



Eutychus: A Case Study of the Role of Youth and Children in Acts *Koinonia*

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In contrast to numerous stories of Jesus blessing and healing children in the Gospel accounts, children are relatively absent from accounts of the early church's ministry in Acts. The story of Eutychus's near-deadly fall in Acts 20:7–12 stands as a surprising and startling exception. Nevertheless, situated within the breaking of the bread and preaching of the word, this episode places Eutychus at the center of emerging Christian community. By discerning Eutychus's place within this community, this essay brings children out from the shadows of the Acts text and suggests a model of Christian community that supports more integrated inclusion of children in worship today.

INTRODUCTION

Within the pages of the Acts narrative, many types of stories are told—conspiracies, shipwrecks, narrow escapes, political intrigue—but one type of story goes nearly untold: the life and doings of children. In fact, apart from one narrative, children are not mentioned at all in the book of Acts. It is this one story, then, which offers a narrow window into the place and role of children as the Lukan author understood

In understanding the context of a biblical text, it is important to know what the community of a biblical book understood and valued. In the case of Acts and the story of Eutychus, it is vital to know how that community conceptualized the role of youth and children in their social world, and the implications of how Eutychus is understood, treated, and valued.

it in the nascent Christian communities. This is the story of Eutychus, a young boy who fell through a window and survived.

The story of Eutychus has, perhaps, received the most attention in recent years from scholars engaged in the practice of ministry. Drawing both positively and negatively on Eutychus's slumber and Paul's response, practical theologians have applied Acts 20:7–12 on both sides of what to do and not do in effective preaching and youth ministry.¹ Such a connection with ministry is intuitive given the near-total consensus among biblical critics that this scene represents a distinctly religious gathering, as opposed to, say, people greeting Paul as an out-of-town envoy.² While this liturgical link connects the practical and academic studies of this text, few on the academic side have asked the question of what the presence of such a child, situated as he is within the church of the Acts narrative, can reveal about the place and role of children in the worshipping community that Acts presents. Nor have many practical theologians taken seriously the agency of Eutychus as such a child in the biblical context in penning their recommendations. Consequently, this essay seeks to bridge this gap and restore Eutychus to his place as an active and accepted participant in the Acts community and, through him, to offer a model for understanding the integration and participation of children and youth in early Christian worship communities.

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Reading Eutychus as a model for understanding the role of youth and children in early Christian communities first requires establishing his youthfulness. While Eutychus's youth is assumed by practical theologians who seek to take up his mantle in the name of better youth ministry, it is worth noting that the category of youth as we understand it in the Global North today has no immediate corollary in first-century Antioch. This is the case because adulthood was determined far more

¹ Houston Heflin, *Teaching Eutychus: Engaging Today's Learners with Passion and Creativity* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012); Gary Miller and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2016); John Oberdeck, *Eutychus Youth: Applied Theology for Youth Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010); David H. C. Read, "Eutychus—or the Perils of Preaching," in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 6, no. 3 (1985):168–78; Ronald W. Scates, "The Dreaded Eutychus Syndrome: Have Things Changed Since That Night in Troas?" in *Reformed Worship* 28 (1993):11–13; and Vernon E. Wendt Jr., "Raising Eutychus: A Model for Youth Ministry (Acts 20:7–12)," in *Lutheran Mission Matters* 27, no. 2 (2019): 352–63.

² Recently, historical critics have suggested reading this text as more representative of Luke's late-first-century worshipping community than Paul's early-first-century context, but the emphasis on this context as an early worshipping community remains. Cf. *Biblica* and *Biblical Interpretation*.

by participation in society than by chronological age. Children were expected to participate in tasks pertaining to the upkeep of the household and community from a very young age, especially enslaved children. However, certain tasks requiring strength of body or mind were reserved for the more mature.

The closest correlate to a contemporary understanding of the term *youth* would be the life stage of νεανίας (youth, young man), which is the first descriptor applied to Eutychus (20:9). Greek philosophers and medical practitioners vary widely on the ages they assign to this life stage, ranging from ten to twenty-eight years of age depending upon the source; however, there is a general agreement that this term represents the middle stage of life before reaching full maturity.³ The Greek statesman Solon (ca. 638–ca. 558 BCE) describes this phase in a male as having attained “the capacity to emit seed” while not yet reaching one’s full “growth of beard.”⁴ It is in this context that the term νεανίας adheres with contemporary conceptions of youth or adolescence as a state of liminality in which a child is not yet an adult. In the Greco-Roman world, this life stage typically preceded marriage and carried continued legal protections for a male child, even as he continued to live into his vocational and civic identities.⁵ Eutychus is thus most accurately read within this transitional context, best represented as youth.

Moreover, Eutychus’s youthfulness is emphasized by the Lukan author at the end of this vignette when Eutychus is described as τὸν παῖδα (the child). The overlapping of this term with the former can help us to locate Eutychus more specifically in the age spectrum of νεανίας at the earlier end of ages associated with the designation.⁶ The root παῖς has a larger semantic range than νεανίας inasmuch as παῖς has been translated, respectively, as either “child” or “servant” throughout Greek texts.⁷ In Acts, the term is used six times but only here translated in the semantic range of childhood. In each of the five earlier occurrences of the root παῖς in Acts, the term is used in reference to the divine relationship, describing both

³ Tim Parkin, “Life Cycle,” in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 98–99. Cf. Hippocrates, *Hebdomades* 5 (as quoted in Philo, *de Opif. Mundi* 36.105); Censorinus, *de Die Natali (On Birthdays)* 14.3; Pollux, *Onomasticon* 2.4; Scholiast on Hesiod, *Words and Days* 447); J. F. Boissinade, *ANEKΔΟΤΑ: Anecdota Graeca e codicibus regiis*, vol. 2 (Paris: in Regio Typographeo, 1830), 455–56; Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 667. Hereafter referred to as BDAG.

⁴ Solon fragment 27 [West] (quoted in Philo, *de Opif. Mundi* 35.103–4), cited in Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 97.

⁵ See Thomas McGinn, “Roman Children and the Law,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 342 footnote 3; Beryl Rawson, “Adult-Child Relationships in Roman Society,” in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 28.

⁶ Codex Bezae provides an alternate reading that remains more consistent with reading Eutychus as νεανίας; however, this represents the minority of the received texts. Moreover, Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park plausibly suggest that such a variant is not related to clarification regarding Eutychus’s age, but rather, “The reading of Codex Bezae seems to avoid designating Eutychus with the same title used for Jesus and David.” Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, *Acts Part Two: Chapters 13–28* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 134 footnote 26.

⁷ BDAG, 750. It is worth noting that the association of the meaning “servant” with this term seems to represent a secondary derivation based upon an infantilization of servants in the Greco-Roman period not unlike similar linguistic maneuvers used to justify slavery in the American South.

Jesus and David as servants of God. When the meaning of child is read expansively as a description of descent, this meaning could be easily substituted for each translation of *παῖς* as “servant” both in Acts and, more broadly, where it fluctuates between the two meanings more fluidly, in the Lukan Gospel as well. When English translators choose to render the term as “child” in these texts, however, they do so in a much more limited form that refers to a phase of childhood, specifically the age span between seven and fourteen that occurs before and overlapping with adolescence.⁸ Given the concomitant use of both terms to describe Eutychus, I postulate that it is reasonable to assume that the figure whom Luke constructs is a youth between ten and fourteen years old. Such an age places Eutychus at a transitional phase in the larger community, no longer fully dependent upon the care of his mother, but not yet an adult with all of the liberties and responsibilities thereof. Moreover, given the use of the ambiguous term *παῖς* it is possible, though not necessary, to postulate that Eutychus may have been a part of the enslaved or servant class.⁹ Indeed, his name, Eutychus, which means “Fortunate,” would have been typical of the types of names given to first-century Greco-Roman slaves by their masters.¹⁰ If such is the case, then Eutychus’s presence, activity, and assumed value and place in the gathered worship community suggest not only that a few elite children were welcome in these spaces but, rather, that the Acts author assumes the presence of children across the social and economic spectrum in worship gatherings and, even more so, that the author uplifts the experience of one whom the broader society would have considered among the “least of these”—a child who is enslaved.

WORSHIP LIFE AT THE CENTER OF ACTS *KOINONIA*

The experience of fellowship or community in the early church has been associated with the term *κοινωνία*, best translated as a close association or sharing of mutual interests. The term is most abundant in Paul’s letters, where it describes the sharing of resources (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13), unity in Christ and/or the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 6:14; 13:13; Phil 2:1; 3:10), eucharistic fellowship (1 Cor 10:16), and shared ministry (Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; Phlm 6). It occurs once in the Acts

⁸ Hippocrates, *Hebdomades* 5 (as quoted in Philo, *de Opif. Mundi* 36.105), quoted in Parkin, “Life Cycle,” 98.

⁹ It is possible to read the term *παῖς* in Acts 20 as echoing the meaning of “servant” used elsewhere in Acts. If this is the case, we might assume that Eutychus is a young man who is either employed in domestic service to or enslaved by another. Such a status is in keeping with the social situation that we know about early Christian communities, which included and perhaps even drew heavily from enslaved populations (cf. Gal 3:28; 4:7; Col 3:11, 22; Phlm; Eph 6:5; 1 Tim 6:1; Titus 2:19; 1 Pet 2:18); however, in each of these instances the Greek root *δοῦλος* is used. In each of the instances in which the Lukan author specifically uses the term *παῖς* rather than *δοῦλος* to refer to those in service or enslaved to another, there remains ambiguity around the specific age of the servant. Therefore, I posit that if *παῖς* is used in this sense of servitude in the Acts text, particularly when paired with *νεανίας*, it does not negate the overall sense of youth that the term also implies but, rather, modifies how we are to understand the social situation of this particular youth.

¹⁰ Richard Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 92–93.

narrative, as a part of a summative description of the worshipping community: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship [κοινωνία], to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Within this context, Richard Pervo understands this sharing, or fellowship, to reflect a unity across public and private realms, such that “worship” and “service” are not separate but rather two sides of the life of those who participate in this fellowship.¹¹ In other words, the κοινωνία, or fellowship, at the heart of Christian community extends across all aspects of life, while remaining centered in the act of communal worship.

Communal worship in the Acts church is characterized by two major activities: attendance at the temple or synagogue in accordance with their continued Jewish identity, and gathering as an ἐκκλησία that affirmed and enacted this new κοινωνία, most explicitly in the breaking of the bread and other traditions that distinguished them from wider Judaism. “In Greco-Roman society *ekklesia* is one of many words used for associations, where people of different social classes meet to uphold social, religious, or professional relations; consume communal meals; and revere earthly and supernatural benefactors.”¹² This type of religious gathering matches the description of gathering in Acts 2:42 and elsewhere in Acts where the term is more explicitly employed.¹³ Cho and Park explain, “The breaking of bread is the term used especially in Acts for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (2:42; cf. 1 Cor 10:16).”¹⁴ Whenever reference to the breaking of bread occurs in Acts, it is situated within the context of worship fellowship (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35).

The combination of the breaking of bread with words of teaching in Acts 20:7–12 clearly situates Eutychus’s story within an act of worship.¹⁵ Moreover, that this gathering occurs on the first day of the week (although it eventually extends past dawn) suggests that it was not just an ad hoc special worship service, but rather, a regular gathering of the faithful.¹⁶ Eric C. Smith observes:

This crowd had distinctively Christian practices—the kind that might be typical of a long-standing community of practice, not an ad hoc gathering for an out-of-town guest, and certainly not a crowd gathered to hear an unknown itinerant preacher for the first time. The community met on the first day of the week to break bread, a detail that suggests tradition, or at least continuity of practice, in line with similar

¹¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 510.

¹² Dieter Mitternacht and Anders Runesson, eds., *Jesus, The New Testament, Christian Origins: Perspectives, Methods, Meanings*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 425.

¹³ See Acts 5:11; 7:38; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39; 20:17, 28.

¹⁴ Cho and Park, *Acts Part Two*, 133. See also William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 153.

¹⁵ Pervo, *Acts*, 510.

¹⁶ Cho and Park, *Acts Part Two*, 133–34, quoting Edward Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 834–35: “The contemporary Christians seem to have already gathered on the first day of the week (see 1 Cor 16:2; also cf. Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) to worship and have the Eucharist (see 1 Cor 11:20–21). So this gathering in Troas could be seen as a regular meeting for worship and the Lord’s feast ‘rather than an ad hoc gathering because of Paul’s presence in the city.’”

practices known from other early Christian contexts. The community tolerated long sermons from a stranger—a stranger who would later become famous in such a way to cause people to wish they had once had occasion to hear his long sermons. They broke bread upstairs, in community, in a way suggestive of the *Agape* tradition, and indeed the tradition of table fellowship found throughout both of Luke’s volumes.¹⁷

Arguing that this scene is borrowed from the Lukan author’s own experience rather than a direct narrative of the communities Paul visited, Smith further suggests, “We see here a place that Luke has made space through the trappings of his own experience—a kind of spatial expression of his own *habitus* of worship . . . the *habitus* of Christian community and worship.”¹⁸ In this way, the Acts narrative not only paints a picture of an imagined worshipping community in Paul’s Antioch, but it can also, and perhaps more accurately, tell us about the worshipping communities in which the *Acts* narrative may first have been read.¹⁹ In short, Acts 20:7–12 provides a window into the worship life and fellowship of an early Christian community—a vision of *κοινωνία* in practice.

EUTYCHUS’S PLACE WITHIN THE ANTIOCH *KOINONIA*

The tale of young Eutychus’s fall is thus situated within the context of an early Christian community of worship. This community of worship, further, was gathered, as the majority of such communities did, in a home—specifically, in an upstairs room typical of early Christian urban tenement housing.²⁰ Such a crowded and, as Pervo describes it, “gritty” environment may also explain Eutychus’s likely status as an enslaved youth in the city as common among those attendant at this gathering, since it is likely that if there were a large contingent of upper-class believers in this fellowship, they may have offered to provide their own home as a larger or more comfortable space for meeting. Nor should Eutychus’s youth be taken as atypical of the gathering either. As I have argued elsewhere, the first-century world offered little differentiation between adult and child-oriented spaces, and therefore children and youth found themselves in most spaces inhabited by adults, especially within the domestic sphere of the household—the sphere in which such worship as is described in Eutychus’s story took place.²¹ The lack of reference to children in the Acts narrative is more likely due to a lack of concern or attention typical of the adultist perspective of the author than it is due to an actual lack of

¹⁷ Eric C. Smith, “The Rise and Fall of Eutychus: The Church of Paul and the Spatial Habitus of Luke,” in *Biblical Interpretation* 28 (2020): 242–43.

¹⁸ Smith, “The Rise and Fall of Eutychus,” 239.

¹⁹ Smith, “The Rise and Fall of Eutychus,” 240.

²⁰ Pervo, *Acts*, 510.

²¹ Amy Lindeman Allen, *For Theirs Is the Kingdom: Inclusion and Participation of Children in the Gospel according to Luke* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 27–31.

presence of children in either the religious or secular community, an anomaly that would have been remarkable due to the demographics of the day.

Eutyclus is likely one of many enslaved youth present in the worshipping community gathered to hear Paul preach. Moreover, following the same logic that suggests that the gathering described in Acts 20 is an ordinary gathering, not one especially arranged for Paul's arrival, it makes sense to assume that those present are imagined by the Lukan author to represent a typical audience rather than an unusual demographic of people gathered solely on Paul's account. Nor is there any indication in either Acts or Paul's letters that the gathering of youth or children would seem uniquely appropriate for Paul's arrival more than any other time. Consequently, the presence of enslaved or service-oriented populations as well as children, and, indeed, enslaved and servant children, is represented by the Lukan author as typical of such worship gatherings. This is further supported by the lack of fanfare or special circumstances associated with Eutyclus's introduction into the narrative (Acts 20:9). Eutyclus's story thus demonstrates the assumed presence of youth and children in early worship settings.

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Having established this presence, the question remains as to how and to what extent youth and children participated in worship communities. Eutyclus's story offers several clues: first, youth were present for the breaking of the bread; second, youth were present for the teaching and proclamation of the word; and finally, youth were deemed important enough to interrupt the regular proceedings of the assembly in order to address their needs. To begin with, Eutyclus's presence at an assembly gathered for the purpose of the breaking of the bread suggests the inclusion of youth such as him in this ritual act. Although Eutyclus himself, together with several others who accompany him to provide additional care following his fall, does not partake in the breaking of the bread in this narrative (Acts 20:12), he is initially represented among those gathered for the stated purpose "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Such breaking of bread is an act of communal fellowship in which all who are gathered are invited to participate (cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17). Eutyclus and other youth like him are among the gathered and thus among those whom the Lukan author assumes intend to participate in this celebration of the Lord's Supper.

In addition, Eutyclus not only intends, by his presence, to hear the word of God proclaimed but, until his unfortunate slumber, accomplishes precisely this. The text tells us that all who are gathered, implicitly including the youth, listened

to Paul preach until after midnight (Acts 20:7). If one assumes that the assembly began around sundown, Eutychus and the rest of his community, young and old, would have been engaged in this act of teaching for several hours already by the time the jarring actions of v. 9 take place. Nor does the text presume that this teaching was a one-way monologue. Rather, the text tells us that Paul was “engaged in a discussion with them” [διελέγετο αὐτοῖς]. The object of this discussion does not specify community leaders or a certain demographic, but rather references the entirety of the group gathered together, a group which we will soon learn explicitly contains at least one youth. In this way, Paul is proclaiming the word of God through communal engagement with those gathered, including Eutychus and any other youth and children present in the dialogue. Eutychus thus models not only the reception of the word of God by youth and children, but also an active engagement with God’s word. Eutychus is active in the preaching event.

Finally, concern for Eutychus’s well-being following his fall prompts enough alarm not only to cause a break in Paul’s sermonic dialogue, but also to cause multiple members of the community to leave the gathering before it has concluded in order to care for Eutychus. Immediately following Eutychus’s fall, the reader is told first that the boy is “picked up dead” (Acts 20:9). Given the late hour of the evening and the speed of this response, it seems most likely that those who engaged in this initial response were none other than members of the gathered community themselves, likely those who observed the boy’s fateful accident only a moment too late to do anything to prevent it. In the next breath, however, the narrative continues, describing how “Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, ‘Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him’” (Acts 20:10). This clues the attentive reader in to two additional responses. First, the response of the gathered community is one of alarm. There is communal concern over the fate of this boy which Paul finds it necessary to address. Such concern is in line with the concomitant understanding of youth in Greco-Roman antiquity as both valuable and vulnerable members of their families and communities.²² Youth required extra care. Next, Paul also responds by providing care. While it is worth noting that, whether due to a general indifference or a faithful confidence in the power of God to resuscitate the child, Paul does not mirror the community’s alarm, nevertheless, Paul deems Eutychus valuable enough to pause his urgent proclamation, descend three stories, and wrap himself around the boy in order to revive him to life (Acts 20:10).²³ Put another way, Paul prioritizes the emergent needs of this enslaved child over his own convenience and desire to continue with proclamation—a desire that is confirmed when, following Eutychus’s revival, Paul returns to the third floor, where he continues with the proclamation and breaking of bread. In this way, the needs of Eutychus as an injured youth take priority over but do not dominate or control the

²² Lindeman Allen, *For Theirs Is the Kingdom*, 26.

²³ “The embrace is modeled after the dramatic stories of Elijah (I Kings 17:21–24), where the prophet embraced and resuscitated the dead son of the widow of Zarephath (a story invoked by Jesus in his Nazareth sermon [Luke 4:24–27]), and Elisha’s reviving of the Shunammite widow’s son (II Kings 4:34).” Willimon, *Acts*, 154–55.

order of worship as it is carried out by Paul as the leader. At the same time, verse 12 makes clear that others who had been a part of the worshipping community, perhaps including both youth and adults, excuse themselves from the remainder of the liturgy to see to Eutychus's continued well-being. In this way, even after the initial alarm has passed and the gathered community is "not a little comforted," appropriate care for this youth in need is balanced with the continuation of the act of worship. Such a balance is in keeping with Paul's own description of his commission to ministry as it is recorded later in Acts, with Jesus exhorting him, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16). Service is embedded in the proclamation of the gospel.

CONCLUSION: INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Often, even among those volumes that seek to engage Eutychus's story for the sake of youth ministry, Paul is centered as an adult who ministers to this child. This essay has sought to answer the question, What happens when we start with acknowledging Eutychus's role within the community, rather than Paul's response to him? I would offer that we observe a couple of important things. First, we see Eutychus as an integrated member of the worshipping community—arguably, even more a part of the gathered κοινωσία than Paul, who is a guest in their midst. Through Eutychus we are able to see that youth are invited into the fellowship, participate in the breaking of bread, and take part in the sermonic dialogues that engage the word of God as teaching. Second, we observe a tangible concern for Eutychus embodied by the gathered assembly. The case of Eutychus demonstrates that youth are both valued as participants within the worshipping community and cared for due to their added vulnerability. In such a crowded gathering space, perhaps the very fact that Eutychus was allowed a seated perch on a window was an attempted act of care. Certainly, the fact that the assembly noticed, responded to, and offered prolonged care for Eutychus points toward a robust sense of value and concern for the youth in their midst.

This series of events indicates the power of a youth or child not only to garner temporary attention but also to inspire sustained communal action on his behalf. Put simply, youth are not only an active part of the worshipping community but, when placed in conflict, deemed more important than even the act of worship.

Finally, Eutychus is portrayed as not only a valued member of the Antioch worshipping community, but an active one at that. Specifically, Eutychus interrupts Paul's speech. Despite the presence of an honored guest, an action (albeit unintended) by an enslaved youth from their own community stops the gathered

assembly short. They turn their attention to Eutyclus rather than Paul. Only after Paul has provided the necessary care for Eutyclus is some of the assembly comforted enough to return their attention to him; even then, a portion of the community breaks away to offer care for Eutyclus. This series of events indicates the power of a youth or child not only to garner temporary attention but also to inspire sustained communal action on his behalf. Put simply, youth are not only an active part of the worshipping community but, when placed in conflict, deemed more important than even the act of worship.

Willie James Jennings highlights this importance of attending to the place and role of youth in the worshipping community. Specifically, he highlights the implications for both adults and children when we pay attention to the effect that engaging in such community might have upon youth. Jennings writes:

We who speak of the saving life of God are often not mindful of the bodies that listen and the dangerous positions they are in *as they listen*. Nor do we consider enough the danger we put them in as we place the weight of the word on young bodies. In an upper room filled with the Spirit and the sounds of salvation, a young person fell out of the window. Our task, like Paul's, must not only be to go and raise the child up, bringing them back to life and health, but also to be mindful of the effect of our words on the ears of the young.²⁴

Although I would proffer that the words of children can also have meaningful effects on the ears of the old and aging, Jennings's overall point is well taken—worshipping communities must consider the presence of and implications for all whom they invite into their midst. It is not enough to stand by and watch a boy doze on a windowsill; it is incumbent upon the community of which he is a part to draw him into participation *before* he takes his fatal fall.

The implications of such a place and value for youth in early Christian assemblies have long-ranging implications for contemporary churches that wish to model themselves after biblical priorities. To begin with, the case of Eutyclus suggests that children can and perhaps even should be incorporated fully into worshipping communities. Such inclusion extends to their participation in both the breaking of bread and the central teaching elements of the worship gathering. Indeed, the model of dialogical preaching that the Antioch community employs may well open space for greater engagement of both youth and adults in the proclamation of the word. Additionally, in those difficult times in which multiple priorities (such as youth and worship) come into conflict, the Acts narrative clearly illustrates a preference for tending to the needs of the vulnerable and at-risk. In this liminal time within the present Covid-19 pandemic, this has concrete implications for congregational decisions around loosening health precautions while many children under the age of twelve years old have not yet been vaccinated. In short, Eutyclus demonstrates that within worshipping communities there is

²⁴ Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 190–91.

biblical precedent for valuing youth, especially those most at risk due to social status or health concerns, both as active participants and worthy of communal protection and care. ⊕

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