



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 13

Transcript: What Millennials Want

Reuel Sample: The church is one of the oldest institutions on the planet, and there's the only institution that Jesus directly ordained. What do we need to do to get people of this age group back into the church or the church to be more trusted by people in this age group? It's a two way street, obviously. So what has to what has to happen?

Andrew Grissom: I think so often we're looking at what kind of worship style do we offer? What kind of social media do we offer? Are we singing the the newest songs off of K-Love or something along those lines? And and I think we're missing the point there. Young adults are young adults are not looking for young adults are not looking for the newest programming in this, that and the other. They are looking for people who are truly living out what Act 2 is talking about. They're eating together, they're worshipping together, they're praying together. They're coming together and they're being in community. And I think I think where we in the church has been so focused on the sort of programming that will get them in the doors, we need to change as the church a mindset of saying, hey, let's go out and get them. And it doesn't start with it doesn't start with the big programming. It starts with the with the one, it starts with the one. It starts with the person who turns around and looks and looks and sees the young adult who might be sitting in the back of their church by themselves and says, Hey, let's go have lunch together after church and I want to know about you. We want to the hope and the prayer and what young adults are searching for is people that don't just say they care for them, but they back it up with action, with thought, with care. They really are a community because I think so often that a young adult and really anybody in the church,

then they're not going to hear what you're trying to say to them until they know that you are for them and that they love and that they are seeking after Jesus with you.

Andrew Grissom: And so I think that, you know, I look back at Mark chapter five, where where Jesus calls the demons out of the demon possessed man and sends them into the pigs. And and the people are freaked out right there. And they're going into the city and they run back. And what people miss so often in Mark Chapter five is when the people get back, they see the man who had been once covered in demons for so long. He was fully clothed. He was in his right mind and he was sitting at the feet of Jesus and he was just listening to him, you know. And I think I think that is a beautiful, powerful picture that a man who had been taken over by so many demons for so long, the first thought that he had as soon as he was of a free mind and a free will, was he was saying, hey, I just want to sit at Jesus's feet and listen. And and, you know, so I think for young adults, it's not about the programming man. It's what it's what does it mean for us to be intentional and looking? And this is for for the people who are listening to this today. What does it look like for maybe one young adult in your community, one young adult in your church, to reach out to them and say, hey, come over to my house and have a meal with me. I want to know who you are. So many young adults don't have that. They're sitting at home alone and they're eating dinner alone. And so you would be blown away at how much a simple invitation like that would mean to them.

Reuel Sample: It's not about whether your church is liturgical, which is I'm a frozen, chosen Presbyterian and or it's not about whether you're rockin the aisles, which is what my wife likes to do. I wear foamies when I worship with her. It's about being genuine and it's being about community. Is that what I'm hearing?

William Merriman: Yeah, I think that that's that's a big piece of it. This young adult generation is the most connected from a technology standpoint, but really the most lonely. And then they also have the greatest zeal to change the world. And the church is the one place where you could find the solution to both of those things.

Reuel Sample: I'm going to interrupt you for just a second, because you said something that was extraordinarily powerful, is that they are the most connected generation that we have ever had. But you are also the most lonely.

William Merriman: Absolutely. And you know, you have this this illusion of community or of life. But really, it's a lot of it's online or a lot of it's really substance-less. And my goodness, the church for 2000 years has developed these really ancient practices of some of the most life giving community that's so real and so grounded. And so I think, you know, the place that the church has kind of missed the missed the boat on this one is that in trying to be too relevant, you know, going online or blowing up social media and doing all those things, it's actually made itself the least relevant. It's just become another part of the feed. And so really what churches need to lean into is what is ancient, what is historic, what's orthodox, what's sacramental, and giving people a real like something that is real and tangible. If you if you look at young adults, they're not listening to like CDs anymore. They're going back and listening to vinyl. They want something old, they want something ancient. They're not taking pictures on iPhones as much anymore. They want Polaroid cameras, something real, something to hold on to. And I think the church goes back to its ancient practices of being sacramental, of gathering around communion, focusing on baptisms, laying hands on each other like these kind of things are really radical and really powerful.

William Merriman: And it's something that I know in our church that our young adults are hungering after. And then something else too. I'm a firm believer that the gospel is caught not so much taught. It's it's really you really soak it in almost through osmosis by being in community. And a big piece of that is, like Andrew said, really taking a personal interest in the one and and including them into just the regular, regular operations of your life, inviting young adults over for dinner, even I mean, even if you're just working on a gardening project, inviting someone over to help help do some yard work or just be be involved in their life because I mean, they really are hungering after real human connection. And and then I would say this just the last thing Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. And even though the statistics, you know, aren't aren't looking good, Christ loves the church. It's his it's his bride. And and, yeah, it's not going anywhere.

Reuel Sample: Bill Hybels, who wrote the who who wrote the book on megachurch, also came out quite a few years ago with a mea culpa that said, exactly what you folks are saying is that we've missed the boat. It's not about program, it's about discipleship.

And that's exactly what you're saying, is that millennials are not coming to church because there's no genuine discipleship making.

Andrew Grissom: Well, and that's you know, I think, too, that's the thing. We are if you look at our churches right now in a global sense, we are missing the boat, not even just in our young adult years. But I would argue in a lot of our years of of teaching and and showing and modeling what true discipleship was. Look at what Jesus did. I mean, look at what Jesus did with the 12 disciples. You know, he walked and he lived so much life with them and he taught to thousands of people. But we're missing the boat on that. We got to get back to what it means to be 1-on-1 seeking after and seeking to be closer to Jesus together.

William Merriman: Yeah, if I could say one more thing. In college, the thing that really was just like a resting place for my soul, were a couple older Christians inviting me in. And so I went to a small Methodist church, the average age there was like 70 and a couple of and there were all retired folks living in Middle Tennessee and they would just took a real genuine interest in me and would invite me over after church and these beautiful homes and make food for me. And and it really felt like home. It felt like somebody really seen me, really loved me. And the same thing was true on Friday nights, a Christian philosophy professor who was one of the only Christian professors on campus would invite a few students over on Fridays when the whole rest of the campus was turning up and and going crazy, I would drive over and just share a meal, like Andrew said, break bread and be together. And it gave me a sense of home and. And security. And I think if anyone in the church can can do that. And I think it would be really wonderful way to to reach and touch our our young adults.

Reuel Sample: Thomas Aquinas once wrote that after the fall, he wrote Before the fall we could talk of spiritual things by appealing to the spirit. After the fall, we we can talk about spiritual things by going through the body. And so there's nothing like feeding a college student.

Andrew Grissom: Amen.

Reuel Sample: About spiritual things. And and to create that spiritual bond and that discipleship and that, I don't think that's ever changed. When I was in college having a

good home cooked meal, there was nothing like it. And then just being able to sit around afterwards and talk and chat and and it doesn't take it doesn't necessarily take another young millennial to disciple another young millennial. Oftentimes it takes an old an older person to disciple you, but it has to be genuine. It's not why I'm checking a box. Okay? I've got my I've got my I've got my three millennials in tow. This, this, this month. It's just about being it's just about discipleship making.

William Merriman: Yeah.

Reuel Sample: Final question, guys, is that the Pastor's Voice is all about developing a Christian worldview, how reacting and interacting with the world around us with a mind focused on Jesus Christ. How can we encourage that in young adults?

William Merriman: I really am a believer that the gospel is caught and not taught. I think in our Western world we've put too much of a focus on just the mind and the intellect. And so a lot of our preaching and teaching is, is information, but the development of a worldview is holistic. And so I think that I mean, what you said about Aquinas, that those truths come through the body, I think encouraging young adults to take up ancient Christian practices and those those kind of practices of formation. So not just learning the information super important, but I think supplementing that with with the disciplines of the faith. So meeting together, breaking bread, praying, fasting, taking a Sabbath. I mean, you wouldn't believe how many young adults are just tired and feeling like they are running empty, but calling people back to a place of genuine rest. It's a the clearest moments where I know from my life. I can see that taste and see that the Lord is good and then just spending, spending time with them. The way that you carry yourself will will be one of the greatest pictures of the gospel to them. And then lastly, the ancient saying like *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi* The way you worship is the way you believe. I think I think modeling our worship with just a genuine sincerity and not not just focusing on the preaching, but making the whole experience very worshipful, whether it's the songs or the liturgies. I think liturgy is an incredible it's something that our young adults are really hungering for, because at the beginning we said that there's so much suspicion and distrust. It's hard to know what's true. But when you begin to hear these these ancient words put in just a beautiful poetic meter and cadence, your soul can almost rest and rest in it. And those kind of things go a lot further in shaping

your heart and your worldview. So the way you worship really will begin to shape the way you what you believe.

Reuel Sample: Andrew I just did a podcast with a Lutheran minister, and he and I are members of the old denominations. He's a Lutheran. He started it all and Presbyterians came along and we're old denominations. But what William is saying is that the order and the liturgical liturgy that comes with these old denominations, there's a place for that in our new society.

William Merriman: Yes.

Andrew Grissom: I think there is. And I think there is a beautiful sense of giving people an opportunity excuse me, an opportunity to think through. Yes. What are these liturgies saying? What is scripture saying? What is the Lord saying to me? And being able to wrestle with that my my saying the saying that I often say is we have to be we have to get back to the place where the church is a safe place to wrestle with tough questions. And I'm worried that the church has veered away from being that safe place where we feel like we have to we have to fit a mold. We have to fit a standard. We have to fit a certain we have to be in a certain box in order to be accepted in church. And people need to hear, it's okay to ask questions. It's okay to wrestle with scripture. It's okay to bring up things that they may be going through in their lives because Jesus wants to walk with us in that. And I think the beauty of the liturgies and the beauty of the ancient, the ancient turned modern is we see, hey, for thousands of years, the church has walked out life and they've walked out life in the best of times.

Andrew Grissom: But they've also had a lot of questions. They've also wrestled through a lot of strife. They've also wrestled through conflicts and disagreements. But the beauty is that is that we worship a God who doesn't just accept us when we have everything together. He accepts us when we have questions, have anxiety or wondering what what is the truth? And we have questions in our own life. Jesus accepts us in the same light as well and says, come with me. I love the story of I love the story of Jesus in the Samaritan woman and the most unlikely of conversations. I think it's so beautiful that Jesus extends that living water to that woman, even by just asking the question, Hey, will you give me something to drink? Will you give me something to drink? And so I think I think we've got to be the place again where people can feel comfortable, both at the

best of times and the worst of times, that God's people are welcome in his house yet again.

Reuel Sample: And at the heart of that is this understanding that we must be genuine. And if there's a big lesson that the church can take is that we're not being genuine. And it's taken your generation to point that out to us in powerful ways. Everything else liturgy, teachings, everything else is secondary to the genuine discipleship making that should have been at the heart of the church the entire time.

Andrew Grissom: Amen.

Reuel Sample: William Andrew, thanks for being on the podcast. I'll leave you both with the last word. Go ahead.

William Merriman: It just really is a joy to be here and to have this conversation with you. And our hope and prayer is going back to going back to Scripture. This is Hosea 2:14. God says this. Therefore, I'm going to allure her. I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. Our prayer is that if you're a young adult or you're anyone out there feeling like you're displaced, like you're alone, like you've been let out from home or from the church, from community, and you're alone. Rest assured that God is with you. He's the God who hears and He's the God who sees. And His heart towards us is so tender and so kind. And for those of us who are in the church, God's calling us to be that tender voice and to see and hear His people. And so my prayer is that we could really be an extension of the hands and feet of God going after the one.

Reuel Sample: Amen. Andrew, William, thank you for being here.

Andrew Grissom: Thank you so much for this time.

William Merriman: Thank you.