



*Ministering to Millennials*  
with Alistair Begg and Darrell L. Bock  
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- Dr. Darrell Bock* Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture and our topic today is the church and my very special guest is Alistair Begg who is – are you a transplanted European from Scotland or do I put European and Scotland next to each other? How does this work?
- Alistair Begg* It's hard isn't it?
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, I mean I don't know anymore.
- Alistair Begg* Nobody knows anymore. I'm a hybrid now.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* You're a hybrid now?
- Alistair Begg* Well Scotland is my birthplace. I lived in England from the age of 15 so that fierce Scottish nationalism was eroded enough to enjoy the United Kingdom and you know I've now lived longer in the states than I lived in the UK.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Oh wow, so cricket is not a bug to you.
- Alistair Begg* No, cricket is a mystery to me.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Great. Well so you're a pastor of a church in Cleveland, Ohio, is that right, and how long have you been there?
- Alistair Begg* Yeah, suburban Cleveland; we're about 20 miles south and east. I've been there since the 3rd of August 1983 so almost 34 years now.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Oh wow, yeah. I've been here a year long, yeah, so that's basically the same ministry.
- Alistair Begg* It's kind of like a lifetime, isn't it?
- Dr. Darrell Bock* It is, yeah. And describe the nature of your ministry. What do you hope to do in your church from the pulpit, that kind of thing? How do you view your...

*Alistair Begg* Well I know you know Scotland and so you've seen the pipe bands in Scotland –

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's true.

*Alistair Begg* And the man at the back with that gigantic drum that he plays left to right and sometimes the pipes stop and the snare drums stop and all that remains is that 1 drum. And I think actually what I do is I play that drum in the sense that trying to just consistently sound out the note of scripture with all the other instrumentation that's going on around it but that never is silent, whether it's me that's there or whether it's 1 of my colleagues that's there. So essentially teaching The Bible in such a way that doesn't simply seek to provide information for people but hopefully brings them into a direct encounter with the living God through his word.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That sounds like a wonderful goal. Well our topic today is the church and in particular we're going to talk about a particular age group, the millennials in the church, but I want to talk about the church first and then the millennials. And there's a reason for this because the millennials as a group are in a kind of – at least the ones who are associated with the church are in almost a kind of love/hate relationship with the church these days at many levels and we want to take a look at that.

But first we want to articulate perhaps what the church ought to be in the midst of a world in which so many things are changing around us. I think we could hardly go through the last couple of years, whether we're talking about the situation in Europe and Britain or we think about the situation in the United States or globally we think about the growth of the church around the world and not see that we're part of a changing world.

So you know the church is in 1 sense the apple of God's eye. It's where he manifests himself. So how would you talk to people about how they should think about the church before they even walk in one?

- Alistair Begg* Right. Well if we're talking about somebody way on the outside with no real understanding of church I think I might start at the very end, the ultimate purpose of God, to put together this company of people that come from such a diverse background so that there is an inherent diversity that is built into the plan of God and that the unity that he creates is in relationship to different nations, peoples, languages, and tongues.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* So you're talking about Revelation 4 and 5 where all the nations are gathered praising the name of God and what he's done through Jesus Christ and there I mean diversity sometimes is a hard word for the church but in that case that's a very biblical diversity and that's a very healthy diversity.
- Alistair Begg* Yeah and so that's if you like that's the final product so that the church, local church, our church is supposed to be at least some kind of charcoal sketch that approximates to that that if you think of what God is doing in the world in gathering. You see the story in The Bible as they were scattered, they were gathered, they were scattered, and the idea of a broken world being repaired within the context of the church so that the church is supposed to be a place that gives a kind of microcosm of what God is ultimately planning to do.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* I call it a sneak preview.
- Alistair Begg* Sneak preview, there we go, a charcoal sketch of that, which will finally come in glorious Technicolor. To try and think of it in those terms so I don't think about it first of all in institutional terms or in architectural terms, but in relational terms.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Or even political terms.
- Alistair Begg* Oh, definitely not in political terms because that's –
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, we won't go there.
- Alistair Begg* Not immediately.

- Dr. Darrell Bock* So it's a play – you know Paul describes the ministry that he's engaged in as a ministry ultimately of reconciliation so it isn't a case – a piece of bringing people together who in 1 sense or another have been estranged, estranged from God on the 1 hand, estranged from one another on the other, and so it should be – I like the picture of a place of gathering, a place of gathering where eyes are all pointed in the same direction.
- Alistair Begg* Right.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* We're all looking to the same leader, the same savior, the same king, the same lord, however you want to express it and of course it's Jesus Christ.
- Alistair Begg* Yeah and I think that comes across so clearly in Ephesians as much as anywhere where he talks about the wall of partition has been broken down and now the 2 have become 1 new body.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* That's right and the interesting thing about that passage of course is that the 1 new man that it talks about is not something that's going on inside the individual; that's actually a corporate entity that we're talking about.
- Alistair Begg* That's right.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* I like to tease people that the passage in Colossians says there are no Barbarians or Scythians in the 1 new man. I said, "I don't go to the doctor and he says to me, 'Oh, you're sick Darrell because you've got too many Barbarians and Scythians fighting inside of you.'" No, that's not the metaphor. The metaphor is groups of people that are gathered together in a community that is different than the way the rest of the world is living. That's what the church is supposed to be.
- Alistair Begg* That's what the church is.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, that's what the church we hope is, right?
- Alistair Begg* Yeah, in terms of I mean the essential church or the invisible church, I mean that is what God is in the process of doing. We've got it fouled up at the local level pretty consistently.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, but at least the target should be clear that that's where we're going, that's what God has designed us to be; that's the way it's supposed to function. He's given us the spirit of God to enable us to be that, which he is working in us as he gives us his spirit to make us into those kinds of people. So that's what the church hopefully is and is aiming towards and is –

*Alistair Begg* Well what we're trying to do is become what we are, not become what we're not.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.

*Alistair Begg* So, yeah.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And 1 of the things that I think the church is sometimes slow to recognize is that God has given us everything that we need to be that already.

*Alistair Begg* Right.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And sometimes we sell short what it is we have received by God's grace.

*Alistair Begg* That's right. Yeah, again in Ephesians you know you have been seated. You've been raised. You are – and he prays for them that they will be filled with all the fullness of God.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And they've been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

*Alistair Begg* Exactly, yeah.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* We could just talk to each other in the language of scripture and we'll be in great shape.

*Alistair Begg* Well but you know I think part of the challenge is that there's an identity crisis within the church that people who attend church and would be adherents to church don't really know who they are.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right. That's a whole other podcast.

So I want to dive into this list. This list that we're going to go through is a list written by a millennial who says he loves the church but is also communicating to the church why millennials as a group struggle with the church. Now I've got to do a disclaimer before I start this, which is this is a terrible thing to do to put everybody all under the same label all at once. It risks generalization and that kind of thing. But the flip side of it is to try and articulate the sensitivities that a group of people, maybe not every single person in that group, but many of them feel when they encounter the church.

And so we're going to go through these 1 at a time, there are 12, and just respond to what we think is of merit here or what the church needs to be sensitive too on the 1 hand and to also perhaps articulate what might be missing or a part of this conversation that also needs to be considered. So we're going to try and balance this out but I introduce this list because at the seminary of course, and I'm sure this is true in your ministry, we minister to a large block of millennials. They make up a very substantial portion of the people who are in school with us here and I have come not to view the millennial as this alien from a foreign land who's invaded my territory but very much a group that has sensitivities and sees things that we might miss because we've been too close to it.

So this is – this list is gone through with some sensitivity that there could be some merit in some of what's being said about the church here. So here's the first one. It's a hard one to go with first. It says, "Nobody's listening to us." Let me read a little bit of it so you get the feel of what it's saying.

"Millennials value voice and receptivity above all else. When a church forges ahead without ever asking for our input we get the message loud and clear nobody cares what we think. Why then should we blindly serve and institution that we cannot change or shape?" That's a pretty strong indictment.

*Alistair Begg*

Yes, it is. Just as you read that I think that in a church where that is true it's probably true across the board in that the whole category of people are probably not being listened to. It may be a style of leadership that stifles any kind of participation in that way. But to the extent that young people like that would feel that somehow or another we have reintroduced the notion of children should be seen and not heard and just moved it up the food chain, there's a legitimate issue there.

How the listening takes place in that kind of context is an interesting question as well. I think you know just thinking as a pastor as I walk the hallways, as I have occasion to say, "Hello, how are you, where are you, how are you doing?" to engage people in a way that actually conveys to them that I am actually 1, interested in them and 2, I recognize that they have a perspective, and 3, that I'd love to hear it. But if I don't evince that kind of notion then I'm sure it contributes to that sort of feeling.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, 1 of the things that we've tried to do here and we've just started to do this is to meet pretty regularly with different groups of students to get their voice and say to them out loud, "We actually want to hear what you're saying. This meeting is very, very intentional of what it's about," and making sure that we set up whatever particularly decision-making committees we have and that kind of thing that plan out the events that we do that there is certainly some representation and input that's sought and then the other trick of course is to take some of what is said and make that part of the implementation of what you do, obviously where it has merit, and work to make sure that you're sending conscious, structural signals that you are listening to this group and that their input does matter.

*Alistair Begg* That's good.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, I think that's the way to handle it. So nobody – it starts off nobody has been listening to us so I guess my plea is well some people are listening. We're listening and we've heard this so we would try and do what we can to deal with this. But I do think that sometimes it's easy particular with a church or an institution that has some history and that has a level of leadership that perhaps significantly older for them to be making all the decisions and to only hear the wheel when it squeaks as opposed to in the process of planning and developing and looking ahead involving them into the conversations at the point at which decisions are being made rather than reacting to it.



*Alistair Begg*

Well you know on a practical level 1 of the ways that we are I supposed addressing it in part is by constantly introducing to our pastoral team lower and lower ages so that these people are on our pastoral team, therefore flavoring the discussion, therefore in so far as they represent a demographic if we put it that way that if they are engaged with their own, it sounds terrible, but if they're engaged with their own group as it were then to the extent that they are in communication with one another then their voice is actually being heard. And the challenge for me in my old age now is to make sure that I'm trying to create a climate in those conversations where the youngest voices, whether it's of interns or members of our pastoral team actually feel that their participation is not only valued but is necessary.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

Yeah and you know a key part of this conversation is the way in which that input is dealt with and honored and the way in which there's a sense of participation in the group. Well we could probably spend the whole podcast on just that first one but let me go onto the second one. It says – now this guy is vivid so I'm just, "We're sick of hearing about values and mission statements." Here's the subplot.

"Sweet Moses people, give it a rest. Of course as an organization it's important to be moving in the same direction and that should be easier for Christians than anyone because we already have a leader to follow. Jesus was insanely clear about our purpose on earth. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength and the second is this: love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.' Love God, love others, task completed."

*Alistair Begg*

Yeah. Well you know my immediate reaction to that is there's another group out there who for ages have been saying, "Why can't you clarify what it is we're doing here?" so we're bending over backwards to address that question and following it up on the other side. Yeah, I think there's some validity to that. You know I think that clarity – the real question for me is are we oriented around the gospel? And if we're seeking to be a gospel church then we're pretty well where this questioner is asking.

And that constantly has to be reinforced though because if we are not establishing our identity and defining our progress around the gospel we for sure are going to be doing it somewhere else and some of the default places are distinctly unhelpful.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* You know 1 of the challenges of the church is, and this is where the diversity picture comes back in, is it's so cross generational. The church is not just about millennials. It's not just about boomers. It's not just about the tweeners. It's about all those groups and getting them to participate with and alongside one another and the expectations that people have of their institutions, of those different age groups are a little bit different I think colored perhaps by the different experiences they've been through sociologically, et cetera.

So a church who repeatedly says hopefully and clearly, "This is what we're about," is important and I think the other thing that this may be getting at and I think the other points are going to show this is well we can talk about what our mission is and what are values are until we're blue in the face but what are we actually doing.

*Alistair Begg* Yeah, right.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Exactly. And I think that's – in fact the next point is an interesting one because it injects us into a segment of that concern coming out of this concern for loving others. The third one is, "Helping the poor isn't a priority." This is what he has said. "My heart is broken for how radically self-centered and utterly American our institution has become." Now this is great asking someone who didn't grow up in America this question.

"Let's clock the number of hours the average church attender spends in church-type activities, Bible studies, meetings, groups, social functions, book clubs, planning meetings, talking about building community, discussing a new mission, and let's clock the number of hours serving the least of these. Oh, awkward."

*Alistair Begg* Yeah. Well let's take the best models in history. It's almost a false dichotomy if the church is dealing with correctly. You take for example Spurgeon in Victorian England. He's known as the Prince of Preachers. His church was in 20th Century terms a front-door church. People came through the front door. They didn't come through the side doors. They came to hear Spurgeon priest but he's the one who established the orphanages. He's the one who had the people out in the rural villages. He's the one who was saying when the gospel takes root in a culture it does all these things.

And part of the challenge I have in hearing that kind of thing is to have to say to my young friends, "Now wait a minute. The real poverty, the real poverty that we're dealing with is the poverty of soul." I mean William Booth of The Salvation Army, he says you know you can put new trousers on a man, you can give him an education, you can give him 3 square meals a day, but unless the Holy Spirit has changed him from the inside out ultimately all of that is not there.

That's not an argument for not engaging with the poor but it is an argument for making sure that we distinguish between the nature of the saving work of Christ and the expressions of what it means to be gospel-oriented as a result of – that we're not saved by it but that we're saved for it, Ephesians 2:10. And where there is an absence of that then we've clearly misunderstood the nature of what it means to be in Christ and I would imagine that the person who writes this is responding to a sort of complete absence there.

But it's got to be genuine you know. It's not got to be setting up soup kitchens to try and get the millennials off our back. It's got to – I mean we've got to be engaged in this because we truly understand that this is the call of Christ to us to go to the least, the last, and the left out.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*     That's right.

*Alistair Begg*     Yeah, and so I think some churches are better at it than others. Some by virtue of where they're placed have a greater opportunity than others. Where we live in suburbia we have to go to the inner city to make those expressions and that can feel kind of weird as well, like oh, here come the rich people to solve their consciences because we don't have these opportunities that are immediately on our doorstep.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah and I sometimes say that churches sometimes feel like they have to reinvent the wheel to make this happen but there actually are a lot of extant organizations in their communities where this is already being attempted and done and churches can encourage people to be involved in those kinds of efforts as a way of expressing this Christian compassion, which I see this is fundamentally an expression of in order to express that Christian compassion and to show a presence and in some cases do so in a way in which you might actually be working shoulder-to-shoulder with people who also need the soul care that you're talking about.

*Alistair Begg* Sure and actually I think part of the think that I've failed to do in the church is the let the congregation itself know everything that's going on.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's right.

*Alistair Begg* Because there's tons of stuff that is being done selflessly but very effective in the very way in which you're speaking. It's not – we don't constantly put it up on the screen and we're dealing with it. But in terms of unwed mothers, in terms of the Boys Club of America, in terms of food at 5:00 in the afternoon for kids that haven't eaten at all that day, members of my congregation are involved in all of these things in an unheralded way. And 1 of the things that would be encouraging to someone who asks a question like this is just actually to take the lid off as it were and just say, "Look at what's happening."

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, you can see what's going on. You know in our church 1 of the things that we do is we have a testimony periodically about the way people are involved in the community to make a visible way, give a portion of the service that says, "Here's – " it's both kind of an opportunity, informational thing, but also a testimony to the fact of in some cases how easy it is to do this, that there – put a no excuses clause on top of it and say this is something that we can be done.

Well we've managed to get through 3 of our 12 as we're coming up to the first break here and when we come back on the other side we're going to go through the remainder of the list but this is I think a healthy and important conversation to be having about how people view the church and the strengths and weaknesses and it almost gives an opportunity for a kind of self-assessment about where the church as an institution is.

*Alistair Begg* Yeah, it's a useful but painful exercise.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Well we'll try and keep the pain to a minimum or make sure the surgery is as painless as possible as we go through.

*Alistair Begg* Good man.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* We're going through 12 lists of things that millennials struggle with about the church. We've gone through 3 so if I do my math that means we've got 9 left so here we go. "We're tired of you blaming the culture. From Elvis's hips to rap music, from Footloose to twerking, every older generation comes to the same conclusion." We were just talking earlier about generalization and this probably does the same thing in the other direction, but that's okay.

"The world is going to pot faster than the state of Colorado. We're aware of the downfalls of the culture believe it or not. We actually are living in it too. Perhaps it's easier to focus on how terrible the world is out there than actually address the mess within it." That's pretty either/or-ish but what do you think?

*Alistair Begg* Well I think 1 of the things in terms of the role that I fill and share with others around the nation, I don't want to be unkind to my colleagues but I don't know how many of them actually realize that we are the culture. We make up part of it. We are in it.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.

*Alistair Begg*

And that it would be good to let our congregations know that we actually understand this, that we read something other than our Bibles, that we are alert to things that are going on and moves, and that we don't see them always in terms of us and them. There is a tone in a congregation that is set from the pulpit without question and I think it's Perkins, 1 of the old Puritans who had – I think he had 7 categories of listeners that he told his friends, "You'd better keep in mind that they're there."

And I couldn't repeat them for you now but an awareness of that I find tremendously helpful and it prevents me from – you know I like to try and think that 5 people from my immediate neighborhood are sitting on the front row. Now how am I approaching this as opposed to now we're all in here in the salt box and they're all out there in the mire and – that stuff is – I don't like that myself. I don't like it when I find it and so I'm on-guard against it.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

Yeah, I find myself when I'm speaking sometimes hearing myself speak and saying, "Okay, I've just spoken to the insiders. Now what do I say to those on the outside? What do I say to the person who if I were encountering them on the street and I didn't know what their spiritual status was, how would they hear what I'm saying?"

*Alistair Begg*

Exactly.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

I also think that another element of this one is that sometimes there are things in the culture that are exemplary, that do model something positive, and if every illustration of our culture is negative then we send 1 signal whereas if it's mixed it's probably more a reflection of the reality that a lot of people sense they live in.

- Alistair Begg* Yeah, I said to somebody I think it was just in the last 36 hours, somebody mentioned Christopher Hitchens, the late Christopher Hitchens, and I said, "Oh, he was my favorite atheist." And the person said, "What do you mean by that?" as if you can't have a favorite atheist, as if he only exists as the butt of our animosity. And I said, "Did you ever read anything he wrote? Did you ever pay attention? And if you did it would make you weep. It wouldn't make you become strident in the way you are." And I think that's Paul to Titus in Crete. Teach these people to be eager to do good, to be engaged. It falls – you know as it goes from the pulpit so it really goes for our congregation.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, I think this is something that's interesting to think about and some pastors who I sometimes view as what I would call tone-deaf speak so consistently so negatively about everything that's going on around them that you wonder if they see the kindnesses that do sometimes appear and the things that are worth merit. But the flipside of course is there are things to complain about.
- Alistair Begg* Yeah, but you know why is La La Land going to win the Oscar? Let's think about it, this celebration of something, you know – yeah.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yep. Okay, number 5, "The you can't sit with us effect. There's this life changing movie all humans must see regardless of gender," and I'm already disqualified. "The film of course is the 2004 classic Mean Girls," which I haven't seen.
- Alistair Begg* Neither have I.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* "So in the film the most popular girl in school forgets to wear pink on Wednesday, a cardinal sin to which Gretchen Whiner screams, 'You can't sit with us.' Today my mom said to me, 'Church has always felt exclusive and clique-y like a high school.' With sadness in her voice she continued, 'I've never been good at that game so I stopped playing.' The truth is I share her experience and so do thousands of others." Wow, that's painful.
- Alistair Begg* Yeah, you know it's an irony for me that when I talk – when I listen and I try and listen, you know in terms of sort of moral consensus or how potentially blurred are the lines around certain sacrosanct parts of Christian morality that many of these young people are prepared to debate with me many of these things. The 1 thing is the fundamental taboo is you can't be mean; you just can't be mean.

And what I've learned is if I sound mean then even if I'm not mean I've lost half of the conversation right there. And so it works for me then to think, "How does my tone sound?" So when you – when we're engaged in conversation, not only from the pulpit but when the people come to you afterwards and have reaction and questions, I've had to really work at trying to say to myself, "Now think just a moment before you take and hide like an old guy."

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah and I actually think this is connected to something that was said earlier that I don't feel heard, I don't feel like I belong. This is really an 'I don't belong' complaint to 1 degree or another, which takes us back to that space.

*Alistair Begg* What is it that we have to tell them that they know they belong?

*Dr. Darrell Bock* You know I think about that and I go, "It may not be an action of something that's said. It may have to be something that's done." So again we're back to how involved are we? How much are we listening? How much are we engaging? How much are we in conversation with them? How much are we – how much are they feeling like they can express themselves with the idea of – there are 2 ways – a person can express themselves and then I can defend where I've been. That doesn't do any good. Or I can actually engage them and if there are concerns I have about what they're saying to me about where they're coming from, if I give them the space to express where they're coming from to me and I show some honoring of that and respect, I also at the same time create the space for me to do the reverse.

*Alistair Begg* That's good.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And so – and frankly sometimes I think it's the responsibility of the older person or the older group to show that space to the younger person than vice versa because theoretically as I should be the person as the more mature person who's willing to go there, although sometimes I think the way we tend to think, "Well I'm the older person. He should respect his elders and that's the end of it."

*Alistair Begg* But you know there's something that just occurs to me Darrell that this is not actually new.



*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah, no, not at all.

*Alistair Begg* This is not new.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* I did this with my parents.

*Alistair Begg* I can tell you in 1972 I visit America for the first time. I'm asked to speak and give a little story in suburban Detroit. My jeans were tighter than if they'd been painted on. My hair was as long as the front of the James Taylor album. I gave an articulation of following Jesus and as I walked back to my seat the pastor said, "There you are folks, even people who look like that can actually be Christians."

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Wow.

*Alistair Begg* Yeah. That was very inclusive. It made me feel good.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And look how far you've come.

*Alistair Begg* Now I'm doing it to people.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Okay, the next one, this is number 6, we're not even halfway through. "Distrust and misallocation of resources." I'm not going to read the underneath of this. I do think that there is an interesting – how can I say this – an interesting testimony and observation that comes from people in the congregation about how a church uses its resources.

*Alistair Begg* Right, across the board.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah.

*Alistair Begg*

So it's no surprise if somebody's 24 and they're asking the question because somebody who's 64 may be asking the same question. So what that really argues for is scrupulous honesty and being able to give full disclosure to the use of funding. And you know when you begin to build a team of people who are mission-ly involved, both locally and around the world and you support them and the people are aware of that, then they begin to see. They do the math themselves. They say, "Well this is costing us a fortune. We've got people in China, we've got people in Japan; we've got them all over the place. Why are we doing this?" Well for the very reasons that the person is asking.

And you know my approach with leadership is that we ought to tell the congregation everything that we can tell them that is good for them to know and we should safeguard them for things that are unhelpful for them and I mean by that spiritual issues in people's lives that are not – we can't jeopardize their integrity. But this stuff, I don't think that's a millennial question. I think that's a trans-generational question.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

Yes. And the next one is very relational. It says, "We want to be mentored, not preached at." Now again everything is being put in this kind of binary category and I often tell my students you know sometimes binaries don't help us. Binaries should perhaps be stated and maybe I should think of this in the Hebrew not X but Y stance in which it's not so much X but Y and think about this. If we aren't mentored, if people aren't coming alongside of us to help us in a personal and intimate kind of way and we're just being preached at, that doesn't help us. Amen, right?

*Alistair Begg*

Yeah, well see I don't like the terminology 'preached at.' The preposition is wrong and it speaks to actually a very skewed view of what is actually happening in preaching. If we see preaching in terms of Ephesians 4 that we are edifying the saints to enable them to do the works of ministry, if we see it in terms of the feeding of the flock, the leading into pastures, if there is a pastoral tone that pervades the preaching act –

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

An arm around the person as you're speaking...

*Alistair Begg*

An arm around the shoulder as you're speaking, which then – which is a short step from there to out of the pulpit and now following through. So yeah, I think the antithesis is unhelpful there.

- Dr. Darrell Bock* Fair enough. "We want to feel value." Who doesn't? But in fairness if you're feeling marginalized, if you're feeling like you don't – your word isn't valued or isn't part of the discussion, you might feel devalued. You might feel marginalized and therefore wondering why you're here. I told Alistair before we did the podcast that part of what is motivating this particular podcast is a discussion that we had with under 30 women who feel very marginalized in the church but they're also deeply committed to Christ and deeply committed to the church. It was a complaint made out of love and that's what I think this piece is to a certain extent. So they're kind of saying to us, "What can turn us off?" That's worth listening to.
- Alistair Begg* It's essential.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Number 9, "We want you to talk about controversial issues because no one is." That's an interesting one.
- Alistair Begg* It is.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* I know that 1 of the things that has certainly emerged from our doing these podcasts, these Table podcasts, consistently we walk into controversial areas and in some cases areas with a time and a depth that you don't necessarily have time and class to deal with in the confines of a normal curriculum. And the response particularly by younger people has been, "I'm so glad we're talking about this on campus."
- Alistair Begg* Right.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* It's a very common reaction to what it is that we've been doing with the podcast. So they want these conversations to go deep. Now I think there's another half to this story and I would articulate it like this that sometimes the sermon isn't the place for that to happen, that the church has other means that are actually better suited to go there than a sermon might. I always tell my students a sermon is a monologue. If I get feedback I get it later. But these kinds of issues that we're talking about here that they want discussed are often not monologues; they are conversations. So they need environments where a conversation can take place.

- Alistair Begg* Yep and 1 of the ways we can do that is by simply opening the floor to questions in a context where it's easy to do and I like to do that because it's a Socratic way of teaching and I get an opportunity to respond to find out actually what are the questions that are on the minds of the group that I have in front of me and when I do that here at the seminary it's not so much about me being able to try and come up with an answer as it is a huge investigative project on my part to walk away from here and say, "You know that's fascinating. Those questions were all in this area," or they were whatever they were. And it enables one in returning to the pulpit to come with a greater sense of clarity as to the people to whom you're speaking.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah and frankly sometimes life is awkward and the questions are awkward because life is awkward and being able to model how to function in awkwardness is not always a bad thing because life isn't as neat and clean as we'd often like it to be.
- Alistair Begg* Yeah and I think it's actually a wonderful way to teach. And you're right, you can – I teach 4 times on a Sunday. The 3 morning services are all the same, the evening service is different, it's different content, but there's no way in the world that I can fit all of this into that pattern. So then a church has to be intentional about saying, "How do we do this?"
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Right, fair enough.
- Alistair Begg* I think that's a good point.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Yep. Number 10, the public perception and this one probably needs to be filled out a little bit. "It's time to focus on changing public perception of the church within the community. The neighbors, the city, the people around our church buildings should be audibly thankful the congregation is part of their neighborhood. We should be serving," and then I'm going to edit this, "We should be serving the – out of them." Okay?
- Alistair Begg* Yep.
- Dr. Darrell Bock* Anyway, so very directly how the church is perceived by its neighbors and having the positive testimony. We ask this of elders.

*Alistair Begg*

Right. Well I mean it covers every level doesn't it? It covers the way in which we drive around the community, the way in which we seem to be a pleasant group. I mean we do certain things intentionally in this regard like the Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the police come in, so we do it in our building in order that it's the best building for them to do it in and so we do it there. The roof blew off a school and we gave them our building for 6 months where 400 children populated the building. We did it because we had the space and we needed. It wasn't a mechanism to try and make the community think good about us but years later people say, "Oh Parkside, you're the people that took the school in aren't you?" They're not saying, "Oh, you're the one that preached the gospel." So there are all kinds of small ways in which we make huge gains and I think the point is well made.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*

Yeah, at our church we sometimes – well we do, we have a tutoring service for some of the public schools that are right around as a way of saying, "This is a concrete way of serving the community," and getting to know people in that community and the kind of life that they live that puts us in a better position to minister to them. Number 11, this is obviously not the Ten Commandments. Number 11, "Stop talking about us unless you're actually going to do something." I actually think this is a recalibration of something we've been hearing throughout this, you know show that we matter. "Words without follow-up are far worse than ignoring us completely. Despite the stereotypes about us we are listening to phrases being spoken in our general direction," that kind of thing. So it says, "Stop speaking in abstract sound bites and make a tangible plan for how to reach millennials. If you want the respect of our generation under-promise and over-deliver."

*Alistair Begg*

Okay, that's good. I mean as I listen to that you know there's a young fellow that I should've met with in the last 2 weeks but I've been unable to do so and he fits this category entirely. We had a meeting and he offloaded his entire operation, I gave him a book by Chesterton and he went away, and actually I thought that I'd done a horrible job of meeting with the fellow but actually I must have listened enough to establish a good enough link that the dialogue continues. And so point well made; point well made. And this is where the – we're all better together than any one of us is on our own. We're not all good at all these elements.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's right. Okay, here's the last one. "You're failing to adapt. Here's the bottom line church: you aren't reaching millennials. Enough with the excuses and the blame. We need to accept reality and intentionally move towards this generation that is terrifyingly anti-church." Remember this is coming from someone who says they love the church but is trying to be self-critical and I like to remind people whenever you get into this mode and have this kind of a conversation the prophets were a wonderful example of this. They were pro-Israel, couldn't have been more pro-Israel, but being pro-Israel didn't mean being so tribal you couldn't be self-critical. They were very self-critical at the same time because they were pro-Israel.

So how we view and take criticism and how we respond do it is actually an important element in growing and in pursuing in some cases change, which can be hard for some communities, or in some cases thinking about what we can do that might meet the needs of this group whose needs might be slightly different than the group we're used to ministering to.

*Alistair Begg* Yeah. I'd like to know how Paul would've responded to that question in Ephesus or whatever it was because it is a – that's a sort of perennial thing. A little church history helps in this doesn't it?

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yes, it does.

*Alistair Begg* I mean in Scotland, in the UK in general, 1 generation drifts away from God, the next generation rejects him completely and the generation born under them has got no notion whatsoever.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.

*Alistair Begg* But what I've discovered with that group is if we appear to be coming up with cute ways to engage them that turns them off even more.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Because there's still got to be substance behind whatever you do.

*Alistair Begg* Absolutely. So now we're back at good news and good deeds.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right, yep. Absolutely. The church is – I like to tell people the church is called the body of Christ for a reason and this is going to sound – and that is it represents the presence of God in the world in the midst of Jesus' seeming absence, seeming is the key word here because he's actually active all the way through it. But the point is the church is supposed to be a reflection and an imitator of who God is. And the better job we do that some people will not want anything to do with it. We know scripture tells us that Jesus told the disciples you're going to get pushback, he kind of spent the second half of his ministry preparing them for it, but you want the pushback to be for the right reasons and not the wrong reasons.

*Alistair Begg* Exactly.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* You want it to be because you're representing the gospel as opposed to doing something else. Well any final word you want to give to us as we kind of wrap this up and think through what it is that we just walked through?

*Alistair Begg* Yeah, you know In Search of Excellence, that old book, at the end when the fellow reviews it he says, "There's 1 thing that all these different companies had in common and that is they all did the basics well most of the time." And so loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength in the way in which this person mentions it and living it out is basic. And so if we can just stick with the basics...

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Well we thank you for coming by and help us kind of negotiate this space. Our intention is down the road to actually invite in some millennials and hear from them directly rather than kind of –

*Alistair Begg* Send me that podcast.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* I will send you that podcast. I'm actually interested in it. We're in conversations very regularly with as I said this age group at the seminary and at the center and we really do value and respect many of the concerns that they have as well as having concerns of our own because if you're going to give you've got to take and vice versa and this is a healthy conversation for the church to be in.

*Alistair Begg* I think so.

The Table Podcast

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah. So we thank you for being a part of The Table today and we hope you'll be back again with us soon.