

How to Engage with People on Matters of God's Truth

(Sharing God's Truth in an Age of Relativism)

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(Follow up article to [What is Truth?](#) ^[1])

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Part 1: A Critique of Modern- and Post-Modernism

Before we can explore the topic of evangelism in Part 2, we must first understand the political, cultural, and religious landscapes of our time. Because of the inherent complexities of these landscapes, many have difficulty understanding the relationship between partisan politics, the conservative and liberal movements, civil unrest, the decline of church affiliation, and other trends. Part 1 of this paper attempts to untangle and make sense of these interrelated trends and their respective narratives.

Based on trends in Modern Social Theory, the prevailing social theory stresses free will, individual choice, subjective reasoning, and the importance of unpredictable events in place of deterministic necessity. This current state of thought is a direct result of Modern- and Post-Modern worldviews. ^[2]

While these shifts in thought account primarily for secular trends, they do not account for current trends in the Christian world, namely, how Christian thought has shaped modern societies.

¹ [What is Truth?](#), Leo Modica, April 2023.

² [Classical and Modern Sociological Theories](#), Aditya Sharma, Academia.

What follows is a Christian social theory I developed that explains our nation's current state of affairs from a Christian perspective. It asserts that people are leaving the Christian church – Christianity – due to a division of conservative/liberal ideals in the political sphere motivated by a seismic division of morality in the religious sphere.^{[3][4]} And, without an objective source of moral truth, our nation finds itself in a morass of relativistic thinking that short-circuits determinism and consensus which is evidenced by our nation's widespread indecision and civil unrest.

Distancing from the Church

Like many church leaders, I am troubled by the secularization of our society over the past few decades. People I know and love are walking away from the church and embracing secular worldviews and ideologies. People I meet who have not been raised in homes where the traditional Christian worldview has been taught are despairing.

The phrase from a recent Gallup survey that continues to grip me is that people are *distancing themselves* from the church, and from God.^{[5][6][7]} Regrettably, they have moved away and found community elsewhere with little to no intention of returning.

According to Pew Research, the Barna Group, and Gallup polls, there are many factors that cause people to leave the church. Their findings suggest that people leaving the church do so because they feel that Christian dogma is culturally repressive, right-winged, and lacks substance and credibility. Rarely do these polls examine the outsized role of politics and the media.

In a series of articles in the New York Times, opinion writer Jessica Grose reports that politics play a major role in the decline of church attendance.

"There's a convincing body of research showing that the connection between right-wing politics and conservative Christians that drew closer in the 1980s and early '90s has pushed liberal and moderate Christians away from religion."

"The connection between political conservatism and religiosity has kept many Republicans in the pews, while it's pushed scores of Democrats away from religion entirely."^[8]

Grose concludes that religion and politics have become so intertwined that many believe being a right-wing, conservative Christian and a Republican are synonymous. Regrettably, this stereotype is a grave disservice to the Christian community. Not all Christians are right-wing, Republican, and polarized as Grose's survey respondents would suggest. Further, to imply that all Democrats and Independents are liberal and irreligious is misleading.

Grose's findings are corroborated by PBS in the series *America at a Crossroads* hosted by Judy Woodruff. Group interviews with Democrats and Republicans reveal that religion is the primary separator among both political parties.^{[9][10]} In the interview with Pennsylvania Democrats, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians are viewed as a formidable problem to be reckoned with. In the interview with Iowa Republicans, those condoning abortion and LGBTQ+ rights are viewed as non-Christian, people lacking any sense of moral values.

³ [The Age of Spectacle is Upon Us](#), David Brooks, June 22, 2023, New York Times.

⁴ [Abraham Kuyper, A Short and Personal Introduction](#), Sphere Sovereignty, Richard J. Mouw, Eerdmans, 978-0-8028-6603-5.

⁵ [Why America's 'nones' don't identify with a religion](#), Pew Research, August 8, 2018.

⁶ [U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time](#), Gallup, March 29, 2021, by Jeffrey M. Jones.

⁷ [About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated](#), Pew Research, December 14, 2021.

⁸ ['Christianity's Got a Branding Problem'](#), Jessica Grose, May 10, 2023, The New York Times.

⁹ [Pennsylvania Democrats discuss nation's political divisions and their feelings for Biden](#), September 13, 2023, PBS Special Report.

¹⁰ [Iowa Republicans discuss role of politics in their lives, hopes for overcoming divisions](#), July 19, 2023, PBS Special Report.

What is apparent from these surveys is that people have vastly different views of conservatives and their underlying motives. Many mistake Christian convictions as justification to push their right-wing views and agendas into the mainstream through partisan politics, while others interpret Christian convictions as a way to align with God's Word and a commitment to genuinely living out God's truths in all arenas of their lives, including politics and education.

From the perspective of the unchurched, these Christian convictions are viewed as unwelcome proselytization. From the Christian's perspective, these actions are regarded as obedience to God's moral law, and an unwavering devotion to living rightly in a largely secular world.

In recent years, this distancing from the Christian church is evidenced by church splits along moral lines. Most notably, many Presbyterian, Methodist and Christian Reform churches have split from their respective denominations over cultural issues such as LGBTQ+. Many denominations have abandoned the authority of God's Word and succumb to the cultural norms that characterize modern times.

Abandoning Moderate Values

This notion of Republicans becoming more conservative, even right-wing, and non-Republicans becoming less conservative is corroborated by a recent 2023 Gallup poll. ^[11]

In 2022, 54% of Democrats identified as liberal, compared to 25% in 1994. This represents a 29% increase in liberalism among Democrats in 28 years. During this same period, the percent of Democrat moderates and conservatives decreased. Overall, we can conclude from these data that Democrats are becoming more liberal over time.

Conversely, in 2022, 72% of Republicans identified as conservative, compared to 58% in 1994. This represents a 14% increase in conservatism among Republicans in 28 years. During this same period, the percent of Republican moderates and liberals decreased. Overall, we can conclude from these data that Republicans are becoming more conservative over time.

Finally, the number of Moderates is decreasing. Moderates are becoming either more conservative or more liberal.

From this Gallup study, it is fair to say that Republicans are becoming mostly conservative and Democrats are becoming mostly liberal. These findings underscore the fact that the conservative/liberal divide is increasing. People are abandoning their moderate positions and choosing sides centered around divergent and even opposing ideologies.

I believe these studies regarding conservatism and liberalism – not politics – better explain the polarization we are experiencing today. At the heart of this polarization is a strong disagreement over moral values. ^[12] The real debate is about the *source* of moral values, not the practice or governance of moral values within society. ^[13]

Moral Divide

The question many are asking today is, What is the cause of this moral divide?

In answering this question, we trace the formative moral trends that unfolded during the middle to late 20th century.

Firstly, World Wars I and II were galvanizing events that brought Americans together around the goal of defeating the aggression of nations such as Germany, Russia, and Japan. The common values of democracy and freedom united our nation. These values were held by conservatives and liberals alike, regardless of political and religious affiliations. Once

¹¹ [Democrats' Identification as Liberal Now 54%, a New High](#), Lydia Saad, January 12, 2023, Gallup.

¹² [The Deep Source of Trump's Appeal](#), David Brooks, July 11, 2024, New York Times.

¹³ [Changing Partisan Coalitions in a Politically Divided Nation](#), PEW Research Center, April 9, 2024.

these existential threats were eliminated by the 1940's, Americans turned their attention to national issues, most notably human rights.

The first human rights debate unfolded in the 1950's. This debate centered around civil rights and the need to institute laws guaranteeing equality for all people regardless of color. Granting people of color equal rights is consistent with the creation story where all people are created equally in the image of God. Dr. Martin Luther King and others called attention to this inalienable human right in the 1950's and 60's.

The second of these national debates unfolded in the 1960's. This debate centered around a woman's right to an abortion. Unlike civil rights, the Roe decision of 1973 denied the inalienable right to life to the unborn child; a right granted to them before the decision was handed down. ^[14] Regrettably, this Supreme Court decision is inconsistent with the sanctity of life taught in God's Word.

Ross Douthat of the New York Times referred to the abortion decision as an *inflection point*.

*"If I set out to write a story about how exactly we got here, I would place the original Roe decision near the center of the narrative — as an **inflection point** where the choices of elite liberalism actively pushed the Republic toward our current divisions, our age of chronic strife."*^[15]

What Douthat is saying is that the Roe decision was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" regarding our nation's moral conscience. This decision left moral conservatives outraged over the total disregard for the sanctity of human life. This outrage gave rise to many pro-life and pro-choice movements across our nation. For the first time in American history, a moral battle line was drawn and the conservative/liberal troops mobilized around their respective agendas and narratives.

Emboldened by the Roe decision, liberals pushed their agendas even further. In the late 1900's and early 2000's, a wide range of highly divisive and morally charged issues became mainstream in the media and politics. These included LGBTQ+ rights, woke ideologies, immigration rights, climate change, gun control, and socialism, to name the most prominent. While new rights were granted to a few, existing rights were denied to many.

In short, the military wars of the early 1900's gave way to the culture wars of the late 1900's which finally gave way to the moral wars of the early 2000's. As battle lines were drawn, people were forced to choose sides.

Regrettably, moral strife has left our nation divided and embittered, and some argue, irreparably damaged with no hope of regaining common ground. It has separated families, friends, and churches. ^{[16][17]} It has fractured governments to where leaders are stalemated over existential crises. It has imperiled societies to a point where they are experiencing endless civil unrest and despair.

We need to be reminded that in the spiritual war between good and evil (Ephesians 6), what we are experiencing today is the necessary outcome when people take a stand for what they believe. The "wishy-washy" indecisiveness of 20th century regarding morality has finally given way to the decisiveness of the 21st century. I believe this decisiveness is good for the Christian church, and bad for the secular world. While the church is finding hope under God's rule, the world is despairing over the ensuing moral chaos that continues to enfold our nation. Ultimately, this crisis provides opportunity for the church to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ The Declaration of Independence gives three examples of inalienable rights, in the well-known phrase, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

¹⁵ [How Roe Warped the Republic](#), Ross Douthat, May 7, 2022, The New York Times.

¹⁶ [How Politics Poisoned the Evangelical Church](#), Tim Alberta, June 2022, The Atlantic.

¹⁷ The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism, Tim Alberta, December 5, 2023, ISBN: 006322688X, ISBN13: 978-0063226883.

Rise of Relativism

When people reject God and His absolute moral law, by default, they are left with *relativism*. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, relativism is defined as follows.

*“A family of philosophical views which deny claims to **objectivity** within a particular domain and assert that valuations in that domain are **relative** to the perspective of an observer or the context in which they are assessed”.* ^[18]

This definition denies an objective truth from a transcendent source. Rather, it asserts that truth emanates from within a person based on individual preference, perspective, and context.

For Christians, the source of all truth is God’s Word. God’s truth is regarded by Christians as transcendent and singular. It is revealed through the process of *special revelation*, the Bible.

For Relativists, the source for truth is subject to interpretation and perspective within a given context. This form of truth is therefore relative and variable. For Relativists, the word “truth” has been deconstructed to mean preferences or values.

According to a recent Pew survey, 65% of Americans believe that it is not necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, while 34% say belief in God is an essential component of understanding morality. ^[19] These findings are consistent with the Ligonier State of Theology biannual survey conducted in 2022. In the Ligonier survey, relativism among Americans is increasing year-over-year. ^[20] When presented with the statement, “Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth,” 68% of US respondents agreed while only 25% of evangelical respondents agreed.

While Relativism may seem plausible at first glance, it violates the first principles of logic namely the Law of Non-Contradiction. The Law of Non-Contradiction states that a physical object cannot be in two contradictory states at the same time in the same space. By extension, two opposing statements or facts cannot both be true at the same time. Either they are both false, or one is true and the other false, they can’t both be true.

As applied to morality, Relativists reject one universal moral code. Rather, they are accepting of multiple moral codes derived from personal preferences, cultural norms, and democratic majority. Consequently, the resulting moral codes may be contradictory. If morality can mean *anything* for anyone, it is devoid of meaning altogether and therefore means *nothing* for everyone. This relative system of morality is only sustainable through tolerance, not consensus.

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the *culture* wars of the late 1900’s which finally gave way to
the *moral* wars of the early 2000’s.

Prominent Worldviews

All systems of truth have coalesced into three prominent worldviews. The table below highlights the characteristics of the *Traditional*, *Modern*, and *Postmodern* worldviews.

¹⁸ [Relativism](#), September 15, 2020, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹⁹ [Is belief in God needed to be moral? Many in US, other countries say NO](#), BY JANEL FETTEROLF AND SARAH AUSTIN, April 20, 2023, Pew Research Center.

²⁰ [The State of Theology](#), 2022.

Worldviews (Overview)			
	TRADITIONAL <1700 AD	MODERNIST 1700-1970 AD	POSTMODERNIST >1970 AD
CENTRICITY	God-Centric	Science-Centric	Man-Centric
TRUTH	Absolute Transcendent	Relative Material	Unattainable Non-Existent
SYSTEMS of THOUGHT	Fundamentalism Dogmatism	Nihilism Materialism Relativism	Deconstructionism Individualism Hedonism

#1 Traditional or Biblical Worldview

- The Traditional worldview argues that **God alone is the source** of truth and reality.
- **God-centered** truth is transcendent, it comes from outside of creation.
- This truth is rooted in the nature of God.
- Traditional truth is singular, absolute, self-consistent, inerrant, infallible, and eternal.

#2 Modern Worldview 1700's enlightenment period

- The Modern worldview argues that **Science is the source** of truth and reality, **not God**.
- **Science-centered** truth is solely based on the sciences and mathematics, things we can observe with our five senses.
- Modernists **discover** what is **true** from the **physical world** around us.
- Modern truth is derived from our **physical reality** and subjective to interpretation.

#3 Post-Modern Worldview 1900's

- The Postmodern worldview argues that **Man is the source** of truth and reality, **not science** or **God**.
- **Man-centered** truth comes from within. Truth is what an individual believes.
- Postmodern truth is **man-made**, subjective, inconsistent, contradictory.
- Postmodernists **distrust God, science, language, mathematics**.
- Postmodernism is **devoid of certainty** because all systems of inquiry are **fallible**.

For both Modernism and Postmodernism, relativism and the denial of deities form the basis of thought. In the case of Modernism, reality is derived from the physical world. While in the case of Postmodernism, reality is derived from mere sensory perception because all other systems of inquiry are deemed untrustworthy.

In the end, what's insidious about relativism is that on one hand everyone is right unto themselves, and on the other hand, since the collective truths of society are inherently contradictory, real truth is indeterminable. So, we are left with many false truths and the absence of real truth.

Consequences of Relativism

Thus far, we have surveyed the formation of the conservative and liberal factions, the pivotal role of morality, the rise of relativism, and the prevailing systems of thought. We have uncovered that the common thread among both Modernists and Postmodernists is relativity of thought.

In this section, we explore the consequences of relativism as it relates to social and human destinies in the context of Modernism and Postmodernism.

Modernism

With the denial of deities, Modernists are constrained by the natural world. They disregard any notion of the supernatural because it cannot be observed with our five senses and empirical methods. Miracles and the intervention of God in the creation of the universe and life are emphatically rejected.

For Modernists, all truth and reality must be explained by natural process. Modernists reason that without God, convergent evolution *must* be true. Without God, the universe *must* be self-created or self-existent. And, without God, extraordinary events *must* be explained as chance.

Consequently, Modernism is characterized as follows.

- **LACK OF CREDIBILITY:** It is expressly through empirical methods that Modernists discover reality. Unfortunately, this discovery process is often problematic. The misinterpretation, bias, and outright exclusion of certain facts leads to conclusions that lack completeness, fairness, and ultimately credibility. Depending on the researcher's agenda and mastery of their domain, the certainty of scientific findings is always suspect. ^[21]
- **ABSENCE OF SUPERNATURAL:** Because all deities are rejected, miracles and the supernatural intervention of God are denied. Modernists are therefore constrained by the natural world. Anything that cannot be explained by natural process remains a mystery until scientific facts emerge.
- **UNBRIDLED FREEDOM:** Modernism ushers in the ultimate expression of personal freedom irrespective of moral constraints and social conscience. What is right and moral are a matter of personal preference. There are no universally accepted rules, no consensus on morality and conduct. Individualism trumps the common good and respect of others.

The following statements characterize the attitudes of Modernists and Atheists.

- "Seeing is believing."
- "There is no god, therefore ..."
 - "... evolution is the only rational explanation for the origin of life."
 - "... life and marriage are not sacred."
 - "... living 'life to the fullest' is a reasonable goal."
 - "... there are no consequences to my actions."
 - "... don't lecture me on morality, I'm not listening."
- "Mankind can be good without God." ^{[22][23]}
- "Mankind is capable of establishing rules of morality."

Postmodernism

Unlike Modernists, Postmodernists reject *all* systems of inquiry and determination, and are therefore completely unconstrained. This includes deities, authorities, institutions, scientific methods, mathematics, formal logic, languages, and even human reason. What remains is mere sensory perception. Only what individuals perceive with their five senses is real.

²¹ The very basis of scientific inquiry is to establish theories by validate hypotheses. This methodology is fundamentally flawed because it lacks objectivity. For hypotheses to become theories, researchers must be selective in their data acquisition and analysis of facts in order to prove their hypotheses truth, rather than be completely objective and let the facts lead to a legitimate, nonpredetermined conclusion.

²² These Pew Research findings echo the same sentiment as the American Humanist Association motto, "Good Without God". [Humanist Manifesto III](#), American Humanist Association.

²³ "[Good without God? The Necessity of a Theistic Basis for Morality.](#)" Will Honeycutt, Evangelical Theological Society's 61st Annual Conference New Orleans, Louisiana, Friday, November 20, 2009.

Consequently, Postmodernism is characterized as follows.

- **ABSENCE OF FACTS:** Because all scientific authority and human reason are rejected, the absence of facts and the ability to formulate facts leads Postmodernists to be uninformed on a wide range of issues.
- **ABSENCE OF LOGIC:** To accept the position that truth is relative is to disregard the law of non-contradiction where two opposing views cannot both be true in the same state at the same time. They distrust the first principles of logic and embrace an “both/and” logic that allows for contradictions.^[24]
- **ABSENCE OF CERTAINTY:** Because truth is undiscernible, Postmodernists have difficulty drawing useful conclusions about important matters of life. For many, uncertainty breeds anxiety and fear.
- **ABSENCE OF MEANING/PURPOSE:** Because Postmodernists embrace Nihilism – the rejection of all religious and moral principles -- they believe that human life is devoid of transcendent meaning and purpose. This leads to a total absence of moral truth, and any notions of an objective right and wrong, good and bad.
- **ABSENCE OF VALUE:** Because Postmodernists cannot agree on what characterizes intrinsic value, they have no basis for valuation except human preferences. Therefore, the sanctity of human life is patently disregarded.
- **ABSENCE OF TRUTH (Personal Truth):** In order to allow for relative truth, Postmodernists need to deconstruct the word truth to mean personal preference. Essentially, there is no such thing as a singular, objective truth. Rather, there are multiple truths.
- **ABSENCE OF TRUTH (Societal Truth):** At the social level, truth is the byproduct of prevailing social norms and democratic process. Therefore, Postmodernist have no grounds to disagree with someone from another culture that believes differently.^[25]
- **ABSENCE OF ORDER:** Because creation is intentionally designed to be orderly, living without order in an inherently ordered world leads to confusion and instability. Unlike Christians, Postmodernists do not find comfort living within God’s orderliness and sovereignty.
- **ABSENCE OF CONSENSUS:** Because there is no basis for truth, there is no possibility for agreement and consensus. This leads to confusion, divisions, chaos, and ultimately anarchy. This is already evidenced by our paralyzed congress, and the utter lack of civility and outright hatred toward others.
- **UNBRIDLED FREEDOM:** Postmodernism ushers in the ultimate expression of personal freedom irrespective of moral constraints and social conscience. What is right and moral are a matter of personal preference. There are no universally accepted rules, no consensus on morality and conduct. Individualism trumps the common good and respect of others.
- **OPENNESS TOWARD SPIRITUALITY:** While Postmodernists deny a single deity such as Christianity, they are somewhat open toward spirituality. It is through various forms of spiritualism they find solace from life’s uncertainties. These include meditation, religious rituals, naturalism, and the occasional use of drugs. The impending danger is that Postmodernists are flirting with the demonic.

Postmodernist objections of Traditional and Modernist worldviews are selective. While they have a distrust and harbor disdain toward all systems of inquiry – science, mathematics, language, formal logic, human reason, theology – to determine reality, they often champion movements, such as global warming, that are ultimately based on these systems

²⁴ [Law of Non-Contradiction](#), Mainstream Apologetics.

²⁵ [“Many people in U.S., other advanced economies say it’s not necessary to believe in God to be moral,”](#) Pew Research Center, April 20, 2023.

of inquiry. The same can be said for morality. While Postmodernists deny the existence of a deity and a transcendent moral code, they do believe morality is important in maintaining civility and social order.

The dilemma Postmodernists find themselves in is that while they distrust all systems of inquiry, they must break their own rules and trust in some systems in order to maintain some level of normalcy. Their reality is opportunistically bimodal. They believe A when A suits them, or not-A when A no longer suits them. Their notion of truth is transient.

The following statements characterize the attitudes of Postmodernists. ^[26]

- “I am looking for a truth that works for me.”
- “I believe in letting others live like they want to. I believe tolerance is the highest virtue.”
- “I am suspicious of schemes that try to explain everything or give simplistic answers to complex questions. People who espouse these schemes I completely ignore.”
- “I like to have a group of close friends with which I share common values.”
- “I am open to non-institutional spirituality but I am not sure where to find it.”

Blended Worldview

Some are professing atheists, agnostics, Modernists, and Postmodernists. They strongly adhere to their respective belief systems and are typically outspoken. However, most people today have little to no concept of what it means to be Traditional, Modern, or Postmodern. Consequently, they live somewhere between the Traditional and the Modernist/Postmodernist worldviews.

While many today claim to be “Christian,” they are uncertain about what they believe and why. They *unknowingly* identify with a blended worldview by the way they ascertain truth and reality. For those who ascertain truth and reality exclusively through science or human senses, truth is relative. Because they deny the authority of God's Word, their lives are subject to the consequences of relativity.

When people are challenged about how they ascertain truth, they generally respond with indifference. They are reluctant to think critically. They shrug off critical thinking as philosophical indeterminism; endless cycles of thought which lead nowhere. Rather, they are preoccupied with life's immediate demands and have little time for anything else. They are satisfied living within their comfort zones and are blissfully ignorant of spiritual matters. Unfortunately, this critique characterizes a great many people today.

The following statements characterize the attitudes of the Blended Worldview.

- “I am too busy with life's demands to concern myself with church and God right now.”
- “I have not thought much about what I believe, let alone why.”
- “I am comfortable turning to the Internet and others to answer questions.”
- “I am able to come to my own conclusions regarding truth.”
- “I am trying to live in accordance with Jesus' teachings.” (Social Gospel)
- “I have a hard time reconciling my personal beliefs with the teachings of God's Word and the church.”

Generational Considerations

While worldviews have a major impact on how people approach life, they are not the only factors that shape people's thinking. Factors such as social media, religion, politics, education, career, and many others influence the way people think on a day-to-day basis. Over the last century, these factors have impacted each generational cohort differently.

Perhaps the greatest contribution in the last century has been the exponential advances in technology. During the Silent (1928-45) and Boomer (1946-64) generations, technology gained a foothold primarily in the business world. In recent

²⁶ [“9 Ways of Communicating the Gospel to Postmodernists,”](#) Free Ministry Resources, Lin Pearson.

years, modern technology has pervaded every aspect of our personal lives. Through the use of the Internet and smartphones, people connect continuously with friends and the media.

While many find these technical advances enabling, many find them to be detrimental. This is especially true among Generation Z (1997-2012). The constant diet of information – and misinformation – for the developing minds of our nation’s youth and young adults has proven to be exceedingly harmful. ^{[27][28][29]}

Generation Z is constantly inundated with news of increasing crime and gun violence, unjust policing, racial prejudice, atrocities of war, global warming, and rampant diseases, to name a few. Additionally, they are subjected to denigrating statements made on social media. These trends were exacerbated by forced isolation due to the COVID pandemic.

Collectively, these influences have driven Generation Z toward anxiety, fear, and eventually, depression and withdrawal. Instead of looking ahead to a world of opportunities, Generation Z peers into an uncertain future. Regrettably, they have turned to computer gaming, virtual experiences, and other outlets to find anonymous communities of acceptance.

Summary

While reliance on science and individual freedom are heralded by Modernists and Postmodernists respectively as progressive, they are actually regressive. Evidence demonstrates time and again that these worldviews imperil societies and individuals alike. Without a moral compass, societies devolve into conflict and ideological factions.

For Modernists, their fixation on the natural sciences as the only oracle of truth constrains them to the inherent complexities of empirical research. They cannot be 100% certain of their findings due to erroneous or insufficient data, misinterpretations, biases, and many other factors outside their control. For Modernists, truth is a moving target. ^[30]

For Postmodernists, their absolute rejection of all deities, authorities, institutions, scientific methods, mathematics, formal logic, languages, and human reason constrains them to their five senses. This crude method of inquiry is unreliable due to sensory and cognitive limitations. For Postmodernists, truth has been reduced to a perception, a feeling. Effectively, objective truth has been eradicated.

Modernists plod ahead with a **false sense of certainty**
while Postmodernists are paralyzed by **uncertainty**.

Over time, as the complexities and uncertainties of life press in on Modernists and Postmodernists, they are left with a sense of uncertainty, a sense of hopelessness. Without a transcendent God, they have nowhere to turn to cope with their despair as societies continue to unravel.

Part 2: The Need for Modern Evangelism

Today, the word *evangelism* means different things within the evangelical world. Traditional approaches of evangelism were used in the early 20th century. These approaches were largely *declarative* where the gospel was declared from

²⁷ [On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far](#), Pew Research, by Kim Parker & Ruth Igielnik, May 14, 2020.

²⁸ [Speaking of Psychology: Why Gen Z is feeling so stressed](#), American Psychological Association, by Emma Adam.

²⁹ [The emotional and social health needs of Gen Z](#), American Counseling Association, by Lindsey Phillips, January 10, 2022.

³⁰ [The Quest for Scientific Certainty Is Futile](#), Dr. Adam Mastroianni, October 9, 2023, New York Times.

pulpits and street corners (e.g., Billy Graham crusades). This message of sin and salvation appealed to the masses because most people held to a traditional belief of the God of the Bible.

Toward the latter half of the 20th century, a new approach to evangelism emerged. This new approach was espoused by many evangelists, most notably Rebecca Pippert, and is commonly referred to as *lifestyle evangelism*.^[31] With this new approach we lead people to Christ first with a demonstration of faith with our lives and then with a verbal witness. This softer approach builds on the need for relationship and community, on winning peoples' trust.

Both the declarative and lifestyle approaches are valid today. With the lifestyle approach we demonstrate the potency of the Gospel in our lives with credibility. With the declarative approach we articulate the content of the Gospel with clarity.

Engaging in Christian Community

Mankind was created for community (Genesis 2:18). This is especially true for those outside the community of faith. Enfolding the unchurched into Christian community enables them to witness the power of God at work. It is through this witness that the Holy Spirit draws people to Himself.

This concept of *belonging-before-believing* gives people the time and space they need to respond to the Gospel.^{[32] [33]} It enables them to build trusting relationships and see authentic faith in action. It opens up pathways of communication and enables people to ask honest questions and find biblical answers. Ultimately, it moves people beyond their spiritual *sticking points* toward saving faith.

Christian communities provide a safe haven for people to escape feelings of isolation and rejection. In Christian community, they are welcomed with unconditional acceptance and love, not judgement and condemnation. They come to learn the true meaning of God's love as it is modeled by members of the community. They also come to learn that God's kingdom stands supreme to the failing kingdoms of this world.

The art of relating with the unchurched is something that needs to be cultivated in the modern church. The church must be outward focused at the same time it is inward focused. The church must explore avenues to connect with the communities in which they are located.

The process of engagement
helps seekers to see the Gospel
in the setting of Christian community.

This process of hearing, discovering, and responding to God's Word is essential. As people hear the Word of God, they come to realize that God's Word is the basis of Christian doctrine, not personal opinion or Biblical interpretation. As they grapple with God's Word, they are forced to juxtapose their beliefs with the truths of God's Word. And finally, they are compelled to come to terms with what they believe.

³¹ "Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life", Rebecca Pippert, 1979, ISBN-13 : 978-0830822201.

³² "[What Postmodernism Means for Evangelism](#)", Paul Mumo Kisau, 02-2007.

³³ "[Re-imagining evangelism in a postmodern culture](#)", May 2013.

Evangelism as a Process

The evangelistic process of hearing, discovering, and responding is formative. It is the means by which people come to terms with their understanding of the God of the Bible. Our aim as Christians is to get close enough to people in order to engage them in this process.

According to Pew Research, younger generational cohorts are less likely to hold traditional views in the God of the Bible, unlike their parents and grandparents, many of whom were raised in the Christian tradition. Consequently, these younger cohorts do not have a basic understanding of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith and are less open to considering Christianity as a viable worldview. The distance that separates younger cohorts from Christianity is greater than that of older cohorts.

This trend has a significant impact on evangelism. Unlike the Billy Graham crusades of the late 1900's where decisions for Christ were made in a matter of minutes and hours. Today, the time to conversion is measured in days, months, and often years. The implication for the Christian church is that evangelism is more about a long-term commitment to building meaningful, caring relationships with people than it is about organizing evangelistic events. Modern evangelism is a process, not an event.

Modern evangelism is more about a long-term
commitment to building meaningful,
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than it is about organizing evangelistic events.

Because of the spiritual sensitivities of our day, a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism is no longer viable.

Building Trust in God

According to the Pew Research, trust in American institutions such as government, politics, law enforcement, and business is waning with each passing generation. ^[34] This is especially true among younger Americans. Their findings suggest that lack of trust is not limited to secular institutions but includes religious institutions as well. A growing number of Americans today do not trust religious leaders, and the fundamental doctrines and practices of the Christian faith they espouse. ^[35] If Americans can no longer trust in their religious leaders and institutions, how then will they trust in God?

In their quests for certainty, Modern- and Post-modernists turn to science and sensory perception to ascertain what is real, what is true. In both cases, their respective methods of inquiry are unreliable. At the end of their futile quests, all they will find is degrees of uncertainty.

How do people today find a truth that is certain? Should they rely on their own abilities to discover truth? Or should they rely on a truth that has already been revealed by a transcendent God?

These vexing questions lead people to search for another source of truth, one that is trustworthy. Inviting people into Christian community opens the door for people to observe God's truth in the lives of believers and discover that it is trustworthy. Trust in God is built over time. It is the desired outcome as people belong-before-believing.

The following stages illustrate the process of building trust in God. These stages of spiritual awareness are born out of people's engagement with individual believers, Christian communities, and God's Word.

- **Building trust in the GENUINNESS of a believer's personal witness.**

³⁴ [Younger Americans less trusting of other people, institutions](#), John Gramlich, Pew Research Center, August 6, 2019.

³⁵ [Americans Under 30 Don't Trust Religion — or Anything Else](#), Jessica Grose, New York Times, November 25, 2023.

As we engage with people, we have opportunity to speak into their lives and share our witness. The genuineness of our witness is demonstrated by our steadfast faith, devotion to the inspiration and authority of God’s Word, obedience to God’s moral law, and an openness to God’s leading. Over time, people observe the centrality of God in our lives.

- **Building trust in the AUTHENTICITY of a Christian community’s experience.**

Since the local church is a microcosm of God’s kingdom, it offers a community that is vastly different than those offered by the kingdoms of the world. The authenticity of a Christian community’s experience is demonstrated by corporate testimonies, answers to prayer, healings, and other works of God in the community of believers. Onlookers come to realize that God’s involvement in the life of the church is unmistakable; it is authentically the activity of God.

- **Building trust in the INSPIRATION and RELIABILITY of God’s Word.**

The inspiration and reliability of God’s Word has been debated for years. Many argue it cannot be attested as the authentic Word of God, and that it has not been transmitted accurately throughout the ages. Today, many consider God’s Word outmoded and irrelevant. However, the inspiration, reliability, and authority of God’s Word is demonstrated by Biblical scholarship, the cohesiveness of the Biblical narrative, fulfillment of prophecies, and the power it has to change lives. ^{[36][37]} Through exposition and study, people come to know God’s Word is matchless, trustworthy, and authoritative.

- **Building trust in the TRIUNE God.**

As God proves himself trustworthy in the previous three stages, people consider entrusting their lives to God. They embrace the gift of grace through the salvific work of Jesus Christ and depend on God the Holy Spirit for wisdom and strength to live victoriously.

Each of these stages of trust take place in the context of Christian community. It is through Christian community that people witness the providence and power of God, and the supremacy of God’s kingdom.

Evangelism is a process that involves both
knowledge and experience.

Preparing to Engage

Before we can engage with people, we must prepare ourselves with the requisite life skills and knowledge to meet people where they are on their spiritual journey. This need for preparation is based on the apostle Peter’s imperative to “always be prepared” found in 1 Peter 3:15.

Always be prepared
to give an answer to everyone who asks you
to give the reason for the hope that you have.
(Emphasis added)
(1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

Peter is saying we need to be ready with an answer and a reason. Here, he is referring to *what* we believe and *why* we believe, respectively. The rationale for this imperative is that we need to be ready and not be caught off guard when people ask us what we believe and why.

³⁶ “From God to Us”, Norman L. Geisler, William E. Nix, Moody Publishers, August 1, 2012, 2nd Edition, ISBN-10: 0802428827, ISBN-13: 978-0802428820.

³⁷ [Mainstream Apologetics: The Revelation of God](#)

In addition to skills and knowledge, our response is born out of experience. Our experience is based on God's intervention in our lives. It is through life change, answers to prayer, and numerous other evidence that God faithfully demonstrates His power in our lives.

A great example of a response born out both knowledge and experience is the apostle John's account of the blind man and the Pharisees found in John 9. When interrogated by the Pharisees regarding the nature of Jesus (v17), the blind man responds by saying (vv17, 25, 33),

¹⁷ "I think he must be a prophet."
²⁵ "I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"
³³ "If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it."

While the blind man was asked a simple question "Who is Jesus?", he responded with an answer (v17b) and two reasons (vv25, 33). The first reason (v25) was born out of his *experience* with Jesus; he was miraculously healed. The second reason (v33) was born out of his *knowledge* of Jewish Law; Jesus could not possess the power of healing unless God were with him.

The blind man satisfies Peter's imperative. He provided a reasoned answer for what he believed and why he believed it. Likewise, we must be able to present a reasoned answer for what we believe to be true about God, and why we believe it based on our experience and knowledge of God's Word.

Knowing Your Purpose

The apostle Paul exhibited purpose in his ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:26, Paul states that his ministry to the lost is not aimless. Rather, his ministry had purpose. It had an overarching plan, a strategy.

*I run with **purpose in every step**. I am not just shadowboxing.*
(1 Corinthians 9:26 NLT)

The apostle Paul's writings and ministry were also relevant. As an itinerant evangelist, he traveled to many nations and cultures. In doing so, he immersed himself in those cultures in order to identify with his audience's frame of reference. He wanted to relate with his audience in a manner they would understand and act upon.

*I have become **all things to all people** so that by **all possible means** I might save some.*
(1 Corinthians 9:22B NIV)

For us, the same holds true. Our ministry must be purposeful and relevant. We must know those we engage with to best determine how to serve them.

The manner in which we communicate the Gospel should never be confrontational or adversarial. This demeans people and causes them to withdraw from the conversation. It says to people, "I am right, and you are wrong".

Rather, our conduct should always be invitational not confrontational, it should be inclusive not exclusive. We should always communicate the Gospel in love realizing that without God's grace we would all be slaves to sin.

Being relevant also means knowing our audience well, knowing their needs. People today are vastly different. Their receptivity to the Gospel depends on their perspective and frame of reference. Therefore, we must *know* people before we can effectively *engage* with them.

Knowing Your Role

God the Holy Spirit plays a preeminent role in the process of evangelism. Because human nature is fundamentally evil, no other agency apart from the Holy Spirit has the power to change minds, hearts, and lives. We are simply the conduit through which the Holy Spirit works.

According to God's Word, the Holy Spirit enlightens, convicts, and ultimately draws people to Himself.

Enlightenment

*I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth.
He will come to you from the Father and will **testify all about me.***
(John 15:16 NLT)

*And the Spirit, who is truth, **confirms it with his testimony.***
(1 John 5:6 NLT)

Conviction

*When he [Holy Spirit] comes, he will **convict the world of its sin,**
and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.*
(John 16:8 NLT)

Drawing

*For no one can come to me unless the Father
who sent me **draws them to me.***
(John 6:44 NLT)

Admittedly, the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways. This is because He has infinite wisdom, whereas we have finite wisdom. While we have a plan to reach people who are lost, the Holy Spirit supersedes us with His perfect plan.

We must therefore cooperate with the Holy Spirit through prayer. Prayer is the process by which we align our plans with the will of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit guides us as we respond in every circumstance. Therefore, we step out in confidence as God prepares the way.

*The Holy Spirit will **teach you** at that time what needs to be said.*
(Luke 12:12 NLT)

As conduits, we give voice to the truths God reveals to us through His Word. God the Holy Spirit ultimately applies His Word to people's hearts and minds and brings people to saving faith.

Knowing Your Audience

Before we can effectively engage with people, we need to know where they are on their spiritual journey.

The following sections provide an overview of the stages of religious belief ranging from Atheism to Christian theism.

Atheism – There Is No God

Atheists do not believe in a god. In fact, atheists ardently affirm the non-existence of god. They argue that because there is no evidence for god, atheism must be true.^[38] Their indoctrination forces them to view reality exclusively from an Atheistic perspective. They are unwilling to openly consider the overwhelming evidence and arguments for theism.

Moreover, Atheists believe that Christian faith and experience is completely baseless and is built on wishful thinking. This is understandable considering they have not experienced the presence and confirmation of God the Holy Spirit in their lives. They have not experienced answers to prayer and God's providential interventions in their lives. Without that, they have difficulty connecting with our testimonies.

³⁸ [Atheism and Agnosticism](#), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, March 22, 2022.

The position of Atheism is held by most Modernists. Modernists believe that reality is observed exclusively by mean of empirical science. Their mantra is that if it cannot be measured or observed with the five human senses, it is not real. Any notions of supernatural or spiritual realities are firmly rejected.

Agnosticism – There May Be A God

The term agnosticism was originally coined in the late nineteenth century by the English biologist, T.H. Huxley. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, agnosticism is the middle ground between atheism and theism since neither atheism nor theism can be validated by adequate evidence. ^[39]

*English biologist T. Huxley argued that since neither theism and atheism are adequately supported by evidence, we ought to **suspend judgment** on the issue of whether or not there is a God.*

*An agnostic is a person who has **entertained the proposition** that there is a God but believes neither that it is true nor that it is false. Agnostics maintain that it is **not known or cannot be known** whether there is a God. ^[36]*

Based on this evolved definition, two positions are held by modern agnostics.

The first position is that agnostics “suspend judgement” as to whether or not there is a god. They reason that if the existence or non-existence of god cannot be proven, then why waste time trying. Holding this position, agnostics claim neither belief nor disbelief in God. It is a state of *spiritual limbo*.

The second position is that agnostics believe there may be a god, but because the true nature of god cannot be ascertained, god is forever unknown. This nascent belief in a god may be the result of *natural revelation* or a willingness to believe in some form of spirituality. Any notion of *special revelation*, such as the Bible or other religious manuscripts, are not regarded as trustworthy. This position is consistent with the Athenian altar to the *Unknown God* found in Acts 17:23.

The position of Agnosticism is held by some Modernists and Postmodernists.

Natural Theism – There Is A God

Natural theists believe there is a god that can be known through nature.

Natural theism is referred to more broadly among Biblical scholars as *General Revelation*. General Revelation teaches that the general nature of God is observed in the world around us through nature and can be observed through the human senses and conscience.

According to Romans 1:19-20, God reveals himself to all people at all times through creation. In this passage, the apostle Paul declares that God's power and nature are abundantly obvious and self-evident.

¹⁹ *They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.*

²⁰ *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky.*

*Through everything God made, **they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature**. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

(Romans 1:19-20 NLT)

And, according to Romans 2:14-15, God reveals himself to the human conscience. In this passage, the apostle Paul declares that God's moral law is indelibly written on our hearts in order to instinctively distinguish right from wrong.

³⁹ Agnostic is to have an uncertain or non-committal attitude toward something.

¹⁴"Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵They demonstrate that **God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.**"
(Romans 2:14-15 NLT)

By means of nature and the human conscience, natural theists know that God exists. They come to realize that creation in all its vast complexities is the work of a transcendent being, not man or chance. They observe that god's transcendent nature is eternal, powerful, majestic, and moral.

The position of Natural Theism is held by some Modernists and Postmodernists, and by most indigenous people groups. Positions commonly held by Natural Theists include naturalism, animism, pantheism, and spiritualism.

World Religions

The category of world religions falls somewhere between Natural Theism and Christian Theism. It represents a wider range of spiritual and religious beliefs.

The most prominent world religions other than Christianity include Islam (23.2%), Hindu (15%), Buddhism (7.1%), Judaism (0.2%), and numerous other religions (6.7%).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to cover each religion. Readers should avail themselves to other sources. ^[40]

Christian Theism

Christian theism is distinctively different than any other world religion. Christian theists believe in the triune God of the Bible as revealed in both the New and Old Testaments. They also believe in the biblical meta-narrative of *God-Man-Sin-Jesus* which holds to the following truths:

- The universe and life came into being through the power of a triune God (Genesis 1).
- This triune God consists of three persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gospel of John).
- While originally created sinless, man willfully transgressed God's moral law, and hence, alienated himself from God (Genesis 3).
- Sin entered the world causing all creation to "fall" from its original state of sinlessness (Genesis 3, Romans 8).
- While man was alienated from God, God provided a plan to redeem man from his sin by sending Jesus the Son to pay the ransom price for man's sin through His death on the cross.
- Jesus demonstrated His power over sin and death by His resurrection.
- Through faith – trust in God – man is "saved" from his state of sinfulness through Jesus' atonement.

According to this system of theology, the FATHER creates the plan of salvation, the SON implements the plan of salvation, and the Holy Spirit administers the plan of salvation.

These tenets are essential to Christian theism.

Knowing the Gospel

As Christians, it is incumbent on us to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we engage with others. Knowing the Gospel enables us to communicate it with completeness and clarity. Knowing the Gospel intimately, helps us communicate it reflexively and authentically.

⁴⁰ [5 Main World Religions and Their Basic Beliefs](#), Mary White, May 11, 2021, YourDictionary.com.

Essentially, the Gospel is an exposition of the Biblical narrative found throughout Scripture. This narrative can be summarized by the four-word phrase *God-Man-Sin-Jesus*. Perhaps the best overview of this narrative is the *Roman's Road to Salvation* found in the book of Romans. ^[41]

The Human Problem

As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one."
Romans 3:10 NLT

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.
Romans 3:23 NLT

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*
Romans 6:23

Humanity's Hope in Christ

*But God showed his great love for us
by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*
Romans 5:8 NLT

The Sinner's Response

*If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and
believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God,
and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.*
Romans 10:9-10 NLT

For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."
Romans 10:13 NLT

The Result of Salvation

*Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith,
we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.
Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place
of undeserved privilege where we now stand,
and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.*
Romans 5:1-2

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.
Romans 8:1 NLT

This brief tour through Romans provides a concise summary of the Gospel. As our authoritative source, this summary serves as the basis for developing your own personal testimony.

Putting the Gospel message into your own words is essential. A 60 second *elevator speech*, offers a brief yet personal explanation that bears witness to how the Gospel has impacted your life ^[42]. Those listening validate the credibility of your testimony by observing the power of God at work in your life.

⁴¹ ["What Is the Romans Road to Salvation?"](#), Emily Hall, August 13, 2021, Christianity.com.

⁴² [Circles Evangelism Guide](#), Multiplying Disciples, [multiplyingdisciples.us](#).

Presenting the Gospel as a personal story is amenable to people, especially to Postmodernists. It does not come across as preaching. It is heartfelt and genuine. It demonstrates authenticity.

Knowing How to Defend God's Word

Does the Christian worldview have substance? Is it credible? These are questions many today are asking. Their receptivity to spiritual matters hinges on the plausibility of the Christian worldview.

A deeper understanding of science and the Bible reveals that the Christian worldview is in fact plausible. The Christian worldview offers the most compelling and cohesive explanation of the world around us. It demonstrates that science and the truth claims of the Bible are in perfect harmony.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a defense of these claims. For a deeper understanding of how science corroborates scripture, the Mainstream Apologetics website offers a systematic, evidence-based defense of the truth claims of the Christian faith. ^[43]

Topics on the Mainstream Apologetics website are presented as building blocks. It first defends the existence of god, then defends the creation of god, the revelation of the Christian God, and finally the divinity and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These defenses help equip Christians with the fundamental arguments as they engage intellectually with skeptics such as atheists, agnostics, natural theists, and followers of non-Christian gods.

Being armed with a clear and credible Christian defense is essential when responding to people's spiritual needs. As people question the basic tenets of the Christian faith, Christians should be prepared to offer a thoughtful response (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

Practical Skills for Engaging

Once we have prepared ourselves for engagement, we are ready to engage with people. In this section, we will explore some practical approaches to engaging with people on the topic of God's truth, based on biblical principles and established practices. These principles and practices provide the necessary life skills that will serve us for years to come.

Art of Relating

The hallmark of a healthy community is the strength of the relational bonds shared among its members. Love is the central ingredient that draws people toward each other. It empowers people to engage with selfless, humble acts of service.

Because God created mankind as multidimensional beings, our approach to evangelism must be multifaceted. We therefore must engage with people using a variety of means.

SOCIALLY:

Friendship is the fertile soil in which engaging relationships are nurtured. The currency of these relationships is *mutual trust* that when expressed in love produces openness and transparency that forges meaningful relationships. Ultimately, friendships provide a showcase to exhibit believer's faith.

INTELLECTUALLY:

Human intellect makes sense of the complex world around us. Without it, there would be no certainty. *Facts* coupled with our five senses are the currency of intellectual inquiry as individuals strive to ascertain what is true. Facts, when deliberated in love, result in a willingness to *reason*. It moves the skeptic from being resistant to God's truth to being open, curious, receptive, decisive, and finally agreeable.

⁴³ The [Mainstream Apologetics](http://mainstreamapologetics.org) website (mainstreamapologetics.org) is a good starting point. It provides 200+ articles and 350+ references to useful apologetics resources. It also provides resources for answering the big questions of the Christian faith.

EMOTIONALLY:

While human intellect is a function of the mind, human emotion is a function of the heart. God created us as both intellectual and emotional beings. As such, we have the ability to vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another, to be sensitive to one another's needs. *Empathy* is the currency of emotional engagement. When shared in love, empathy results in mutual respect and concern for one another's wellbeing. When others struggle, we struggle as well and come to their aid.

SPIRITUALLY:

Relating spiritually brings our relationships to a new level. It allows Christians to express their personal faith in both word and deed. It also allows people to witness believer's faith in the context of life's challenges. *Believer's faith* is the currency of spiritual relationships. It functions as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). When expressed in love, believer's faith produces spiritual *awareness*. This awareness enables people to behold the blessings of God's rule and the potency of God's power.

These means of engagement form the basis upon which we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each one is essential and necessary.

As we interact with others, we want our exchange to be meaningful. We want others to know us at a deeper level. In doing so, we establish a climate of authenticity and give people permission to ask deeper questions of us. This approach allows us to better understand where people are on their spiritual journey. As we get to know them during the beginning stages of friendship, we better understand their frame of reference; how they think, what worldviews they hold.

Art of Engaging

First impressions are often lasting impressions. As Christians, we often battle unfair stereotypes that characterize religious conservatives. Knowing in advance that some disagree with our conservative values, we need to exercise caution as to not alienate people as we make our introductions.

The following principles have proven useful when engaging with others.

LEAD WITH LOVE AND RESPECT

Love and accept others as persons made in the image of God. Model civility in all circumstances. Be graceful. Do not be put off by outward appearances, foul language, or other distractions that make you uncomfortable. Welcome people with an open mind and heart, not with condemnation.

LOOK FOR THE GOOD IN OTHERS

Calling out the good in others helps focus on people's qualities. It helps us appreciate how God has gifted others. It enriches our conversation and enables us to encourage others.

MODEL PEACE AND POSITIVITY

In a world of constant negative news, we need to model the peace and calm demeanor that is characteristic of a life grounded in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Do not engage in negative discussion, but rather change the topic or direct the discussion toward the blessings of trusting in the sovereignty of God in all situations.

SEEK TO IDENTIFY

Try understanding other's perspective and circumstances by putting yourself in their shoes. Pay attention to the topics they raise to understand their struggles. Identifying with others demonstrates we are listening and are interested in knowing them on a deeper level.

FIND COMMON GROUND

Commonalities are the basis upon which enduring relationships are formed. They enable people to come together. Commonalities include common interests and struggles, as well as shared perspectives on important topics.

DROP THE “CHURCH” WORD

Perhaps the most inoffensive way of introducing ourselves as Christ followers is to casually drop the “church” word when asked about “what you do in life”. Attending and serving in a local church conveys that church and our Christian faith are an essential part of our lives. This approach serves as a trial balloon to reveal what others think about Christianity, and whether they are receptive to having spiritual conversations.

MAKE GOD’S WORD YOUR REFERENCE

Perhaps the worst expression used when sharing what we believe as Christians is “I believe that ...”. In so doing, we are mimicking relativists who value personal perspective over objectivity. Rather, we should phrase our beliefs as “I believe God’s Word teaches that ...”. The import of this rephrasing moves the discussion from personal opinion to the objective rule of God’s Word. This approach puts the onus on God - not us - for any repercussions.

WAIT FOR OPEN DOORS

Open doors usually come in the form of questions (e.g., “how do I deal with ...?”) or comments (e.g., “you seem to have your life together.”, “I don’t know where to turn.”). If an opportunity arises to share your faith, the Holy Spirit will give you the words as you speak to the heartfelt needs of others. Describe how God has changed your life, and given you hope and power to overcome your circumstances.

EXTEND AN INVITATION TO RECONNECT

As God the Holy Spirit prompts, extend an invitation to meet again. Reconnecting to explore shared interests or needs may be the start of a meaningful relationship.

PRAY FOR THE RELATIONSHIP

In prayer, we invoke the power of God to superintend the relationship. God the Holy Spirit works behind the scenes to draw others to Himself as they later recall what transpired.

These principles consider the cultural sensitivities necessary to evangelize effectively in our modern age. They strive to draw people into relationships. More importantly, they establish a rapport with others where meaningful, spiritual conversations can ensue.

Art of Active Listening

James’ admonition to the church is to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry” (James 1:10). While this warning is directed toward those who are prone to quickly respond in anger with an “uncontrolled tongue”, it serves as a general warning to those who dominate conversations, those who want to be heard.

Rather, we are instructed to first listen to others. In doing so, we benefit by learning from another’s perspective. This principle of *listening-before-speaking* is essential as we seek to engage with others to understand where they are on their spiritual journey.

Active listening is a process by which we listen intently to one another. Our mission is to understand them well enough to be able to speak into their lives. According to James, this process requires patience and humility. It requires us to be other-centered, not self-centered.

According to columnist David Brooks of the New York Times, active listening involves giving people our mindful, undivided attention. ^[44] This requires us to listen so intently that we “burn calories” in the process. Energy spent on listening intently to others replaces the energy otherwise spent preparing a response. This process of paying attention to

⁴⁴ [The Essential Skills for Being Human](#), David Brooks, New York Times, Oct. 19, 2023.

others ultimately honors and validates the other person. It gives people the space to open up and bear their souls authentically.

As we seek to effectively engage with others, improving our listening skills is crucial. The following practices are recommended.

Eliminate Distractions:

Undivided attention literally means undivided attention. Find a quiet place free of interruptions. Mute or turn off all devices. Eliminate unnecessary noise. Make the other person the exclusive focus of your attention. Not doing so communicates that distractions are more important.

Observe Nonverbal Cues

Researchers have determined that nonverbal cues comprise 55-60% of what we communicate. ^[45] This requires us to pay close attention to the other person's body language that reveals important emotions not verbalized.

Avoid One-Upmanship

Avoid responding to every comment others make. Don't respond with one-up, personal stories that trivialize and devalue the other person's stories.

Listen Loudly:

Use appropriate body gestures (e.g., nods, smiles, posture) and simple verbal cues (e.g., "yes", "aha") to demonstrate you are listening actively. These affirming gestures and cues add momentum to the conversation. They encourage the other person to continue sharing.

Seek Clarity:

Understanding what the other person is saying can sometimes be challenging. As we interpret what others are saying, we often assume what is not meant. Ask for clarification as needed to accurately understand the other person.

Gain Perspective

Understanding the other person's perspective is best accomplished by putting ourselves in their shoes as best we can. Understanding through the lens of their perspective, not the assumptions we make about them, enables us to see others on a personal level with greater clarity.

Growing in our desire and capacity to listen attentively makes us more compassionate and empathetic toward others. It shows others that they matter. ^[46]

Art of Asking Great Questions

As we engage with others, asking great questions unlocks what is often not verbalized. Great questions evoke a thoughtful response by challenging people to go deeper. ^[47]

The stages of engagement closely parallel the stages of friendship. First, we get acquainted. Then, we interact casually, regularly. Lastly, we form close, intimate relationships. At each stage, the types of questions progress from *what/where* questions, to *how* questions, to *why* questions, and finally *then* questions.

⁴⁵ [How Much of Communication is Nonverbal?](#), Albert Mehrabian, University of Texas PERMIAN BASIN.

⁴⁶ "Listening is about showing people they matter by aiming our curiosity at them; wanting to know them and know what they think." Quote from Monica Guzman, [TED Talk](#), November 2021.

⁴⁷ Questioning Evangelism, Third Edition: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did, Randy Newman, January 17, Kregel Publications, 2023 ISBN-10: 0825447801, ISBN-13: 978-0825447808.

Acquaintances

Getting acquainted in social settings is all about introductions. It is about being sociable. Asking non-threatening, exploratory questions is a great place to begin any relationship. These types of questions put people at ease and encourage people to engage willingly.

Example WHAT/WHERE Questions:

- Where do you live? How long have you been in the area?
- Are you married? Do you have children and grandchildren?
- What do you do for a living?
- What area of the country were you raised in?
- What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? Why do you enjoy it?
- What are your top three restaurants? Why?
- What activities are at the top of your “bucket list”?

As we become acquainted with others, we should be mindful that God the Holy Spirit may be prompting us to pursue a deeper relationship.

Causal Friendships

Engaging with people on a regular basis provides opportunities for us to move beyond acquaintances to deeper relationships. It demonstrates a level of curiosity to know one another, a level of caring for one another.

Meeting regularly gives way to greater levels of exploration and understanding. It enables us to move beyond *what/where* questions to *how* questions, beyond assumptions to understanding.

One of the best ways to get inside a person’s mind is to *storify*. Storifying – asking questions which require people to tell a personal story – reveals the deeper *hows* of their lives.

Example HOW Questions:

- How did you decide on your career?
- How did you and your spouse meet?
- How did you come to that conclusion?

Close, Intimate Friendships

Close, intimate relationships are built on trust and commitment. They are genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of others.

As we get to know others deeply, we begin to ask more challenging questions. These questions go beyond *what/where* and *how* questions to asking *why* and *then* questions.

Why questions reveal people’s rationale for what they believe. They expose people’s motives and misconceptions.

Example WHY Questions:

- Why do you believe ...?
- Why are you certain of ...?

Then questions challenge people to justify their beliefs in light of a dilemma, dichotomy, or contradiction. *Then* questions typically take the form, “Given that you believe ..., then how do you reconcile/explain ...?”.

Example THEN Questions for Modernists:

- How do you ascertain whether scientific findings are true, and not biased, misinterpreted, or incomplete?

- How do you explain the creation of the universe - something from nothing? How do you explain the origin of the universe without a god?
- How do you explain the abrupt appearance of phyla and species during the Cambrian period, without intermediates? Don't you agree it contradicts Darwin's theory of stepwise evolution?
- How do you explain the prediction and accurate fulfillment of biblical prophecy without the omniscience and intervention of God?

Example THEN Questions for Relativists:

- How do you determine what is true and factual? What is your guiding star as it relates to truth?
- How do you wrestle with life's uncertainties?
- How do you come to agreement with others who hold different or diametrically opposed views given that what you both believe is true/right? How do we ever reach consensus on anything?
- How can a society govern itself without a definitive basis of rights/wrongs, true/false, and prevent itself from devolving into a terminal state of chaos and anarchy?

Asking great questions enables us to gain valuable insights about others. It enables us to explore life from another's perspective. At the same time, asking great questions challenges people to come to terms with what they believe and why they believe it.

Art of Group Discussion

Group discussion complements one-on-one interactions by enabling people to learn from the shared experiences and insights of others. Through Bible-centered group discussion, people not only hear but also *interact* with God's Word. Group discussion provides a way for people to come to terms with what they believe and why they believe it.

Bible Discussion Groups are a useful evangelistic tool. They complement traditional church ministries by providing a safe place where people can come and ask questions, find biblical answers, and learn from each other. They are designed to meet people where they are on their spiritual journey. They give people space to explore and discover God's Word at their own pace, on their own terms.

Bible Discussion Groups bridge the gap between the secular world in which people live and the Christian community. They enable people who are otherwise reluctant to attend church to move beyond their *sticking* points – their spiritual obstacles and misconceptions – toward a more comprehensive understanding of God's Word. They provide a steppingstone for many to come to faith and assimilate into the life of the local church.

Bible Discussion Groups strategically support the principles of *Belonging-Before-Believing* and *Evangelism-as-a-Process*.

The following resources are available for planning, launching, and leading Bible Discussion Groups.

- [Why](#) Bible Discussion Groups are Important. ^[48]
- [What](#) are Bible Discussion Groups. ^[49]
- [How](#) to Launch and Lead Bible Discussion Groups. ^[50]

Closing Remarks

People today are exposed to lethal amounts of distressing news. This is taking a toll on people's mental well-being and is driving people to despair. They are losing hope in man's ability to solve crucial, existential problems.

⁴⁸ [Articulating God's Truth in an Unbelieving Age](#), Leo Modica, Converge Point Magazine, January 2022.

⁴⁹ [Discovering God's Truth Through Bible-Centered Discussion](#), Leo Modica, Converge Point Magazine, May 2022.

⁵⁰ [Launching and Leading Bible Discussion Groups](#), Leo Modica, Mainstream Apologetics, 2023.

According to a recent 2023 Gallup poll, 29.0% of U.S. adults have been clinically diagnosed with some form of depression sometime in their lifetime. ^{[51][52]} This represents a 10% increase from the last poll taken in 2015. These findings estimate that an additional 33 million Americans have been diagnosed with depression over the last 8 years alone!

Gallup also found that this rate increase was not exclusively due to the COVID pandemic, but attributable to “other big factors”. Based on other research, these other factors likely include climate change, inflation, social media, mass shootings, fractured government, civil unrest, and widespread wars. ^[53] These factors also contribute to a global decline in birth rates and many other social ills. ^[54]

I believe the Christian church has an opportunity to minister today to a captive audience. By all accounts, people are running out of options and have nowhere else to turn.

This dire situation reminds me of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). His downward life spiral drove him in the end to choose between certain death or going home to the Father.

People today are in desperate need of being rescued from this fallen world (Galatians 1:4). Therefore, we, the church, should declare with renewed boldness and confidence that God alone is the hope of the world!



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⁵¹ [U.S. Depression Rates Reach New Highs](#), Dan Witters, May 17, 2023, Gallup.

⁵² [Depression rates among US adults reach new high: Gallup](#), Mary Kekatos, May 17, 2023, ABC NEWS.

⁵³ [Stress in America 2022, Concerned for the future, beset by inflation](#), American Psychological Association.

⁵⁴ [The Real Reason People Aren't Having Kids](#), Christine Emba, August 1, 2024, The Atlantic.