

TOPIC: What are Ways We Can Reach People? July 5, 2009

All materials available at: <http://20s30s.WWJDtoday.com>

Last week, June 28, we all met together to discuss the new **Child Protection Policy**.

The week before that, what did we cover?

1. Great Commission

- a. **Where?** Matthew 28:19-20
- b. **What?** (NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
- c. **Learned:** What is the main point? It appears that the apostles are told to do two things: "go!" and "make disciples!" However, if you look at the Greek, you will find that there is only one imperative: "make disciples!" "Go" is a participle, like "baptizing" and "teaching." Jesus is telling His disciples (and us): "Therefore, as you go, make disciples by baptizing and by teaching." Wherever you are, wherever you go (whether, I would add, you are in full-time ministry as a missionary or as a stay-at-home Christian), you are to make disciples.

Traditional Readings:

New International Version -- 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

King James Bible -- Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

More Accurate Readings:

International Standard Version (©2008) -- Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

GOD'S WORD® Translation (©1995) -- So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Young's Literal Translation -- having gone, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them -- to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

2. Culture Is Passing Us By!

3. No More Samaritans (8 minute video)

- a. Had more comments about the video than about the rest of the class put together.
- b. It is available at the web site shown at the top of this page.

4. Introduced Two Books:

5. unChristian, by the Barna Group
6. No Perfect People Allowed, by the preacher at Gateway Church in Austin

OK, for today let's consider:

WHAT DOES "MAKE DISCIPLES" mean today, anyway?

Two Questions come to mind:

1. HOW do we *disciple* people immersed in today's culture? and
2. What IS "today's culture" anyway? What does today's culture think, believe, understand about the church? About Christians? About religion?

unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... And Why It Matters

From the Barna Group

Here are Some Excerpts for the book review...

WHY unCHRISTIAN?

Using the lens of the careful, scientific **research** we conducted, I invite you to see what Christianity looks like from the outside. In fact, **the title of this book, unChristian**, reflects outsiders' **most common reaction** to the faith: they think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be. I will describe this in greater detail in chapter 2, but for many people the Christian faith looks weary and threadbare. They admit they have a hard time actually seeing Jesus because of all the negative baggage that now surrounds him.

One outsider from Mississippi made this blunt observation: "Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become marketed and streamlined into a juggernaut of fear-mongering that has lost its own heart!"

MCM – How do you react when you hear accusations like this?

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24 million between 16 and 29 years of age ← **TARGET STUDY OF THIS BOOK**

Trivia: How many SINGLE ADULTS in the U.S.? -- 92 Million. If we reached just 1 – 2 percent of those, we would double the size of Churches of Christ in America.

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One of the generational differences is a growing tide of hostility and resentment toward Christianity. In **1996**, our firm released the report "Christianity Has a Strong Positive Image Despite Fewer Active Participants." The study showed that Americans, even those on the outside looking in, possessed widespread respect for Christians. **Among outsiders—atheists or agnostics, those of a faith other than Christianity, or unchurched individuals with no firm religious convictions—we discovered that 85 percent were favorable toward Christianity's role in society.** And the perceptions of the youngest generations mirrored this finding.

That was then.

Now, a decade later, the image of the Christian faith has suffered a major setback. Our most recent data show that young outsiders have lost much of their respect for the Christian faith. These days nearly two out of every five young outsiders (38 percent [mcm-15% ten years ago!]) claim to have a "bad impression of present-day Christianity." Beyond this, one-third of young outsiders said that Christianity represents a negative image with which they would not want to be associated. Furthermore, one out of every six young outsiders (17 percent) indicates that he or she maintains "very bad" perceptions of the Christian faith. Though these hard-core critics represent a minority of young outsiders, this group is at least three times larger than it was just a decade ago.

Outsiders direct their skepticism toward all things Christian: the faith itself, the people who profess it, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. Frankly, their feelings toward all of these are interwoven. Still, don't assume that each of these four elements is perceived on equal footing—young outsiders are most likely to be frustrated with present-day expressions of Christianity, followed by their aggravation with Christians.

Their impressions of the Bible are mixed: most think it has good values, but only three out of ten believe that it is accurate in all the principles it teaches. And Jesus draws an interesting set of reactions. Jesus receives outsiders' most favorable feelings, but even the clarity of his image has eroded among young people. They are more likely than previous generations to believe he committed sins; they are also more likely to believe that people can live a meaningful life without him.

How Outsiders Perceive Evangelicals and Born-Again Christians

percent of outsiders, ages 16 to 29 (N* = 440)

	Christianity	Evangelical Christians	Born-Again Christians
Know of/aware of	NA	57 %	86 %
Have bad impression**	38 %	49 %	35 %
Have neutral impression**	45 %	48 %	55 %
Have good impression**	16 %	3 %	10 %

*sample size **percent of those aware of each group

One crucial insight kept popping up in our exploration. In studying thousands of outsiders' impressions, it is clear that Christians are primarily perceived for what they stand against. *We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for.*

MCM – Does your circle of acquaintances (or EX-acquaintances!) know you more for what you are AGAINST, or for what you are FOR?

How common are these perceptions? It is one thing to encounter a person on the street who says audacious, brash things about Christianity, but quite another if these perceptions broadly define the Christian faith among young people. In our national surveys with young people, we found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are

1. antihomosexual (an image held by 91 percent of young outsiders)

2. judgmental (87 percent)
3. hypocritical (85 percent)

MCM - Question: Why did the author say "*perception*" of Christianity instead of "*mis-perception*?"

MCM - Question: Are we anti-homosexual?

During the Alexandrian plague (third century), Christians risked their lives in caring for the sick, taking a posture of grace that said, "I am here for you. I may die, but you will not be alone." The church embodied the gospel and the message was not forgotten.

In the 1980s, the AIDS epidemic hit the gay community. Otherwise healthy men were dying and nobody knew why. The only link seemed to be their sexuality. The church had opportunity to again speak grace and instead spewed venom. Rather than showing compassion, we self-righteously proclaimed God's judgment. The message came through loud and clear.

It was the wrong message.

And it has not been forgotten.

When Greg, who is gay, discovered I was a pastor, his demeanor changed. His wounds had history. After a few minutes of hyperbolic invective, I stopped him. "Tell you what, you don't assume I'm a gay-hating bigot, and I won't assume you're a pedophile. Deal? If we buy into stereotypes, we'll never be able to love one another."

Tears streamed down his face. He asked, "Are you sure you're a Christian?"

Now there were tears of my own.

Christians may say, "Love the sinner; hate the sin," but Greg and many other homosexuals hear, "God hates fags." It's unfortunate. It's wrong. And it's our fault.

These "big three" [perceptions] are followed by the following negative perceptions, embraced by a **MAJORITY** of young adults:

- old-fashioned,
- too involved in politics,
- out of touch with reality,
- insensitive to others,
- boring,
- not accepting of other faiths,
- confusing.

When they think of the Christian faith, these are the images that come to mind. *This is what a new generation really thinks about Christianity.*

Six broad themes—the most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders. Those six themes are as follows:

1. **Hypocritical.** Outsiders consider us hypocritical—saying one thing and doing another—and they are skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. They say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people.
2. **Too focused on getting converts.** Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people. They question our motives when we try to help them "get

saved," despite the fact that many of them have already "tried" Jesus and experienced church before.

3. **Antihomosexual.** Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leveraging political solutions against them.
4. **Sheltered.** Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. Outsiders say we do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people's lives.
5. **Too political.** Another common perception of Christians is that we are overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues. Conservative Christians are often thought of as right-wingers.
6. **Judgmental.** Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.

DO PERCEPTIONS MATTER?

Gabe and I frequently encounter the idea that Christians should not care what outsiders think about us. After all, Jesus warned that the "world" would hate us. Scripture even promises persecution for those who follow Christ.

Keep in mind that part of the reason Christians possess a bad reputation is because our faith perspectives grate against a morally relativistic culture. Mosaics and Busters find that Christian perspectives run counter to their anything-goes mindset. Although outsiders don't always understand us, we have to be very careful about not tossing aside the biblical motivations that contribute to these perceptions. For instance, Christians are known as judgmental because we address sin and its consequences. Christians should be involved in politics because faith weaves itself into every aspect of our lives. Christians should identify homosexual behavior as morally unacceptable because that is what Scripture teaches. Christians should be pursuing conversations and opportunities that point people to Christ because we are representatives of life's most important message. And Christians should strive for purity and integrity even if that makes us appear sheltered.

As Christ's representatives, we have to articulate the reality that there is a holy Creator who holds us to a standard that exists beyond our finite, cracked lives. Our awareness of a transcendent being should alter who we are and how we think.

However, before you dismiss the unChristian perception as "just Christians doing their duty" realize that the challenge runs much deeper. **The real problem comes** when we recognize God's holiness but fail to articulate the other side of his character: **[WHICH IS WHAT, CLASS?] grace**. Jesus represents truth plus grace (**John 1:14** -- The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. NIV). Embracing truth without holding grace in tension leads to harsh legalism, just as grace without truth devolves to compromise. Still, the important insight based on our research is that Mosaics and Busters rarely see Christians who embody service, compassion, humility, forgiveness, patience, kindness, peace, joy, goodness, and love.

[Eric , June 19th, 2009](#)

One other note, this time about our culture. My experience has been that our culture doesn't need more salespeople. We don't need to go out trying to convince people to be Christians. If we love the unlovable, feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the poor, and show justice to the oppressed, then people learn the nature of Christ. That may be the best way to introduce Christ to our culture.

Postmoderns don't just want you to practice what you preach. They just want you to practice and skip the preaching.

Before we look at the next book, let's read **Matt 13:24-30**

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Would anyone like to comment on the relevance of this passage to the topic we're discussing?

If not, let's proceed.

**BOOK: No Perfect People Allowed:
Creating a Come As You Are Culture in the Church**

MCM - What do you think about the sub-title? Is this something we WANT to do?

- **Listen to The Upside Down Funnel (8 minutes)**

Note: RB - All elders at the New Braunfels church

Here are Some Excerpts for the book review...

Results of the PostModern Experiment -

The Egghead's your typical college-town breakfast dive, situated in the middle of Isla Vista, a beach community of students who attend the University of California Santa Barbara.

It was 1991, and I was enjoying the Egghead special, the Breakfast Slammer, as Chris and I talked about Christian faith. As a campus pastor, I had conversations with spiritual seekers. I don't even remember how we met or got into the conversation that day, but that conversation marked the continental divide in my approach to engendering faith in my generation.

After listening to Chris discuss some of his views on reality and the relativity of perception, I gave

him a well-rehearsed four-point outline of message of Christian faith. He asked some questions, and I used my best arguments in response. He agreed with all of my philosophical, logical reasoning.

Misreading his affirmative head-nods as evidence he might be close to a decision of faith, I asked Chris if there was anything that would keep him from accepting this gift offered in Christ. His reply confounded me.

He said, "I can totally see why that makes sense for you, but it's just not for me."

That response didn't compute with me. "But it is for you," I insisted. "If it makes sense and is true, then why not believe?"

"I can see why it's true for you, but it's not true for me," Chris rebutted.

"But Chris, you just said it all makes sense, and you can see why I believe in Christ—so why wouldn't you want to believe too?" I pushed for clarity.

His reply haunted me for years: "You know, I guess I just don't want to be like you."

Ouch!

I didn't have a good, back-pocket reply for that one. That conversation marked a turning point in my thinking. I don't know if it was simply my breaking point after beating my head against the wall in years of similar conversations, or if it was a divine epiphany, but in that moment I began to sense a shift. A cultural quake was about to alter the landscape of ministry permanently.

It was not so much that Chris didn't like me; after all, he didn't really know me. What he didn't like was what I represented. He didn't like Christians, or should I say, the stereotype of what Christians are like. I'm afraid Chris's sentiments extend more broadly than most Christians care to realize. I've since discovered that the average person has a strong perception of what Christians are against, but little of what Christians are for. I was simply confirming his negative stereotype of a narrow, intolerant, arrogant person who just wanted everyone "to be like me." In our postmodern world, you can't separate the message from the messenger. I think Chris was really saying, "Arguments don't convince me. Show me a faith that's attractive, and I'll consider it. Otherwise, I'm not interested, no matter how 'true' you say it is."

Truth had gone relational.

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In every culture, a leader must consider the factors that have shaped the people he or she seeks to communicate with and reach: What language do they speak? How do they hear this message? What issues are highly sensitive and why? What has happened in the past that put up barriers to belief? What metaphors or symbols communicate in positive or negative ways? What styles of communication or stories or art forms or songs best connect with both the head and the heart? What factors shaped who they are today? And most importantly, the question for every culture: **How do we best contextualize the unchanging truths of Scripture in ways they can understand and live out in their culture?** Answers to these questions are critical for creating a come-as-you-are culture at any time, for every generation, in every place.

These were the questions the early church wrestled with at the **Jerusalem counsel in Acts 15**. What elements of Jewish custom needed to be stripped from the message of faith for a Gentile culture? Their decision was based on an understanding of the cross-cultural message of faith and the unique Gentile/Hebrew mix of the receiving culture.

MCM – Insert THE MESSAGE text from Acts 15 –

15 It wasn't long before some Jews showed up from Judea insisting that everyone be circumcised: "If you're not circumcised in the Mosaic fashion, you can't be saved." ² Paul and Barnabas were up on their feet at once in fierce protest. [MCM: Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. NIV] The church decided to resolve the matter by sending Paul, Barnabas, and a few others to put it before the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem.

³ After they were sent off and on their way, they told everyone they met as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria about the breakthrough to the Gentile outsiders. Everyone who heard the news cheered – it was terrific news!

⁴ When they got to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were graciously received by the whole church, including the apostles and leaders. They reported on their recent journey and how God had used them to open things up to the outsiders. ⁵ Some Pharisees stood up to say their piece. They had become believers, but continued to hold to the hard party line of the Pharisees. "You have to circumcise the pagan converts," they said. "You must make them keep the Law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and leaders called a special meeting to consider the matter. ⁷ The arguments went on and on, back and forth, getting more and more heated. Then Peter took the floor: "Friends, you well know that from early on God made it quite plain that he wanted the pagans to hear the Message of this good news and embrace it – and not in any secondhand or roundabout way, but firsthand, straight from my mouth. ⁸ And God, who can't be fooled by any pretense on our part but always knows a person's thoughts, gave them the Holy Spirit exactly as he gave him to us. ⁹ He treated the outsiders exactly as he treated us, beginning at the very center of who they were and working from that center outward, cleaning up their lives as they trusted and believed him.

¹⁰ "So why are you now trying to out-god God, loading these new believers down with rules that crushed our ancestors and crushed us, too? ¹¹ Don't we believe that we are saved because the Master Jesus amazingly and out of sheer generosity moved to save us just as he did those from beyond our nation? So what are we arguing about?"

¹² There was dead silence. No one said a word. With the room quiet, Barnabas and Paul reported matter-of-factly on the miracles and wonders God had done among the other nations through their ministry. ¹³ The silence deepened; you could hear a pin drop.

James broke the silence. "Friends, listen. ¹⁴ Simeon has told us the story of how God at the very outset made sure that racial outsiders were included. ¹⁵ This is in perfect agreement with the words of the prophets:

¹⁶ After this, I'm coming back;
I'll rebuild David's ruined house;
I'll put all the pieces together again;
I'll make it look like new

¹⁷ So outsiders who seek will find,
so they'll have a place to come to,
All the pagan peoples
included in what I'm doing.

"God said it and now he's doing it. ¹⁸ It's no afterthought; he's always known he would do this.

¹⁹ "So here is my decision: We're not going to unnecessarily burden non-Jewish people who turn to the Master. ²⁰ We'll write them a letter and tell them, 'Be careful to not get involved in activities connected with idols, to guard the morality of sex and marriage, to not serve food offensive to Jewish Christians – blood, for instance.' ²¹ This is basic wisdom from Moses, preached and honored for centuries now in city after city as we have met and kept the Sabbath."

Do you understand the unique factors of the broader culture you live within? Are you willing to adjust your customs to be true to the message of God's grace for emerging cultures? To do this, we must not only understand how to draw out the timeless truths of Scripture, we must understand the times.

== HMMM, his issues sound a lot like the unChristian book topics, don't they? ==

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Tolerance

"Hey Sarah, your kids any better?" I shouted, as I rode my mountain bike past my neighbor unloading her three-year-old from her car.

"Mike's better, but Jake's still got a fever — thanks for asking," Sarah shouted back. Then she surprised me. "Hey, what times are your church services?"

I U-turned and pulled into her driveway to keep from yelling.

Sarah, a twenty-something mother of three, had only been married once. Her husband was the father of only one of the children (there were two other dads in the picture before she married Tom). Both Sarah and Tom were extremely warm, welcoming people who lived one street over from us. Their loving nature showed in the way they treated their kids—not to mention how they let Sarah's sister live with them as she struggled to get back on her feet from a crack addiction. Tom worked two jobs, as a software analyst and waiter, to afford their modest three-bedroom suburban life. Kathy and I had built a relationship with Sarah and Tom and invited them to church several times, but this was the first sign of interest in a year.

"We have two services, nine o'clock and ten thirty," I said as nonchalantly as possible.

"We're thinking about coming, but can I ask you a question that might offend you?" she hesitantly inquired.

"Sure! Don't worry, you're not going to offend me." I tried to make myself vulnerable while praying for wisdom for whatever arrow was pointed my way.

"Well ..." She hesitated. "Are you a loving church? I mean, do you teach people to love others?"

I laughed, feeling some relief and trying to ease her tension, "Of course—that's the central point of the message of Jesus, 'love God and love others.'"

"Well ... but how do you feel about gays?" she finally spit it out.

Not knowing why this was so important, I decided to try to both ease her mind and understand more, "We feel they are people that matter to God. Is that something you have dealt with personally, or do you have close friends who are gay?"

"No," she replied, "I just need to know you're not one of those hateful churches. I just couldn't go to a church that teaches people to hate others."

To understand how serious this issue of tolerance is for emerging generations, you have to consider Sarah's underlying concern, reflected in many people I meet. During the first two years of Gateway's existence, I consistently was asked two questions by spiritual seekers more than any other questions: "What do you think of other religions?" and "How do you feel about gay people?" I've discovered the real question they are asking is: "Are you one of the narrow-minded, bigoted, hate-filled, intolerant types of Christians I've heard about?" What they really want to know is whether we promote love or hatred. The connection may not seem obvious, but it is critical to understand if you want to communicate effectively.

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Creating a culture of dialogue means becoming people who truly respect and value all people as worthy of the love and sacrifice Christ demonstrated. It means being willing to respect their thoughts and opinions, making sure they know we value them, even if we differ in belief. An atmosphere of dialogue requires us to take into account the perspective of the other person, seeking to understand her position as much as we want her to understand ours. It is other-centered communication. It creates a two-way street of conversation. This kind of environment respects the free will of individuals and helps people not be afraid of offending us in their exploration and questioning.

Culture creation that allows dialogue requires immense trust in God. It requires letting go of the need to fix, change, or control others' beliefs or actions. It requires trusting that God's Spirit can work behind the scenes in people's hearts as we create a culture where they are free to question, doubt, and explore faith at their own pace. This shifts the burden to change people back where it belongs—with God alone.

This does not mean we hold back telling the story of God's work in our lives and throughout history. Nor does it mean there is not a time for proclamation—for speaking God's truth revealed in the Scriptures. But timing is everything! Creating a culture of dialogue requires us to walk in the shoes of the other person. To consider how it feels to be an "outsider" to faith; desiring to understand, but not having a clue; wanting to ask questions, but afraid to offend; needing to fit in to explore, but not sure of the rules.

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Creating a culture where questions and doubts can find voice is not only healthy, it's thoroughly biblical. In the Bible, you do find those who had absolute certainty. But those who never doubted, struggled, or wrestled with what it meant to do the will of God were not the heroes of faith ... they were the Pharisees who crucified Jesus!

The religious leaders' certainty of what was true and right gave them confidence to crucify the Son of God. Stop and consider that for a second. Do we think we are "above" being deceived by our religious cultural conditioning? Do we feel pretty confident we have faith all figured out? Has our theology boxed out the mystery of God who sometimes works in strange ways? Maybe we should ponder the plight of the Pharisees who crucified Jesus. How about the apostle Peter? In his confident declaration of what he knew was "right," Peter had to be rebuked by Jesus saying, "Get away from me, Satan!"

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Historically, there seems to be nothing with more capacity for evil than a so called "righteous man" hell-bent on doing God's will. From the Crusades to the Inquisition to the Salem witch trials to the wholesale slaughter of Native Americans to slavery on up into the 20th century when black men were lynched with impunity, people have performed acts of evil with a sense of self-righteousness. With so much evil done in the name of God and religion, there are times when I just wish I could make God and religion disappear completely. This is the religious crossroad that I have been staring at for a long time now. Thanks for making Gateway the kind of place where someone with the doubts and "religious scars" that I have can feel welcome. —Darrin

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A story in the "Key of Goth" -- (skip down and just read highlights in class)

"Christians are hateful, condemning, nasty, and mean. They like to torture people who don't fit their stereotype. They treat people in any subculture like dirt," Kyle ranted to his friend Rachel as they drove home from Elysium—a Goth club where they had met six months earlier. "See Rachel, you don't know what Christians are like. You're very different than most Christians I've known." Kyle, a twenty-one-year-old 3D graphic design artist, grew up feeling judged and condemned by Christians.

"Come to Gateway, just once, and you'll meet others. If you don't like it, at least you were open," Rachel contended. Rachel was a believer against all odds. Physically beaten black and blue for a decade, sexually molested as a teen—all by her father who was a professor, pastor, and traveling evangelist. Yet Rachel had discovered the healing grace of a God who despises the horrendous evil her father perpetrated. She had won Kyle's trust because she was a survivor.

"Rachel, I work Sundays and Wednesdays. I would if I could," Kyle said, being polite.

"Okay, next time you're off—you're coming with me." Rachel began praying consistently that night. One month later, Kyle happened to call her on a Wednesday. "Come on over," Rachel said, "We're going to Gateway since you're off work."

"#\$%&," Kyle cursed forgetting his vow. "I'm going black—wearing my Skinny Puppy shirt with the crucified dog on it then. If they can't take it, I'm not going. And I'll probably sleep through it too—just to warn you."

Kyle not only stayed awake, he listened to every word as I taught through 1 Corinthians 12 about the unity of the church as Christ's Body. It especially caught his attention that we were not threatened by a diversity of views on trivial, divisive issues. He came up to talk to me afterwards, dressed in black, with long, sandy-blond hair, dark sideburns, pierced ears and a goatee. What I noticed most was the crucified dog on his shirt.

"Skinny Puppy? Is that a band?" I asked.

"Yeah—it's an industrial band." With that, Kyle launched in ... making sure I knew religion was manipulative and mean. I talked with Kyle for about twenty minutes, agreeing with him where I could about the evils of some religious people, telling him my story of discovering that all people are messed up—including Christians; but also discovering a loving God really exists — and our only hope for change is one life at a time, humbly letting God do his will in me. He talked more than I did as I asked questions, interjecting personal discovery along the way.

When they walked out that night, Kyle turned to Rachel and said, "I was a real ass to your pastor."

"Great," she said.

"But he took it, and he was really cool. Didn't even react to my shirt either. I think I want to talk to him again."

Ironically, Kyle only comes to the Gathering, our midweek service, where we do thirty minutes of worship and teach straight through books of the Bible. **About six months after his first visit, he came up to me to tell me he now considers himself a theist.** It just makes more sense than being atheistic," he admitted.

"Kyle, I can see God is doing something in your life," I told him. "He really does love you, and he wants you to know that he's not like you imagined from watching messed up Christians."

Rachel told me **Kyle now argues with Goth friends when they bash Christians** saying, "Not all Christians are like that. You should check out this one church before judging all Christians. I've gone in decked out in black vinyl and no one stared me down. At Gateway they don't judge people by appearance, and they don't judge people's opinions—they listen. The pastor doesn't have a loudspeaker on his head."

Recently he told Rachel, "When I become a Christian," then caught himself, "If I become a Christian, I'm not singing the songs." Rachel keeps pointing out little evidences that God is trying to get Kyle's attention. This Christmas Kyle made a deal with me. He said he would read Mere Christianity if I would watch the movie Bowling for Columbine.

Jesus would often look at the trajectory of a person's heart and either confront or congratulate him. He would say things like, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." In other words, you're heading in the right direction. We need to affirm and validate those who are truly seeking and making progress, pointing out to them the behind-the-scenes work of the Spirit as we recognize his workings in their lives. This bridges the gap of trust.

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Us Versus Them?

Instead of acceptance that draws them into relationship and says "I'm for you," seekers pick up an "us versus them" mentality from many Christians. It is subtle but deadly.

We had to work hard to root out lobby conversations or attitudes that portrayed to seekers, "We are right and you are wrong" or "I have it all together, and you have nothing without Christ." While some of this may be true, the attitude conveys a message that stinks of ungrace — as if we did something for ourselves apart from God's grace. This attitude gets interpreted as looking-down-the-nose in judgment. As Mark Twain so appropriately put it, some people are "good in the worst sense of the word." This attitude sends the message, "We know the law and live it, and you don't." Nothing could be more patently false.

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You Ought to Fire That God!

When Christians wrongly assume their job is to help make others acceptable—even though we could never make ourselves acceptable—this tells people God will not accept them "as is." Consequently many people reject the God of Christianity not realizing the god they associate with Christ is a false god! We must constantly teach to clearly define the true God of grace.

Keith Miller, author of *A Hunger for Healing*, talks about being a Christian in a recovery group, overhearing a new guy talk to this old-timer about taking Step 3 — the step of surrendering your life and will to God.

The new guy said, "No way I'm going to turn my life over to God! He'd ruin me—and I'd deserve it!"

The old-timer listened patiently to the young guy's description of God and then said, "You ought to fire that God; you ought to fire him! You've got the wrong God for this program, friend. The God who operates here is loving, <...>"

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Acceptance but Not Agreement

Of course, the big argument against taking the risk of accepting everyone with open arms—they might not change! They may misunderstand our acceptance as agreement with beliefs or behaviors God would not agree with.

If we accept others, are we accepting wrong behavior and therefore condoning things God clearly says are against his will—sinful? And if you've been fighting these thoughts, you're not the first. In Romans 6 Paul heads this fear off at the pass by saying, "So since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!" But what he proceeds to show is that grace-based relationship is the only hope for authentic growth—there's no other option.

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Jesus used a parable in Matthew 13 of a farmer (God) who sows good seed, but his enemy plants weeds at night that sprout up among the good wheat. His servants come and ask him, "'Shall we pull out the weeds?' they asked. He replied, 'No, you'll hurt the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn..' "¹⁹

How often do leaders try to get weeds out of the church but inadvertently yank up good plants that were just so tiny that they looked like weeds? I think about Natalie and Chad, who came into our church while living together. We don't condone living together, but Natalie and Chad were on the right trajectory. If their small group and others had focused first on weeding out their living situation rather than watering the soil with acceptance—conveying how much they mattered to the God who was for them—it would have uprooted their spiritual growth. But soaking in grace, they both started following Christ after six months. Nine months later they came to see me for premarital counseling. I asked them about living together and their views on sex before marriage. They told me they had stopped having sex six months prior, after hearing a message on the subject and realizing God was trying to protect them. Chad and Natalie stayed on that growth trajectory, and they now lead a couples' small group four years later. This story has been repeated over and over again in our church.

Two gay men came and sat in our church for a year before coming to faith in Christ. They got connected in a small group, they started growing spiritually—finding an increasing sense of worth and value rooted in Christ. On their

own initiative, they decided the Lord wanted them to stop their sexual relationship. They have put support systems in place to follow the Lord's leading (we will talk more about this in a later chapter). But only in the soil of acceptance can people find the love and security and value to allow God to do his work in their lives.

I have seen so many seekers soak in grace, begin to grow, and truly change over the years because God's Spirit is alive and working in their hearts, through his Body, the community of grace. But it takes time for those tiny shoots of faith to grow fruit. **How many leaders get impatient and yank up good wheat because it looked like a weed to them? Jesus says, "Don't do it!" No, it will not be a pretty, tidy garden, but if the Lord of the Harvest is okay with letting it all grow together in a tangled mess and sorting it out later, can we be okay with it too?**

Grace is the soil where people best grow, and creating a culture of acceptance defines the work we can do to prepare the soil of grace. But how do we provide the water and fertilizer and support structures to keep people growing? That's the subject of the next chapter. **Come as you are ... But don't stay that way!**

BACKUP MATERIAL

BOOK REVIEWS

Monday, October 15, 2007

UnChristian by David Kinnaman (Book Review), B+

Church: Guess Why America is Giving You Dirty Looks?

America's growing malaise with regard to Christianity is no secret, unless you've been living inside a hermetically-sealed subculture where the drive through at MacDonald's passes for living "in not of" the world. But you probably didn't know how pervasive and specified those ill feelings were. Now, thanks to David Kinnaman, you can.

I'm not being sarcastic. Reading UnChristian is like walking into a closed-door staff meeting to find out why exactly people have been giving you those mean looks. The clarification hurts but it's very helpful.

The findings in UnChristian are the result of extensive polling by the Barna Group. Want a snapshot? Large slices of the American population, ages 16 to 29, view Christianity as "antihomosexual," "judgmental," "hypocritical," "too involved in politics," "sheltered," and "insensitive to others"--with some interesting variations. Can it be true? Are we really this awful? By and large, yes.

Kinnaman takes a blow-by-blow look at the descriptors, analyzes the stats, and makes suggestions for corrective action that are largely circumspect and wise. He avoids cultural posturing and points out that Christians will never be popular, but ought to be giving offense for the right reasons. We need to choose our battles, learn the culture, and put money and muscle behind our good intentions.

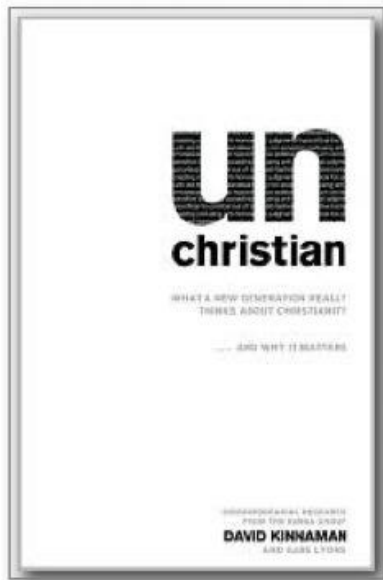
A variety of contributors weigh in with short essays at the end of each chapter--among my favorites are Andy Crouch, Mark Batterson, Mike Foster, and Jonalyn Fincher. Their contributions aren't substantive, but the variety of voices adds to the book's rounded perspective. Brian McLaren appears briefly, but says nothing controversial, settling for merely ambiguous.

The book's weakness is probably its individualistic emphasis. Kinnaman's vision is for the church to fix its "image problem" via real, personal change. What he doesn't really address is how current, institutionalized forms of church may be inadequate to the task. However, UnChristian is a much-needed diagnostic tool for the flailing American church and I recommend it. Solid B+. If the writing style had been stronger, it would have vaulted into A range.

UNCHRISTIAN?

Book Review

I've lost several hours of sleep over David Kinnaman's and Gabe Lyons's book, [*unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... And Why It Matters*](#). James Emery White, in his *Serious Times* email newsletter, said* in response to this book, "Christianity has an image problem." With all due respect to Mr. White, one of the authors I most respect, I disagree. *Christianity has a reality problem*. The problem is shallow discipleship, and the rest of the world sees it for what it is. It's a disturbing picture.



Reading this book has reminded me of experiences I had in developing "360° Reviews" for our organization. These are something like performance reviews, except that you hear from people all around you: your supervisor, people who report to you, and peers and friends. Even though I developed and validated the questionnaire and the system, when I went through my own first review, I was apprehensive leading up to it, and I was surprised by some of what I heard. Not all of it was pleasant! But by adjusting to what I learned, I became a better leader. Good leaders say things like, "I like reality"--not that reality is always pleasant or good, but that we need to face it, study it, know what it is, and adjust accordingly.

I certainly don't like the reality that has been exposed by *unChristian*: a generation of young Americans, age 18-29, who hold overwhelmingly negative views regarding Christianity. But I like that it has been revealed. It needs to become very widely known and understood. My prayer would be that every church staff in the country would use this book as the basis for extended discussions on "what do we do about this?!"

The book is about perceptions of Christianity. To some extent the problem actually is image rather than reality. When people claiming to be Christians show up at public events with signs reading, "God hates fags," that's not real Christianity, but it sure attracts the media. Real Christians, in my experience, hover between nausea and tears over such outrageous distortions of the gospel. (For the record: God doesn't hate people who say "God hates fags," any more than he "hates fags." So even people who say things like this need love and compassion. On the other hand, Jesus stood in strong disagreement and direct conflict with that kind of judgmentalism, trying to shake people out of it, and I stand with him in strong disagreement and disgust.) If, however, there is a portion of the problem that is just image, created by false portrayals of Christianity or by the media, it is a limited portion.

According to Kinnaman and Lyons, young people see Christians as hypocritical, too much focused on "getting people saved" (and therefore inauthentic), anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental. There are nuances to these impressions that I do not have time to explore here. Now, Kinnaman and Lyons do not suggest that Christians back away from Biblical truth in the way we respond to these impressions. They urge us, rather, to see with clear eyes the culture to whom we are trying to introduce God's Kingdom. As such, the book stands

squarely in the tradition of good missiology: to hold the truths of Scripture in one hand, and a thorough, respectful knowledge of the culture in the other hand; and to communicate the Gospel accordingly.

The greatest point of dissonance revealed in this book is over homosexuality. "God hates fags" signs certainly haven't helped; nor have pronouncements by some leaders that the 9/11 events, or hurricanes in Orlando, have been God's answer to America's growing toleration of homosexuality. Just in the past few weeks, one of my family members has been working through a very grievous misunderstanding with a homosexual loved one. This member of my family had said, "We believe everybody needs to follow what the Bible says." What the homosexual person heard was, "If you don't give up your homosexuality you're going to hell." That wasn't what was said, and it's certainly not what this person believes, but it's what he heard. Given the current climate the mistake was understandable. Christians have been portrayed as incredibly judgmental towards homosexuals, and the portrayal is based in reality.

The truth of the matter, as quoted in Kinnaman's and Lyons's book, is that "there is not a special judgment for homosexuals, and there is not a special righteousness for heterosexuals. For all of us, our only hope for the fracture in our soul is in the cross of Christ." So how should Christians respond to issues like this one, and the others raised in the book? By deepening our discipleship, our love, our service, our genuine, respectful engagement with the world.

And by learning our culture. One of my greatest life lessons came from listening to a homosexual describe the depth of his struggle, how he actually didn't choose his orientation, he would rather not have it be that way, but that he can't imagine how to change. It has caused him struggles all his life. Why should we wonder that many of them are urging their fellow homosexuals to accept themselves as they are? And how can Christians make blanket condemnations and glibly say, "It's all your own choice"? It's not that simple. Homosexual practice is not right. Neither are a lot of other things that we all struggle with. And it's not simple or unidimensional. This homosexual friend, by the way, wants to follow Jesus Christ, and I believe he is to the extent he knows how (which is all I can say for myself). Does he have it all right, or all figured out? Do I?

That's just one of the focal issues in this book. As I said, this book robbed me of sleep, revealing, as it does, how badly the church is disconnected from younger Americans, and how negatively we are viewed. The source of the disconnect, I'm convinced, is that our discipleship has been weak, sloganistic, not very thoughtful, not loving enough, shallow. Though 29% of Americans say they are highly committed to Jesus Christ, only 3% espouse a Biblical worldview, defined for research purposes as adhering to 8 basic doctrines of Christian religion (for example, that God is the Creator, that Jesus died and rose again for our sins, that there is objective morality based in the Bible). Our practice has been similarly shallow. (Christians could take much greater initiative in helping with HIV/AIDS, for example.)

"We consistently find that the vast majority of teenagers nationwide will spend a significant amount of their teen years participating in a Christian congregation. Most teenagers enter adulthood considering themselves to be Christians and saying they have made a personal commitment to Christ. But within a decade most of these young people will have left the church and will have placed emotional connection to Christianity on the shelf. For most of them, their faith was merely skin deep. This leads to the sobering finding that the vast majority of outsiders in this country, particularly among young generations, are actually de-churched individuals." (p. 74)

I find hope in several currents, however. One is the attention this book seems to be receiving:

it's appearing in multiple news media, and it may just wake us up. The book includes, by the way, many responses by wise Christian leaders with suggestions on how to improve our discipleship, our reality (and thus the way we're perceived).

Another source of hope is the [announcement this week](#) by Willow Creek Church--one of the two most influential evangelical churches in America, along with Rick Warren's Saddleback Church--that they have recognized a significant need for a radical change to encourage deeper discipleship.

And another is very local--the youth in our church, who are seriously engaging the truth of Christ and [living it out in our community](#). We're now in the middle of a unique series called "40 days of seeking" -- 40 days in a row of small group meetings in homes, inviting community leaders to help us understand youth culture. These visitors have included school principals, a judge, policemen, social services representatives, and others who are helping us wake up to the reality of the world we're trying to reach.

But we all have a long way to go. Read this book, pray over it, and see how God would have you adjust.

Related: From the National Conference on Christian Apologetics, and my newspaper article on this book, a [follow-up post on November 10, 2007](#)

*Note my [update](#) later the same day about James Emery White and about research sources.

unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity ... And Why It Matters, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007. 256 pages. Amazon Price US \$12.23.

Cross-posted at [Strategic Christian](#).

Posted: Sun - October 21, 2007 at 09:42 AM

NO PERFECT PEOPLE ALLOWED

Excellent, February 27, 2008

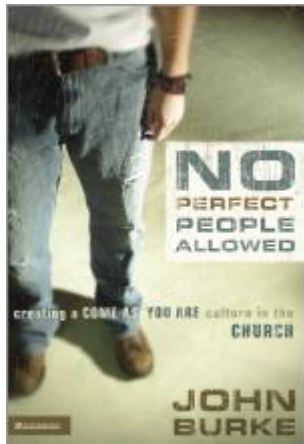
By [Karen K. Walters](#)  - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

After the Bible, this is the best book written for the church today. Bar None. If this book (the ideas in it) would be taken seriously, it will change the church in America - maybe save it from being like the church in Europe. I've recommended it to every single pastor I know.

[Book Review – No Perfect People Allowed](#)

Posted on January 4, 2009 by Bruth Abran



John Burke is the founding pastor of [Gateway Community Church](#) in Austin, TX and also founded the [Emerging Leadership Initiative](#). ELI is the church planting network that I am partnering with for Renovate Church in Winchester, VA. He also wrote the book I am reviewing: [NO PERFECT PEOPLE ALLOWED: creating a COME AS YOU ARE culture in the CHURCH.](#)

Let me start by saying that any pastor or church planter whose target is emerging generations MUST READ THIS BOOK! For me and Shelley, it's required reading for ELI, but I would have picked it up regardless. Craig Whitney, the Executive Director of ELI told me that if I read the book, and that's the kind of church I'm looking to plant, then we're on the right track as far as our values lining up with ELI. Look's like we're on the right track!

The idea of the book is to help pastors create a "come as you are culture in the church." This becomes very messy when you invite everyone, and he means EVERYONE into your midst. Are we really ready to deal with addictions, homosexuality, and other religions? If so, then we must create a culture in the church that welcomes those people, sets them on the path for discipleship, and allows the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

Some takeaways from the book:

The postmodern experiment has made Christianity and the church in America very messy. We're dealing with the fallout of the sexual revolution, drugs, new worldviews and more. For Burke, the 5 main issues emerging generations are dealing with are Trust, Tolerance, Truth, Brokenness, and Aloneness.

Trust – We must create a culture in our church that recognizes the incongruence in our lives. Address our hypocrisy and correct it. Encourage and create dialogue about difficult issues. Let go of the churchy facades and create a culture of authenticity.

Tolerance – Accept people as they are, but create a system for spiritual growth. There are two litmus test questions for postmoderns – “What do you think about other religions?” and “What do you think about gays?” What people are really asking is “Are you arrogant with what you believe?”

The sections on other religions and homosexuals are the best I've seen. Instead of giving a step by step plan or lofty platitudes, Burke writes out manuscript conversations he's had with people regarding these issues. He presents a way to be unashamedly Biblical, while not marginalizing the people he's counseling. I'd love to see more books from him expounding on these two subjects.

Truth – While we know that we have truth, we need to be humble with our knowledge. Postmoderns don't care about what we know. We need to introduce them to who we know. Jesus is Truth. We don't just know the information of truth, we knew the person of Truth. We must then encourage new believers to share their newly discovered Truth with their friends and family.

Brokenness – People are hurting for all kinds of reasons. We must create a culture of hope so they can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In dealing with sexual wholeness, Burke presents the idea of first practicing mental monogamy. The idea is to first fully understand all of the right reasons to remain abstinent before marriage. He presents the whole package on the issue, and it's great. Finally, we must create a culture of healing. If you can tell by now, the issues and culture creation are building upon each other, and this progresses until the end of the book.

Aloneness – People are lonely. We find ways to escape, whether it is alcohol, porn, drugs, whatever. In the church, we must create a culture of connection that allows people to be authentic and vulnerable. We can only find true intimacy with others when we are authentic and vulnerable. This must first be modeled by the Pastor and pastoral staff. Through small groups, we can then create a culture of family.

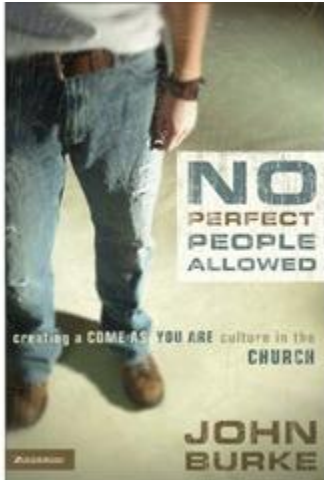
Burke goes on to top off the book with a plea to start new churches. He describes ELI, the need for new churches, and the need for existing churches to partner in reaching emerging generations.

The motto for Gateway Community Church is “Come as you are... but don't stay that way.” I've seen people misinterpret the idea for approval of all sins and lifestyles in the

church. Burke is not advocating that sinners be in active leadership, flaunting their lifestyle. Acceptance is not approval. We must create a culture that all people can come into our church, create systems for growth to occur, and trust the Holy Spirit to change people. We can only force people to *conform*, we cannot *change* them. Only God can.

[Book Review: No Perfect People Allowed by John Burke](#)

[Leadership](#), [Philosophy](#) [Add comments](#)



Over the past 3 months I've started reading 5 different books but haven't finished any recently. I've decided to finish some of them before starting any new one. Last night I finished reading "No Perfect People Allowed" by John Burke. Two words... absolutely incredible!

This is a "must read" for anyone serving in or desiring to serve in a church intentionally reaching the Post-Modern community.

Four years ago I was on staff at a contemporary denominational church. It was a great church making an impact on our community, but I knew something was missing. My generation wasn't there. I was in my mid-twenties and there was a significant gap between 18 and 30. Nearly all of my friends were people serving in the Children's Ministry. They were about 10 years older than me and my wife and they had kids. We were completely missing this segment. It was then that I started to look and see what others were doing. This was also at the time that the seeker sensitive or seeker driven churches were on the rise. These churches had the rockin' music and served Starbucks in the lobby. God forbid, you could even take your coffee into the "sanctuary."

I remember the criticism. "These seeker churches are an inch deep and a mile wide." Yeah, a lot of them were (and still are). I know I was confused as I wanted to serve at a place that didn't compromise as a church but was doing something to reach "my" generation. Shortly after this I moved to Texas where I served a church that fit the "seeker" description. Although different from the denominational church, it wasn't "shallow church" by any means. I was now in a church where my generation was at least represented (reaching my post-modern generation still wasn't intentional). Honestly, ministry had become a lot more fun. However, I still probably couldn't tell you exactly what the whole "seeker" thing was about. I knew it was about doing ministry in a socially relevant way and it was about building "authentic" relationships.

Sorry, getting to my point now. This book by John Burke is the very first clear description of what this whole "seeker" thing is about (or was originally intended to be). He was a Willow Creek (weren't they the pioneers of this stuff?) guy and now pastors a church in Austin, TX. For the first time the lights have really come on for me. It's obvious that the "seeker" movement is in

full swing here in the US. But it really doesn't have anything to do with music or the coffee. I think a lot of churches have jumped on this "seeker" bandwagon the way many churches added a "contemporary" service at 10:30 after their traditional service. Some of these churches have added all the seeker ministry "components" thinking that if they are more relaxed, more real with cooler music, then they are doing it right.

What I've learned from "No Perfect People Allowed" is that in order to reach the post-modern generation, it's got to be your DNA. Like I said, it has nothing to do with adding "seeker" components, it's either who you are or who you aren't. Ministry to post mods can be really messy. It's really messy because life for post mods is messy. It's a generation bound by alcohol, drugs, cohabitation, homosexuality, religious ambiguity and so much more. Reaching this generation is going to take intentional efforts to connect with them as it's unlikely they'll just show up at your front door. Truly, it's about contextualizing the gospel into a message that makes sense to a generation that doesn't really understand what this "Jesus thing" is all about.

By no means is this book pointing fingers at how others aren't reaching this generation, it's the story of [Gateway](#) church as they've seen incredible success at reaching those who belong to the Post Modern generation. If you're like me, your heart will skip a beat over and over as you read about people's lives being changed in a highly relevant way. It's definitely challenged me and will go down as one of the best books I've read this decade.

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5.0 out of 5 stars **If only there were more churches like this one!**

June 20, 2005 By [Casey W.](#) (Fort Worth, TX)

This review is for: [No Perfect People Allowed: Creating A Come As You Are Culture in the Church \(Hardcover\)](#)

We've been living in a new city searching for a church where we could invite any of our friends, regardless of their background, life situation, and past church experience (or lack of), without fear of putting them in an uncomfortable situation. A much larger order to fill than we had expected, because, as it turns out, many people are NOT comfortable in church--period! This book explains how that has come to be and why churches are struggling, but, most importantly, it demonstrates exactly how churches and ALL Christians can (and should) reach out to and meet the needs of an ultra-diverse population with diverse backgrounds, lifestyles and situations. This is NOT "watered-down Christianity" or "moral relativism"--contrarily, it is biblical Christianity in its best, purest, most powerful and effective (and user-friendly) form. For ANYONE interested in effectively reaching the seemingly unreachable. The author is incredibly engaging and easy to read, but be warned that the substance might just change your perspective on church and religion!