THE NEXT CHRISTIANS

SEVEN WAYS YOU CAN LIVE THE GOSPEL AND RESTORE THE WORLD

A GUIDE FOR CHURCH LEADERS

By Gabe Lyons

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The Next Christians: A Guide For Church Leaders
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Dear Leaders,

We have an unprecedented opportunity to **make disciples by changing the conversation.**

In today's culture we find many Christians growing more apathetic, complacent and lacking commitment to the core mission of the church. Believers are struggling to find real connections between their faith and the rest of their life—their work, friendships and local community. Christians want real answers to how the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel can be applied in our modern world. This is a call for you—the church—to step up.

Church leaders who meet this challenge will win committed believers, make disciples and reform the reputation of Christianity in their communities. We are prepared to partner with you to see this happen.

Pastors are calling their people to be "RESTORERS". The biblical message of redemption and restoration is helping Christians re-imagine their rightful place in the world. When the people of your church grasp this concept it changes everything!

After reviewing Section 1 of this leader's guide, consider how you can cultivate this learning and understanding throughout your church. Consider experiencing the growth and health that hundreds of other churches are enjoying as they intentionally build a culture of "Restorers". Section 2 will give you three ways to lead this conversation throughout your entire church. If you want to see your entire congregation living the gospel and restoring in your community, contact Nate@QIdeas.org for special sermon tools, videos and resources that will help support your vision.

Godspeed,

Gabe Lyons

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The Next Christians: A Guide for Church Leaders is designed to show church and cultural leaders how they might present the ideas in *The Next Christians* to their own communities. In the pages that follow, you will find introductions to many of those ideas with diagrams to help make learning easier.

This guide is intended to be a complement to *The Next Christians*, not a replacement for it. The ideas found here are not fully developed and can only be understood through reading the book itself. Additionally, this guide is not intended to be used as a small group study or curriculum. If you are looking for such materials, we recommend The Next Christians DVD Study and Participant's Guide. To purchase the book, DVD and the Participant's Guide at our church leader discounts visit "Section 2" of this guide to learn more.

UNDERSTANDING *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS*

1

THE END OF CHRISTIAN AMERICA

The title of *Newsweek's* April 13, 2009 cover story by Jon Meacham says it all: "The End of Christian America." Jon Meacham, the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer made it clear that he was not saying the Christian God is dead. Rather, that Christians are exerting less force in America than ever before. "While we remain a nation decisively shaped by religious faith," writes Meacham, "our politics and our culture are, in the main, less influenced by movement and arguments of an explicitly Christian character than they were even five years ago."

Meacham is correct. Public perceptions of Christians are overwhelmingly negative, church attendance is rapidly declining, and Christian voices are less persuasive in public spaces than in the past. In short, the Christian faith is quickly losing traction in Western culture and it's not only a result of Christians acting unchristian (as significant as that is). It's because we haven't recognized our new reality and adapted.

Such changes force our brutal honesty in addressing uncomfortable questions:

- What does the Christian mission look like in twenty-first-century America?
- How does the Gospel go forward in a pluralistic, postmodern, post-Christian society?
- If "Christian America" is truly over, how can Christians revitalize the movement so that it becomes good news for our faith?

These questions are pressing in on us with the force of a bulldozer. If we don't answer them correctly or refuse to answer them at all, the future of the Christian faith in the West could be undeniably bleak.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Consider some of the examples and statistics that Gabe shares in *The Next Christians* about the changing ethos of our nation:

- The removal of Judeo-Christian symbols, like the Ten Commandments, from public spaces (p. 15)
- The influence of atheists like Christopher Hitchens and his best-selling book God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (pp. 15-16)
- A Hindu chaplain leading prayer in the U.S. Senate in 2007 (p. 22)
- Fifty-one percent of Protestant teens that say they left their childhood religion because their spiritual needs were not being met (pp. 22–23)
- Thirty-one percent fewer young people who are regular churchgoers today than in the heat of the cultural revolution of the 1970s (p. 23)
- In light of this, Gabe concludes that "few will argue that our country as we know it today can still be labeled 'Christian America'" (p. 22)

PHYLLIS TICKLE on the End of Christian America (1:12)

2

RESTORATION THINKING

In years past, Christians in America have either withdrawn from culture or without conviction, blended into the world around them. But such uncritical engagement is no longer sufficient in light of our current reality. A new generation of believers is rediscovering what a faithful public witness looks like in a post-Christian world.. They are engaging the world in a fresh way.

As Gabe writes in *The Next Christians*:

> *Restorers seek to mend earth's brokenness. They recognize that the world will not be completely healed until Christ's return, but they believe that the process begins now as we partner with God. Through sowing seeds of restoration, they believe others will see Christ through us and the Christian faith will reap a much larger harvest.*
>
> *They are purposeful about their careers and generous with their time and possessions. They don't separate from the world or blend in; rather, they thoughtfully engage. (p. 47)*

FOR AN EXPLANATION OF HOW A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL FUELS A RESTORATION MINDSET, SEE *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS*, PP. 51-63.

Christians have historically recognized that the story of God unfolds in four parts: creation, fall, redemption and restoration (and ultimately consummation). In the recent past, however, some Christians have articulated the Gospel in terms of only two: fall and redemption. This "truncated Gospel" doesn't fully explain what God is up to in our time, and doesn't provide a cogent vision for post-conversion Christian mission. By ignoring God's design in creation, which gave human beings the ability to reflect His image and leaving out the restoration work of Christ in the here and now, we've taken away the coherence of the Christian story. By placing the Gospel back into the context of God's whole story, the next Christians are able to live a life of restoration.

CHRISTIAN INTERACTION

Restoration as a way of thinking and engaging with the world is not new. In fact, it is very old. It is similar to that of the first Christians, it finds resonance in the Bible, and it is rooted in the good news of Jesus. Furthermore, it may carry the most hope for the future credibility of the entire Christian movement in the West.

In *The Next Christians (pp. 31-46)*, Gabe identifies five ways that Christians have interacted with culture:

- → "Insiders" who live in a Christian subculture and often come across as judgmental toward outsiders
- → "Culture warriors" who are determined to fight against those who are threatening America's Christian heritage
- → "Evangelizers" who are focused solely on "winning souls to Christ" at all costs
- → "Blenders" who maintain a faith that is largely personal while demonstrating actions and lifestyles that are, for all practical purposes, no different than non-Christians
- → "Philanthropists" who focus solely on doing good works to the exclusion of a more holistic faith expression

SCOT MCKNIGHT on Restoration Thinking (:54)

3

PROVOKED TO ENGAGE

Let's face it: the world is often a messy place in which to live. Violence, perversion, and injustice are rampant. No one—including Christians—can avoid contact with such things. That leaves us asking how we should respond to corruption when we're confronted with it.

In the past, many Christians have responded by being offended and withdrawing from culture as much as possible. But this approach does little to further Christian mission or influence, or to shape and restore the world. The next Christians are taking another approach. When faced with ugliness, sinfulness, and injustice, they are provoked to engage those circumstances with a plan to restore them.

FOR EXAMPLE IN THE GOSPELS WHERE JESUS CHOSE TO ENGAGE RATHER THAN BE OFFENDED AND WITHDRAWING, SEE *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS*, PP. 77-78.

This way of being Christian isn't always easy. It means resisting the urge to judge non-Christians, displaying courage to speak up when others won't, and refusing to avoid doing the right thing even if it means jeopardizing your reputation. But showing up in the midst of corruption and letting restoration thinking flood your actions is the only way for Christians to engage the world as Jesus did.

In *The Next Christians* (pp. 80-85), Gabe provides some observations on how Christians who display this quality live:

- Engagement (over condemnation)
- Grace (over judgment)
- Courage (over comfort)
- Faithfulness (over reputation)

JO SAXTON on Provoked to Engage (2:08)

4

CREATORS WHO ARE CALLED

Gabe writes, "The next Christians are provoked to *do* something when they arrive on the cultural scene—namely to create culture that can inspire change" (p. 93). The term "creating culture" may not be familiar to you, but most of us are doing it regularly even if we don't realize it. If you start a ministry, plant a church, manufacture a product, or launch a project, you are creating culture or cultivating existing cultural artifacts. And all of these things have an effect on the world itself.

For this reason, the next Christians don't simply work at jobs; they serve in vocations. It doesn't matter if one is a stay-at-home parent, engineer, artist, accountant, or government employee. The next Christians realize that their vocations are a vital part of living out the Christian mission. In this thinking, the office becomes more than a workplace. It becomes a launching pad for restoration thinking.

FOR THE STORY OF HOW ONE MTV EMPLOYEE BEGAN THINKING IN THESE TERMS AND RESTORED FROM WITHIN A MEDIA EMPIRE, SEE *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS*, PP. 110-113.

This doesn't mean that every position of employment becomes a dream job. Nor does it mean that there won't be seasons of setback or times of failure along the way. Not everyone will start a game-changing nonprofit or create a product that will revolutionize international manufacturing. For most, it means seeing their current nine-to-five occupations in a different light and making the decision to begin restoring right where God has placed them.

SEVEN CHANNELS OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE

MEDIA

Television
Radio
Publishing
Newspaper
Internet

EDUCATION

Public Schools
Private Schools
Charter Schools
Home School
College + University + Graduate
Adult + Continuing Ed

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Artists
Film
Literature
Music
Fine Art + Performing Arts
Sports
Theatre
Video Game Entertainment

BUSINESS

Advertising + Marketing + Public Relations
E-commerce + Retailers + Services
Finance + Investments + Securities
Legal

Technology + Biotech + Nanotech
Science + Medicine

GOVERNMENT

Executive
Judicial
Legislative
Military
Public Policy + Advocacy Groups

SOCIAL SECTOR

Educational
Family
Foundations + Trusts
Marriage
Religious

CHURCH

Local Churches
Para-Church Organizations

In *The Next Christians*, Gabe describes four kinds of culture that we can create or cultivate within our vocational lives in the seven channels of cultural influence (pp. 97-104):

- *Culture that celebrates beauty*: those things that tease our souls and give us glimpse of how things ought to be.
- *Culture that affirms goodness*: those things that accentuate the work of the divine in the world around us.
- *Culture that tells the truth*: those things that paint an honest picture of the way things are in hope that others will then desire to restore them.
- *Culture that serves*: those things that result from the pursuit of the common good in our communities and among our neighbors.

ANDY CROUCH on Creators who are Called (1:25)

5

GROUNDED AND IN COMMUNITY

While restoration thinking can be incredibly powerful, it is also very dangerous. It is easy to drift away from Christian communities and healthy life practices as we engage the world and create culture to restore the world's brokenness. Everyone is susceptible to this temptation, so it is necessary to stay grounded and in community.

FOR AN EXAMPLE OF HOW AVOIDING THESE PRACTICES CAN BE DESTRUCTIVE, READ JASON'S STORY IN *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS*, PP. 127-130.

One way that the next Christians stay grounded is through spiritual disciplines. Practices such as observing the Sabbath are no longer considered dusty artifacts of bygone eras. They are now considered beneficial ways to keep one's sanity and retain spiritual vitality. Additionally, no human is designed to be alone. Finding and maintaining community with other believers is the best way to receive constant encouragement, fellowship, and accountability. Christians need to be restoring their communities, but community is what restores Christians.

As Gabe writes, the next Christians "decide to live in proximity to one another and often combine their resources to serve others. They have made the choice to be a part of a community that knows them, loves them, and wants the best for them. And in doing so, perhaps they stand a much better chance of staying aligned with God's intention for their lives" (p. 163).

In *The Next Christians*, Gabe highlights five practices in particular that are critical for followers of Jesus in a post-Christian culture (pp. 134-145):

- Immersed in Scripture (instead of entertainment)
- Observing the Sabbath (instead of being productive)
- Fasting for Simplicity (instead of consuming)
- Choosing Embodiment (instead of being divided)
- Postured by Prayer (instead of power)

JON TYSON on Grounded and In Community (:49)

6

COUNTERCULTURE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The word *counterculture*, a sociological term describing a group whose actions run counter to mainstream norms, is making a comeback. The term was popularized in the West during the 1960s when it was used to label the movement that opposed the Vietnam War in the United States and England. But the next Christians are also countercultural, though they look nothing like the peace-loving protesters of the mid-twentieth century.

As Gabe writes, "For now we know that the clear call of Jesus is for the Christian community to be salt and light. Not simply a bunch of small lights in all the dark corners of the world, but a communal light that provides a picture to the world of what a loving, sacrificial, countercultural community really is. It's a collective of people living by a different standard—raising the bar and inviting everyone who's interested to join in" (p. 202).

TO SEE HOW JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT INFORMS ONE'S UNDERSTANDING OF BEING COUNTERCULTURAL, SEE *THE NEXT CHRISTIANS* PP. 192-194.

In contrast to countercultures that separate, antagonize, or copy culture, the next Christians are "a counterculture for the common good." On the one hand, they don't concern themselves with popularity, what they can achieve for themselves, or whether the masses are following. On the other hand, they are constantly striving to make sure that the things they pursue are promoting the common good of their communities—that is, "the most good for all people." This is best demonstrated when Christians are careful to always be civil and never divisive

In *The Next Christians*, Gabe gives several examples of what being countercultural looks like:

- Restorers are civil and never divisive
- Muslims in prayer on the streets of New York City (pp. 194-195)
- Shane Claiborne and "the simple way" (pp. 196-197)
- Christian churches cooperating to impact the city of Portland, Oregon (pp. 198-200)
- The early Christians as described in a letter from Diognetus, a second century Roman scholar (pp. 201-202)

LEADING OTHERS IN THIS CONVERSATION

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM
THE NEXT CHRISTIANS

24 books and 1 DVD (FREE SHIPPING)

www.nextchristians.com

LEADING YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM THROUGH THE CONVERSATION

Reading and discussing *The Next Christians* as a team helps you understand the new dynamics and challenges presented by life in a post-Christian culture. But Lyons' take doesn't leave you pessimistic, it will energize your team with clear steps on how to move forward and engage believers who have lost confidence in their faith. It begins with your leadership team.

Getting started is simple…

1. Buy copies of *The Next Christians* for each church elder, staff member and volunteer.
2. Assign a six-week reading schedule (2 chapters each week) and one-hour weekly meeting time for a team conversation.
3. Play *The Next Christians* DVD interviews to stimulate thought at the beginning of each meeting.
4. Discuss and plan how to implement the applicable ideas to your church and unique cultural context.

The structure for these times of dialogue should be flexible enough to allow for each department or ministry head to explain the unique way these ideas apply to his or her area. You should also come to each gathering with a prepared list of questions to intentionally direct the conversation.

By assigning reading, you provide accountability that will enhance your staff's experience. By directing the dialogue through intentional questions, the gatherings will feel more worthwhile. By being flexible, you will encourage each participant to contextualize the themes being presented.

www.Qideas.org

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR YOUR SMALL GROUPS
THE NEXT CHRISTIANS

Group Starter Pack:

- **5 Books**
- **5 Participant Guides**
- **1 DVD**

LEADING YOUR SMALL GROUPS THROUGH
THE CONVERSATION

Each person in the small group should receive a copy of *The Next Christians* in addition to *The Next Christians Participant's Guide.* The small group leader or group facilitator should receive the books as far in advance of the study as possible for preparation. Meet with your small group leaders corporately in advance of the study to explain to them how the curriculum works and make sure they understand any expectations you may have.

Doing this study in a small group format of between six and twenty people is crucial. Learning takes place best in the context of community. The group will gather six times to discuss each topic presented in the participant's guide and will read one or two chapters in *The Next Christians* before meeting. Each gathering should last about an hour and fifteen minutes. The DVD included with the participant's guide includes a short video clip each week that will stimulate conversation.

Your small group leaders should encourage taking each "assignment" seriously. They should encourage respectful dialogue, even when there are disagreements among those in the group. Their willingness to prepare for group sessions, keep an open mind, and demonstrate eagerness to learn together will pave the way for a great experience.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR YOUR CHURCH WIDE CAMPAIGN
THE NEXT CHRISTIANS

Church Wide Campaign Starter Kit

170 Books, 100 Participant Guides, and 30 DVDS. (FREE SHIPPING)

Additionally, a church resource guide, which includes; sermon series outlines, powerpoint slides, posters and video trailers will be made available to make hosting this conversation throughout your church as turnkey is possible.

*If the Church Wide Campaign Starter Kit does not meet the needs of your church please contact churchleadersupport@qideas.org for help customizing your campaign. We offer substantial discounts on all Next Christian resources ordered in case quantities.

LEADING YOUR CHURCH THROUGH
THE CONVERSATION

If you've decided to take your church through the ideas presented in *The Next Christians*, please consider first taking your staff through them. This will allow you to approach the topic with a unified effort and will empower your people to answer any questions that congregants may have. The small group curriculum is also a perfect complement to a corporate approach to these topics.

First, determine the number of weeks you'd like to spend on these ideas. If you plan to pair it with small group studies, it is ideal to spend a corresponding six weeks on them. The way the ideas have been broken up in this resource are recommended. Churches who want to spend less time on this or who elect not to engage their small groups may be able to do it effectively in three weeks.

Sample sermon outlines will be provided in Church Resource Guide to get you thinking about how you'll prepare text-driven expositions that correspond to these ideas. These outlines are only suggestions to get you thinking about your sermons and are not intended to replace the inspiration and research times of your sermon preparation.

Graphics will also been provided in the Church Resource Guide. These graphics can be used for your sermon slides, promotional pieces, web banners, and worship guides. Feel free to utilize these graphics or design your own graphics to accompany a series title and theme of your choosing.