

## Seven Ways to Connect With the “Now” Culture

Here we refer to a mindset or way of thinking. There are three groups that we must deal with and have a basic understanding of how they think. They are the postmoderns, unbelievers, and cultists.

**Postmoderns.** We have already mentioned some of their beliefs. Here are some other critical elements that we must consider as we bring the gospel message to them.

- **Connectivity**—no one is isolated.
- **Interactivity**--the ADHD generation does not like to just sit.
- **Spirituality**—the goal is to unite people of like faith.
- **Closeness**—relationships matter above all.
- **Truthfulness**—they are all about authenticity.
- **Impact**—they want to change the world.
- **Relativism**—there are no absolutes including the Bible.
- **Imagination**—Postmoderns live in the future, and the future is now.

Regarding relativism, a Barna poll indicated that 53% of evangelicals believe there is no such thing as absolute truth. On a CNBC interview Tim Russert asked Don Imus whether or not he was a Christian. "Sure, I believe Jesus is the Son of God," Imus responded. "So, you believe you are going to heaven?" Russert asked. "Nah," Imus explained. "I'm into that karma thing."

Oprah Winfrey's personal guru Marianne Williamson puts it this way: "The word Christ is a psychological term. No religion has a monopoly on the truth. Christ refers to the common thread of divine love that is the core and essence of every human being. Focus on Christ means focus on the goodness and power that lie latent within us, in order to invoke them into realization and expression. 'I accept the Christ within,' means 'I accept the beauty within me as who I really am.'"

It is easy to see where evangelicals stand in postmodern thought.

**Unbelievers.** As we share God's message of love with the unchurched, we must overcome some of their preconceptions of the Christian community. Nonbelievers don't read the Bible to find out more about God—they watch Christians. Here's what they think we are:

1) *Fanatics.* "They're always trying to recruit me," said one woman. "They don't socialize either."

2) *Money-driven.* Many non-Christians see money as the main goal of churches and TV evangelists. One man said about Christian television, "They're always pushing and pushing for money."

3) *Wet blankets.* "They don't know how to have fun--they miss out on so much," said one observer.

4) *Judgmental.* "It's supposed to be a religion of love, but they're not loving. They're too busy telling you that their way is right," said one man.

5) *Hypocrites.* An unchurched man said, "Their walk doesn't equal their talk."

**Cultists.** There are millions of people involved in cultist groups all over the world. They are caught up in a false doctrine. "What is a false doctrine?" asked a teacher. "False doctoring,"

answered on little boy in the class, "is when a doctor gives the wrong stuff to sick folks." That's what is happening in the kingdom of the cults: the people are given wrong medicine. A cult is defined as "a group of people polarized around someone's interpretation of the Bible. It is characterized by major deviation from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ. The glaring difference between cults and mainline Christianity is that every non-Christian cultic system denies that Jesus Christ is God in human form. All cultic systems have some Bible truth but have some perversion of historic Christian doctrine and theology. The doctrine of the cults in the area of the deity of Christ is the key issue.

It's not hard to bridge the gap with twenty-somethings. These seven tips can serve as a helpful guide.

## **Seven Ways to Connect with the Culture**

- **Be relational.**
  - Too many churches have emphasized formulas and programs rather than people. The answers are not found in postmodern pastors and conferences, books or even magazine cover stories. The way to reach this generation is to get out of your office and build relationships with them in the real world. You'll then begin to understand their lives and their hearts and will know how to better reach them.
- **Be cross-generational.**
  - Who said 20-somethings wouldn't like a church service just because it has more traditional praise and worship? And who said the older generations wouldn't mind a little change in their services? By bringing the generations together, give-and-take is established that benefits everybody.
- **Get outside your comfort zone.**
  - "On the outside, lose the suit," advises Jim Poorman, pastor of H20, a progressive church in Orlando, Florida. "Be 'scary' real in your teachings, give the 20-somethings more ownership, lengthen the guitar strap, turn up the amps, let them meet outside your church walls, name it what they want, invest financially in it, give them your life."
- **Put on stage those you're trying to reach.**
  - People only feel connected with something when they feel as though they are a part of it. If you want racial diversity in your church—which is very important to this audience—you'd better have racial diversity reflected in the church staff and on-stage during services.
  - It's the same with age. If a 20-something looks up front and only sees middle-aged suits, they don't feel as though they belong there. Make a concerted effort to have a gender, race and age diversity reflected at the front of the church. Otherwise you'll end up with a congregation full of only stodgy middle-aged men.
- **Watch your words.**
  - One of the biggest things holding back the church from truly reaching current culture is the code language it uses. Some have referred to this as "Christianese" or "Evangelical English." Be aware of how someone from the "outside" would

perceive the things you say. For example, someone who is not on the “in” with Christian lingo would ask, “Who in their right mind would wash themselves in the blood of the lamb?” What does it mean to be “On fire for God?” He or she wouldn’t have the vaguest idea what you’re talking about.

- There are other ways to convey deep, substantive biblical truth—not watered down—by using words that normal, intelligent people would understand. When something comes up in Scripture that may sound strange, be aware that some people there don’t know the meaning behind the phrase. Take a minute to explain it so everyone can understand and grow in their faith.
- **Listen. “Provide a safe, comfortable atmosphere for them to be real,”**
  - Poorman says. “Do the best to connect them with others who have a similar past or are presently in the midst of some of the same struggles. Bottom line: Listen to them.”
- **Above all, be yourself.**
  - “Be yourself, and don’t sweat this stuff,” says Don Chaffer of the Christian roots/rock group Waterdeep. “Find out what [type of] church you have if you really are yourself. If everybody leaves, you’re probably not pastoring the church you thought you were.”