier for them to
meet up in person if that is something they’re interested in doing. A quantitative observation
based on the most frequent word usage gave me insight into why people think the Christian
community is important. The top three words for this question were “Growth,” “Jesus,” and
“Support.” The most common words used in the question “Of the resources listed in the previous
question, which one(s) do you not have that you feel you need the most in your life today?” were
discipleship and accountability. The resources listed in the previous question were Youtube
videos, sermons, podcasts, blog posts, counseling, mentorship/discipleship, accountability
partner, in-person communities, and an online community. The quantitative data revealed helpful
statistics that proved a need for the Stewards of Hope website. The average rating of how helpful
hearing others’ testimonies was 8.52/10. The average rating of how helpful hearing others’
perspectives was 8.44/10. The average rating of how effective an online Christian community
was 7.6/10. The data showed that the highest percentage of participants fell under the
non-denominational category, with 68% considering themselves non-denominational. Other
denominations represented in the survey were protestant (10%), presbyterian (6%), evangelical (8 %), and baptist (4 %). The data showed that non-denominational Christians had the highest average rating (5/5) of how effective they thought an online community would be. This is helpful information as it will help me further refine my target market for when I am advertising the Stewards of Hope community.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

The core of this project evolved as more research was conducted and more data was collected from the survey. My research questions also changed and become more specific and catered towards all young adults rather than just women, after the data findings revealed that gender doesn’t make a difference in the resources that young Christians need. The data also revealed that overall people prefer in-person communities to online.

I was able to use the knowledge I have gathered from my major, journalism, as well as my minor, entrepreneurship, to refine and alter this project to better fit the needs of the Christian community. A major part of entrepreneurship is being able to adapt an idea, even if it is not in line with your original plan. This can be a tedious process but ultimately leads to creating ideas that cater to your target audience, which in the case of this project changed from Christian women to all young adults.

Discussion

I was able to answer my research questions by researching for the literature review component as well as through data collection and external resources. The Bible was the primary tool for answering the research questions about Christian community, as the main goal of this project was to be aligned with what the Bible says and implement it into a practical resource for young adults. The research questions were primarily answered through qualitative data and factual evidence.
Research question #1: Why is community important for Christians?

The answer to why community is important for Christians is subjective and can be answered in two different ways. As previously mentioned in Chapter four, the top answers to “Describe why the Christian community is important to you in one word” were “Growth,” “Jesus,” and “Support.” This question can also be answered from a biblical perspective. One of the main reasons the Bible says that community is important is to help people become more like Jesus. This can happen in a variety of ways—through mutual encouragement, accountability, discipleship, rebuking, confessing sins, and simply enjoying God’s creation. I found that there was a common trend of people wanting a Christian community in order to not only grow in their faith but to have people around them who are like-minded.

Research question #2: Which resources do Christians most connect with?

The research question that asked which resources Christians most connect with was answered primarily through the survey. 96% of respondents engage with resources by watching sermons, 92% engage with the in-person community, and 66% of respondents watch Christian-focused YouTube videos, such as Bible Project videos and Christian influencer vlogs. The most common and easiest resource to engage with worldwide is sermons. According to Pew Research Center, a computational analysis revealed that there were about 50,000 sermons posted online from April through the beginning of June 2019. The research showed that the median sermon length was 37 minutes. This is not overwhelmingly long, making it easy for a Christian to engage with a sermon during daily life such as during a car ride, walk, or while doing dishes.
The Bible is the most important resource that Christians connect with—it is the basis for all other resources available. The Bible is God’s word, and therefore reading is the best way for Christians to connect with God. This is backed up by Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of the soul and of the spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” It can be a resource used in counseling, mentorship, discipleship, Bible studies and accountability groups because it offers practical advice and is easily accessible. This is seen in Romans 12:19, which reads “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” However, even though it is believed to be the ultimate resource, as all biblically based resources flow from it, according to Statista only 11% of adults read their Bible everyday in the United States in 2021. Research suggests that this is due to COVID-19 and people not being able to attend church in person. This suggests that Christians need other resources to supplement and sustain Bible reading. Although the Bible is arguably the most important resource, it is not always the one that Christians most connect with.

Research question #3: What does the Bible say about the design of the Christian community?

Stewards of Hope emphasizes doing life with other Christians, rather than just seeing Christians every so often, because the Bible talks about Christians being there for each other in all seasons of life. Some specific attributes of community that the Bible talks about are the following:

- **Making a regular practice of meeting together.** Hebrews 10:24-25 reads “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet
together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” One practical way Christians can meet is by eating together, a practice that is commonly mentioned in the Bible through feasts and celebrations. This is known as fellowship, which is “friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interests.”

- **Being there for each other in the all seasons of life.** Christians are not only called to celebrate together but also mourn together. This is described simply in Romans 12:15, which says “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” The Bible talks about how there is a time and place for every action under earth (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and this includes both celebrating and mourning.

- **Confessing sins to one another.** This attribute of Christian community involves people holding each other accountable in order to help each other conform to the image of Christ. Being vulnerable about sin is difficult, but there is a freedom on the other side of confession, as it is the first step towards healing from sins. This is similar to the societal view of therapy, and how the first step to solving a personal issue is admitting you have a problem. James 5:16 reads “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

- **Serving each other.** Serving people who are both in and not involved in the church is a common practice of Christian community. The ultimate goal of serving is to resemble Christ’s love for each other. Service and selflessness go hand-in-hand in the bible, and the ultimate practice of service is within the confinements of marriage, which resembles Christ and his bride, the church. Christians are called to serve within their church as well.
as in daily life. There are many verses about service in the Bible in the New Testament, which provides a practical guide for how Christians should live out their faith.

○ 1 Peter 4:9: “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling”

○ Galatians 5:13-14: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

○ Philippians 2:3-4 reads “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significantly than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Research question #4: Is communication through technology an asset or a burden during in a post-COVID world?

COVID-19 brought a new method of communication used in corporate and personal settings. The craving for human connection didn’t cease, but the mode of communication had to shift in order to represent the “new normal” that was spurred on by the pandemic. Zoom calls and Google hangouts were used for work and personal lives, and people pivoted their daily schedules to conform to the social distancing rules put in place by the government. 2021 was the beginning of the climb out of the pandemic, marked by schools going back to in-person classes, churches regularly meeting, and a lack of mask and social distancing mandates. However, even though COVID-19 has been on the decline since the onset of 2022, people have implemented communication habits learned through the pandemic into their daily life, which has proved to give people more flexibility in their routines. For example, a new concept that became developed
throughout the pandemic is the hybrid work model. This model allows people to go into the office 2-3 times a week, and work the rest of their hours at home. Only a few companies followed a hybrid work model prior to the pandemic, and hence were pioneers when Corporate America was forced into it. It is predicted that 75% of meetings will be held virtually through a video conferencing platform by 2024 (Karl, Peluchette & Aghakhani, 2021). The obvious pros of virtual meetings are flexibility, allowing people to call in from vacation, bed, or a coffee shop. The cons of virtual meetings is it is easier to get distracted, creating a lack of attention from participants. The psychological impacts that come with not being in person are not being able to have the day-to-day conversations with co-workers that are typical before and after a meeting, creating a disconnect between humans not merely as co-workers but as human beings. Relationship building is important in the workplace, and although it is possible to build relationships virtually, in-person time is crucial to sustain a connection.

“But successful meetings are about more than that. It’s the intangibles that matter—a new relationship forged over a drink, a relaxing yoga class after a long day of panels or a level of trust from a casual conversation and a handshake” (The science of being there, 2022).

This research question is subjective and there are strong arguments for both sides of it. Many factors play into whether technology is an asset to communication in a post-COVID world, including what companies or individuals are prioritizing. For example, if a company wants to save money, it would be more cost-effective to meet virtually because of the high expense of renting office space. However, if a company’s goal is to build relationships, then meeting in person is ideal. Technology can be an asset in communication depending on how it is used. There is a line that can be teetered and technology can turn into a burden if it becomes more of a distraction. However, when used correctly, technology can yield more productivity and
be more of an asset than a burden. Neuroscientist Adam Gazzley suggests that virtual meetings that are 50 minutes are more productive (Gallo, 2020). If meetings go longer, it is important to take breaks every 50 minutes or so in order to refresh the mind.

**Recommendations for Practice**

After completion of the study, substantial data has been collected and analyzed on the topic of in person and online communication, Christian community, and where these two areas merge. This data has been used to develop a website that encompasses different features of journalistic and digital marketing practices, including writing, multimedia writing, search engine optimization, color theory and design, and branding. Looking forward to Stewards of Hope launching and growing, some recommendations for practice include monetizing it through the Amazon affiliates program, paying for the premium Wix plan in order to unlock the search engine optimization features, and try the community aspect of it with a test group.

**Monetize website views**

There are many ways to monetize a website, and the best tactic to use can be found by what type of content there is on the website. For a website like Stewards of Hope, the best action to take is affiliate marketing, or CpA (cost per action). Affiliate marketing is when a website promotes other people’s products and gets paid if this product is sold. This would work on the Stewards of Hope website by emailing the authors and websites in charge of the books and Bibles that are mentioned on the website, and asking if Stewards of Hope could make a commission for every book that is sold due to someone finding it through the resources page. Affiliate marketing is possible because of technology that allows websites to track how someone found their product—whether that be through a direct link, external website, advertisement, or
something else. Monetizing a website is the next step to development so a website has money to continue marketing and producing content to continue growing.

**Invest in Premium Features**

Wix, the website creation platform used to create Stewards of Hope, offers different premium packages that are intended to further grow a website’s viewership. This includes increasing a website’s professionality through a logo and custom domain, as well as search engine optimization tools. If the goal of the website is monetization, it is essential to invest in tools that will further market a brand.

**Customer Feedback Usability Testing**

Any new business needs a variety of feedback in order to make sure that it aligns with the needs of target market. Having to reiterate and pivot is common in the early stages of building a brand. Inviting people in to evaluate and test out a product is a valuable process that can result in unbiased findings about the user’s perspective of a brand. For Stewards of Hope, this looks like observing users as they navigate the website, and noting any roadblocks they have while going through its different sections. This also includes getting raw feedback at the end of the user’s experience on the website. Usability testing could also look like inviting a certain number of people to fill out the “Join the Community” questionnaire, matching them with a partner, and making changes based on their experiences.

**Study Conclusion**

This study started as an idea that was solely created for women, and throughout the past few months has expanded into something for both men and women, with the only binding
characteristic being Christianity. The data proved that both men and women are in need of this idea. Overall, a wider variety of data is needed to continue the iteration process of Stewards of Hope, but the data that was collected has given valuable insight into trends within the Christian sphere in society. It proved that everyone is looking for some type of community, and that many Christians are unaware of the plethora of resources available to them.
References


Watson, Amy. “Bible Readership in the U.S. 2021.” Statista, 23 May 2022,
Appendix A

Stewards of Hope Website Screenshots

Home Page:

Stewards of Hope

A hybrid Christian community for young adults seeking genuine conversations, resources, mentorship, and discipleship.

Home Join the Community Resources Gallery Blog

We're Glad You're Here! Join The Community

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do so with gentleness and respect."

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

Imagine if we were able to better follow God's design for being in community with others.

Help Grow the Mission

As this is a growing and evolving website, any feedback is appreciated. Click the button below to fill out an anonymous survey and provide your thoughts on the Stewards of Hope website.
Mentors can be hard to find. Christian counselling can be expensive. Although we think these outlets are amazing, we wanted to provide another way for young adult Christians to connect with each other in a low-maintenance and low-stress type of way.

**Our vision** is to match people based on age, life circumstances, and mutual interest in what they’re hoping to get out of this community. After getting a match, young adults will connect with each other online, in person, or both, daily or weekly. The vision is for young adults to be there to relate, pray, and lift each other up through life’s ups and downs. We hope you can find new brothers and sisters in Christ through the Stewards of Hope community. Our ultimate goal is for members to be vessels of Christ by emulating His love and bringing each other closer to Him.

**Blog Page:**

**Identity: Where Are We Casting Our Net?**

Recently I was humbled by a conviction I had about my identity in relation to sports...

**The Contrast between Joy and Happiness**

Phil Wickham describes joy best in his song, Song in My Soul: “There’s a joy in my soul...”

**Truths about God**

For this very first blog post I wanted to talk about the main purpose of this website: Our...
Join the Community Questionnaire:

Join the Stewards of Hope Community!

Please take a moment to fill out the form and we will get you connected as soon as possible!

Name *

Email *

Birthday *

A little bit about your current life circumstances (school/work life, community, etc.)*

Why is Christian community important to you? *

Are you interested in being a mentor or mentee? *

Are you looking for an accountability partner? *

Share a little bit about where you are in your faith journey. There are no wrong answers! *

What city do you live in?

Would you want to meet your accountability partner/mentor/mentee in person?

Submit
Resources Page:

Welcome to the Resources Page!

Click for...
- Sermons
- Websites
- Books
- Bibles

Our world is full of an abundance of resources.
It's just a matter of stewarding these resources well and in God's design.

1 Corinthians 4:1
"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

A PLAYLIST OF SERMONS

1. A Life Under Trusting God into Whose Hand
   18:41
   2. The God of Wonders
      Thought Wonderful Sermons Podcast by Gospel Life
      23:11
   3. What does it mean to be filled with the spirit?
      WaterMist Ministries
      50:15
   4. God39; s plan for your life
      The Preach
      42:09
   5. Jesus in Mary's heart: a changing, growing, loving Christ
      Jesus in Mary's Heart: A Changing
      48:34
   6. Jesus in the innermost heart
      COMPARTMENTALIZING
      45:40

A LIST OF WEBSITES:

Recommended by young adults

- Bible Gateway
- Bible Project
- Daily Verses
- Desiring God
- Enduring Word Commentary
- For The Gospel
- The Gospel Coalition
- Join The Journey
- Live Original
- Madi Prewett
- Riley with Courage
Stewards of Hope *Reading List*

1. *Mere Christianity*—C.S. Lewis
2. *The Meaning of Marriage*—Tim Keller
3. *Freedom of Simplicity*—Richard Foster
4. *Gentle and Lowly*—Dane Ortlund
5. *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*—Ben Stuart
6. *Deep Like Me*—Rick Bundschuh
7. *The Sacred Search*—Gary Thomas
8. *Four Loves*—C.S. Lewis
9. *Live No Lies*—John Comer
10. *Every Moment Holy*—Douglas Kaine McKelvey
11. *A Gospel Primer*—Milton Vincent

**The Ultimate Resource: The Bible**

Links to Different Types of Bibles:

- The Study Bible
- The Journal Bible
- The Message Bible
- The Bible Study
Appendix B

Blog Posts

Truths about God

For this very first blog post I wanted to talk about the main purpose of this website: Our heavenly Father! There are so many truths about Him that I need to be reminded of every single day.

When I am reminded of these truths, I am filled with joy because of how amazing it is that the God of the universe is the same God every day, and therefore these truths will never change.

- He is love (1 John 4:16)
- His timing is always perfect (Isaiah 60: 22)
- He is drawn to sinners (James 4: 8)
- He listens when we pray (1 John 5: 14)
- He works everything together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8: 28)
- He is good to those who hope in Him and seek Him (Lamentations 3: 25)
- He gives and takes away for our good (John 15: 2)
- He fills us with joy when we choose to follow Him (Psalm 119)
- He can relate to everything we go through on earth (Hebrews 4: 15)
- He does not withhold good from us (Luke 12: 32)
- His plans override our own (Isaiah 14:24)
- He is outside of time (2 Peter 3: 8-9)
- He is a provider (Philippians 4: 19)
- He has already forgiven us for our sins (Hebrews 8: 12)
- He laid down His life for us (John 10: 11)
• He tends to our deepest wounds and heals the brokenhearted (Psalm 147: 3)
• He alone fulfills our deepest desires (Psalm 37: 4)
• He wants to spend eternity with us! (John 6: 40)

Challenge of the week: Devote 30 minutes to intentionally resting in these truths, and any other truths about God that you are learning right now!

The Contrast between Joy and Happiness

Phil Wickham describes joy best in his song, Song in My Soul: “There’s a joy in my soul and it rises like a morning, this I know for sure.”

To me, these lyrics mean that God’s word ensures that we can be joyful every day because of what Christ has ultimately done for us. He has freely given us the gift of salvation, which we can rejoice in each morning when we wake up. Jesus dying for our sins is the basis of joy— He is found in everything we will ever be able to be joyful about not only on earth but beyond this life and into eternity. But how often do we view joy like this? I know that for me, the answer is hardly ever. Often when I wake up, I think about what is going on in my life: my problems, what I have planned for the day, etc. But when I spend time with God, He puts everything into perspective by reminding me that compared to Him, my little world is microscopic. He fills me with joy that is bigger than everything: my fears, hopes, worries, desires, and ambitions.

When we view joy with Jesus in the center, we start to see the world differently. Hindrances are turned into opportunities, and obstacles are viewed with lenses of appreciation. Everything changes when we accept Jesus as our savior— He gives us new life, and he replaces our temporary happiness with overflowing and eternal Joy.
When we choose to trust in God, He fills us with a joy that is not of this world. Romans 15:13 says “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in peace.”

Happiness isn’t a bad thing, but the longer I follow Jesus the more I realize how different joy and happiness are from each other. Happiness is temporary—we get a dopamine hit from social media, an ice cream cone, or winning a game. The happiness we get from these events can only last so long and can only fulfill us so much. However, finding joy in The Lord is constant and isn’t defined by our external circumstances.

When I think about joy versus happiness in my own life, I think about my experience as an athlete. Ever since I was little, I have been competitive and have wanted to reach the next level, whatever that entailed. Just like everything in life, in sports there will always be something to strive for: making the team, playing in college, starting on your team, beating top-ranked opponents…the list goes on and on. This ongoing list of desires has been the case with my experience playing beach volleyball.

Recently, God has been teaching me (and I have been struggling to learn) to rest in Him and play to glorify Him. He is showing me that when I view my sport as a gift from him, I can be filled with a joy that is so much better than the temporary happiness any worldly accomplishment from it could give me. Because even when we do get what we have been striving for, we will never fully be satisfied. For me, this is a lesson that God has repeatedly taught me.

We can choose to be joyful because we can choose how we view our circumstances. I can choose to be joyful about the gift God has given me: Getting to be on an amazing team and playing a sport I love every day. Or I can choose to sulk in the fact that I am not on the starting lineup this season. I can be joyful and accept whatever God has laid in front of me, knowing that ultimately, He will be able to satisfy me, no matter how hard I work and how many worldly accolades I have. And even if and when I do reach my goals, all the glory goes back to Him—because He is the reason I can do anything in this life.
When the world seems to be falling apart, Jesus offers us joy that surpasses all understanding. He is greater than anything in the world, and His joy is greater than anything this world tries to use to tear us down.

Romans 5:3-4 talks a lot about choosing to be joyful in the face of suffering. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

It is so contradicting to the world that the bible says we can be joyful amid suffering. Even as a follower of Christ it is hard to wrap my head around this. But when we view being joyful as a choice and a blessing, our perspective shifts from how we view our circumstances. We can find joy in God’s presence, even when the world has nothing to offer us.

When we go through the fire, Jesus is with us, and He gives us the strength to be joyful as we lean into Him. He is with us in the good seasons in life too– Our God is faithful no matter our circumstances!

As a college student and young adult who struggles with how many unknowns are ahead of me, I find myself having to lean into the Lord when my fears and anxiety about the future take hold of me. But Jesus is continuing to teach me that when we keep our eyes on Him, we can be joyful in every phase and season of life. He will provide us the wisdom, guidance, and discernment we need to not only get through each day but be joyful through all of our days.

Looking to Jesus every day seems like a simple thing to do, but I find myself needing to consciously choose Him every morning when I wake up, as each new day comes with its own battles and temptations. And although I will always fall short of following Him perfectly, when I do look to Him, He never fails to give me joy and peace with each unique situation I face. On the flip side, when I look to the world for happiness, I find myself feeling empty every single time.

Jesus will provide every single time when we let him, and the joy He brings to our lives is unexplainable, glorious, and worthy of all our praise.
Identity: Where Are We Casting Our Net?

Recently I was humbled by a conviction I had about my identity in relation to sports and how that affects who I am. I was walking to school, and a thought popped into my head: I care more about people knowing that I’m a division I athlete than I do about people knowing I am a follower of Christ.

This thought was humbling because it made me aware of the deep-rooted sin within me: Pride.

Pride comes to the surface in many forms, and I believe in my life God has used sports to show me how inherently prideful I am. Sports are naturally centered around pride and ego because when doing anything athletic and competitive, there is a chance to win and receive praise from others, which can turn into a pride that is associated with accomplishment if we’re not careful and discerning.

I struggle to give glory to God when I am playing my sport. I even struggle to give glory to my own team. I often find myself wanting to win for me, and that’s all.

It has been a painful but beautiful process of God showing up in my life and teaching me that my identity is not associated with my accomplishments. Our accomplishments will fade and will never fully satisfy us. In fact, accomplishments make us look to the next thing we want to succeed in; It is a never-ending cycle.

Accomplishing our goals that we’ve worked hard for is not sinful, but as naturally prideful people we can turn them into a sin by putting our accomplishments above God.

Just how true friends care more about our character than our abilities, so does God! At the end of the day, we can only truly win if we give glory to God and honor Him through the process. This can be applied to anything we do in life. If it is a win for His kingdom, then it is a win for us too.
We need to think in terms of our biggest accomplishment being taken away from us tomorrow, and then asking ourselves this question:

What "net" in my life would I fall back on?

If this "net" is not Jesus, then we need to do some re-evaluating. When we put our trust in Christ, we have the opportunity to be joyful in every circumstance. We have a hope that is not of this world. We have the privilege of our identities being rooted in Christ rather than in something temporary. We need to live it out this truth and let it depict where our identity lies, no matter what God decides to give and take away from us.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" —John 1: 12
### Appendix C

**Website Feedback Survey Responses**

**Person A:** Looks great! Love all the pictures and Bible verses

**Person B:** The website looks great! One suggestion is to use a different Bible verse for the home page. Matthew 18:20 might get people confused since God can be present when there is one person and there is more than 3 people.

**Person C:**
- on the home page, you use two different fonts: a serif & sans serif. i suggest choosing one look & being consistent throughout
- also on the join page, the first thing you see is vision. it might be more direct to your audience to have a separate vision tab and have the connect step front & center on that page with a brief (1-2 sentence) explanation of what the person is signing up for
- i also accessed this on my phone, so laptop layout might be different, but it felt squished. there wasn’t much breath room between text boxes. it might help the feel of the website to have space before & after the text

**Person D:** my favorite text box visually is the provide feedback. it is restful for the eyes & has clear layout with next step. possibly add a photo behind the title text box (first one) to tie in the other photo so it doesn’t look out of place

**Person E:** something like this is a big step for people. if there’s no personal contact, filling out the form is a leap of trust. to make it less robotic & scary, maybe put a time stamp on your response time in the “join the community” tab. instead of “we’ll get back to you soon” write “we’ll reach out to you in the upcoming week!”

**Person F:** the last phrase “to bridge the gap between how we currently live & Gods design” assumes people are NOT living in Gods design for community. what if they are and just want more community? i think this assumption is too bold for the wide audience it seems like you’re trying to reach
**Person G:** the matt verse is ok, but I don’t suggest using it as the opening or theme. That verse in context is talking about church discipline & excommunication. Not that it’s untrue, but could be a turnoff when other verses speak similar truths in contextually correct ways.

**Person H:** Hey! Great job on the website. It’s really effective and you make it super easy to get plugged in since everything is so easy to access (podcasts, etc. Here are some suggestions:

1. For content, use sans serif font (without the little tails) — it is easier to read and shows up better. But you can keep serif fonts for titles.

2. There is a lot of big font on the home page so it kind of makes the larger font redundant since there is no visual hierarchy. Try sizing some of those down (I would recommend sizing down either “join the community” or “we’re glad you’re here” and then also sizing down the Bible verse a little.

3. There is a lot of underlining, bold, and italics on the home page which also becomes redundant if there’s too much. Try to pare that down and really focus on what you want to get across. I’d recommend not italicizing the headers (home, gallery, etc).

**Person I:** Loved the website Suzuki! I usually don’t enjoy this type of thing but read through almost all of it! (Gonna read the last two blog posts later). I am going to keep this link handy! I feel like this is an excellent package to give anyone but especially young/new or not yet Christian’s who have questions. I only had minor things that I would change:

- I would move the menu bar to the extreme top right of the page and also if you can add another menu bar at the extreme bottom left of the page so that you can access the menu after scrolling all the way down that would be cool.

- If there is anyway to blend the transitions between background colors that might be nice but I have also been told I have no taste so probably ignore that.

**Person J:** Cool concept and beautiful website design. It looks good on mobile!