



CREATING SAFE SPACE FOR POSTMODERN YOUTH



WE WILL EITHER GROW OR DIE?

Postmodernism in North American is impacting our world, and it will continue to impact religious institutions and affect whether they will grow or die.



THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND SECULAR SOCIETY

In order to successfully reach secular urban people, people who are considered non-religious or unchurched, you have to understand the type people group you are trying to reach. The society we live in today is considered a secular society. People think more differently than people of modern societies of the past. The average citizen in Western society today has different life style values. The Western culture of today is one that is considered to be less religious and is not heavily influenced by traditional religious structures such as the church. The secular person that lives in North America thinks very different from a Christian person in North America.

SECULAR PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT

The Christian population has values that are very much rooted in God, the Bible and religious church services. For the secular person, they may not have any belief in religion, God or the Bible for that matter, and has no interest in attending a church building on a continued and regular basis. Many secular people may base their beliefs about life around science, the universe and nature. Their lack of belief in the traditional view of God maybe due to a lack of interest, lack of understanding or lack of indoctrination and education or simply just a choice not to believe in a Christocentric way.

SECULAR PEOPLE THINK DIFFERENTLY

When Christians in general understand that the secular person in which they are trying to reach through traditional evangelism, is one who lives in a metropolitan city, thinks differently about God and approaches life much differently, it will help lead to a more impactful and meaningful evangelism.

ATTITUDES TOWARD INSTITUTIONS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL

A growing number of people are increasingly unwilling simply to accept pronouncements of institutions, whether they be religious, political, or otherwise, and are instead looking to themselves, to their peers, and particularly to alternative resource centers, such as Internet Web sites and contemporary media, in order to create new means for grappling with questions of ultimate reality. This is not to say that the day of traditional institutions is over, but it is to say that those institutions no longer have the last word or hold the authoritative sway that they once did. (113)

-Barry Taylor

Characteristics of Postmodernism

- When listing the characteristics of postmodernism, it is important to remember that postmodernists do not place their philosophy in a defined box or category. Their beliefs and practices are personal rather than being identifiable with a particular establishment or special interest group.

The following principles appear elemental to postmodernists:
(allaboutphilosophy)

1. THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH -

Postmodernists believe that the notion of truth is a contrived illusion, misused by people and special interest groups to gain power over others

2. TRUTH AND ERROR ARE SYNONYMOUS

Facts, postmodernists claim, are too limiting to determine anything. Changing erratically, what is fact today can be false tomorrow

3. SELF-CONCEPTUALIZATION AND RATIONALIZATION

Traditional logic and objectivity are spurned by postmodernists. Preferring to rely on opinions rather than embrace facts, postmodernist spurn the scientific method.

4. TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY IS FALSE AND CORRUPT

Postmodernists speak out against the constraints of religious morals and secular authority. They wage intellectual revolution to voice their concerns about traditional establishment.

5. OWNERSHIP

They claim that collective ownership would most fairly administrate goods and services.



6. DISILLUSIONMENT WITH MODERNISM

Postmodernists rue the unfulfilled promises of science, technology, government, and religion.



7. MORALITY IS PERSONAL

- Believing ethics to be relative, postmodernists subject morality to personal opinion. They define morality as each person's private code of ethics without the need to follow traditional values and rules.

8. GLOBALIZATION

Many postmodernists claim that national boundaries are a hindrance to human communication.

Nationalism, they believe, causes wars. Therefore, postmodernists often propose internationalism and uniting separate countries.

9. ALL RELIGIONS ARE VALID

Valuing inclusive faiths, postmodernists gravitate towards New Age religion. They denounce the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as being the only way to God.

10. LIBERAL ETHICS

Postmodernists defend the cause of feminists and homosexuals.

11. PRO-ENVIRONMENTALISM

Defending “Mother Earth,” postmodernists blame Western society for its destruction.

CENTRALITY OF COMMUNITY

While individualism and personal freedom is important to postmodernists, Community and interconnectedness is also highly important

“Revisionary postmodernists agree with narrative postmodernists that creatures are not isolated individuals. Community is essential.”

13. DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

- **Postmodernism** appreciates and promotes diversity and difference.
- those at the margins (e.g., women, ethnic minorities).
 - **Intersectionality:**

the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

14. CONSTRUCTING A NEW WORLDVIEW

- Revisionary postmodernists accept the project of constructing a worldview adequate for our time.

Culture

Culture is a more or less integrated system of knowledge, values and feelings that people use to define their reality (worldview), interpret their experiences, and generate appropriate strategies for living; a system that people learn from other people around them and share with other people in a social setting; a system that people use to adapt to their spiritual, social, and physical environments; and a system that people use to innovate in order to change themselves as their environments change. (19)

Michael Rynkiewich's book *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World*

A NEW & DIFFERENT KIND OF GENERATION

“The Christian community faces a new urban generation. They are less idealistic and considerably more pessimistic. Jaded and old before their time, without hope and marginalized by broken promises, they become easy prey to the temptations of cynicism and meaningless violence. How do we respond to their needs?”

(210)

Ortiz and Conn (Urban Ministry)

YOUTH ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH

“One study suggests that 50% of all young people begin leaving at age 15. Another grimmer study found that the percentage to be even higher, as high as 70%. The research is clear; young people are leaving the church in droves.”

David Kinnaman's *You Lost Me: Why Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith* (2011)

CREATING A MISSIONAL CULTURE

If we want to create a missional culture in the congregations we serve, we need to understand how the different elements of culture work. The language we live in, the artifacts that we make use of, the rituals we engage in, our approach to ethics, the institutions we are a part of and the narratives we inhabit have the power to shape our lives profoundly. In addition, we need to cultivate learning, healing, welcoming, liberating and thriving environments. We do this by yielding to the work of the Spirit in our lives by developing communal rhythms of life—grace-filled spiritual practices which engage our senses, grab our hearts, form our identities and reshape our desires toward God and his kingdom. (20)

JR Woodward (2012), in the book *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*,

UNCHRISTIAN: WHAT A NEW GENERATION REALLY THINKS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY... AND WHY IT MATTERS, AUTHOR DAVID KINNAMAN (2007)

Millions of young outsiders are mentally and emotionally disengaging from Christianity. The nation's population is increasingly resistant to Christianity, especially to the theologically conservative expressions of that faith. Of course, we have always had detractors, but not the critics of the faith are becoming bolder and more vocal. And the aversion and hostility are, for the first time, crystallizing in the attitudes of millions of young Americans. A huge chunk of new generation has concluded they want nothing to do with us.

POSTMODERN PEOPLE ARE SKEPTICAL OF CHURCH

As Christians, we are widely mistrusted by a skeptical generation. This is difficult to take. Our research findings are a punch in the gut to Christians, and they are particularly challenging to theologically conservative Christians...There is more we have to understand about outsiders if we want to represent Christ effectively to this culture. We are at a turning point for Christianity in America. If we do not wake up to these realities and respond in appropriate, godly ways, we risk being increasingly marginalized and losing credibility with millions of people. (39)

GROWING YOUNG: SIX ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER AND LOVE YOUR CHURCH

Warmth resonates, especially doing ministry in an urban context. For kids growing up without biological fathers or being raised by an aunt or in foster care, the church as to stand in the gap and be a family. That means much more than a programmatic approach. Young people have to experience, “This is where I belong, where I’m affirmed, where I’m pushed and held accountable.” This is a hopeful finding for a small church in the inner city or rural area. You, too, can make a significant difference with young people. You can get in the game. (167)

IS THE CHURCH STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

For many people, the old religions no longer offer comfort and consolation or guidance and insight they once did. The rise of many forms of religious fundamentalism has not helped. More and more people regard traditional religions as a source of conflict. Yet the desire for ultimate meaning continues. There are more and more resources available that offer “religion with the baggage.” Baggage in most cases means the perception of unnecessary and definitely unwanted dogmatics—arcane and archaic views that seem inconsistent with much of the rest of life—and a feeling that traditional religions are out of touch and incapable of responding quickly enough to the massive and social and cultural upheaval that many sense themselves navigating. (Taylor 2008, 146)

WE HAVE TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The church must move along or be moved off the map on the margins of irrelevance. I am not one who has idealistic notions of a millennial “new world order.” The new world on the other side will have the same old problems—a stubborn human nature, ecological risks, economic pain, hunger, disease, racism, sexism, all kinds of sin. But these problems must be faced in a new way because—make no mistake—a new world is bursting forth beneath our bands of concrete and asphalt, erupting under our miles of wire and drooping between creosoted telephone poles, having its strength like tectonic plates to crack presumably solid foundations. (17)

Brian McLaren

An aerial photograph of a city at sunset, with a blue and yellow color palette. The city is densely packed with buildings, and the sky is hazy. The image is framed by a blue circuit board graphic with white lines and circles at the corners.

4 ESSENTIAL INTERPERSONAL VALUES FOR POSTMODERN URBAN SMALL-GROUP MINISTRY

1. Be Incarnational

2. Keeping It 100 and Being Oneself

3. Relationships Are Key

4. Creating a Community

BE INCARNATIONAL

Because urban youth love community and long for socialization, the church can focus its efforts on living among urban youth in their everyday lives. One of the most powerful things Christians can do is *journey with* urban youth every day, sharing in their joys and struggles. Urban youth need to see how Christians live every day and see that there is meaning in the way they choose to live their lives.

KEEPING IT 100 AND BEING ONESELF

Urban youth are drawn to peers and leaders who are not afraid to be authentic, who share their faults instead of cover them up. They also need to see that churchgoers are not “afraid” of others being authentic—in their lifestyle, their experiences, and their social identity. Being oneself is highly important to urban youth. Urban youth sense when something is contrived or adopted with a specific goal in mind; therefore, authenticity cannot be something a small-group ministry leader adopts superficially. It must be an internal value and natural way of being.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

The young demographic thrives on real relationships. They seek to develop new and different relationship experiences. They will go beyond their comfort zones and their cultural backgrounds and will intentionally connect with someone whom they deem as having something valuable to offer and seem worth connecting with. Therefore, a ministry leader engaging a small group must also shake any apprehensiveness toward “the other.”

CREATING A COMMUNITY

Churches structured around traditional worship tend to focus more on the act of worship itself than on being welcoming. It is seen as a place where religious services are being exchanged. Church is a place to *come* and to *get* something spiritual, yet for urban youth, church should signify finding and *creating community*. Urban youth want to know that there is a place where people love them, care for them, and do not judge them but treat them like they belong there and have a place and purpose—and further, that they can be free to discover that purpose rather than have it imposed on them.

How to Engage With Urban postmodern Youth

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- Always Keep It Real
 - Speak Truth to Power
 - Always Change the Game
 - Rep Your Hood
 - Never Front for Company
 - Express Yourself
 - Don't *Talk* About it; *Be* About It
 - Always Strive to Make Power Moves
 - Know the Power of Broke

1. ALWAYS KEEP IT REAL

“Keeping it real” means that you are always true to yourself and you never go against or violate your own personal principles. This is significant because it is compatible with the Christian principle of standing for one’s “convictions.”

2. SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

“Speaking truth to power” means that you always tell the full story about higher powers that seek to enslave, oppress, or abuse power for negative purposes. This value is also point of connection because Jesus always sought to lift up the marginalized and free them from socially enforced bondage. He also gave religious oppressors of his day their spiritual diagnosis and rebuked them for preying on the vulnerable

3. ALWAYS CHANGE THE GAME

“Always changing the game” means that a person always stays current, timeless, and ahead of the “game”—in other words does not fall behind and is not easily blindsided and also does not allow others to pin them down, figuratively. Just when people think they have figured you out, switch up the format and keep them guessing with something new.

4. Rep Your Hood

To “rep your hood” means never forget where you came from and always represent the place and people who raised you. When you have made it to certain level of success, go back and bring along those who supported you from your earliest days. In other words, “repping your hood” is a form of gratitude, recognition, and humility—a commendable and virtuous practice.



5. NEVER FRONT FOR COMPANY

“Never front company” means do not present yourself as something you are not and do not seek to impress people by trying to be something you never were. This principle is, really, a practical iteration of authenticity and integrity. In effect, it speaks against pride, an undecided or shallow identity, and even superficial works, as it were.

6. NEVER BE AFRAID EXPRESS YOURSELF

Urban youth value uninhibited self-expression and creativity—and the vulnerability and courage that it takes to do so. For the church to be relevant to urban postmodern youth, it must seek to change its environment to one that invites a life of expression. Church members will need to be more open, inviting, and expressive of emotions and feelings.

7. EMBRACE THE STRUGGLE

Life, with its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, is seen as a beautiful struggle. There are thorns in life, but the journey is ultimately a string of experiences that one must seek to press forward and keep it moving.

8. **DON'T *TALK ABOUT IT; BE ABOUT IT***

Do not just talk about what you are doing or going to do; be a person of action. Let your actions speak for themselves.

9. ALWAYS STRIVE TO MAKE POWER MOVES

A power move is a move that “changes everything.” It is a powerful, life-changing move one makes, and it ultimately propels that person forward.

10. KNOW THE POWER OF BROKE

Most people from the “hood” who managed to succeed with nothing to start, know the power of being broke. When you are broke and don't have many resources, it forces you to be persistent and resourceful. Having nothing has a way of pushing a person to achieve and become more than what they currently are.

THE SEVEN KEY COMPONENTS OF A POSTMODERN URBAN MISSIONAL SMALL-GROUP MODEL

1. The People

2. The Environment

3. The Space

4. The Culture

5. The Experience

6. The Relationships

7. The Gathering

1. THE PEOPLE

The people who attend the urban missional small group are non-traditional and contemporary. They are seeker sensitive, looking to meet God in unconventional ways. They are unique and not tied to tradition, customs, and formalism. The majority of the people who attend a missional church will be unchurched and have no church experience. They come with a laid-back attitude and are often known to be artistic and creative.

2. THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment of the urban missional small group must be inviting, warm, friendly, and, most importantly, non-judgemental. Urban people will feel accepted and welcomed. Those who attend will feel open to come and be, to share and express themselves. The biggest component of the urban missional church environment would be that of safety. Those who attend will feel safe with their feelings, their emotions, and their identity.

3. THE SPACE

The space of the urban missional small group must be a neutral space, nonaggressive, and unintimidating. The space is very laid-back with low lighting and artistic in nature. Chairs must be set up that are comfortable and in a circular setting. Couches should also be a part of the design, and the space should be open concept, like a café-style setup.

4. THE CULTURE

The culture of the urban missional small group must be open, authentic, and accepting. The culture reflects people who are artistic, musical, and creative. Artists are constantly creating, making mistakes, recreating, and reformatting. The culture will be open to its participants to come and create. It will allow the worship community to struggle with idea of creating identity and developing themselves into whom God has chosen each person to be.

5. THE EXPERIENCE

The experience of the urban missional small group must be organic and not pretentious. The urbanites who come to the worship should have an experience that makes them want to come back. The worship experience is an experience that constantly takes the believer on a journey of personal development and self-discovery. The atmosphere will encourage participants to explore how God is leading and moving in their lives. God will have free reign to move and display His love, mercy, and grace to all those who attend.

6. THE RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships fostered in the urban missional small group must be intentional, nonabrasive, and nonjudgmental. Discipleship and mentorship will be highly focused on. Each person that comes will have a spiritual mentor assigned to them. This mentor will help to support and empower the new believer who joins the urban missional church plant. There will be a commitment to living life together on mission in mid-sized gospel-centered communities that are small enough for people to care for one another and for the surrounding community.

7. THE GATHERING

How the urban missional small group comes together will be intentional and will be a community that encourages and fosters a grace-filled relationships. Each gathering will explore and discover purposeful and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ and fellow believers.