



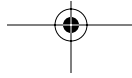
INTRODUCTION

IT MAY SEEM ODD TO QUOTE longtime rocker Tom Petty as the source of a timely prayer for our young in his recent song “Lost Children.” Even though he’s a man who’s never made claims to be a follower of Christ, he’s concerned enough about children and the myriad of problems they face to intercede on their behalf. When he asks the Lord to shine “light on these lost children far away from home” and to “lead them all home again” he captures the essence of what the twenty-first-century church should be praying for the emerging generations.

In a world where the lost long to be found, Jesus still commands his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

This is a book about obedience to the Great Commission in a rapidly changing culture. I want to help you think seriously about our responsibility to go to the unique “nation” of young people living in our current postmodern culture, as well as subsequent cultures sure to emerge.

Whether we admit it or not, we’ve become increasingly ineffective at the task. We haven’t kept up in our ability to listen to and understand our world and its cries for redemption. We need to take a fresh look at what it means to live and proclaim God’s will and way as we cross cultures into the mission field of youth.





Having attended ministry conferences for years, I've walked through numerous exhibit halls resembling Middle-Eastern bazaars and heard promising pitches on hundreds of sure-fire ministry methods and tools. "Buy this and your ministry success is guaranteed!" While there are surely some helpful things we can glean from many of these, we don't need any new ministry inventions. Rather, we need to prayerfully reexamine the Scriptures to see how Jesus and his apostles did ministry. If we would only recover the distinctives of who they were and how they did ministry as they loved God and their neighbors, we'd be surprised at how God would use us as we engage the emerging generations with the gospel.

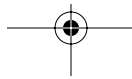
Because our particular historical situation and spiritual climate is strikingly similar to what Paul encountered in Athens, we will examine how Paul's ministry there can serve as a model for us. I've become increasingly convinced of the validity of his Mars Hill ministry as an approach that opens doors for significant discussions with young people about life in the kingdom of God. None of this material is new, earth-shattering or original. It's been here for two thousand years. Somehow, though, we've forgotten it.

This Book's for You

I've written this book for those who wish to (1) obediently live out the Great Commission in our particular time in history, and (2) love and minister to young people.

Though this isn't a book on parenting, I've written with *parents* in mind. This book will help parents understand their children and the postmodern culture they inhabit. While the postmodern worldview has been discussed by many ministry practitioners in the years surrounding the turn of the millennium, it remains largely unknown or misunderstood by parents and many others. Consequently, I've endeavored to offer an introductory overview to this emerging mindset.

Youth workers will also find this book helpful in supporting parents as they raise their children. Many young people, though, receive no positive spiritual guidance from their parents. In those cases, I pray





God would use this book to help youth workers point young people to the cross and new life in the kingdom.

Many young people in church feel a disconnect with the person in the pulpit. Therefore I believe that *pastors* must listen to, understand and reach out to youth. This book should help them renew their ministry to young people.

Finally, *Christian educators*, who are in daily contact with students in public and private schools, will discover that the information and principles in this book will foster deep and significant connections with the emerging generations.

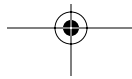
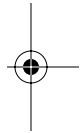
Remember Four Truths

This book will challenge your thinking. You may find yourself struggling with a concept, a definition or even a perceived tone in my writing. For this reason I'd like you to remember four things as you read.

First, I've striven to be faithful to the written and incarnate Word. I don't believe either needs to be reinvented or reimagined as some have said. I believe that the Word continues to speak to today's world. I've endeavored at every turn to look at our world through the corrective lenses of a biblical worldview.

Second, I've tried to avoid the traps of *false optimism* and *habitual pessimism*. False optimism looks at the world and with a shrug of the shoulders says, "No need to worry. Everything is going to be all right." Truth is, the collective lot of children and teens hasn't gotten any better. False optimism leads to forfeited influence because there's nothing anyone *needs* to do. Habitual pessimism looks at the world and says, "It's so bad and so far gone that there's nothing anyone can do about it." Not only does this view belittle God, but it too forfeits influence because there's nothing anyone *can* do.

In recent years Christians and cultural analysts have traveled down both of these roads as they've looked at the emerging generations—particularly Generation X and the Millennials. I've sought to avoid both of these extremes by taking an approach that I trust is *biblically realistic*. Through this approach, I believe we can accurately under-





stand our mission field and plan our mission approach.

Third, at times I am critical of the “faith” we’re calling young people to. For too long youth ministry has been about getting young people “saved.” I struggle with our definition of what it means to be saved and the methods we employ to get young people saved. Gordon Smith says that the church is guilty of thinking of conversion in “minimalist terms: What is the very least that a person needs to do in order to be freed from the horrors of hell and assured of the glories of heaven?”¹

We have failed to understand that conversion is not just about belief, repentance, forgiveness and eternal life. Something else has to happen after someone accepts Christ as Savior. Salvation makes a person free from sin *and* a slave to righteousness—integrating the Christian faith and kingdom of God into all of life. When we call young people to faith, we are not calling them out of the world and into heaven. Rather, we’re calling them to live God’s will and way in the world. Theologian David Wells describes it this way:

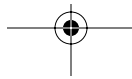
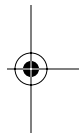
True conversion is not an isolated experience but one that is related to a life of discipleship. . . . Discipleship belongs to and should follow from conversion the way that natural life belongs to and should follow from live birth. . . . And just as there is no discipleship without conversion, so there is no conversion without an ensuing life of discipleship that involves growth in moral maturity, a deepening faith, and loving service.²

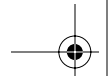
The goal of our missionary efforts is to call the emerging generations to a compelling faith that transforms every area of life and every nook and cranny of God’s creation.

Fourth, this book does not teach a method of evangelism. Rather, it calls us to a lifestyle of listening to and understanding our mission field long before we speak. It’s a lifestyle that’s always looking for ways to communicate the unchanging Word to a rapidly changing world.

¹Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 135.

²David F. Wells, *Turning to God* (Carlisle, U.K.: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1989), p. 25.





Overview

This book is divided into three sections. Section one analyzes the mission field of the emerging generations. Here we'll examine the world of youth and the influence of the postmodern worldview.

In section two we'll lay out the steps of our missionary journey into the culture and world of the emerging generations. First, we will consider the phenomenon of culture. Then we will look at how followers of Christ are called to approach culture. This may be the most difficult section for many, because the church has traditionally avoided rubbing shoulders with the world.

Section three lays out the strategy for engaging the postmodern generations. First we will look at the marks that must be evident in our lives as we fulfill our calling as messengers. Then we will examine Paul's first-century missionary journey into Athens and how to use his Mars Hill ministry as a model for ministry today.

While some might pessimistically label the emerging postmodern generations as hopelessly lost or something to put up with, in reality things are, as the Beatles might say, "getting better all the time." The emerging generations are self-consciously spiritual, and their interest in discussing and examining spirituality continues to rise. If church history remembers our particular time and place in God's world as one marked by our indifference, retreat or isolation, we will not only have been disobedient to our Master who tells us to "go," but we will have missed an amazing ministry opportunity.

