

# **Millennials @ Work:**

*Pastoring 20- (and 30-)somethings toward Faithful Presence*

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## INTRODUCING MILLENNIALITY

“Don’t stereotype me or my generation.”<sup>1</sup> This statement—made by a female millennial not long ago—is representative of the millennial response when they are pegged with generalizations. Not wanting to see themselves as an extension or continuation of anything outside themselves, this highly individualistic generation desires to be recognized for their unique qualities and contributions.<sup>2</sup> Given this hyper-individuality and that they are the most ethnically diverse generation in American history,<sup>3</sup> those roughly 20 to 35 years of age do, in many ways, elude broad-swathe definition.

But that doesn’t keep the pundits from trying. The cover of a 2013 *Time Magazine* highlighting millennials read: “The Me Me Me Generation,” claiming millennials are basically “lazy, entitled narcissists still living with their parents.”<sup>4</sup> Simon Sinek devotes an 18-minute interview responding to the resounding claim that millennials are “entitled and narcissistic, self—interested, unfocused and lazy.”<sup>5</sup> Americans (and many others) watched as 30-year-old Michael Rotondo fought his parents in a legal battle because they asked him to finally leave their home in Syracuse.<sup>6</sup> This “confirmed” for many that “this is just what millennials are like.”

Not all descriptions are only negative—“Meet the Millennials: liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident, and broke.”<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere they are packaged as

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<sup>1</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto and Craig L. Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 80-81.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Sinek, “Transcript of Simon Sinek Millennials in the Workplace Interview,” <https://ochen.com/transcript-of-simon-sineks-millennials-in-the-workplace-interview> (accessed September 21, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Amanda Jackson, “A Judge Sides with Parents and Rules Their 30-year-old Son Must Move Out,” <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/22/us/judge-rules-son-must-move-out-new-york-trnd/index.html> (accessed June 14, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *The Next America*, 26.

“empowered by digital technology; coddled by parents; respectful of elders; slow to adulthood; conflict-averse; at ease with racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity; confident in their economic futures despite coming of age in bad times.”<sup>8</sup> Some have argued instead of “millennials,” we can (and should) refer to them as “lost in transition,” “trophy kids,” or simply “Generation Me.”<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of which labels and characteristics we apply to the millennial generation, one empirical reality proves inescapable and especially relevant for pastors and church leaders: Those born from 1981-1996 (give or take)<sup>10</sup> *do not take the Christian faith as seriously as their parents*. Excavating the reasons for this unearths *particular opportunity with leveraging the agency, education, and excitement of this millennial generation* in and for the world ahead of us. *Recalling and rooting ourselves in the grand narrative of Scripture* will provide an adequate context to address the questions and longings of this generation.

Seizing this opportunity also requires taking seriously the particular bents and tendencies of millennials. Moving past overly critical stereotypes, we must—in Christlike fashion—*learn the assumptions, hangups, and overall makeup of this demographic we are called to pastor* to meet them where they are. This will give rise to *new pastoral passageways* that have already demonstrated sustained fruit amongst millennials. In turn, we should take clarified hope in the enduring truth that *the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ is expansive enough to be wisely contextualized even in our late modern age*.

## **THE FAITH(LESSNESS?) OF THE MILLENNIALS**

Meet the “nones.” When asked to select the religion with which they identify, one-third of millennials select “none.” They are religiously unaffiliated. And 88% of these “nones” have

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Jaco Hamman, “The Millennial Generation and the Church: Doing it Differently,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, Vol. 3 (2015): 161-164.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Post-Millennials Begin,” *Fact Tank: News in the Numbers*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/defining-generations-where-millennials-end-and-post-millennials-begin/> (accessed September 21, 2018).

virtually no interest in discovering a religion for themselves.<sup>11</sup> Yet this does not imply the other two-thirds are fully engaged. Gallup reports that just 55% of millennials have any interest in religion,<sup>12</sup> with a mere 27% attending church on a consistent basis.<sup>13</sup> When we recognize we're dealing with an American generation consisting of over 80 million people, the sheer numbers begin to convey more weight.<sup>14</sup>

Why is this so? Wouldn't we all like to know—so much so, in fact, that loads of research dollars have been funneled toward this end.<sup>15</sup> Myriad findings are emerging, but a few particular and overlapping truths appear especially pertinent. Millennials simply lack the confidence that church and religion—really, institutions in general—have the motivation, morality, and means to address the ills of society.<sup>16</sup> They have seen or even experienced the abuses and inefficiencies of the organized church and often fail to be convinced of its value-add. This generation typically finds the church irrelevant, quite boring, and abysmal in doing “good work in the world.”<sup>17</sup> In short, the voice and influence of the church in America is shrinking amongst our young adults.

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<sup>11</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 198.

<sup>12</sup> Compare that with 65% GenX, 70% Boomer, and 75% Silent. The trend is vivid and strong. Bradford Richardson, “Millennials Seeking Fulfillment in Work Instead of Faith or Family,” <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jun/6/millennials-seeking-fulfillment-in-work-instead-of/> (accessed September 24, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 198.

<sup>15</sup> Many examples exist, including those of: The Lily Endowment [Lily Endowment, Inc. “Lily Endowment Annual Report 2016.” <http://lilyendowment.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/complete-report.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2018)]; Pew Research [Richard Fry, Ruth Igielnick, and Eileen Patten, “How Millennials today compare with their grandparents 50 years ago,” *Fact Tank: News in the Numbers*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/> (accessed September 21, 2018).]; Deloitte [Deloitte, “The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning Over the Next Generation of Leaders,” <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2018).]; and Barna, which is soon to be released [David Kinnaman, “How to Vocationally Disciple Millennials,” Webinar, Bonus Lab from Made to Flourish, Ventura, CA, September 25, 2018.].

<sup>16</sup> Armand J. Boehme, “The Church and the Culture of the Millennials—The Best of Worst of Times?” *Missio Apostolica*: 95-124.

<sup>17</sup> Barna Group. “Millennials at Church: What Millennials Want When They Visit Church.” *Millennials & Generations*. <https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/> (accessed June 15, 2018).

Though, this shouldn't surprise us all that much. Millennials are "digital natives" who grew up in "digital Babylon."<sup>18</sup> With 24-hour news coverage, social media, and hyper-connectivity through the internet, the world has been an increasingly smaller place since millennials came into it.<sup>19</sup> The average millennial drinks in 2700 hours of screen time per year. (Compare that with somewhere between 110 and 220 hours of "in—church" time *for those who actually go*.)<sup>20</sup> Every scandal, every misstep, and every distinct perspective is accessible and often communicated in compelling ways. Further, the societal "gatekeepers" known by this generation tend toward pessimism if not being outright antithetical to biblical Christianity.<sup>21</sup> As James Davison Hunter has put it, "[T]he reminders of God's love or his judgment or of his purposes in daily experience—all of those things that reinforced belief—may not have disappeared but they have receded from shared public life."<sup>22</sup> In their place we have an ever-stronger social realm that assumes the contestability beliefs and narratives.

Moving away from traditional religion, "millennials are looking elsewhere with increasing urgency" to find relational locales in which to live out their primary values: community, personal transformation, social transformation, purpose, creativity, and accountability.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, though much less connected to organized religion than their predecessors, this generation reflects fairly similar patterns of spiritual belief and practice, even with distinct improvements in certain areas.<sup>24</sup> The social groups millennials form tend to "promote neighborhood welfare, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 105-106.

<sup>20</sup> Kinnaman, "How to Vocationally Disciple Millennials," *Made to Flourish*.

<sup>21</sup> Greg Koukl, "How Social Gatekeepers Shape the Next Generation," *Stand to Reason*.

<sup>22</sup> James Davison Hunter, *The Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

<sup>23</sup> Hamman, "The Millennial Generation and the Church."

<sup>24</sup> Richard D. Waters and Denise Sevick Bortree, "'Can We Talk About the Direction of This Church?': The Impact of Responsiveness and Conflict on Millennials' Relationship With Religious Institutions," *Journal of Media & Religion*, Vol. 11 (2012): 200-215.

spread messages for the betterment of individuals and society.”<sup>25</sup> But the distinctly *Christian* nature of these activities is evaporating. The secular age of integrated pluralism and societal engagement millennials inhabit *and* are helping to create challenges and at times undermines traditional American Christianity. Perhaps this is where the opportunity is found.

## **THE MILLENNIAL LAND OF OPPORTUNITY**

We’ve established that millennials are drifting away from traditional American Christianity. And yet, they still have many beliefs and values that mirror their parents and grandparents.<sup>26</sup> The easy response is to extend the index finger at those “rebellious youngin’s” who are entitled, unwilling to submit to authority, and demonstrate such arrogant individualism. Maybe we just need to preach louder and with more force the word of God in the same ways we always have, exposing these common millennial sins, and hopefully some of them will eventually repent and subscribe to what we say. The trouble with this approach is that it regurgitates the cliches and “shallow, concrete, black-and-white responses” that made millennials deaf to religion in the first place.<sup>27</sup> The other problem is that it simply does not work.

The next response that some adopt is to use new marketing ploys and strategy shifts that appropriate cultural forms they see millennials already appreciating “out there.” Millennials are on Twitter so now our church is too. You like screens? Now they’re everywhere in our church. Pallet walls will make millennials feel like they’re at the local hipster coffee shop, especially with that latte in-hand they picked up in the foyer. And we’ll sprinkle our sermons will “savvy” movie quotes, song lyrics, and celebrity references. Here’s the issue: Millennials have been marketed to since they were in diapers. “They will “smell ‘fake’ a mile away. They know when people aren’t being real and sincere. They are attracted to organizations where the

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<sup>25</sup> Hamman, “The Millennial Generation and the Church.”

<sup>26</sup> Waters and Bortree, “Can We Talk About the Direction of the Church?”

<sup>27</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 234.

leaders are transparent and open.”<sup>28</sup> There is nothing less sincere than velcro-ing cultural forms to something that hasn’t changed in substance. You will feel to them like a brand that is trying too hard to succeed through “traditional advertising.”<sup>29</sup>

So if traditional American Christianity with the volume turned up won’t work, and traditional American Christianity with cultural forms pasted on is ineffective, then what is left? The answer is discoverable in the ways millennials already engage the world and the questions they are (often implicitly) asking. And if anything is broadly true of millennials, it is that they deeply desire to be listened to, feeling as though their perspectives and contributions are appreciated.<sup>30</sup> Now would be an excellent time to start.

Young adults often exit the church and have no interest in returning because they experience something that is more “traditional American” than it is Christian. They are quite exhausted from mere abstractions and stale platitudes designed for a cultural context that is all but extinct. Dismissing axioms and advice that do not carry felt value and practicality, millennials hunger for a rooted Christianity that extends into the corridors of life as they experience it. Responses to life’s complexities need nuanced and compassionate answers that match the weight and fragility of the matters at hand. Millennials are also largely disappointed by self-help approaches that fail to tap into a richer sense of purpose and meaning. Besides, they “have products of all kinds promising to make their life better; what they lack is something bigger than themselves that gives their lives meaning, purpose, and significance.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> The stats are telling: 89% of millennials trust recommendations from family and friend over claims from a brand; 84% of millennials say user-generated content influence what they buy; 84% don’t trust traditional advertising. To quote the author, “The goal is for posts to showcase your products in a natural way that doesn’t make them feel like advertisements.” Erin Sagin, “10 Stats to Help You Market to Millennials,” *The WordStream Blog*, <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2016/02/02/marketing-to-millennials> (accessed September 21, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 149; Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 248.

<sup>31</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 233.

In other words, an articulation of Christianity that fails to relate to the everyday lived realities of millennials and is unable to connect them to something substantial and real outside of themselves is likely to slide quite unnoticed through their grid of what is useful or important. Well, providence is on our side. From the cultural mandate to the new heavens and new earth, the biblical narrative has much to communicate concerning value creation, daily tasks, relational networks, societal involvement, and cultural creativity—all things millennials are working hard to make sense of in their lives. Herein lies promising opportunity for what is often termed the “faith and work movement.” Far from a mere gimmick, a passing trend, or a sellout to the “social gospel,” the effort to integrate our Christian faith with work, vocation, and economic and social systems is an endeavor to recover beautiful and timely truths found within a truly biblical Christianity. Yes, learning to disciple our people for an integrated presence in the world has pragmatic value because of the millennial ache to make sense of their lives in rich yet practical ways. But making holistic disciples *isn't mere pragmatism*. It's simply what pastors and Christians in general are called and equipped to do. “When people are saved by God through faith in Christ they are not only being saved from their sins, they are saved in order to resume the tasks mandated at creation, the task of caring for and cultivating a world that honors God and reflects his character and glory.”<sup>32</sup> So what is the biblical backdrop for this holistic discipleship through the lens of the “faith and work movement”?

### **INTERLUDE: CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION, & RESTORATION**

As a refresher for some and an apologetic for others, let us briefly consider the story God is telling through human history on the stage of creation as it relates to the full spectrum of human life. Many have discerned a four-chapter breakdown of the grand narrative of Scripture: 1. Creation: *What God wants for us*; 2. Fall: *What happened to us and what went wrong with the world*; 3. Redemption: *What God has done in Jesus Christ to put things right*; and 4.

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<sup>32</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 236.

Restoration: *How history will turn out in the end as a result.*<sup>33</sup> Much of otherwise biblical Christianity in America has heavily emphasized chapters two and three—“You have sinned against a righteous God and Jesus has come to die and save you from that sin; repent and believe.” This is certainly correct as far as it goes. But we have apparently taken a scalpel to the very first two and very final two chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1—2 and the original goodness and glorious intent of the created order is seldom heard on the lips of pastors. And Revelation 21—22, with its magnificent depiction of our final home in the new heavens and the new earth, is basically incognito.<sup>34</sup> The functional output is disciples of Jesus who are unaware of “what it’s all for” and “where it’s all headed.” And yet millennials in our cultural moment are asking just these questions.

#### *CHAPTER ONE: CREATION*

In the beginning the triune God spoke creation into existence. Nothing but the greatness of his love and joy in his creative power prompted God to create. Yet it wasn’t simply a remote activity of God; it was something he was intimately and intentionally connected to as a conduit of his glory, personality, and purposes. “[N]ot only did God make the world, he also delighted in it. Seven times in the earliest pages of Scripture, God celebrated the world, rejoicing in its goodness. And then, as the final act of creation, God made human beings, not only as emblems of this goodness, but also as stewards of it—bearing the noble calling to nurture the world’s native goodness unto fullness.”<sup>35</sup>

God created humanity, his image, to interact with and within the created order according to his good purposes. We were designed to “work and keep” creation as representatives of the

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<sup>33</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 43.

<sup>34</sup> Andy Crouch, “The Christian Call to Culture Making,” Lecture, *Veritas et Caritas Institute* event at Front Range Christian School, January 24, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory Thompson, “The Church in Our Time: Nurturing Congregations of Faithful Presence” (Charlottesville, VA: New City Commons, 2011), 13.

king, “called to spread the blessings of Eden to all the earth.”<sup>36</sup> The “good” and “very good” created order still required ruling and subduing in order to cultivate the raw materials of the earth to make them beneficial to others. This is the cultural mandate given to men and women (Genesis 1:26–28). God’s vision was a flourishing humanity enjoying life together complete with people having families, farming the land, starting new ventures, inventing useful tools, creating beauty, and developing social systems; in short, we were created to create culture for the glory of God and the good of others.

#### *CHAPTER TWO: FALL*

Of course this vision did not remain untainted for long. The great deceiver cunningly toppled God’s design through subverting God’s good reign. Declaring their independence from God, humanity began to fracture and dissolve—and so did creation, the very thing we were made to steward. Because unity with God was severed, relationships in every direction became diseased as well, including with the world itself. “Though God intended creation to reflect the state of peaceful wholeness between God, humans, and the world—a state the Bible calls shalom—sin has broken this wholeness, splintering it into the ruin of corruption...embracing not only our broken inner lives, but also our broken bodies, our broken relationships, our broken cities, and our broken world.”<sup>37</sup>

Though never rescinded, the cultural mandate was now embraced by broken and rebellious human persons, orienting themselves around their own glory rather than the glory of God. Not only does brother kill brother (Genesis 4), but entire civilizations strive to build their systems and structures around self-promotion (Genesis 11). The unraveling of the cosmos across every square inch came into full effect. Millennia later, we hear and share in creation’s groaning still today.

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<sup>36</sup> William Edgar, *Created & Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 168.

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, “The Church in Our Time,” 15.

### CHAPTER THREE: REDEMPTION

But all is not lost. As early as Genesis 3:15, we receive the *protoevangelium*, the first hint at gospel redemption—the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. The unfolding narrative leaves readers aching for that promise to be fulfilled. *How will God finally accomplish his purpose to deliver his people?* Yahweh's covenant with Abraham provides greater clarity and confidence, assuring him that his descendants would be blessed with the presence of God so that they would in turn bless the world. Jump ahead to the exodus—where God mercifully and mightily rescues his people—followed by the tabernacle and the temple—where God begins taking up residence among his people—and we see God's vision begin to take root. Here is what life oriented toward the worship of the one true God looks like—family, community, work, and society are all structured to promote *shalom*, human flourishing to its fullest extent. When Yahweh dwells with people, the redemptive entailments are felt and seen in every direction.

But the long and sorted history of Israel—God's chosen nation—perpetuates the longing for full redemption. Rebellion, injustice, self-serving leadership, and false worship persist. Israel, redeemed to be the image of God on earth, once again spreading the blessings of life with God across the world, only proved disappointing and counterproductive. And so God enters his own creation as the incarnate Jesus Christ, the true and better Adam and the true and better Israel. Coming as the unexpected King, Jesus nevertheless established a kingdom—his kingdom—on earth. After conquering sin, satan, and death through his sinless life, substitutionary sacrifice, and vindicating resurrection, Jesus gave us two vital things: 1. The promise of his Spirit, God's full presence with his people (which he fulfilled at Pentecost); and 2. The mandate to go and make disciples through baptizing and teaching (the great commission).

It is here we understand how following Christ re-humanizes us. Designed for right relationship with God, ourselves, others, and creation, we cannot obtain this on our own.

Through the reconciling work of Jesus, we are brought back to God, and the transformative impact of life with God begins to permeate every other relationship and activity we engage. This is why Jesus' "great commission" includes more than simply "getting people saved"—he also anticipates and requires that we will *teach people how to live as though they are truly saved*. He shows us how to be human again in every dimension of our lives, taking up again the original call God gave humans back in the garden. As John Frame puts it:

*The Great Commission, therefore, can be understood as a republication of the cultural mandate for the semi-eschatological age. Unlike the original cultural mandate, it presupposes the existence of sin and the accomplishment of redemption. It recognizes that if the world is to be filled with worshipers of God, subduing the earth as his vassal kings, they must first be converted to Christ through the preaching of the gospel. But when the evangelization of the world is complete the result will be that envisaged in the cultural mandate.”<sup>38</sup>*

#### CHAPTER FOUR: RESTORATION

And so the work of restoration funnels through the people of God, his church, both gathered in organized worship and scattered in everyday work in the world. Living within the tension-filled “already, but not yet” of Jesus’ reign, we bring aspects of the fully realized eschaton to bear on our present arenas of stewardship. The gospel is *profoundly* personal, but it was never intended to be *merely* personal. Transformed people live transformed lives. And the influence, authority, agency, creativity, and productivity of these transformed people will be increasingly marked by the aroma of Christ as each is wielded for the glory of God and the flourishing of humanity. “[I]n Jesus Christ, God is taking his creation—which has, because of sin, fallen into ruin—and redemptively restoring it in every part, until the time of consummation, in which all things will at last be made new. It is this Christ-centered, comprehensive, and restorational gospel that should animate the life and witness of the Christian church.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, “The Church in Our Time,” 19.

We eagerly await the *new* heavens and the *new* earth, where we will enjoy the newly integrated spiritual-material cosmos under the reign of a fully present God. The abyss will be no more, along with every tear, reason for mourning, the full spectrum of pain, and death itself being utterly wiped away. But for now, we live as citizens of the already-established kingdom of God in the *present* earth influenced by its *present* heavenly realities. And we lay hold of the words of our conquering King Jesus, “Behold I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Indeed he is. As the Head, he is accomplishing this restoration through the labor of his bod. That’s us. It seems there is plenty of work yet to be done.

### **TAKING CONTEXTUAL CUES**

The above interlude provides, in broad strokes, the grand story of which we still play a vital part. Quite amazingly, this true narrative, when told in biblical and compelling ways, carries contextual weight with millennials. They long to be connected to a purpose much larger than themselves *and* to meaningfully make sense of their everyday individual lives.<sup>40</sup> It’s tempting to feel this is an untenable paradox, that is, until we step back and recognize the Bible’s rich and coherent expressions of human life with God and for the world.

Millennials are (implicitly and explicitly) asking certain questions. We must be poised to answer them through our pastoral ministry. Rather than a new tool to “get millennials into my church,” the vision of whole-life discipleship through integrating the Christian faith with work and workplace, neighbors and neighborhood, systems and society is a recovery of some largely lost aspects of biblical Christianity. Further, this allows us to be adequately and beautifully contextual with gospel-centered ministry. Contextualization is not simply giving people what they want to hear. “Rather, it is giving people *the Bible’s answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking, *in language forms*

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<sup>40</sup> This comes out in numerous reports: Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 196; Richardson, “Millennials Seeking Fulfillment in Work Instead of Faith or Family;” Grace Duddy Pomroy, “Stewardship: What the Church Can Learn from Millennials,” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 2 (April 2018): 11-15.

they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel.”<sup>41</sup> Human participation as the church in the mission of God through the lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration is a grounded and fitting contextualization of the eternal gospel message.

Three issues in particular emerge amongst millennials. More precisely, there are three primary sieve-like questions millennials—following Jesus or not—implicitly thrust upon any truth assertion they hear. Those desiring to pastor, and pastor effectively, this generation will do well to take these contextual cues in their approach to ministry. This will allow us to translate and adapt “the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself,” which is the very substance of sound contextualization.<sup>42</sup>

### 1. DOES THIS FIT MY EXPERIENCE?

Perhaps the quickest way for a millennial to dismiss a comment is for a communicator to come across archaic, irrelevant, or disconnected from the listener’s own personal experience. If the visceral response is something akin to, “I have never felt[thought/seen/experienced] that,” then virtually all is lost. This is the issue of *relevance*, the first contextual cue of which pastors must make strong mental note.

Sadly, only about half of millennials find any relevance in church at all.<sup>43</sup> Though, this shouldn’t take us by too much surprise. Many church leaders, pastors or otherwise, who provide governing oversight and possess the most influential voices in the church have been weened, trained, and formed in an era of substantially contrasting presuppositions with today’s. The “type of [worldview] scaffolding” that existed in previous generations is not the same for the millennials. This is a generation defined much more in terms of micro-level dimensions of life

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<sup>41</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Barna, “Millennials at Church.”

rather than national and world events; identities emerge from close interpersonal relationships and experiences. Common qualifiers amongst millennials include, “At least that’s how I personally feel,” “I can only speak for myself,” and “That’s just how I feel.”<sup>44</sup> With information and entertainment continuously at their fingertips, “they have never known a time when one source was looked to as the keeper of truth or the final authority on a subject matter.”<sup>45</sup>

Multiple perspectives, deceitful authorities, conflicting claims, and the like are not a recent addition for millennials—it’s quite honestly all they have known. An assertion of “this is fact,” therefore, is vetted through personal experience. Millennials at times carry a reputation of repeatedly poking holes in what others say. This is often because they see the “gray areas, messy lives, and complicated answers” that are required to navigate life.<sup>46</sup> Simplistic platitudes that conflict with existential life in the world cannot compete with the flavorful and complex issue-engagement seen on a screen or heard from a friend. In this sense, pastoral leadership needs to feel less like Proverbs and more like Ecclesiastes. As Derek Rishmawy has put it: “We need to show the consistency, coherence, and comeliness of the gospel to this generation... actively answer[ing] objections to the gospel from *inside* the mindset of our cross-pressured culture.”<sup>47</sup>

If the goal is to shape and disciple our people for all of life, and millennials demand our claims to somehow engage their lived experience, then the avenue should be obvious: Let’s talk about those things. Let us bring the rich and beautiful word of God to bear on the physical places and relational spaces people are actually engaged with on a consistent basis. Marriage, kids, and personal ethics are important, but much more awaits us to mine for relatability. Money,

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<sup>44</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 172-173.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Derek Rishmawy in Colin Hansen, ed., *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2017), 59.

employment, bosses, disappointment at work, confusion around calling, frustrating coworkers, anxiety around deadlines, depression over job loss, lack of wisdom concerning transitions, sadness over unused potential, neighborhood involvement, life in the city—all of these realities and countless others are directly relevant to the lives of millennials (and many others for that matter), and they desperately need the truth, beauty, and goodness of God’s word to provide pastoral direction.

## 2. COULD THIS WORK FOR ME AS WELL?

If a message passes the “experience-test,” then it will next meet the question about practical import. Young adults want to know if something is applicable, ideally posthaste. Pastoral faithfulness with millennials must include articulate connections between idea and practice. In other words, the abstract must become concrete, and what is concrete must be customizable to the millennial in the proverbial pew. This is the issue of *livability*, and is the second contextual cue needed for pastors seeking to serve millennials.

Even if examples, stories, and points of application are relevant, it doesn’t necessarily imply that the content of the illustration can be actualized in the lives of those listening. There is an intense need to make concrete the broader principles and truths such that a new moral imagination animates the lives of millennials. In short, this is shepherding the application, learning to bring theological and biblical truths to bear on the ins and outs of everyday life—in the home, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and throughout broader society—in ways that are genuinely and satisfyingly livable.

Much of this can (and probably should) take place through meaningful interpersonal relationships between the pastor and the people. Roughly 75% of millennials desire a mentor in their lives.<sup>48</sup> They ache for strong relationships with older generations.<sup>49</sup> To exacerbate the

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<sup>48</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 144. (Deloitte’s research says much the same.)

<sup>49</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 223.

issue, millennials subsist in a milieu that is “hollowing out the middle while concentrating the ends” of society’s relationships. We “stay in constant contact with our family and closest friends, and also build loose networks with people around the nation and the world who might share a single interest or hobby.” But this comes at “the expense of the more middling relationships we might otherwise have had with some of the people who constitute our actual real-world *communities*.”<sup>50</sup> Without these more personal institutions of formation through concrete example, millennials are left with nothing but impersonal and detached voices conveying the nature of the “the good life.”

Particularly in a society in which the plausibility structures of belief have been largely demolished, millennials need clear, accessible, and concrete models of men and women who faithfully walk with Christ. This, in a sense, incarnates the abstract claims of Christianity. “In formation, it is the culture and the community that gives shape and expression to it that is they key. Healthy formation is impossible without a healthy culture embedded within the warp and woof of community.”<sup>51</sup> Relational proximity between older generation Christians—starting with the pastor—and millennials, “firms up” the plausibility and sense of livability concerning the Christian faith. And this increases confidence.<sup>52</sup> Contextualized pastors will lovingly leverage the fact that human persons “are naturally, innately, and inescapably *social* beings who depend upon social relationships for their ongoing life and development,”<sup>53</sup> and that millennials feel the present dearth in our churches of embodied examples of holistic discipleship played out in every facet of life.

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<sup>50</sup> Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America’s Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 89.

<sup>51</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 227.

<sup>52</sup> Although an atheist, Berger is helpful in understanding the (God-designed) sociological principles underlying religious confidence. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 47.

<sup>53</sup> Christian Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 46.

### 3. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OTHER PEOPLE I KNOW?

Even if an idea presented hits on lived experience and appears practicable, the pastor has not escaped complete scrutiny quite yet. Millennials are much more heavily relationally-invested, at least at the theoretical level, and certainly swim in much more diverse waters than previous iterations of American culture. They will quickly consider how a statement or assertion would land with the people they know, or somehow feel connected to. Are all relevant demographics considered? What would people in group X feel about this? This contextual cue is *cultural awareness*, and perhaps requires the highest degree of pastoral patience and sensitivity.

We currently sit within the most ethnically diverse nation in America's history, with the lowest proportion of caucasians. Experiences and interactions with people of various backgrounds, cultures, and layers of assumptions are manifold for the common millennial.<sup>54</sup> "We all know sane, rational people, living much the same as we do yet believing radically different things. Your Sikh neighbors, your Buddhist gym buddy, and your atheist co-worker buy groceries at the same niche food shop, catch the Marvel franchise of superhero flicks, and love their families. But none of them goes to your church on Sunday."<sup>55</sup> The non-Cristian person or perspective cannot be so easily dismissed or quickly painted as heinous, trite, or visibly destructive. The empirical relational data simply points to the contrary. And this has led to millennials being at extreme "ease with racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity."<sup>56</sup>

The "others-bashing" tilt in many church gatherings is indeed what drives not so few millennials away from Christianity. Substantial majorities of millennials who don't go to church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%) and

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<sup>54</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 80-81.

<sup>55</sup> Rishmawy, *Our Secular Age*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *The Next America*, 33.

insensitive to others (70%).<sup>57</sup> To be sure, there are those who so fundamentally and ardently oppose the voice of God that any articulation of certain biblical truths concerning the nature of humanity and society will garner vitriolic reactions. But let those around us be offended by the untainted words of God (if they need be), and never by our own careless or callous communication of them.

As we considered in the interlude, the gospel has profound implications for culture, society, and each corner of everyday life. But these entailments of the gospel are to be handled with wisdom and care. Pastors are to be acutely aware of the integrated pluralism that makes up the daily experiences of the millennial—friends, coworkers, neighbors, family members, acquaintances, baristas, faces in the news, stories in TV shows, movies, music, etc. Such awareness will cultivate an ability to speak directly yet compassionately to the complex issues and realities against which millennials bump with routine regularity.

## **PASTORAL PASSAGEWAYS**

These contextual cues do not leave today's pastors with their hands tied. In fact, as we've already briefly considered above, opportunity knocks at some new doors, if one is willing to discern new passageways. Never departing from eternal truth, pastors ought to engage new forms in their pastoral ministry. After all, "sound contextualization means translating and adapting to the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself."<sup>58</sup> These cues provide at least three glorious pastoral passageways for church leaders to pursue.

### *1. EXPANSIVE PREACHING*

True contextualization will not slide into cowardice. God's word in Scripture is abiding in its truth, relevance, and beauty. Further, to fully communicate the grand narrative found in the

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<sup>57</sup> Barna, *Millennials at Church*.

<sup>58</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

Bible is to connect with the questions millennials are asking. The immanence of God and his awareness of human experience flow through redemptive history. Robust hermeneutics will expose rich practicality. In turn, the pastor must shepherd the application, explaining and demonstrating how God's word illuminates and informs our present culture and concerns. In short, preaching must go deeper into the Grand Story, and wider into the personal stories of the millennials we pastor.

“The pastor’s job is to continually renew the word of God for the present age.”<sup>59</sup> This involves exploring how the rich truth in the Bible connects to the rich complexities in our world today. It’s no small or easy task, especially with a millennial culture that often presumes someone is being preachy or disrespectful when a firm stance or belief is articulated at all.<sup>60</sup> Given this context, pastors “need to actively answer objections to the gospel from *inside* the mindset of our cross-pressured culture on a regular basis as a part of our scriptural exposition.”<sup>61</sup> It is in this sense that preaching is about more than the Bible, though never less; faithful preaching will always also be about history and civilization—the very history and civilization millennials are currently living within and helping to create.<sup>62</sup>

Consistently proclaiming how the eternal truths of Scripture found in God’s grand narrative connect to everyday dynamics, questions, and difficulties builds legitimacy around the gospel. This teaching liturgy instills confidence in the recipients that God alone provides sound wisdom for life in any age—including the modern one.<sup>63</sup> Isn’t this what we’re after anyway—the formation of disciples who love God and others, “oriented toward the cultivation of

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<sup>59</sup> Greg Forster, *Joy for the World: How Christianity Lost Its Cultural Influence & Can Begin Rebuilding It* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 112.

<sup>60</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 196.

<sup>61</sup> Rishmawy, *Our Secular Age*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Forster, *Joy for the World*, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 40.

faithfulness in the totality of life”? If this be so—and I pray it is—then what’s required is “intentionality and...the hard work of teaching, training, and cautioning believers with wisdom in the ways of Christ so that they are fit for any calling and any service to him.”<sup>64</sup>

As Tom Nelson puts it, “From cradle to grave, a robust theology of faith, work, and economics [ought to] be woven into the fabric of the teaching ministries of the local church. A liturgical regularity reelecting the integration of work and economics will be evident when the local church gathers.”<sup>65</sup> How can the preacher of the Bible accomplish this? Below is a list of questions to begin sharpening the pastor toward that direction:

1. What do you read beyond what could be feasibly assigned in a seminary class?
2. Where in the city could you do sermon prep, outside of the church building?
3. What people and situations do you consider when preparing?
4. How do your examples, stories, and application points relate to the fullness and complexity of human life in 21st century America?
5. If a non-Christian were to listen to 50 of your sermons at random, what aspects of life would he or she assume God cares about?
6. Have you considered the fundamental narratives millennials in your congregation and/or city operate within? And further how the gospel intercepts and improves them?
7. When was the last time you asked for direct and honest feedback on your preaching from millennials?
8. In what ways do you connect your preaching to your own life and experience, demonstrating proper vulnerability?

It’s true, millennials likely expect more from a preacher than people their age several decades ago. But it’s not unattainable. It also takes seriously the secular age within which we all increasingly live. The word of God, and the gospel in particular, is expansive enough to encompass every dimensions of human existence. The millennials within earshot ache to hear just how.

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<sup>64</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love: Investing in Your Community's Compassion and Capacity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2017), 169.

## 2. PASTORAL PRESENCE

Millennials must feel both known and valued. This will not happen if they are not both known and valued *in actuality*. Feigned interest will be sniffed out immediately.<sup>66</sup> What is required is pastoral presence with those who are being pastored—a relational presence that provides visibility and vulnerability in a two-way relationship. A pastor too relationally distant from the people creates suspicion in the soul of a millennial: A man with power, a platform, and perceived perfection is a dangerous thing. Join the rest of humanity in the struggle to make sense of a world full of brokenness, nuance, and layers of complexity; this will gain you a voice in the life of the young adult.

No matter the domain, the biggest motivator in life for millennials is relationships.<sup>67</sup> Closely connected, they persistently want to know the “why” behind the what.<sup>68</sup> Relational proximity to church leaders establishes context for the relational itch to be scratched, the underlying “why” to be seen and experienced firsthand, and, as a result, trust to be built. This is not simply a function of quantity; it’s often more about quality. The types of relational time, the direction of pastoral conversations, and the location of pastoral meetings all convey weight, meaning, purpose, and value. Additionally, there are ways for pastors to make themselves *feel* more present to their people by virtue of what they celebrate and highlight, even if true proximity is more limited.

This felt need is aggravated by the “age of anxiety” within which Americans live and besides which millennials have known little.<sup>69</sup> Margaret Manning Shull puts it well:

*[M]any of us feel as if we are always on edge or we sense an underlying feeling of dread. For our world is often a very frightening place. Indeed, the time that we live in has been described as the “age of anxiety.” Perhaps this is true, in part, because our 24/7*

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<sup>66</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 148.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Pomroy, “Stewardship: What the Church Can Learn from Millennials.”

<sup>69</sup> Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 81-104.

*access to technology ensures that we are immersed in global images and headlines of terrorism, epidemics, the threat of environmental collapse, violent crimes, economic woes, international conflict, and political strife. Particularly in the West, the incidence of anxiety-related diagnoses are increasing among individuals of all ages, including among teenagers, college-students and young adults who have grown up in a technological age full of anxiety-producing images.<sup>70</sup>*

This widespread angst is found in the cultural swimming water of the millennial fish. And it prompts them seek wisdom from someone somewhere. Pastors need to see and seize the shepherding moment to invest in, care for, and speak into the lives of millennials. They actually want it.

While numerous ways of achieving meaningful pastoral presence exist, two jump to the foreground. First, a pastor should meet with congregants in their places of work. Get to know the nature of her workaday world. Eat lunch at his office. Second, highlight the normal occupations and work of people in the church. Celebrate and teach how the everyday and seemingly mundane labor of God’s people throughout the city connects to the kingdom and mission of God. Third, mentorship and shared life are extremely important. The life of the pastor leads and helps create a broader atmosphere of rich community. Examples abound for how this can work itself out in the local church:

1. Meet with congregants at or near their workplace, instead of at the church building
2. Develop genuine friendships with those you pastor
3. Ask questions about the nature of their work, dynamics of the their workplace, tensions experienced, and joys to be celebrated
4. Follow up about projects, deadlines, presentations, work trips, hirings/firings, setbacks, opportunities, promotions, and the like
5. Learn the demographics and makeup of congregants’ neighborhoods and ways they seek to engage and serve
6. Enjoy recreation and other activities alongside those you pastor
7. Commission people on Sunday mornings to their particular vocations—family, work, community, neighborhood, and city
8. Host classes and seminars or provide curriculum and study guides for topics that relate to life beyond the church walls

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<sup>70</sup> Margaret Manning Shull, “Age of Anxiety” (RZIM: A Slice of Infinity, 2018).

For a generation that pines for mentorship and relational investment from the generations above them, the opportunities abound for the pastor willing to restructure priorities and schedules to gain more and higher quality relational proximity to those in the pews. Humble and relationally available church leaders show to millennials a particular kind of strength that they admire and want to emulate.<sup>71</sup> They also listen to these voices. If 89% of millennials trust recommendations for household products from a friend or family member over a distant brand, how much more will they trust the kind, wise, and pastorally present voice of their primary spiritual leader?<sup>72</sup> The opportunity awaits; the question is if we have the courage to sacrifice and rearrange in the necessary ways.

### 3. MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Churches and pastors must additionally have a God-oriented vision for the entire society around them. The in-breaking kingdom of God under the reign of King Jesus is to be cultivated and encouraged through the activity of the church. Internal investment amongst the church *gathered* is essential, no doubt, but the church *scattered* must likewise be appreciated and activated. Done are the days of isolated “within our walls only” ministry. (And honestly, that’s never been a biblical approach to pastoral ministry, it was just culturally tolerable and sustainable for many decades.) “Millennial Christians abhor churches that focus inwardly, and they are more concerned about meeting their own needs than those of the community and the nations.”<sup>73</sup> Yet only 8% of millennials who go to church do so because “the church does good work in the world.”<sup>74</sup> Since this (quite large) generation cares about the welfare of the city, pastors have the opportunity to lead the charge on this biblical front with loads of automatic buy-

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<sup>71</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 248.

<sup>72</sup> Erin Sagin, “10 Stats to Help You Market to Millennials,” *The WordStream Blog*.

<sup>73</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 255.

<sup>74</sup> Barna, *Millennials at Church*.

in. These young adults are helping us see our need for a missional engagement that holds more substance.

This begins with a language shift for many. “Missions” must expand to include people beyond church-planters and those working for parachurch ministries or other nonprofit organizations. All of life and all activities may be participatory in the mission of God, when rightly understood and engaged. Sometimes the changes are explicit—instead of talking about “full-time ministry” as opposed to “secular jobs,” pastors should speak of many types of ministry (literally, “service”) no matter the context or societal domain. Each Christian is gifted, wired, and equipped in distinct yet equally valuable ways, able to reengage the cultural mandate as a redeemed, Spirit-filled person to serve the world and glorify God.

But language is only the start, providing the framed-out walls awaiting electrical, insulation, drywall, and eventually some nice paint. It is necessary to talk about every moral occupation as a godly vocation; it is just not sufficient. How exactly does an engineer image the triune God through his work? In what specific ways does a medical doctor show forth God’s character? Is there truly a connection between the work of a web developer and the Lord she serves? Answering these questions and myriad others related to everyday work in the world must become essential in the forming of disciples, which is nothing short of helping people “cultivate integrated lives of purpose and meaning, especially in the realm of work.”<sup>75</sup> Successful ministry must be redefined (for some) to fundamentally include launching millennials (and others) into “Babylon” as mature, grounded, and fruitful followers of Jesus in every sphere of life.<sup>76</sup>

Truly, this has always been the task of the church. As Greg Forster argues: “[W]hen Christians integrate their faith with their work, performing their work as a manifestation of

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<sup>75</sup> Kinnaman, “How to Vocationally Disciple Millennials,” *Made to Flourish*.

<sup>76</sup> Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 241.

discipleship and prioritizing fruitful service to their neighbors, they spend most of their lives infusing the impact of the Spirit's work in their hearts directly into the very bloodstream of human civilization."<sup>77</sup> Transformed people living transformed lives, stewarding and leveraging all God has given in service to the world so that Jesus may be experienced, believed, and known—this is the goal of pastoral leadership. This formation process led by pastors must be designed around “the hard work of teaching, training, and cautioning believers with wisdom in the ways of Christ” so that they are equipped for any vocation in service to him.<sup>78</sup> Unless it's led from the front, it has little hope of being carried out in the life of the people under the pastor's care.

There is yet more. Institutionally, the church has opportunity to wield tangible and intangible assets for the good of the city, promoting fuller participation in God's mission. Many local churches have a church building. Typically this is used for Sunday services and a variety of other “churchy” activities during the week. This is excellent, expected, and needed. But how can these buildings also be used for the flourishing of the surrounding community? Where the pastor is unsure, it's likely a handful of millennials have latent ideas awaiting retrieval. The local church can't do it all, however. Church leaders ought to learn the institutional landscape of their city.<sup>79</sup> What organizations are doing effective work to meet the needs of the vulnerable and help produce thriving humans in their communities? Pastors have the opportunity to use their voice to steer people toward them. Better yet, a formal partnership can develop that involves financial support, volunteer investment, and/or co-hosted events. Millennials must see their churches actively concerning themselves with important, redemptive work in the city. Only then will these young adults be convinced that *this church's* theology has true value.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Forster, *Joy for the World*, 246.

<sup>78</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 227.

<sup>79</sup> A good grid for thinking through this would be the six endowments put out by Thriving Cities.

<sup>80</sup> Henry B. Johnson, “Post-Church America as a Mission Field,” *Brethren in Christ: History and Life*: 61-76; Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 223.

Here's a summary list of questions for embarking on fuller missional engagement:

1. What language shifts need to take place amongst leadership and printed material to convey the missional importance of your people's various vocations?
2. Do your people see their work and life in the city as an essential component of discipleship?
3. How are you equipping your people to connect the character and mission of God to their occupations and everyday life in the world?
4. Do you believe your work is a "higher calling" compared to those you pastor? (If you do, this will be conveyed subtly but loudly.)
5. In what ways could you leverage your building to produce felt benefit to those in your neighborhood and community?
6. How can you wield your voice to highlight, promote, and encourage whole-life missional engagement among and through your people?
7. With whom can you partner to seek the flourishing of your city?
8. How could you create space for people (especially millennials) to develop and implement their ideas for serving the city?

### **CHRISTIANITY'S ODDS IN THE LATE MODERN AGE**

If millennials ache for a message that can make sense of felt experience, synthesize at a personal level, and demonstrate genuine care for people and the world, then Christianity's odds are quite attractive. Embracing the full narrative of Scripture—God's created purpose, humanity's fall into rebellion, Christ's redeeming work, and the hope of a restored cosmos—strengthens pastors in our cultural moment to effectively equip and shepherd millennials. We also need contextualized wisdom, listening to the cultural cues resounding from today's young adults. Discerning these desires, the opportunity is clear: Pastors must meet millennials with rich practices of preaching, presence, and missional engagement, thereby forming disciples of Jesus for the whole of life. Imagine what could be if pastors choose to lay hold of this vision.

Consider this: By 2020, millennials will account for roughly 50% of the workforce.<sup>81</sup> "[N]o longer the leaders of tomorrow....increasingly [millennials are] leaders of today."<sup>82</sup> And there's a lot going for them. They are the most educated generation in history. They are also the most diverse and the most urban. This young and versatile 80+ millions-strong cohort is chock-full of

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<sup>81</sup> Jeanne Meister, "Three Reason You Need to Adopt a Millennial Mindset Regardless of Your Age," <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/10/05/millennialmindse/#14a9fbac4ee4> (accessed October 1, 2018).

<sup>82</sup> Deloitte, "The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey."

digital natives with tech-savvy skills, longing for a place and a voice in the world that truly makes an impact. Compared to their predecessors, they have a higher emphasis on both the “why” behind what they do and the implications of what is done. They want their lives to be integrated, their voices to be heard, and their contributions to be valued.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps an important dimension to pastoring millennials is ceasing to assume they are simply immature and entitled with too much handed to them. For sure, some of them need to be kindly yet sternly told to move out of Mom and Dad’s and get a job.<sup>84</sup> But what if the pastoral posture shifted to see millennials as the expectant, opportunistic, and high-capacity generation they increasingly prove to be? Their education, experiences, and excitement coupled with their comfort with diversity, desire for tangible impact, and high level of agency ought to inspire the faithful pastor to form these God-given gifts with the gospel. Let us capitalize on the millennial longing to be involved, to make their lives count for something, by tethering their existence and purpose to the existence and purposes of God.

Really this is a call to recover a sound biblical theology of life in the world, portions of which have been lived out in excellent ways throughout the history of the church. No gimmicks and no “social gospel” trickery, this is simply a right and rightly rooted understanding of the grand narrative God has told and continues telling through the life of his people. Faithful presence in accordance with this story entails imaging God by being fully present with and committed to each other, in our work, and throughout society.<sup>85</sup> As Tim Keller has said it:

*Only if we produce thousands of new church communities that regularly win secular people to Christ, seek the common good for the whole city (especially the poor), and*

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<sup>83</sup> Center for Faith and Work, “The Race to Hire Millennials,” *Connecting Sunday Worship & Monday Work*, <http://centerforfaithandwork.com/article/race-hire-millennials> (accessed September 24, 2018); Millennials are more likely to live in metropolitan areas than their predecessors at their current age: Silents were 67%, Boomers were 68%, GenXers were 84% and Millennials are currently at 88%. And in terms of education: 29% millennial men and 36% millennial women have at least bachelor’s degree (GenX, 24%, 28%; Boomer, 22%, 20%; Silent, 15%, 9%), Fry, Igielnick, and Patten, “How Millennials today compare with their grandparents 50 years ago.”

<sup>84</sup> In 2012, 40% of men 18-31 were living at home and 32% of women were, Taylor, *The Next America*, 18-19.

<sup>85</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243-248.

*disciple thousands of Christians to write plays, advance science, do creative journalism, begin effective and productive new businesses, use their money for others, and produce cutting-edge scholarship and literature will we actually be doing all the things the Bible tells us that Christians should be doing!*<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, this is the only hope of the gospel going forth and bearing much fruit in our late modern age. Any “imaginable prospect for human flourishing in the contemporary world, [will begin] when the Word of shalom becomes flesh in us and is enacted through us toward those with whom we live, in the tasks we are given, and in the spheres of influence in which we operate.”<sup>87</sup> What kind of world are millennials helping to create? What vision of “the good life” drives their behavior, decisions, interactions, and activity in the world? The pastor is poised to serve as a contextualized voice of insight, clarity, and practicality, connecting the individual stories of millennials to the meaning-laden eternal story of God. In a culture of growing pluralism and angst, the faithful pastor is called to preach the whole counsel of God, embody God’s nearness to his people, and launch a young generation of holistic disciples into the world, for the life of the world, and for the glory of their God.

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<sup>86</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 292.

<sup>87</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 252.

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