

*Don't Call It a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day*  
Copyright © 2011 by Kevin DeYoung  
Published by Crossway  
1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

Cover design: Studio Gearbox  
Cover illustration: Getty Images  
Interior design and typesetting: Lakeside Design Plus  
First printing 2011  
Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NIV from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica. Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica.

Scripture references marked NRSV are from *The New Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Scripture quotations marked AT are the author's translation.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the authors.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2169-0  
PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2170-6  
Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2171-3  
ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2172-0

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Don't call it a comeback: the old faith for a new day / edited by Kevin DeYoung; foreword by D. A. Carson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-2169-0 (tp)

1. Evangelicalism. 2. Protestantism. 3. Protestant churches—Doctrines. I. DeYoung, Kevin.

BR1640.D66 2011

230'.04624—dc22

2010036244

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

DP	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

# Contents

Foreword	13
D. A. CARSON	
Introduction: All Grown Up and Nothing to Say	15
KEVIN DEYOUNG	
<b>Part 1: Evangelical History: Looking Forward and Looking Back</b>	
1. The Secret to Reaching the Next Generation	21
KEVIN DEYOUNG	
2. The Story of Evangelicalism from the Beginning and Before	33
COLLIN HANSEN	
<b>Part 2: Evangelical Theology: Thinking, Feeling, and Believing the Truths That Matter Most</b>	
3. God: Not Like You	47
JONATHAN LEEMAN	
4. Scripture: How the Bible Is a Book Like No Other	59
ANDY NASELLI	

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 5. The Gospel: God's Self-Substitution for Sinners   | 71  |
| GREG GILBERT   |     |
| 6. New Birth: "You Must Be Born Again"   | 83  |
| BEN PEAYS  |     |
| 7. Justification: Why the Lord Our Righteousness Is Better<br>News Than the Lord Our Example | 95  |
| JAY HARVEY   |     |
| 8. Sanctification: Being Authentically Messed Up<br>Is Not Enough                            | 105 |
| OWEN STRACHAN  |     |
| 9. Kingdom: Heaven after Earth, Heaven on Earth,<br>or Something Else Entirely?              | 117 |
| RUSSELL MOORE  |     |
| 10. Jesus Christ: The Only Way and Our Only Hope   | 129 |
| TIM CHALLIES   |     |

**Part 3: Evangelical Practice: Learning to Live Life  
God's Way**

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 11. It's Sometimes a Wonderful Life: Evangelicals<br>and Vocation          | 143 |
| TED KLUCK  |     |
| 12. Social Justice: What's God Got to Do, Got to Do with It                | 155 |
| DARRIN PATRICK   |     |
| 13. Homosexuality: Grace, Truth, and the Need<br>for Gentle Courage        | 167 |
| ERIC REDMOND AND KEVIN DEYOUNG   |     |
| 14. Abortion: Why Silence and Inaction Are Not Options<br>for Evangelicals | 179 |
| JUSTIN TAYLOR  |     |
| 15. Gender Confusion and a Gospel-Shaped Counterculture                    | 191 |
| DENNY BURK   |     |

Contents

16. The Local Church: Not Always Amazing, but Loved by Jesus	201
THABITI ANYABWILE	
17. Worship: It's a Big Deal	213
TULLIAN TCHIVIDJIAN	
18. Missions: The Worship of Jesus and the Joy of All Peoples	225
DAVID MATHIS	
Contributors	237
General Index	239
Scripture Index	243
The Gospel Coalition	251

## *Introduction*

# All Grown Up and Nothing to Say

KEVIN DEYOUNG

I didn't just grow up in the church; I practically *lived* there. My family was at church every Sunday morning and every Sunday evening. Weather, band trips, vacation, mild case of whooping cough, Bears in the Super Bowl—it didn't matter. We were in church. We were often there to turn out the lights with the pastor and his family. I attended Sunday school. I was there on Wednesday nights as a kid and on Sunday nights (after church) for youth group. I started doing daily devotions when I was in high school. I read my Bible, had parents who loved God, and generally was surrounded by pretty decent Christian friends. And I *liked* it.

After public high school I went to Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Although it's a Christian liberal arts school, Hope is not a college specifically for Christians. You didn't have to be a Christian, believe like a Christian, or live like a Christian to be at Hope. But like many others, I came to Hope as a committed Christian, having been reared in an ordinary, faithful evangelical church.

I'll never forget during my freshman year having a heated conversation about religion with three other guys from my floor. One was a nominal Christian who grew up in the church but didn't seem to care

much about the faith. Another guy was a hedonist. His self-proclaimed goal in life was to have as much sex as possible. This was the good life for him. The third guy was into crystals (seriously). He was a funny New Age dude who liked to watch Rikki Lake and play video games. And then there was me—the little boy Samuel who grew up in the sanctuary.

And yet as we talked on into the night, I felt like I must not have paid enough attention growing up in the house of God all those years.

I don't know whose fault it was, if it was anyone's, but I remember staying awake into the wee hours thinking "I can't articulate what I believe and why I believe it." I felt a bit embarrassed that after all those years I still didn't have a good grasp on some of the most foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Looking back, I wish I had been challenged more (or had challenged myself more) to really understand Christian doctrine when I was younger. The catechism was being phased out of the curriculum by the time I was going through the later years of Sunday school, and the youth group messages seemed to end with the predictable refrain of asking Jesus into our hearts. I was probably one of the best Bible students in our church, and yet I could barely articulate basic Christian theology past "Jesus died on the cross for our sins." And if I couldn't articulate the basics after seventeen solid, earnest years in the church, what must the predicament be for the seventeen-year-old just converting to Christianity, or for the thirty-four-year-old who's getting serious about her faith for the first time?

### **What's the Point?**

This book has two main aims. The first aim is to introduce young Christians, new Christians, and underdisciplined Christians to the most important articles of our faith and what it looks like to live out this faith in real life. I'll be the first to admit that we are not aiming for originality in these chapters. In fact, we hope that what we are saying has been said by many before us and will be said by many after us. But if we are not claiming any new discoveries, we are eager to communicate Christian faith and practice in a way that resonates with teenagers, college students, young adults, and any others who need to have a better grasp of what they believe and why they believe it. We are all young Christians—in our twenties and thirties when this project began—who want to see the next generation of Christians learn to think, live, and worship in ways

that are heartfelt, biblical, and unapologetically theological. We want to see the next generation joyfully embrace and winsomely articulate the truths that matter most.

The second aim of the book is to reassert the theological nature of evangelicalism. In recent years the term *evangelical* has lost almost all its meaning. It has become a political category or a term used by sociologists for Christians affiliated with certain denominations or institutions. *Evangelical* has come to mean everything and nothing. But we think there is still merit to the label, provided it can be infused with theological meaning that manifests itself in some key ethical, social, and ecclesiastical stances and practices.

We realize there are some serious dangers in this second aim. One danger is that we would see ourselves as the be-all and end-all of evangelicalism. We pray this is not our motivation. In fact, the hardest part about editing this book was having to leave out a lot of godly, intelligent, impressive young evangelicals who could have easily written these chapters as well as the rest of us. Evangelicalism certainly does not revolve around us or our ministries. A second danger is that we would be seen as carefully marking out the boundaries for who can and cannot be an evangelical. Understandably, some of this will happen just by virtue of the things we are writing about or not writing about. And frankly we do think the term *evangelical* lacks necessary definition. This book is an attempt to suggest some of the doctrines, ethics, and practices that ought to mark out the evangelical Christian. But we realize for some folks we have not weighed in on enough issues, and for others we have spouted off on too many. Our goal is not to say, “Believe this or else,” or “Believe this and nothing else,” but to say, “Here are the things that seem most essential and basic to the Christian faith in general and evangelical identity in particular.”

### **Hope for the Future**

Our hope is that this book might be of some small use in reforming God’s church according to the Word of God and forming Christians in the truth of God’s Word. Contrary to the doom-and-gloom reports, the evangelical church is not dead. By God’s grace, no matter the financial, military, or political turmoil we may be called upon to endure, the church in North America may have its strongest, healthiest, most

vibrant days ahead. Of course, the church will always be “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,” not to mention the problems caused by our own folly and selfishness. But we see signs of renewed interest in the corporate nature of the church, in social engagement, in robust theological commitment, and in a mature, risk-taking, God-saturated faith that has no patience for gimmicks, imitations, or cultural Christianity.

We are sinners, but God is gracious. So the church is bound to be a mixed bag. It is now and will be in the future. For this we can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Sorrowful over suffering, yet always rejoicing in our redemption. Sorrowful for our sins, yet always rejoicing in our Savior. Our prayer is that this book would help a new generation of Christians rejoice in the most important aspects of our faith and walk, instead of sorrowing to discover that we don't know what to think or how to live like Christians.



## *Chapter 1*

# **The Secret to Reaching the Next Generation**

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Getting a book published is a funny thing. People you've never met suddenly think you're amazing. Other people you've never met (who may leave a review on Amazon) think you're the scum of the earth (and not the good Pauline kind). And lots of people expect you to be an expert in things you don't know much about.

After my first book came out, *Why We're Not Emergent*, pastors and other Christians started asking me how my church reached out to young people. "We don't want to go emergent," the questioner would explain. "We need sound doctrine. We need good preaching. But what do you do in your church to reach the next generation?" My usual response was, "Nothing." I wanted people to understand that there's nothing fancy or brilliant about our church strategy. We are just trying to be faithful.

But after a while I began to sense that "nothing" was not a terribly helpful answer. So I talked about our campus ministry, and staff structure, and our small groups—all of which matter. Yet this answer seemed like more of the same. "If you want to reach young people, you have

to have this program or capture this feel or go for this look.” Don’t get me wrong; thinking about strategy, structure, and feel is not sinful. I’m thankful for all the people in our church who work hard in these areas. I try to be wise in these areas. But this is not the secret to reaching the next generation.

There have been times as a pastor when I’ve been discouraged by the slowness of numerical growth in my congregation. I’ve thought, “Why is that church over there so successful? Why did they go from 150 to 1500 in three years?” I’ve even been borderline snippy at times: “Lord, if I get to heaven and find out there was some secret musical style or movie clip or new program I was supposed to use in order to be successful, I’m going to feel pretty bummed.” But in my saner moments I’ve come to see two things: (1) It’s more my sinful flesh than my sanctified spirit that wants success. And (2) the secret is that there is no secret.

Reaching the next generation—whether they are outside the church or sitting there bored in your church—is easier and harder than you think. It’s easier because you don’t have to get a degree in postmodern literary theory or go to a bunch of stupid movies. You don’t have to say “sweet” or “bling” or know what LOL or IMHO means. You don’t have to listen to . . . well, whatever people listen to these days. You don’t have to be on Twitter, watch *The Office*, or imbibe fancy coffees. You just have to be like Jesus. That’s it. So the easy part is you don’t have to be with it. The hard part is you have to be with *him*. If you walk with God and walk with people, you’ll reach the next generation.

Let me unpack that a bit. After thinking through the question for over a year, I’ve come up with five suggestions for pastors, youth workers, campus staff, and anyone else who wants to pass the faith on to the next generation: Grab them with passion. Win them with love. Hold them with holiness. Challenge them with truth. Amaze them with God.

### **Grab Them with Passion**

Increasingly, people do not go to church out of a sense of cultural obligation. This is true especially among the young. Newer generations will not give Christianity a second thought if it seems lifeless, rote, and uninspiring. They will only get serious about the Christian faith if it seems like something seriously worth their time. You can have formal services, so long as you do not have formalism. You can have casual

services, so long as you do not approach your faith casually. Your services can have a lot of different looks, but young people want to see passion. They want to see us do church and follow Christ like we mean it.

We would do well to pay attention to Romans 12. “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (vv. 9–11). We would be far less likely to lose our young people and far more likely to win some others if the spiritual temperature of our churches was something other than lukewarm. People need to see that God is the all-consuming reality in our lives. Our sincerity and earnestness in worship matter ten times more than the style we use to display our sincerity and earnestness.

I’m tired of talking about authenticity, as if prattling on about how messed up you are or blogging about your goldfish are signs of spiritual maturity. We need passion, a zeal fueled by knowledge (Rom. 10:2). Young people want to see that our faith actually matters to us. They are like Ben Franklin when asked why he was going to hear George Whitefield preach. “You don’t even believe what he says,” people told Franklin. To which he replied, “I know. But he does.” If our evangelical faith is boring to us, it will be boring to others. If the gospel is old news to you, it will be dull news to everyone else.

We cannot pass on what we do not feel. Whitefield blasted the church in his day because “the generality of preachers [in New England] talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ. The reason why congregations have been so dead is because they have had dead men to preach to them.”<sup>1</sup> The next generation, every generation really, needs to hear the gospel with personal, passionate pleading. There is a time for dialogue, but there is also a time for declaration. People don’t need a lecture or an oration or a discussion from the pulpit on Sunday morning. They need to hear of the mighty deeds of God. And they need to hear the message from someone who not only understands it but has been captured by it.

If we are to grab the next generation with the gospel, we must grab them with passion. And to grab them with passion, we must be gripped with it ourselves. The world needs to see Christians burning, not with self-righteous fury at the sliding morals in our country, but with passion

---

<sup>1</sup>Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 53.

for God. As W. E. Sangster put it, “I’m not interested to know if you could set the Thames on fire. What I want to know is this: if I picked you up by the scruff of your neck and dropped you into the Thames, would it sizzle?”<sup>2</sup>

### **Win Them with Love**

The evangelical church has spent far too much time trying to figure out cultural engagement and far too little time just trying to love. If we listen to people patiently and give them the gift of our curiosity, we will be plenty engaged. I’m not arguing for purposeful obscurantism. What I’m arguing for is getting people’s attention with a force more powerful than the right lingo and the right movie clips.

We spend all this time trying to imitate Gen-X culture or Millennial culture, and to what end? For starters, there is no universal youth culture. Young people do not all think alike, dress alike, or feel comfortable in the same environments. Moreover, even if we could figure out “what the next generation likes,” by the time we figured it out they probably wouldn’t like it anymore. Count on it: when the church discovers cool, it won’t be cool anymore. I’ve seen well-meaning Christians try to introduce new music into the church in an effort to reach the young people, only to find out that the “new” music included “Shine, Jesus, Shine” and “Shout to the Lord.” There’s nothing worse than a church trying to be fresh and turning out to be a little dated. Better to stick with the hymns and the organ than do “new” music that hasn’t aged terribly well or do the new music in an embarrassing way.

The evangelical church needs to stop preaching the false gospel of cultural identification. Don’t spend all your time trying to figure out how to be just like the next generation. Be yourself. Tell them about Jesus. And love them unashamedly. I think a lot of older Christians are desperate to figure out what young people are into because they are too embarrassed to be themselves and too unsure of themselves to simply love the people they are trying to reach.

Jesus said it best: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Jesus did not say, “They will know you are my disciples by how attune you are to new

---

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 285.

trends in youth culture.” Or “They will know you are my disciples by the hip atmosphere you create.” Give up on relevance, and try love. If they see love in you, love for each other, love for the world, and love for them, they will listen. No matter who “they” are.

Talk to people. Notice visitors. Invite new people over for lunch. Strike up a friendly conversation at the greasy pizza joint. Let your teenagers’ friends hang out at your house. Love won’t guarantee the young people will never walk away from the church, but it will make it a lot harder. It won’t guarantee that non-Christians will come to Christ, but it will make the invitation a whole lot more attractive.

### **Hold Them with Holiness**

Let me make this clear one more time. I’m not arguing that thinking about music styles or paying attention to the “feel” of our church or trying to exegete the culture is sinful stuff. I’m not saying we shouldn’t be asking questions related to cultural engagement. What I’m saying is that being experts in the culture matters nothing, and worse than nothing, if we are not first of all experts in love, truth, and holiness.

Look at what God says in 2 Peter 1:5–8:

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you pick up on the promise in the last verse? If we are growing in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, we will not be ineffective ministers for Christ. If ever there was a secret to effective ministry, these verses give it to us. Grow in God and you’ll make a difference in people’s lives. If nothing of spiritual significance is happening in your church, your Bible study, your small group, or your family, it may be because nothing spiritually significant is happening in your life.

I love the line from Robert Murray M’Cheyne: “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness.” I’ve given that advice to others dozens

of times, and I've repeated it to myself a hundred times. Almost my whole philosophy of ministry is summed up in M'Cheyne's words. My congregation needs me to be humble before they need me to be smart. They need me to be honest more than they need me to be a dynamic leader. They need me to be teachable more than they need me to teach at conferences. If your walk matches your talk, if your faith costs you something, if being a Christian is more than a cultural garb, they will listen to you.

Paul told young Timothy to keep a close watch on his life and his doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). "Persist in this," he said, "for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." Far too much ministry today is undertaken without any concern for holiness. We've found that changing the way we do church is easier than changing the way we are. We've found that we are not sufficiently unlike anyone else to garner notice, so we've attempted to become just like everyone else instead. Today's young people do not want a cultural Christianity that fits in like a Baptist church in Texas. They want a conspicuous Christianity that changes lives and transforms communities. Maybe we would make more progress in reaching the next generation if we were making more progress in holiness (1 Tim. 4:15).

Remember, the next generation is not just out there. They are also in here, sitting in our churches week after week. We often hear about how dangerous college can be for Christian teens, how many of them check out of church once they reach the university. But studies have shown that most of the students who check out do so in high school, not in college. It's not liberal professors that are driving our kids away. It's their hard hearts and our stale, compromised witness that opens the door for them to leave.

One of our problems is that we have not done a good job of modeling Christian faith in the home and connecting our youth with other mature Christian adults in the church. One youth leader has commented that how often our young people "attended youth events (including Sunday school and discipleship groups) was not a good predictor of which teens would and which would not grow toward Christian adulthood." Instead,

almost without exception, those young people who are growing in their faith as adults were teenagers who fit into one of two categories: either (1) they came from families where Christian growth was

modeled in at least one of their parents, or (2) they had developed such significant connections with adults within the church that it had become an extended family for them.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, sociologist Christian Smith argues that though most teenagers and parents don't realize it, "a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."<sup>4</sup>

The take home from all this is pretty straightforward. The one indispensable requirement for producing godly, mature Christians is godly, mature Christians. Granted, good parents still have wayward children and faithful mentors don't always get through to their pupils. Personal holiness is not the key that regenerates the heart. The Spirit blows where he will. But make no mistake, the promise of 2 Peter 1 is as true as ever. If we are holy, we will be fruitful. Personal connections with growing Christians is what the next generation needs more than ever.

### **Challenge Them with Truth**

In the church-growth heyday, scholars and pastors were wrestling with how to reach out without dumbing down. Today I would argue that we reach out precisely by *not* dumbing down. The door is open like never before to challenge people with good Bible teaching. People want to learn doctrine. They really do, even non-Christians. Whether they accept it all or not, they want to know what Christians actually believe. Young people will not put up with feel-good pabulum. They want the truth straight up, unvarnished, and unashamed.

Thom Rainer did a study a number of years ago asking formerly unchurched people the open-ended question, "What factors led you to choose this church?" A lot of surveys had been done asking the unchurched what they would like in a church. But this study asked the *formerly* unchurched why they actually were now in a church. The results were surprising: 11 percent said worship style led them to their church, 25 percent said children's/youth ministry, and 37 percent said

---

<sup>3</sup>Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 63.

<sup>4</sup>Christian Smith, with Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

they sensed God's presence at their church. For 41 percent, someone from the church had witnessed to them, and 49 percent mentioned friendliness as the reason for choosing their church. Can you guess the top two responses? Doctrine and preaching—88 percent said the doctrine led them to their church, and 90 percent said the preaching led them there, in particular, a pastor who preached with certitude and conviction.<sup>5</sup> One woman remarked,

We attended a lot of different churches for different reasons before we became Christians. I tell you, so many of the preachers spoke with little authority; they hardly ever dealt with tough issues of Scripture, and they soft-sold the other issues. Frank and I know now that we were hungry for the truth. Why can't preachers learn that shallow and superficial preaching doesn't help anybody, including people like us who weren't Christians.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to reaching outsiders, bold, deep, biblical preaching is not the problem. It's part of the solution.

The next generation *in* our churches needs to be challenged too. In his book on the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers, Christian Smith coined the phrase "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" to describe the spirituality of American youth. They believe in being a good moral person. They believe religion should give you peace, happiness, and security. They believe God exists and made the world but is not particularly involved in the day-to-day stuff of life.<sup>7</sup> We are naïve if we think this is not the faith of some of the best and brightest in our churches, or even those reading this book!

Church people are not stupid. They are not incapable of learning. For the most part, they simply haven't been taught. No one has challenged them to think a deep thought or read a difficult book. No one has asked them to articulate their faith in biblical and theological categories. We have expected almost nothing out of our young people, so that's what we get. A couple generations ago twenty-year-olds were getting married, starting families, working at real jobs, or off somewhere fighting Nazis. Today thirty-five-year olds are hanging out on Facebook, looking for

<sup>5</sup>Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 74.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>7</sup>Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162ff.



direction, and trying to find themselves. We have been coddled when we should have been challenged.

Challenging the next generation with truth starts with honest self-examination. We must ask, Do I know the plotline of the Bible? Do I know Christian theology? Do I read any meaty Christian books? Do I know anything about justification, redemption, original sin, propitiation, and progressive sanctification? Do I really understand the gospel? We cannot challenge others until we have first challenged ourselves. That's one of the driving passions behind this book. I want the "average" churchgoer to think more deeply about his faith. I want Christians to realize, like I did that night in college, that they have a lot more to learn.

You've heard it said that Christianity in America is a mile wide and an inch deep. Well, it's more like half a mile wide now. Christian influence is not as pervasive as it once was. I'm convinced that if Christianity is to be a mile wide again in America, it will first have to find a way to be a mile deep. Shallow Christianity will not last in the coming generation, and it will not grow. Cultural Christianity is fading. The church in the twenty-first century must go big on truth or go home.

### **Amaze Them with God**

I beg of you, don't go after the next generation with mere moralism, either on the right (don't have sex, do go to church, share your faith, stay off drugs) or on the left (recycle, dig a well, feed the homeless, buy a wristband). The gospel is not a message about what we need to do for God, but about what God has done for us. So get them with the good news about who God is and what he has done for us.

Some of us, it seems, are almost scared to tell people about God. Perhaps because we don't truly know him. Maybe because we prefer living in triviality. Or maybe because we don't consider knowing God to be very helpful in real life. I have to fight against this unbelief in my own life. If only I would trust God that he is enough to win the hearts and minds of the next generation. It's his work much more than it is mine or yours. So make him front and center. Don't preach your doubts as mystery. And don't reduce God to your own level. If ever people were starving for a God the size of God, surely it is now.

Give them a God who is holy, independent, and unlike us, a God who is good, just, full of wrath, and full of mercy. Give them a God who

is sovereign, powerful, tender, and true. Give them a God with edges. Give them an undiluted God who makes them feel cherished and safe, and small and uncomfortable too. Give them a God who works all things after the counsel of his will and for the glory of his name. Give them a God whose love is lavish and free. Give them a God worthy of wonder and fear, a God big enough for all our faith, hope, and love.

Do your friends, your church, your family, your children know that God is the center of the universe? Can they see that he is at the center of your life?

Imagine you had a dream of someone sitting on a throne. In your dream a rainbow encircled the throne. Twenty-four men surrounded the throne. Lightning and thunder issued from the throne. Seven lamps stood blazing at the foot of the throne. A sea of glass lay before the throne. Four strange creatures were around the throne, giving thanks to him who sits on the throne. And twenty-four dudes were falling down before the one who sits on the throne. You wouldn't have to get Joseph out of prison to figure out the point of this dream. The throne is the figurative and literal center of the vision. The meaning of the dream is God.

This, of course, is no ordinary dream. It is John's vision from Revelation 4. And it is reality, right now. More substantial and more lasting and more influential than your pain, or fear, or temptation, or opposition, or makeup, or clothes, or boyfriends, or video games, or iPods, or BlackBerrys, or whatever else our culture says should be important to young people is God. What matters now and for eternity is the unceasing worship of him who sits on the throne.

As you try to reach the next generation for Christ, you can amaze them with your cleverness, your humor, or your looks. Or you can amaze them with God. I need a lot of things in my life. There are schedules and details and a long to-do list. I need food and water and shelter. I need sleep. I need more exercise, and I need to eat better. But this is my greatest need and yours: to know God, love God, delight in God, and make much of God.

We have an incredible opportunity before us. Most people live weightless, ephemeral lives. We can give them substance instead of style. We can show them a big God to help make sense of their shrinking lives. We can point them to transcendence instead of triviality. We

can reach them with something more lasting and more powerful than gimmicks, gadgets, and games. We can reach them with God.

Imagine that. Reaching the next generation *for* God by showing them *more of* God. That's just crazy enough to work.

#### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994.

Piper, John. *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

Wells, David F. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.