Classic: Engaging with Millennials
with Gabe Lyons and Darrell L. Bock
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Welcome to the table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary. And my guest today is Gabe Lyons. Welcome Gabe, glad to have you.

Thanks Darrell.

And our topic is kind of everything floating around millennials and what's happening in our world and in our culture. And Gabe has been here for a conference called 'Prone to Wonder' that's focusing on millennials and nones. We're not talking about, as you said, Catholic sisters. So we're talking, that's N-O-N-E-S. And Gabe, why don't you start off by telling us both what you do and how you got into what you're doing these days.

Well thanks Darrell. It's great to have this conversation with you. It's important and the work that you're doing is so important to educate so many church leaders so I'm excited to be a part of the conversation with you. And you know for me, this started really when I was 25 years old and one day woke up and it was so blatant and obvious to me that my friends, 25 year olds, this generation were not interested in the ideas of The Christian faith. Pretty outright were rejecting it, weren't interested in talking about it and it was a clear problem that it felt like there wasn't great diagnosis for. Everybody was sorta burying their head in the sand and hoping this figures itself out or that everybody will mature and get older and all of a sudden become conservative Christians again.

And I think for me it was, I was understanding that that's not where this is going. There's something more significant at play and began, at that time, to start to dig into that and try to understand what's really happening with the next generation and how do we help them as Christians have confidence that the Christian faith actually has a lot to say about the current moment that we're in. But also to non-Christians to understand how to approach them in a way that maybe a lot of our assumptions were wrong in the last couple of decades about how to engage with a non-Christian.

Okay, so we'll get right down to it here. So tell us where have we been going and where is the disconnect? Why is it that this has been going on?
**Gabe Lyons**

Well I think what we find is that many, David Kinnaman and I back ten years go did a research project that led to a book called Un-Christian. But that pretty well laid out that the next generation perceives the Christian faith as being very judgmental, too political meaning right-wing politics oriented, only interested in converting people and proselytizing, anti-gay. So many negative perceptions they just associate with the idea of being Christian and so it only made sense that over this past decade it's continued to play out as they've gotten older, that they just have negative views about the Christian faith in general.

The second thing that's been happening though is that the next generation of millennials now are finding it very easy to disassociate from faith and religion at all. Now some of that can be chalked up to the culture they've inhabited that sees religion as a bit of a pariah and a negative within our communities and cities and life and see it as a judgmental sort of source of shaming people versus a life-giving source and generative for our communities.

But the other would be in some cases their parents were very hands off when it came to the faith discussion and religion in general. They didn't wanna use dogma to convince their children to believe the narrative that they had believed because in this new western American moment that we're in there's a lot of value given to, open to all ideas and all expressions. And so parents really stepped way back from encouraging their children towards a specific path. And I think we're seeing some of the fruit of that.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So that means that we're in a situation where the nones if I can say it that way are growing in significant numbers and the church is wrestling with how did this happen and is there any way to stop it from happening?

**Gabe Lyons**

Yeah so I think as you reference the nones, I mean the statistics on that, the latest data, 34 percent of 18 to 22 year olds don't identify with any religion. It's 20 percent of all adults, so 1 in 5 adults that don't associate with religion. And the opportunity there is when you dig into that research you recognize the significant number of them still believe there is a God. Still desire some sense of spiritual formation or transcendence and yet they're not finding the church as the place that would ever lead them towards that. They're rejecting the church.
And so one of the lessons for the church is to think through, again, as we always have to do generationally, what are some of our methods that we've basically institutionalized that may not be aligned with what scriptures ever taught or what we ought to be doing. But it's just something that we do whether it's our liturgies and how we think about a church service, to literally how we accentuate teaching and preaching and how we think about those topics. And when we're not on point in doing something in a way where we're communicating the Gospel and we've started to replace the Gospel with our own sort of practices and things that don't relate to a new generation, they outright reject that. And so the church can learn from that and ask ourselves the questions, what are we doing wrong? Where have we gotten off track here either in our teaching theology or in our practice and then do the hard work of saying where can we reform? And then the second piece of this, and Darrell this is a long answer because it's a complicated –

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Yeah sure.

*Gabe Lyons*  
– bit of a mess that we're trying to work our way out of, is that we also have to trust that God's faithful with a new generation, that it's not all up to us being clever and trying to come up with new methods and methodologies to reach people quote-unquote but that there's something actually very true about the Spirit of God moving throughout every generation and that some of it is a conviction back to ourselves of what are the lives we're living as Christians? Are we really living out the good news in the Gospel, especially in American Christianity in such a way that a new generation who has to ask these big questions would actually find God here. Versus finding something that doesn't actually feel like what they would think God and Jesus would be like.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Yeah and you do something that resonates very much with things that I've also done in my own writing and that is you talked about the difference between the half Gospel and the whole Gospel. And I think this is a extremely important discussion. The way I like to talk about it is to say when you make the Gospel a transaction and people check a box and they say, "Okay I've got the heaven thing taken care of and that's it."
So in effect I gave at the office and I don't have to worry about it again until meet up with God. You've got this huge gap that ends up being in the middle and that's the half Gospel. That's Jesus dying for sin, which certainly is a part of the story, an important part of the story. In fact it's the launching point in many ways for aspects for the story, but the story itself is bigger. Talk a little bit about that 'cause I think that's an important piece.

**Gabe Lyons**

Well that's what I discovered. I mean in my own journey of trying to learn and understand what's been happening with the church over the last couple hundred years was this recognition especially in the last century that dominant amongst evangelical type teaching and talking and instruction has been this half story that you described. Very interested and I think this has been influenced by enlightenment thinking. I think it's also been a result of modern thinking which is the most transactions as you mention we can get at the quickest pace produces the best result. And so we see crusades taking place and all kinds of great things that are good but where tons of people decide they're gonna follow Christ and raise their hand and accept Jesus as their personal savior but have no idea of how that's going to play out in their daily life.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Yeah, I did the decision but where does the decision take me?

**Gabe Lyons**

Yeah and so we look at all the conversions that have happened in American life over the last couple hundred years, you look from the second great awakening even to now, and we have huge conversion growth amongst the Christian faith up until the early '80s. That's when that percentage started to drop off. And yet cultural influence declined. You know how is that possible? It's only possible if we've left off what I would call the bookends of this full story.

The first part we find in Genesis 1 and 2, the creation part of the story that there was a good design to this world that every human being is made in the image of God, meant to bear witness to who they've been designed after. But that sin, so the fall part, the second part of the story distorts all that. It makes us actually disordered. And we go after things that God never wanted us or intended us to go after. And then only through Christ can we be redeemed as you mentioned, through the cross and his resurrection and our belief and acceptance of that gift of grace.
But then there's this fourth part of the story, the final part of the story that we're called to be a part of partnering with God to renew all things, to be a part of reconciling as II Corinthians 5:18 describes that we've all been given the ministry of reconciliation. So the challenge I think for the church today is to get our teaching right, number one. If we're teaching people about just a vertical relationship with Christ and we're kinda hanging on as the world, as we see the world start to slip, we go man, I can't wait to get to heaven one day. Things are gonna be great. We've missed actually the entire point of how God wanted us to live out our lives with our neighbors here on earth, and that is to be a part of his redemptive purposes which I believe God will use to draw people towards himself in a way that our words and our beliefs and talking about those will never do.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Yeah, I mean if you just think about the great commandment it doesn't read, "Love God with all your heart, mind and soul and make your reservation in heaven." I mean the two parts are love God with all your heart, mind and soul, love your neighbor as yourself and the whole picture and ethic of the New Testament is clear. Fact it's also in the Ten Commandments. If you orient yourself properly to God, that impacts the way you're relating to others and it's designed to give you a quality of life that's not just eternal in duration but eternal in quality in its roots. Takes you back to being made in the image of God so that story, the full story that you're talking about, just so it's clear for people is you've got creation. You've got the fall. You've got redemption and then you've got the ultimate restoration and reconciliation.

Those are the four parts. In the half stories when you just talk about the fall in the redemption and you don't bookend it with creation and where, the way God designed us, why he designed us that way, what he hopes our place on earth is and will be and the fact that he has a place he's trying to take us.

**Gabe Lyons**

And I liken it Darrell to you know, when you're trying to reach people with the Gospel, right, we all know as Christians that's part of our goal as proclamation to share people this good news story. When you tell a half story it just doesn't make sense to people and it be the equivalent of handing a wonderful book to a friend of yours that you loved but the first 100 pages is ripped out of the book and they have to start at page 101. Try to figure out who these characters are, what's going on and then just as they're getting into the book, the last 100 pages is ripped out and they don't know where this story's going.
Dr. Darrell Bock: And yet that's what we do every day we hand the half story or tell the story of the Gospel in just these half story terms of you're a sinner, you need to get saved and then you'll go to heaven and then by the way your jobs tells many other people that story is possible. We actually are saying something that's pretty incoherent and people are scratching their heads and they're going, I don't know what you're talking about. You're answering questions for example that maybe in the '60s and '70s people were asking such as if I died tonight where would I go tomorrow? Well there was a nuclear holocaust on the horizon for people. They were really asking the question, I might die tonight. You know I haven't had a lot of people ask that question in 2015, '16.

Gabe Lyons: Yeah, their other question is why am I here, not what's gonna happen to me eventually.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's right and the full story helps unpack for people why they're here, where they find meaning, what are these longings that they have deep in their soul will be met. And it also gives us a good explanation for why over a couple thousand years we saw the Christian faith slowly continue to gain traction and grow and create a beautiful society, create academic institutions, create the hospital system, create all of these things that do good in the world that were good for all people. They weren't just created for Christians, they were created for every citizen that lived on the earth.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Yeah and the way I like to illustrate it is the contrast between, I use Neo of the Matrix. I say, "What's Neo the Matrix doing? He's dodging bullets." And I said, "The half story is a story about dodging bullets but the Gospel's not just about dodging bullets." It's actually about a beautiful design that God crafted us to be a part of that he intended for us to be – there's a good side to the story at the start and there's a good side to the story at the finish in the bookends that we rip out. And what has happened is that it got messed up. And people don't have, you don't have to debate with people whether things are messed up. That's pretty transparent. So but getting them to think about what could be and what can be, that takes them in a positive direction.
Gabe Lyons  Yeah and I think as churches, you know the teachers and pastors have to understand that there is a disconnect in some of what we've been teaching our people as what the whole Christian story is. So to me that's the fundamental first step. Once that's in place you start to develop a church that thinks that way, that operates that way. You're starting to now bear witness as a community to a new way of life that's an alternative for people in the world who are saying, "I'm not so sure I like where my life is going. I don't like that I feel disconnected from community. I don't like that I don't know where to find meaning and that I haven't experienced that in my own life."

And all of a sudden this church, and people involved in this church are having that experience and they're drawn towards that. It becomes attractional not because you created some beautiful service on a Sunday morning in a really cool environment. It becomes attractional because they see a life that's lived counter-culturally that's giving witness to something deep in their soul they know is true.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah they're seeing real authenticity and in the midst of that real authenticity is emerging this attraction. Talk a little bit about – you say there are three social rules that our culture lives by now. Talk a little bit about that and then kind of you know, how to react to that. Because it seems to put churches on the defensive, these social rules.

Gabe Lyons  Yeah and these rules come from an author named Dale Kuehne who wrote a book called Sex and the iWorld. And what he tries to do is define like what are the new social rules? What are the taboos right now culturally? In every society there are certain ones and if you know them then you operate pretty effectively within that culture. If you don't know them and you're blind to them, then you constantly are running into these social walls and you're scratching your head like what is happening?

And I think that's happening for a lot of Christians today because they don't understand these rules. The first rule is thou shalt not, you know do not criticize someone's lifestyle choices or behavior. So for Christians and leaders, many times we almost, our job feels like that we're criticizing people's lifestyles and behaviors because when you're preaching the Gospel it's going to offend people at the root of who they are. Because it's calling into question a lot of the desires that they have, a lot of the things they're trying to live out or where they're trying to find meaning. And so you break that rule and immediately you're the evil person in the room.
So for pastors or Christians who try to try to have conversations with somebody where the conversation focused on what was wrong with their lifestyle or their choice or with a child maybe who's had this experience, you're being rejected because culturally that's not cool man. Don't criticize my lifestyle choice or behavior. So that's number one. The second one is that you're not, do not coerce people to do something that would 'cause harm to others. And in our current moment, again, there's a lot of sensitivity right now to words and to language. And so I think we'd all agree it's not good to coerce anybody to harm other people. So we agree with that.

What's happening though is that idea is now translating purely into language and to ideas. And so if you have an idea that coerces somebody to believe something is wrong, back to the rule number one, that's not really wrong. So for example if you're a pastor or a leader or church leader that's teaching on sexuality and you're teaching the biblical ethic of sexuality and somebody in your congregation is sleeping with their, you know, girlfriend and they're not married and you're teaching this. Well all of a sudden you could be coercing your whole congregation to think badly of that couple. And if you do that you're all of a sudden breaking a huge rule and people kinda get standoffish. The third one is, seems obvious as well which is do not have sex with somebody without their consent and if you break that rule you've created the cardinal sin. Keep in mind there's no reference there to age, limitations, no reference to multiple partners.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So part two of that rule is you don't have sex without consent but anything can go with consent.

**Gabe Lyons**

That's correct. If you have consent, everything goes. And that's why we would see new stories that just hit a fevered pitch of people like Bill Cosby for example and the rape accusations that were taking place. Where it was all, I mean Bill Cosby is the most evil person in our society today because he was having sex with somebody without their consent. So he broke that social rule. And so immediately that becomes the top story and everybody feels comfortable completely judging and dismissing this person.
And the other side of the same rule is a cover on Time Magazine that basically asks, is monogamy over, opening up the possibility of all kinds of sexual relationships outside of monogamy that are on the way perhaps to being socially acceptable in the broad sequence of things.

That's right. And so understanding these three rules I think just helps Christians know here's the dynamics we're interacting with and interfacing with and if we don't know those, we're constantly tripping over these social taboos right now. Now I'm not suggesting we're supposed to follow those rules at all. What I'm suggesting is this is in the air that we're all breathing right now so if you're gonna question or criticize somebody's life choices or behaviors, recognize you're stepping into something that they actually feel a moral authority over you to reject you for it. They feel that they're right. You're the most evil person in the world if you're telling somebody that a choice they've made is wrong.

And so when you start to get your head around that dynamic, it helps you be a little more cautious in how you approach topics. It makes sure that you're not just engaging with people, many times you're not in a relationship with to have those kind of really tough, difficult conversations. And it helps us I think as Christians just to be more understanding and sensitive to the dynamics that I think we should be aware of as sort of mysiologists in our time.

Yeah. And another thing I like to highlight is the idea that tone matters and kind of in this, middle of this conversation, one of the ways to kinda raise that question is to say this is a proverb that I think people talk to me about when I talk about cultural engagement. It is you know, people won't care about your criticism until they know you care about them. And so and sometimes our rhetoric breaks that rule and it shatters it in fact sometimes. And so the question becomes how do you deal with the challenge of this is where the world is. It really says in effect, don't tread on me. Okay? But you know scripture challenges everybody for how they life. So how do you address that balance? How do you cope with those rules?
There's a new patience that has to set in within Christians in the church right now. We've been so used to sort of getting results, telling people they're sinners, they need to repent and come to Christ. And I've no doubt God's power will continue to go forward through just pure proclamation of the Gospel. However as it relates to our relationships with other people, friends, family, colleagues and neighbors, we need a patience that sets in that says I'm gonna love this person for a long time. I'm not gonna have a goal of hey, within the next year if they haven't started to move towards what I believe then I give up on them.

And this sort of patience I think is enduring but leads to the moment when somebody actually asks the big questions and they'll let you question those things which is when they have a crisis. And so either a personal crisis in their life, so this could come in the form of a divorce from a couple, a broken relationship. It could come from some sort of abuse or drug activity or addiction, something happens in people. We all have dealt with this where we have a crisis moment and we do for a moment ask the bigger questions. And if you're in their life during that moment you're gonna have the opportunity to talk about choices, behavior, but really the deeper side of that which isn't about just choices and behavior but about who your life has been aligned under. Is it aligned under our Father the King or is it aligned under sort of what the world has told us will bring the results of meaning and value.

And sometimes when that curveball comes, what's interesting is the person knows you care, they actually come to you asking for advice because you've built that friendship.

That's right. And that's gonna take some new thinking for people. I think the next generation gets that better than the older generation and so therefore they're very qualified to just build really good, authentic relationships with people.
Dr. Darrell Bock: Well this is a great conversation and the reason it's important is because there is, not only is there this difference but there's almost this generational divide about how to deal with this that's important which makes conversations between generations tricky. Well Gabe, as we talk about the tension that the culture puts us under, the other element that's kind of going on in the midst of this is that, is we really have two generations that respond to these realities somewhat differently. And that produces not only a different set of response from different age groups but it also produces some conversational static, if I can say it that way between an older generation and a younger generation that handle these areas differently. How do we work through that part of the reality that we're talking about?

Gabe Lyons: Yeah it's so important that generations can relate. And yet I think in every generation we find parents and kids just not knowing how to talk to one another. That's not a new phenomena. But I do think work can be done and care can be given within the Christian community for us to be really careful to choose to trust a little bit more than we do otherwise. And I do find with some of the older generation there's a constant, there's a fear going on that we're losing the next generation and some of that's grounded. I mean it's statistically proven out. We are losing many in the next generation but that fear can start to drive us to not want to learn, to not want to engage the next generation or to listen to some of their thoughts and ideas.

And I think of the relationship I have with the late Chuck Colson where that was a big part of our relationship the last decade of his life was in his 70's he was still asking me who was in my early 30's like what are you seeing out there? What's happening in the church? How do you respond to this particular topic or issue? And we had a mutual relationship between you know, separated by really three generations. We had this mutual conversation going on where I was learning from him and he was asking me questions and he, I don't know that he really learned anything from me. I think he just nodded his head a few times and acted like it. But he would listen and seek to understand.

And I think between parents and children we're dealing with a similar thing. We've gotta take a step back. I know we think we have all the answers, and listen to the next generation. There's a lot we can learn from them because they're not coming from a place of fear. You gotta understand they've grown up. The air they're breathing right now has been some of these social rules that I've laid out.
And so it's kind of built in so they don't – they're not fearful of it at all. They're used to pluralism. They're used to growing up in an environment where Christians did not have a dominant point of view in the world. They've always been a – and Christians have been a little bit more of a minority point of view. So we can learn a lot from somebody who's joyful and hopeful even in that circumstance. Whereas I think sometimes the old generation sorta remembers the good old days and says, "Man I wish it was like that and since it's not, I've got a lot of fear about where this is going."

Dr. Darrell Bock Yeah. And I think another danger older generation can sometimes do is to say, "Well the way I deal with this is to just kind of plant my flag and stand firm. And in the midst of planting the flag and standing firm, you're actually violating some of the rules that we talked about. Which means, and I think this is the subtle part of this, which means that in the midst of very well intentioned communication where you're trying to challenge someone about where they are in life, you actually never get heard. Not only do you never get heard, you don't have a chance of getting heard and you're actually building a wall the more you respond.

Whereas if you walk in from a different angle, the opportunity exists to build some empathy and sympathy and connection and then when you challenge, you challenge with the credibility of having built a relationship that works. You suggested this with patience but what else would you suggest in terms of how to walk into these kinds of spaces and thinking about these kinds of spaces?

Gabe Lyons Well I think, I remember a conversation I had with my father who grew up, I grew up Baptist and that was their background. And the story we're talking about in the earlier episode of the half story Gospel and the full story Gospel and him having concerns about some of what I was talking about that sounded liberal. Because we were talking about that God wants to renew the world and that there's work to be done in this world to make things new and to make things better to advance the common good. You know these are all flashing red flag signals that this is a liberal point of view.
And in having that conversation, what was so helpful was instead of me being frustrated about his perspective was having a sensitivity to it to say actually everything that I'm talking about and writing about right now doesn't replace how I was raised or the fact that the fall redemption story is true and that that's how I became a Christian and came to know Jesus. I feel like what this conversation is broadening our responsibility as Christians. It's saying yes, not only do we have to proclaim the good news and do evangelism, we have about ten other responsibilities we need to be doing as it relates to following Christ in the world. And having a sensitivity to that conversation allowed my father to see some of what I was talking about without it being this offensive clash.

But I do think Darrell you're right. Language has become a huge problem for all of us. Even in writing this book The Next Christians, one of the things I was trying to do was help parents understand their 20-something children and have a conversation that was rooted in this idea of the Gospel but they were approaching differently. So one of the chapters is called, you know being provoked instead of offended. Well lots of the older generation would be offended sometimes at the types of sin or corruption or even parts of town that they weren't going to go to because it represented a lack of holiness.

Well the next generation sees those places and they feel called by God to actually go into them, to be provoked to engaged some of these spaces that otherwise felt very off limits to Christians. And by doing so put themselves in positions to do real ministry to people who really need it. And yet an older generation sometimes looks at that and goes, "Wait, you shouldn't be doing that. You shouldn't be involved there." And so the religion side can sometimes hold back the next generation who's saying no, I just practically wanna love people. I wanna do justice. I wanna live out what I see the teachings of Jesus tell me to do without all of these rules and parameters you keep trying to put around me.
Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah. And it really does, you know the tension that people feel is the tension between what I like to call sacred space that people wanna create for themselves, their families, their communities and the extension of the hand of the Gospel which basically says the only way you get to a whole life is to come into this sacred space. But if you build walls around that sacred space so high, you never extend that hand out to the person who you're trying to reach. I like to think about it when I'm in the conversation with a younger person, we're kinda taking on the roles of the different ages here, is I understand when I talk – I've worked with young people all my life. I've been in the seminary here for 34 years. And I know they're highly motivated and have the same Gospel commitment I do. I know we share that.

And so out of that builds a desire to listen and hear how they are seeing things because I know their goal isn't to undermine what I believe in. Their real goal is to try and further what I believe in. now let me do it a different way. But part of that is hey, you know I'm here to listen and hear. Your experience isn't my experience. Your age group does react to things differently than I do. I'm all ears.

Gabe Lyons  Yeah and Darrell, that's an incredible model for any listeners who are struggling with this. I think your approach of choosing to trust, knowing occasionally there are people that probably don't agree with everything that you think theologically, that you don't start the conversation there. You start with what can I learn from you? What are you thinking?

Dr. Darrell Bock  What do we have in common?

Gabe Lyons  Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah.

Gabe Lyons  And that's not only good practice within the church, we're gonna find it essential practice in the world today. Where people are having a very hard time knowing how to get along despite differences in opinion, religion, faith, politics, you name it. What a great way for Christians to be the ones that know how to model this, to know how to listen to others, to try to find common ground and really point the way forward I think that in a way our culture is kinda begging for it and there's no real leadership there.
Dr. Darrell Bock: You know I think of two passages that come to mind. They both come out of the exilic experience of the Old Testament. One of them is a very famous passage coming out of Jeremiah in which the urging is you know, to basically serve the city, to work for the prosperity of the city. And he's not talking about Jerusalem. He's talking about Babylon.

Gabe Lyons: Right.

Dr. Darrell Bock: So you go, well you know you wouldn't exactly hang up Babylon as the biblical model of a way a city ought to be and yet the exhortations of these exiles is participate in that culture. Participate in the family, in the life of the city, and do it in a way that benefits the city. Try and be a contributor to what's going on rather than a spectator who's simply shaking their finger at the culture. That's picture number one. Picture number two is actually the figure of Daniel himself. You know who worked in the midst of the Babylonian government. Now I suspect there were things going on in that government that Daniel would go, "probably not the best, most biblical thing to be doing." And yet at the same time he was trying to participate as someone who brought something positive to what was going on as opposed to simply leaving it alone and in many ways letting it just deteriorate on its own terms.

Gabe Lyons: Yes, I think that's all part of this mission to restore. To be those who seek to fix systems that are broken. You know one example we think about justice sometimes, you know it's easy to make the example of maybe an African village where they're not receiving clean water. And so compassion says, "Let's go in and help them while they're sick from this poor water source and feed them well and try to rehabilitate 'em and get 'em medication and those sorts of things." That's compassion but justice is saying, "Why is this water source not functioning correctly? Where's the source of this? How do we fix that problem? Why is the government providing clean water to this group and not this group? What do we need to do to solve the systemic problem?" And for Christians that a new way of thinking for many to go, "How do we think about systemic injustice?" And the next generation gets that. They don't have to think twice about it. It's just again, they see it –

Dr. Darrell Bock: Right, they see it.
Growing up with the race environment that's happening in America right now. There's an understanding that there's some systemic problems here going on that as Christians we can't just be a party to. We've gotta step into those difficult conversations.

How is it that millions of dollars are coming to this government and those dollars never reach that water supply? I mean you know that's really what you're raising. And so you know how do you deal with that? I like to use the picture of you know, sometimes when you move the discussion this direction people say – and you've already alluded to this, that's liberalism or that's the social Gospel when you hear the phrase social next to Gospel that's bad news. And so and you hear that. And then I like to take people to Luke Chapter 4 where Jesus gets up in the synagogue and first he says, "You know I've been anointed by the Lord to liberate the captives et cetera and to declare the year's jubilee," which is the year of forgiveness.

But then the next scene has him in Capernaum and he's doing all kinds of things that actually support in concrete ways the message that he gave in the synagogue. So there's a word in deed coherence in connection that fits. And you see by the way they minister that they mean what they say.

Yeah and he's constantly, I mean we look at the miracles that we celebrate and every miracle seems to be a physical, something physical is manifesting itself as we talk about the four-part story, creation, fall, redemption, restoration. Like the lame man whose leg hasn't functioned since birth. Well God knew in his created order design, legs should function a certain way and part of him transforming this gentleman's life is that he transform his leg to function the way it ought to have functioned when it was designed. So his leg has healed. It gives a physical manifestation of what Christ is talking about spiritually. That usually draws the crowd and then he has the opportunity to talk about the spiritual in that story. And so we see that pattern throughout the new testament and not only that, I think of the story of Zacchaeus, which we you know, for those who grew up in Bible churches and were young, we had a little song about the wee little man.

[Singing] Zachias was a wee little man, yeah.
And you know and we sorta have that story as a certain story in our mind. Well when I look at that story I see Jesus showing up addressing who would've been the oppressor in the community, the person that the whole, all the villagers standing around when he stops at this tree had to be wanting Jesus to just chastise this guy and to tell him why he's wrong and evil. But what does he do? He does the counter cultural thing. He says, "I'm gonna come over to your house for dinner tonight." Zachias can't believe it. And after they have their dinner together where the religious leaders are just so upset that Jesus is engaging this man, Zacchaeus comes out and he's been transformed by his relationship now with Jesus and his understanding, so much so that he decides part of his job now as a Christian, as a follower, is I'm gonna restore back what I've broken in my community. And he gives back four times what he had taken from people.

Maximum penalty of the law.

Yeah so it's a beautiful picture of that Christian restoring and it's physical, and it's tangible. It's not just some spiritual idea.

Yeah I think all these pictures are important because what they show is like I say, the coherence between what we say and what we do. And people are, when there's consistency people are drawn to that. When there's inconsistency which we hear through the word, all Christians are hypocrites, you know people spot that too. And so it really is important to live this out in a way that's important. Well that brings me to another question and it's this. There's the church that, and I don't mean to ask this question to be critical of the way churches were, but I'm gonna frame it in such a way that's going to sound that way.

But that's not the point. The point is to ask what else churches should be doing that they haven't been doing that helps speak into this space. So the question goes like this. There's the church that you grew up in when you were growing up. And then there's the church you would like your child to grow up in. What does the church that your child should grow up in have going for it that you didn't experience when you were in church?
So and it is hard 'cause I don't wanna critique my church experience. Actually I think I was a pretty blessed young man to grow up in a church where I felt very discipled and equipped and I would credit that in the prayers of my grandma and my parents for a lot of anything good in my life.

So there are good things the churches have been doing for a long time.

That's right, yeah. I would say the things that I see the opportunity for in churches today and as I think about my children, is moving away from young people thinking that their best way to serve God is to go into full time quote-unquote ministry and become a pastor or a missionary as the main source of how God's kingdom would go forward.

Not the only way to go.

And helping our children understand that God's designed 'em in a unique way, that there's new passions probably developing in them that have a placement ultimately vocationally in every arena of culture. And that if our churches are thinking in more of that mentality, we start to form and disciple around helping people to know how to real-world navigate being a Christian in an industry such as entertainment or media or technology and gaming or business and finance on Wall Street. You name it.

In law.

Yeah. There's no category that Christians shouldn't be going into. And in fact I really think this will be one of the ways that the Gospel manifests itself even more than just by people showing up in our churches and hearing a pastor teach. It's probably gonna be through these people who are out expressing their gifts with this Gospel motivation in them. The second thing I would add to that, is that you know the reformation took place 500 years ago coming next year in 2017. And that reformation was about getting the scriptures into the hands of the people and it was moving the hierarchical authority from the pastor or the priest to the people. And that transformed the way the church started to operate and think in people's lives and how they related to Christ.
I think what's happening now is a real new opportunity where it moves not just from people in the pews now having access to the scripture but them feeling very empowered as ministers of the Gospel to be going out into every one of these realms. And so it aligns with that first thing I would hope to see churches doing which is teaching in that way and developing and cultivating in that way. But it really goes to how the structures of even the church work that they start to function in such a way that it's not only about people coming into church services on a weekly basis. And we see this in the missional idea played out in some places. But that the church really takes on a whole different mentality for the age ahead. That's about how do I continue to do on the job sort of discipleship for people who are called into these different spaces and that church is a place to nurture and disciple them. Not necessarily, and this is Darrell where I disagree with some of my peers, a place to do evangelism. I don't really see the church is designed to be the seeker sensitive environments where we're just trying to attract people. I actually see the church as needing to be more rigorous in how we're training people theologically, how we're teaching them to believe and to think. And then to go live that out within all of these different places. And so I think the future church is going to have to look like that. You know at the church that I'm at, we do something on the first Sunday of the week. We take prayers that elders gather together for prayer as part of the service and the rest of the congregation is singing while we're praying with the people who come forward as part of the service. The third week we honor birthdays and anniversaries as people get to know one another in their seasons of life and how long they've been married, how old they are and that kinda thing. They actually have women who are willing to confess how old they are when we do this. It's become part of the cultural thing.
And we're talking about adding a third week and the third week we would divide up the teachers or the lawyers or whatever and rotate the vocations and pray for people in an effect, almost like commission them in the midst of their ministry to say, "God had you here doing this. We're praying that you have wisdom and discernment. We're asking that the Spirit equip you to be able to do this." And that's the kind of mentality that you're talking about wraps itself around this kind of a church where it says the whole of life is the ministry if I can say it that way. That ministry is not you know a one day a week two hours a day. It's not 1-2, it's 24-7.

Gabe Lyons
And that's why I appreciate institutions like Dallas Theological Seminary. I mean what you're doing here is teaching theology which is where Christians, this is what we believe. I mean this is what we have to be so rooted in. I think the church of the future is going to have even more of an appreciation for good, theological teaching. And then I think but what will emanate out from that is a lot of freedom for how people are going to express that theology and how they're doing ministry in a broken world, how they're operating in the public square, how they're engaging in politics. There'll be more freedom whereas I would say in the past the church has had a pretty narrow view of how a theology ought to play out in a public square. I think that's where there'll be more discussions and debates. But that a rooted theology is gonna be critical for the days ahead.

Dr. Darrell Bock
Yeah. I mean our real hope is to show that theology really is relevant to all of life and that the types of things that we reflect on and discuss here and that we're preparing pastors to discuss actually applies to everybody in a meaningful way. And it also serves to drive the core missional assignments that God has given his people which is to reflect his presence, not just in their communities but in the world in which he's placed them and where he has them.

Gabe Lyons
Yeah. And that type of functionally for a lot of churches requires re-staffing, re-thinking about what spiritual formation and those dynamics are going to look like for the future.

Dr. Darrell Bock
And we're obviously playing with that here. That's part of what the table has been about.
I'll tell ya, I was in the Bay Area with a leading company that has 20,000 employees and the CEO is a believer. And he was describing their campus as much like Google has campuses where people really spend their whole life there. They have cafeterias. They do family nights where families come out to the campus and encourage basically so everybody will work more. And in describing that phenomena, that's kind of a pretty unique Silicon Valley space. The creativity that they were having to say, "What would it look like for the church to show up on these campuses? What would it look like to not ask people to leave, you know in the evening and go to church but to actually show up and have church on the campus. Is that possible?"

It's those kinds of ways of thinking. I'm not sure that's such a great idea but I'm suggesting that the innovation to really adapt to where are people at today. What questions are they asking? How are we as a church gonna show up in those places? That's what's been great about evangelicalism is we've always been pioneering and innovative to say, "We're gonna take action and keep doing mission no matter what this world throws at us."

Yeah the great commission doesn't begin by saying, "Go into the church and teach them to obey all my commands." But, "Go into the world and teach them to obey all that I've commanded." Well Gabe, I really thank you for taking the time to be with us and to help us think through kinda where we are culturally. It's been a pleasure to have you. We love your work in ministry. Tell us really, really quickly about your next book.

So the next book comes out March 1st, called Good Faith: Being a Christian when society thinks you're irrelevant and extreme. And me and David Kinnaman who did Un-Christian together are coming back together, taking one of the biggest research projects Barna have ever done with pastors as well as a national research project to understand how Americans and people of faith are interacting now. What people think about religion and church and how do we engage some of the biggest and toughest issues in the next few years ahead and have good faith, joyful faith but also remain committed to our convictions.

Well we look forward to that and thank you for being with us today. And we thank you for being a part of The Table and we look forward to your coming back and listening to us again.