



YOU CAN'T

TALK ABOUT

THAT

THREE ESSENTIAL TOPICS THE NEXT
GENERATION NEEDS TO HEAR AND
HOW TO TALK ABOUT THEM

shane pruit

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INTRODUCTION

“Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”

EPHESIANS 5:15–16

The world is attempting to place a gag order on the church.

In the legal world, there is something known as a gag order. A gag order is a legal directive issued by a judge that restricts individuals—such as attorneys, witnesses, law enforcement, or even the media—from publicly discussing certain aspects of a case. The main purpose of a gag order is to protect the integrity of the judicial process by preventing prejudicial information from influencing potential jurors or public opinion. These orders are especially common in high-profile or sensitive cases where widespread media coverage could compromise a fair trial. Violating a gag order can result in penalties, including being fined or even being held in contempt of court.

When it comes to certain cultural issues, the world tries to issue a gag order on the church. It would love for Christians to stay silent in public discourse and on social media about things such as sexuality, gender, and mental health issues—especially when it comes to the next generation. As ministry leaders, we can feel the pressure to stay quiet, and we'll ask ourselves, *Can I talk about that?* However, at the very same time, culture is screaming about these things. The world wants the church to have a gag order, while they have a megaphone.

Current Perceptions of the Next Generation

If culture is screaming while the church remains silent, then an entire generation only hears one worldview. This

is how we end up with very concerning statistics like these:

- 84% of Gen Alpha believe a person’s preferred pronouns should be respected. Alphas take ownership of their own identity and will largely advocate for others to be able to express who they are.¹
- 1 in 6 Gen Zers identify as LGBTQ+.²
- Roughly half of Gen Zers (48%) say gay marriage is a good thing for society.³
- Roughly half of Gen Zers (50%) think that society is not accepting enough of those who identify as trans and non-binary.⁴

For far too long, the world has been trying to bully the church into silence, so that it can continue dominating the conversation. One of the most common statements that culture will use to keep Christians silent in fear is by communicating ideas such as, “You can’t talk about things like sexuality and gender without sounding too political or bigoted.” However, these views were biblical truths before they were ever political statements.

Where to Find Truth

Who defines marriage? The answer to this question is a biblical truth. Who created healthy sexuality? The answer to this question is a biblical truth. Who determines someone’s gender? This answer, too, is a biblical truth. See, the world is actually infringing on the Word’s territory—not vice versa.

¹ Cassandra, *Breaking the Rules: Gen Z & Gender*. (March 5, 2024). <https://cassandra.co/reports/2024/03/05/breaking-the-rules-gen-z-gender-report>.

² Pew Research Center, “Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues.” Pew Research Center, May 14, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/05/14/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Of course, every ministry and church has to approach cultural issues in a way that is relevant and helpful for their context. This may look different for different ministries; however, what must be true for every situation is that silence cannot be an option.

As ministry leaders, we must play a part in the conversation. Christians must talk about these things by speaking where the Bible speaks because the Bible does speak. The Bible is the Word of God. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. Biblical truth always supersedes cultural opinions.

As I travel and speak with teenagers and young adults, I have found that they really do want to talk about these things. Sadly—and understandably—it's often the adults who are too nervous to engage in conversations on these controversial and highly debated topics. But now, it's time to set our fear aside by faith because we must talk about these things with the next generation.

CHAPTER ONE

FOUR WAYS TO

APPROACH

CULTURAL ISSUES

Typically, there are four main ways we can approach cultural issues, but only one of these methods is a proper biblical response.

1. Withdraw

The first approach is to withdraw from it. This approach can take on multiple forms, but its strategy is basically the same: Don't engage in the conversation. Don't try to reach people ensnared in the trap of believing the world's lies. Avoid the conflict—either by proverbially ducking your head in the sand and pretending nothing is going on around you as you live in the world, or by totally removing yourself and your family, disengaging with the world through a separatist mentality: “My loved ones and I are intentionally staying in our little bubble while the world burns down around us.” Unfortunately, more and more Christians are actively pursuing this approach.

2. Complain

The second approach is to complain about it. This approach takes place as Christians sit comfortably on padded church pews, going to potluck dinners and angrily wagging their fingers at the culture, while, at the same time, not actively doing anything to influence people toward the only One who can rescue and transform them—Jesus Christ. We're too busy yelling at lost people for being lost and criticizing unbelievers for behaving like unbelievers.

3. Conform

Another approach is to conform to it. This approach occurs when Christians, churches, and ministries compromise their values in a vain attempt to be more relevant or acceptable to the world. Instead of standing boldly on the truths of Scripture, they start accepting and affirming the world's view on topics like sexuality, gender, and biblical authority.

However, when the church compromises its biblical convictions to "become more relevant," we stop being relevant. Unfortunately, some youth and college ministries have intentionally compromised their views on cultural issues, believing that doing so will be a more loving approach for reaching the next generation. Ironically, it does the opposite; this approach has never been effective. It's not loving; it's destructive. If you want to be more relevant in your pursuit of reaching the next generation, then stick to the living Word of God, the truths of which will always remain relevant.

4. Transform

Finally, transform it. This approach occurs when Christians, churches, and ministries don't withdraw from the world, but intentionally engage the world with biblical truth. Jesus prayed for His disciples: "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:16–18).

Followers of Jesus aren't just complaining about the world; they are *going* to the ends of the earth to make disciples. They're doing precisely what Jesus commissioned His followers to do in the Great Commission. The church isn't striving to conform to the world's way of thinking, but rather transforming the world to have the mind of Christ. As Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

How to Transform the Next Generation

When it comes to thinking with a proper worldview and leading the next generation to do the same, this is what's commanded to us as believers: Don't conform but transform. In the original Greek, the word *conform* means to form or mold one's behavior in accordance with a particular pattern or set of standards. When Paul stated, "Do not be conformed to this age," he literally meant not to let the current worldview form and mold your thoughts and behaviors. Instead, the apostle encouraged them to "be transformed." The Greek word for transform is *metamorphoo*, from which we get our word metamorphosis. It means total and radical change! The Holy Spirit working in us and the Holy Bible guiding us will transform our minds to think differently than the world does.

It's time for Christians to think about topics like sex, gender, and mental health with a renewed mind and

to figure out how to disciple the next generation to have a biblical worldview toward these cultural topics.

The first step is talking about it.

In the sections that follow, we will answer two questions on the topics of sex, gender, and mental health.

1. What does the Bible say?
2. How do we help the next generation live out these truths?

When young people start valuing what their Bible says, they will begin to see life through the lens of God's truth rather than culture's lies. As they follow Jesus, their values, priorities, and worldview will start to shift in powerful, lasting ways. Real transformation happens when Scripture moves from information in their heads to conviction in their hearts.

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CHAPTER TWO

HOW TO TALK

ABOUT SEX

I was around 14 years old when I experienced one of the most awkward moments of my teenage life. I came home from basketball practice to find a book on my dresser, left by my parents, about “the birds and the bees.” It was a cartoon book that seemed to date back to the WWII era, discussing the intimate details of love, intercourse, and reproduction. That was how my parents chose to have—or not have—this all-important conversation with me. Apart from the book, they never brought it up, and neither did I.

However, we need to talk about this with our own kids and with the students that God has entrusted to our youth, college, and young adult ministries. The world doesn’t have a problem talking about sex. Honestly, it talks about it too often, in very unhealthy and destructive ways. Therefore, the church can’t be silent. The Bible has a lot to say about sex, so we must teach the next generation of disciples what it says.

To begin biblically discussing the topic of sex, we must examine the creation story in Genesis.

What Does the Bible Say?

The opening chapters of Genesis describe creation. Scripture outlines how God created everything out of nothing, and He did so with great intentionality and care. Humanity was uniquely formed in God’s image, setting us apart from the rest of creation. Because God exists in perfect relationship within the Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), He created people to be relational as well. From the very beginning, God

established order and intentionality in everything He made.

Although the world is broken because sin entered the world in Genesis 3, the foundational truths in Genesis still reflect God's original design for how life is meant to function.

GOD CREATED PEOPLE IN HIS IMAGE.

Genesis 1:26 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'" As God's image bearers, every person has value. Being made in His image means that humans are spiritual beings. We have eternal worth (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Humanity matters because of our Creator. I live in Texas, so that means I can illustrate this point by using a double-negative: God don't make no junk. No one is an accident. We exist because a holy, on-purpose Creator God said so.

GOD DEFINED MARRIAGE BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN.

Genesis 2 says a lot about marriage: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him'" (Genesis 2:18). Soon, we read as God makes good on His promise to create a helper for man.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the

man into a woman and brought her to the man. And the man said:

*“This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken from man.*

*This is why a man leaves his father and mother
and bonds with his wife, and they become one
flesh. Both the man and his wife were naked, yet
felt no shame” (Genesis 2:21–25).*

The Bible is extremely clear on what God’s design is for marriage: one man and one woman together in a covenant with Him and a covenant with each other. The world doesn’t get to redefine what God has already defined.

GOD CREATED SEX TO BE BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Genesis 1:28 says, “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.’” God’s first command to the man and woman was to be fruitful and multiply, and we all know how that happens. In Genesis 2:25, the man and wife were naked yet felt no shame. These truths remind us that sex was part of God’s plan for marriage. He created it for a husband and wife to enjoy and to fulfill His command to multiply.

We need to help the next generation understand that sex was God’s idea. He is pro-sex. Sometimes, we

confuse young people when we present sex as though it is gross, vile, and disgusting, then tell them to save it for marriage someday. Adam and Eve didn't surprise God with that act. God is not some cosmic killjoy who doesn't want people to enjoy His good gifts. But His gift of sex is designed to be between a husband and wife.

JESUS AFFIRMED GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE.

The biblical insight into God's design for marriage goes beyond Genesis. Jesus taught about marriage too.

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, and he also said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:4–6).

A common argument from social media influencers is that Jesus had nothing to say about cultural issues. However, Jesus *affirmed* God's design for marriage and sex.

When people argue that Jesus was silent on cultural hot topics, they overlook a significant detail found in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Son of God did not emerge 2,000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem. Jesus has always existed! The Son of God was not just sent from God; He is God, and He is eternal. The use of "us" and "our" in the early chapters

of Genesis describes the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That means the Son of God was involved in the design of sexuality, gender, and marriage from the beginning. It's His own!

PAUL WARNED AGAINST SEXUAL SIN.

Paul adds to the conversation about a biblical sexual ethic in 1 Corinthians 6:18–20:

Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.

We don't snuggle up to sexual sin. We flee from it!

More times than I can count in over two decades of ministry, I've had young people ask me some variation of this question, "How far is going too far physically with my boyfriend or girlfriend?" Basically, they're asking, "How close can we get to the proverbial 'sin line' without crossing it? How close can we get to the fire without getting burned?" However, this mindset is completely wrong. Paul doesn't say to tiptoe as close as we can to sexual immorality; He urges us to do the opposite—*flee* from it!

What is sexual immorality? It comes from the Greek word *pornea*. (Yes, this is where we get the word pornography.) Sexual immorality is any kind of sexual

activity outside of marriage between one man and one woman.

How Do We Help the Next Generation?

So, how do we help the next generation live out these truths about sex?

POINT SPIRITUALLY LOST PEOPLE TO JESUS.

Sexual immorality is not an unpardonable sin. Jesus saves sinners! Our goal is not to convince spiritually lost people to clean up their lives before they can follow Jesus; that is self-righteousness. We are called to point them to Jesus. He is the only One who can save them and transform their lives. No one is too sinful for Jesus to save. So, share the gospel with people who desperately need Him.

POINT SPIRITUALLY FOUND PEOPLE TO SCRIPTURE.

Jesus said to His disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15). The Spirit of God propels believers toward obedience. Discipleship is the answer here. Help young people know what Scripture says about marriage and sex and teach them how to live out the principles they’re learning. If someone claims to be a follower of Jesus, then he or she should also have a desire to obey His commands.

OFFER HOPE.

Every believer should remember the heeding Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “Don’t you know

that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.” You don’t give your body to whomever you want. Remind students that God designed marriage and sex to be between a husband and wife.

ADDRESS ALL FORMS OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY.

All sexual immorality is sinful. A boyfriend and a girlfriend who aren’t married. LGBTQIA+ issues. Pornography. Adultery. Don’t only highlight one form of sexual immortality while neglecting to address the others. Doing so could unintentionally communicate to teens and young adults that one sin is worse than others.

SURROUND PEOPLE WITH LOVE AND COMMUNITY.

Helping lead a young person out of sexual immorality is most likely going to involve more than just their decision to think, believe, and live differently. It’s also going to involve a change in relationships and community. Many new believers face a lot of pressure to stay within their old relationships. Because of this social pressure, the church must step in with love and surround these young people with healthy, biblical community.



CHAPTER THREE

HOW TO TALK

ABOUT GENDER

I'll never forget one night while speaking at a youth camp and having a conversation with an 18-year-old young man who was deeply conflicted about a new development in his life. He told me how much he loved Jesus, that he had been living on mission, that he was active in a local church, and was practicing spiritual disciplines daily.

However, his girlfriend of two years (who supposedly loved Jesus as well and with whom he was planning a future) had gone from embracing her God-given gender to identifying as non-binary, then identifying as male, all within a couple of months. This young man's deep confusion over cultural pressures to affirm and validate everyone's chosen identity led him to assume he must identify as gay to honor his significant other's self-identification as a male.

In that moment, I realized that there are many layers to the onion of our young people's confusion about gender. When you start to peel back the layers, you can't help but experience the tears that come with slicing said onion.

The world has confused a generation of young people on this topic. According to one study, 4.1% of Generation Z identify as transgender compared to less than 1% of older generations.⁵ Another study found that 84% of Gen Alpha believe a person's preferred pronouns should be respected.⁶ Social media feeds share stories of biological boys playing girls' sports, robbing championships, breaking records, and even causing injuries.

⁵Giulia Carbonaro, "Number of Gen Z People Identifying as Transgender Twice That of Millennials," Newsweek, February 24, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/people-who-identify-transgender-doubles-gen-z-1783562>.

⁶Cassandra, Breaking the Rules: Gen Z & Gender.

We must speak up on this topic and help a generation navigate gender confusion with God's Word. Silence cannot be an option.

What Does the Bible Say?

Let's return to Genesis 1. In the creation account, we see that the Bible speaks clearly on this topic.

GOD DETERMINES MALE AND FEMALE GENDERS.

Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female." God is the Creator of all life, and He intentionally designed each human as male or female. Gender is not a human invention or social construct. Gender is part of God's purposeful creation. Males and females are equally made in God's image with dignity, worth, and distinct roles that complement each other in His design.

Throughout Scripture, gender distinctions are affirmed and upheld, not as limitations but as reflections of God's order and beauty. Psalm 139:13–14 speaks of God knitting us together in the womb, emphasizing that our physical design is intentional and meaningful:

*For it was you who created my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I will praise you because I have been
remarkably and wondrously made. Your works
are wondrous, and I know this very well.*

A male is a male because God said so. A female is a female because God said so. He is perfect and doesn't make mistakes. The word "oops" is not in His vocabulary. It is biblical to believe and say that males are males and females are females. In fact, it's unloving to affirm or celebrate the lie that someone is in the "wrong" body.

GOD'S DESIGN IS INTENTIONAL.

Our identity as male or female is part of God's deliberate creation. The Bible never discusses gender as fluid, interchangeable, or self-determined. Scripture tells us that our identity is a gift from God, not something we define for ourselves. To embrace our God-given gender is to honor our Creator and trust that His design is good, even when it's countercultural or misunderstood.

Unfortunately, in a fallen world, young people are struggling with distortions of reality. A proper biblical worldview accepts the validity that gender dysphoria results in heartrending distress in a person's testimony. However, Christians must lovingly and boldly reject the idea that males can become females and females become males.

How Do We Help the Next Generation?

How do we help the next generation live out the truths about gender?

**AVOID USING WORDS LIKE "TRANSGENDER"
AND "CISGENDER."**

These words were created by culture to uphold worldly agendas. The use of these words could signal to the next generation that we accept cultural ideas; ideas that don't align with the truths of Scripture and God's design, as well as laws of rationality and principles of biology.

OFFER CARE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.

The parents and guardians of young people who are suffering from confusion about gender are hurting, worried, and embarrassed. Other parents in the community and even in the church may have already ostracized them. In addition, the world is trying to convince these parents and guardians that not affirming their child could result in the child's self-harm. This tactic makes loving adults paralyzed with fear because, of course, they don't want to lose their child. They feel isolated, shunned, and blamed.

As a ministry leader, you can offer care by recognizing their pain and treating them normally. Spend time with them and provide trusted, biblically based resources that will help their family navigate these difficult issues with truth and clarity.

PLAN FOR A LONG JOURNEY.

Ministering to those struggling with gender confusion may take many months, if not years. Be patient along the way. As Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Though it may bring about new conversations and experiences, we need leaders willing to walk alongside

individuals in every season of life, encouraging them to embrace faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

ACCEPT THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT DON'T AFFIRM THE LIE.

Do: love. Behind every self-identified label is a person made in the image of God. People are more than labels. They are image-bearers!

Don't: affirm. One of the most unloving things we can do is affirm and celebrate what the Bible calls sinful.

You must remember the difference between acceptance and affirmation. You can accept the young person and still reject the sinful behavior he or she exhibits and the lies he or she believes. Contrary to what the world says, love and care do not equal compliance, affirmation, and celebration.

AVOID THE PERSONAL PRONOUN TRAP.

I'm often asked, "Should we use young people's preferred pronouns?" Here's why I don't.

Preferred pronouns are tied to a cultural agenda. This practice was not socially utilized until recently. How can I be a steward of biblical truth, while, at the same time, affirming a lie?

Some people will say to do it for those who are spiritually lost. However, what if that individual becomes a believer? At what point in the discipleship process will you tell someone that you actually never believed in their preferred pronouns? Isn't it better

to lovingly stick to the truth from the beginning, so it doesn't seem like a bait-and-switch tactic down the road?

Others in the ministry are watching. If I compromise there, then I have to also ask myself, am I discipling young people to believe an entire movement is okay? Be kind. Be loving. Don't look to argue. We can be welcoming without being affirming.

CONNECT WITH PROFESSIONALS.

Recognize your limits and connect students and parents with trusted professionals when things are beyond your abilities. Working alongside professionals in your community who can provide biblical support to students and/or parents can be extremely helpful. However, not everyone who claims to be a Christian will guide individuals toward a biblical worldview. Know trusted professionals in your area who affirm biblical truth. Don't make recommendations blindly.

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CHAPTER FOUR

HOW TO TALK

ABOUT MENTAL

HEALTH

A mental health pandemic has taken a toll on young people today. According to recent data findings, only 47% of Gen Zers feel like they're thriving in life, only 44% believe they are prepared for the future, and only 15% said they feel that their mental health is excellent.⁷ Mental health is not only a concern of Gen Z; it is also a massive concern for Gen Alpha as well. Research notes that 59% of Gen Alpha agree that mental health is a big issue in their generation, and 62% believe that schools should focus more on mental health education than physical education.⁸ The topics of sex and gender also contribute to this issue. When culture celebrates deviating from God's design, that juxtaposition can create a lot of unrest.

As we continue to explore biblical truth, we remind ourselves that every person is made in the image of God and carries immense value and dignity. We are called to bear one another's burdens and to care for the hurting, the weary, and the brokenhearted. When young people are wrestling with anxiety, depression, and loneliness, the church should reflect the compassion of Christ, who welcomed the weary and promised rest for their souls. To love the next generation well means pointing them to spiritual hope in Christ and practical support through community, prayer, and care.

Ignoring or stigmatizing mental health challenges can create barriers to spiritual growth and discipleship. A young person battling despair or isolation may find it difficult to engage in worship, prayer, or fellowship if they feel unseen or unheard. When the church embraces people in their brokenness, we not only help

⁷Gallup and Walton Family Foundation, *Voices of Gen Z: Perspectives on U.S. Education, Well-Being and the Future* (2023), https://www.the74million.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WaltonFamilyFoundation_GenZSurvey.pdf.

⁸GW, *Gen Alpha Unfiltered: A Deep Dive into the Minds, Values, and Behaviors of the Youngest Generation*, (GW, 2025), <https://www.gwi.com/reports/gen-alpha>.

them work toward healing but also strengthen the witness of the gospel. We show that the body of Christ is a place of refuge, grace, and hope for all generations.

I firmly believe that churches in the United States are doing better at engaging the ever-growing anxiety of younger generations, but we still have a long way to go. Two things can be true at once: The church should address mental health more often and more effectively; however, if we begin to overly focus on anxiety and depression, we can create a bit of a social contagion where groups of teens are diagnosing each other improperly.

If you're around young people for longer than five minutes, you know that many of them are self-diagnosing and have convinced themselves that they are experiencing some level of mental health issues. Let one girl in a friend group struggle with anxiety, and it won't be long until the whole group believes they, too, are anxious. Is it possible that we're raising a generation that is making their feelings and thoughts their idols? Of course, there are cases when young people are struggling with mental health to the point that professional help is needed; however, it would be naïve to misunderstand that some cases are more related to the normal moodiness associated with the teen years.

What Does the Bible Say?

Scripture doesn't use the modern term "mental health," but it speaks often to the reality of human emotions,

the struggles of the mind, and God's care for those who are weary, anxious, and brokenhearted.

GOD CARES ABOUT OUR INNER STRUGGLES.

Scripture repeatedly shows God's compassion for those battling fear, despair, and depression. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). David poured out his anguish in the Psalms (34:18; 42:5), and Elijah experienced deep discouragement, even asking God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). These examples remind us that faithful people have wrestled with heavy emotional burdens, and God met them with comfort and restoration in their times of need. If young people are followers of Christ, they worship an all-powerful God who is up close and personal, intervening in the lives of His people.

PEACE COMES FROM GOD.

Isaiah 26:3 reminds us, "You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you." God is our ultimate source of peace and strength. Philippians 4:6–7 calls us to bring our anxieties to God in prayer, promising that His peace will guard our hearts and minds. Scripture teaches us to not worry and to pray about everything, yet we tend to worry about everything and pray about nothing. God assures us that He keeps those whose minds are set on Him in perfect peace. The Lord Himself is the greatest Counselor there is, as prophesied in Isaiah, "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT MATTER.

In Hebrews 10:24–25, Paul instructs the church to “consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” One of the many important reasons to gather with fellow believers in the local church is so that we can encourage one another and provoke our fellow brothers and sisters to good works. The New Testament letters also emphasize bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), building each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and putting on compassion (Colossians 3:12). God designed His people to walk together, not choosing to live in isolation. We support each other through our struggles. In isolation, the enemy tends to attack our thoughts and emotions the most.

PUT OUR HOPE IN CHRIST.

Throughout his letters, Paul calls on the church to remain hopeful despite their circumstances: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). Ultimately, the Bible anchors our hope in the living God, who overcame the grave. We’re reminded of the hope we have in Christ in 1 Peter 1:3, as it is written, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because

of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Even in seasons of darkness, God promises His presence, His Spirit, and the hope of His ultimate restoration. He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

How Do We Help the Next Generation?

So, how do we help the next generation live out these truths about mental health?

TEACH A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS.

Help young people develop a biblical understanding when it comes to the role of thoughts and emotions in our walk with Jesus, who said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Our hearts (emotions, desires, and feelings) and minds (thoughts) are gifts from the Lord created to help us worship Him and serve others (Matthew 22:39). Our emotions and thoughts were never meant to be our gods. Many young people have already made idols out of them. The world says to follow your heart, but the Bible teaches that you need the Lord to give you a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26) to help you follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

CULTIVATE AN ATMOSPHERE TO SHARE STRUGGLES.

The most valuable things a young person can give you are time and trust. Make space for students to open up and share about their struggles. Make it safe

for them to trust you. If they don't feel like they can tell their church or leaders, then they will seek out wisdom elsewhere: social media, celebrities, podcasts, search engines, or possibly even their unhealthy and unwise peers. I think we'd all agree that we'd rather have young people look to the church for guidance, rather than TikTok.

SHARE TRANSPARENCY IN YOUR OWN STRUGGLES.

When leaders offer transparency in their own emotional struggles, doing so gives permission for young people to do the same. Of course, we should be very wise in what we share and how we share it. However, the next generation won't do what their leaders aren't willing to do. If you're never transparent about your struggles and failures, then they'll believe that we're pretending to be perfect, that they can never achieve such a standard, and that they should simply quit and walk away. Or, on the other hand, they'll believe we're inauthentic, so they'll stop listening because we'll have already lost all credibility with them.

CONNECT WITH PROFESSIONALS.

Again, you must recognize your limits and connect students and parents with trusted professionals when things are beyond your abilities. If you jump into conversations about mental health with the next generation and their parents or guardians, they will likely ask you where they can go to receive help. We must be humble enough to recognize that when we are not equipped to handle a difficult issue, we can

actually make the situation worse. Invite others who are trained and equipped into these conversations and journeys. Be ready with the names and contact information of trusted, Christ-centered, and biblically-based professionals.

BE FAMILIAR WITH TRUSTED RESOURCES.

Again, many young people and their parents have no idea where to find solid, helpful resources, so they'll just type prompts into search engines and dive into the first answers that pop up on their screens. We likely won't agree with or support the majority of resources they find. So, provide biblically-based resources on a regular basis by having them available in your church or sharing information through texts, emails, and social media groups.

TEACH THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek." One popular statement with young people today is "It's okay to not be okay." While this phrase encourages transparency and honesty, we must realize that this statement is only a starting place. The gospel goes further than that by teaching us it's okay to not be okay, but it's not okay to stay that way when there is another way: Jesus (John 14:6). He loves us so much that while He wants us to come to Him just as we are, He also loves us too much to leave us that way.

HELP YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THAT FOLLOWING JESUS IS NOT EASY.

Often, following Jesus is not easy, comfortable, or convenient. Recall Christ's words to His disciples in Luke 9:23, "Then he said to them all, 'If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.'" There may be times when young people are simply feeling the effects of following Jesus in this fallen world. Jesus does not promise us an easy life; He promises us eternal life. Living counterculturally will likely make life more difficult. But the pursuit of Jesus is worth it because He is better than anything the world has to offer. This place is not our home.

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WHAT'S NEXT?

King David said over 3,000 years ago, “One generation will declare your works to the next and will proclaim your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4). As believers indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we are proverbially standing on the shoulders of faithful men and women from previous generations who were intentional about proclaiming the mighty acts of God to the next generation. Then, that generation rose up and pointed the generation after them toward the next generation, and so on, and so on, and so on until it finally arrived to each one of us. Now, it is our turn to be found faithful in pointing the next generation to the mighty acts of God so that they can point the generation after them toward those same truths.

Here are a few final thoughts on how to talk about difficult topics with the next generation:

- Involve, educate, and inform parents.
- Prioritize biblical principles over cultural practices.
- Discern God’s truth through prayer and Scripture study.
- Seek understanding and empathy.
- Get to know young people and let them see how much you care.
- Take time to understand the culture and issues that young people are navigating.

- Focus on the person made in God's image, rather than attacking his or her self-identified label.
- Control your face and emotions. Don't let your reactions cause even more shame and guilt than that individual may already be feeling.
- Welcome everyone to experience transformation through the power of the gospel.
- Accept people without affirming their false beliefs.
- It's okay to say, "I don't know." You don't have to be the expert on every cultural trend. Instead, focus on being proficient in God's truth and in your love for young people.
- Jesus is every young person's greatest need.
- Silence is not an option.

These are the truths we believe:

- No young person is too lost for Jesus to find.
- No young person is too dirty for Jesus to cleanse.
- No young person is too broken for Jesus to fix.
- No young person is too wounded for Jesus to heal.

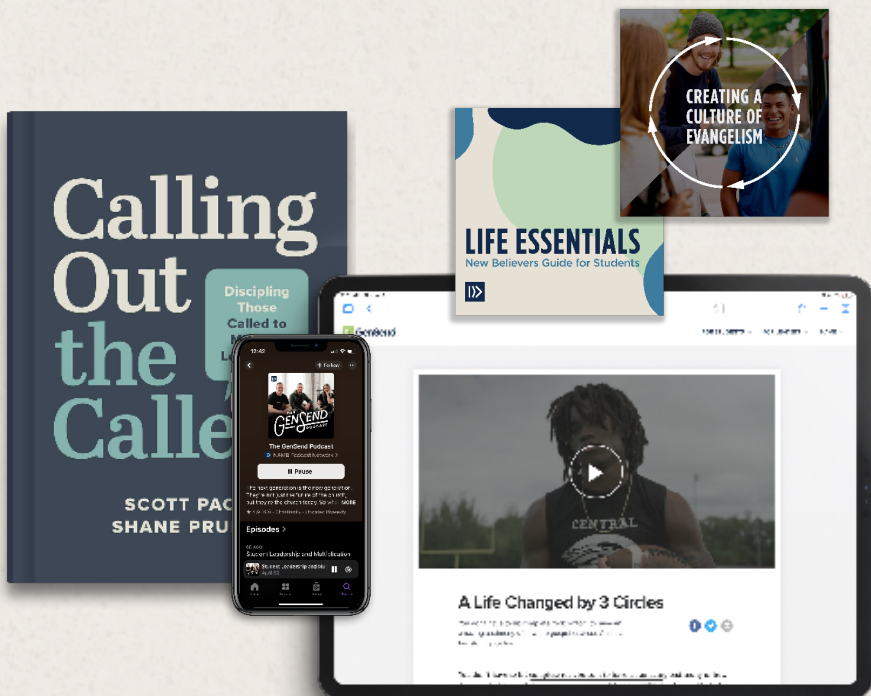
- No young person is too far gone for Jesus to reach.
- No young person is too guilty for Jesus to forgive.
- No young person is too sinful for Jesus to save!

So, who is going to disciple the next generation?

The question is not “How many of our young people are being disciplined?” The question is “Who or what is disciplining them?” All young people, 100% of them, are being disciplined by someone or something. Unfortunately, most are disciplined by social media, celebrities, influencers, politicians, and unwise peers. The world is more than happy to disciple a whole generation of young people in what to believe about sex, gender, mental health, and a host of other controversial topics. This is why the church can no longer be silent. We must lovingly and boldly step into the lives of the next generation and be obedient to the call of the Great Commission we’ve received (Matthew 28:19–20). When we do so, we will see a whole generation disciplined by the Word instead of by the world.



You have an incredible opportunity to reach, disciple, and mobilize students to be the church of today.
We can help!



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