

THE GRASSROOTS GOSPEL

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by

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## THE GRASSROOTS GOSPEL

### **Introduction**

It was a normal Sunday morning, well, all was normal except for the guest preacher. The choir had just finished their special number and were beginning to take their seats as a white bearded, short, stocky man bounced into the pulpit. As he flopped down his 15 pound family Bible and stared at the congregation, he blared, “What is the Great Commission? Or should I say the great omission?” From that question he launched a litany of sins, mistakes and fallacies plaguing the church. And somewhere within the length of his discourse, the man who began his message with the booming voice of Adrian Rodgers closed out his sermon with a benediction as one would imagine Don Knots extending.

This scenario typifies the idea of what most in the Mosaic generation think and believe about Christianity. In this paper, the author will deal with the question that almost every evangelical leader seems to be thinking or asking about this generation: “What is next?” With cultural shifts coming at such a rapid pace it is almost mind boggling to think that ministers are to share the love of Christ in a relevant way, when what is relevant changes almost by the minute. The question has often been raised, “What is the one thing that we can do to reach this generation?” The answer is a surprising, “not one thing.” The Gospel must go grassroots.

In stating that there is not one thing that can be done to reach this generation, the author is making the point that there is no one size fits all solution to the challenges that

lie ahead. Large churches have already begun to experience a small decline in many cases, it seems as though many of the programs of the past are becoming increasingly ineffective and all are quickly realizing that what works for one church, even when replicated perfectly does not yield the same results. The challenge of changing the church is that each culture within this society, as well as the individual strata within that culture are each going to be reached differently. There is no time for massive, resource consuming programs to be developed, workers equipped and then implemented. What this generation needs is a now solution, a Gospel that works wherever, in every situation, regardless of the intended recipient.

### **The Easy Button...Smashed**

The grassroots Gospel or a movement towards a more simple lifestyle Gospel is exactly what this generation is looking for, but making the required changes to the present system may prove to be anything but easy. The day of the mega church is, by in large, over. The days where a student pastor could offer a spread of pizza and the teens would gather like flies to honey are gone. The winning recipe for reaching this generation lies in the relationships that are formed and the bridges that are built, along such paths the Gospel message in any form will be transmitted easily.

For Mosaics, relationships are the driving force of their life. “Being loyal to friends is one of their highest values.”<sup>1</sup> Today’s teens have a strong need to belong to a tribe or group of people who may or may not have similar interests as them. An

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<sup>1</sup>David Kinniman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity...And Why it Matters*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 17.

interesting twist on the Mosaic<sup>2</sup> generation is that while they have an intense desire to be a part of a group, purpose or cause that is bigger than themselves, they also have a fierce sense of individualism. To those who are not in the Buster<sup>3</sup> or Mosaic generations will find many of these terms and trends contradicting, so to understand a little better how this generation of adolescents will best respond to the Gospel, we will start backwards and work to the present.

To begin this journey we will go back to the beginning or at least the place where Jesus left off, the Great Commission. Countless numbers of mission sending organizations, commencement ceremonies and ordination services are built around the pair of verses found in Matthew 28:19-20 known as the ‘Great Commission.’ Almost all of the modern English versions of this passage translate the verse as saying, “Therefore go and make disciples...<sup>4</sup>” Upon reading this passage translated thusly, it sounds as though Jesus were directing His followers to pack their camel leave their homeland and become missionaries for the glory and fame of the name of Jesus Christ. While all of Christianity is grateful that there are valiant men and women across this globe who have given their time, talents and even their very lives for the cause of making Christ known and in no way do we wish to diminish their calling or sacrifice, I believe that the truth of what Jesus is saying is often missed.

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<sup>2</sup>The Mosaic generation within the context of this paper focuses on the sixteen to twenty-four-year-old segment, that is, the leading edge of the Mosaic generation.

<sup>3</sup>The Buster generation within the context of this paper focuses on the twenty-five to forty-one year old segment of the population.

<sup>4</sup>New International Version cited in paper unless otherwise noted.

### What it Really Says

The verb translated ‘go’ in Matthew 28:19 is the word πορευθεντες, a derivative of the word πορεύομαι, which literally means “a going from one place to another.<sup>5</sup>” This verb is found in the conjugated form πορευθεντες fourteen times in the Greek New Testament and is almost always translated as an aorist, passive deponent, meaning “having gone.” In the case of Matthew 28:19 the passive verb πορευθεντες is coupled with an active verb μαθητευσατε, translated “disciple” as in the active process of making disciples.

Since Jesus’ audience is known from the previous verses as being His disciples, the absence of subject in verse 19 makes it, by default, an understood you. This being said, translating the verse “Go, therefore and make disciples,” does not make proper utilization of the passive tense of the verb translated ‘go.’ Translating the verse, “Therefore, having gone, make disciples...” gets the proper message across, but in a way that is a bit cumbersome to grasp in English. The best translation of this verse in modern English would be to translate it as saying, “Therefore, as you go, make disciples...”

### Why it Matters

This is such a subtle shift in semantics that on the surface makes little difference to the overall meaning of the passage. However, it completely changes the way this passage is to be made relevant to one’s everyday life. Translated properly, verse 19 and following is not a charge from the Chief of Christendom to those deemed the most

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<sup>5</sup>James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Nashville: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1476.

faithful or having obtained the highest calling, but rather is a directive for all Christ-followers to disciple, preach, teach and baptize everyone that is within their particular sphere of influence.

Having adhered to the English translation with the presupposition that verse 19 is a mandate for a chosen few has stratified the modern church into two distinct segments: 1) 'clergy' or those called into ministry and 2) 'lay persons' or those who have secular jobs. This partition, albeit predominately mental, has allowed a large portion of the evangelical community to relegate the "doing" aspects of their faith, such as, preaching, teaching, disciple making as listed in the Great Commission to be relegated to those individuals who are employed by a church. This leaves the lay person with the responsibility to contribute to the church financially and fill a spot in a pew on Sunday morning.

This stratification coupled with the lack of practical personal involvement with their faith has turned many individuals away from Christianity. However, this shift away from Christianity has not been entirely negative, because if one were to carefully peel back the foliage of a dying Christendom, they would begin to find a bustling root system rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ without any of the distinctive markings of a denomination. Over the last few years this movement has been called and/or influenced by many different things: postmodernism, emerging church, new-age, revolution and the list continues. Since the title of this movement is not the topical issue of this paper, it shall be henceforth called, the grassroots Gospel.

### **Why the Grassroots Gospel?**

Let's face it, regardless of which denominational branch of Christendom one may hail from, numbers are a far cry from their historic highs. Although it may look as though things are growing, as evangelist Junior Hill once said, "It's just hair and fingernails."<sup>6</sup> The organized Christian religion as a whole may be experiencing decline, but is this disinterest in a particular denomination going to prove detrimental to the witness of Jesus Christ on planet Earth?

God has always had a people and when the going got tough, the tough went to work. This grassroots movement of Christianity is poised for penetrating the dark world with the light of Jesus Christ. It has set itself up to demolish every barrier between the lost world and the Risen Savior. These individuals are prepared to burst the bubble, break the box and bring up the bar, but they just do not know they can. Some have figured it out. Have you?

In an effort to get a grasp on to exactly what is happening, acclaimed researcher George Barna set out to study what he discerned to be quiet rumblings within the Christian faith. However, what he discovered startled him and might have been the tipping point for things to come. Barna discovered that there are a whole host of Christians who "have no use for religious games...have no use for worship services without the presence of God...refuse to follow ministry leadership who cast a personal vision...refuse to donate one more dollar to man-made monuments...are embarrassed by

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<sup>6</sup>I would be the first to recognize that there are portions of Christianity that are growing, especially in specific churches, particular movements and areas in the world. However, for the sake of this paper and this comment I am speaking of the church at large, specifically the North American church.

sizzle and no substance.”<sup>7</sup> It is the opinion of this author that these are the people who will allow Christianity to not only survive, but to thrive in the years to come.

### **Going Forward Backward**

The second great awakening at the turn of the nineteenth century established evangelical Christianity as a prominent figure in American religious history. Evangelical Christianity was the predominant religious expression in America during the nineteenth.<sup>8</sup> This enabled it to shape the nation’s social and political agenda for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Many have even gone so far as to argue that “the story of American evangelicalism is the story of America itself in the years 1800 to 1900.”<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, serious strains were evident within the American church due to the emergence of new social and economic problems within American society. In response to these problems a group emerged that emphasized a more “social gospel,” which “urged the modification of societal structures perceived to be precipitating the social maladies of the day.”<sup>11</sup> During the 1920’s those who were

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<sup>7</sup>George Barna, *Revolution*. (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2005), 14.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Coleman, *Issues of Theological Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 20.

<sup>9</sup>Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>10</sup>William, McLoughlin, “The American Evangelicals: 1800-1900,” in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 1.

<sup>11</sup>James M. Penning and Corwin Schmidt, *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 38.

theologically conservative confronted the movement and the debate that ensued labeled the group ‘fundamentalist.’

In 1942 the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was formed, which was created largely by fundamentals and sought to be inclusively evangelical.<sup>12</sup> The NAE soon became a clearinghouse for the bustling evangelical movement which spawned a host of mission organizations, media broadcasts, Bible societies and training unions. The early leaders of this movement were quick to seize technological opportunities that enabled them to reach mass audiences. For example, Charles Fuller’s *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* had the largest radio audience in the 1940’s.<sup>13</sup> However, by the 1980’s things quickly spiraled out of control when many major ministries were rocked by scandal. This was the birthplace of the present generation, a generation now called the Mosaics.

### **The Generational Challenge**

Author and researcher George Barna gives three marks of the current generation: First, they will be the most numerous generation in America’s history. Second, they will likely baffle millions of people with their unpredictable, quixotic, and seemingly inconsistent and idiosyncratic values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Third, Mosaics will provide the church with a massive and fertile population for evangelism and discipleship.<sup>14</sup>

Born in the throws of a Christianity in upheaval, this skeptical, religious wary generation is undergoing a silent, yet serious transformation. This conversion that is

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<sup>12</sup>George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 71.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 29

<sup>14</sup>George Barna, *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture*. (Ventura, CA Regal, 2001), 21.

currently taking place in Christianity, albeit quiet, is one that with careful Spirit-led leadership will once again radically change the landscape of this culture, society and world for the glory of God. There are loads of untapped potential in the youth of this generation just waiting to be unlocked. In their book *Do Hard Things* co-authors Alex and Brett Harris liken this generation to an elephant tied to a post with a mere piece of twine.

Elephants are large animals with enormous strength. Still today in parts of the world the elephant is used to pull up stumps, drag timber from the forest and bare heavy loads across vast distances. “Some countries hold ‘elephant festivals’ to celebrate the strength, agility, and intelligence of these mighty animals.”<sup>15</sup> The culmination of these festivals is a massive game of tug of war with one hundred men pitted against one elephant and the elephant wins every time. This begs the question, ‘How does an elephant keeper, keep the elephant under control with a mere wooden stake and a piece of twine?’ The elephant from a young calf was restrained with a heavy chain that it had to labor to move. The elephant eventually stopped trying to escape every time it felt the least bit of resistance. The elephant handler would eventually replace the heavy chain with a piece of rope, but the willingness to yield to submission had already been engrained in the elephant. So, an elephant who could easily pull a hundred men, is restrained with a splinter of wood and a twine. Likewise, this generation of young people are easily deterred from doing great things for God and otherwise, because they are young and they are attempting to operate in a structure with many more parameters than

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<sup>15</sup>Alex Harris and Brett Harris. *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations*. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), 27.

they are culturally used to.

Parameters, guidelines, borders, when used properly keep things in their proper place. Without guidelines, there would be no chaos. However, when borders are used in order to perpetuate a style or system based solely on the fact that it is comfortable, they lose their protective property and become a hurdle. The church has inadvertently placed a surplus of hurdles between a lost generation of teenagers and the life-changing Gospel message of Jesus Christ. These barriers also keep well-meaning teens, who are challenging the church norms in order to reach their friends, from expressing their faith and walking with their Creator in the way that He intended. It is part of the generational coding of a Mosaic to challenge boundaries and those who think that “in due time Moslems and Busters will ‘grow up’ and look like everyone else should prepare to have unfulfilled expectations.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Teenager...Where?**

According to the dictionary, a teenager is a person between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. The word teenager has not been around for a very long time, as a matter of fact, it made its first debut in a 1941 Readers Digest issue.<sup>17</sup> From that one issue, a word that is virtually a staple in the English language and is almost always used in a derogatory sense was born. Before the nineteenth century people fell into one of two categories, children or adults. “Family and work were the primary occupations of the group we now

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<sup>16</sup>Kinniman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity...And Why it Matters*, 23.

<sup>17</sup>Kinniman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity...And Why it Matters*, 27.

call teenagers.”<sup>18</sup>

There is a sizeable discussion regarding the prominence and placement of adolescence. Some believe that adolescence is not a blend of both child and nor, is it an expanded phase of either. “Adolescence [according to some] is a unique phase of life that must be understood and dealt with on its own merits.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, John W. Santrock, one of the most formidable voices on adolescence, discusses the inventionist view of adolescence which states that “adolescence is a sociohistorical creation.”<sup>20</sup> This view holds that adolescence and the idea of a teenager did not emerge until the early nineteenth century and is the product of legislation regarding youth in the workplace, as well as the creation of a mandatory educational system. Individuals, who had previously been productive, responsible members of society were now having their responsibilities and ultimately their sense of identity involuntarily removed from them. Enter the dawn of the teenage years.<sup>21</sup>

If one were to conduct an internet search for the word ‘teen,’ it might produce a list quite different than expected. Comingled with the plethora of pornography sites, one

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 30

<sup>19</sup>Chad Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 23.

<sup>20</sup>John Santrock, *Adolescence*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2007), 7.

<sup>21</sup>I write this with the understanding that there are additional views on the origin of adolescence from great influencers including Plato, Aristotle, Stanly Hall, and Margret Mead to list a few. It is also my understanding that the preceding description is an over simplification of the process of adolescence and that there are many more complex issues involved in the social, physical and mental development of a young person.

would find suggestions for expanded searches related to the topics of teens and drugs, teens and alcohol, teens and smoking, teens and cell phones and the list continues. What if this energy and zealotry to be someone, create a unique personal identity and leave their mark on history could be turned towards something positive? The devil seems to be using teens effectively for his service, so, shouldn't the God who created them be able to do great and mighty things through them for His glory?

### **Enter the Great Commission**

If one is looking for challenging words to motivate students, they need look no further than the Great Commission. When understood as Jesus literally meant them, they are poignant prods aimed at each Christ-follower to get their head in the game and be a part in ministry. If students would grasp hold of the truth that God wants to use them in extreme ways and that He plans to use them to reach their friends with the life changing power of the Gospel, the world would literally be turned upside down in one single generation.

Simply because teens seem to be wandering through adolescence jockeying for the hippest facebook page, the latest cell phone, the trendiest clothing or the opportunity to date the big man or woman on campus, does not mean that they are in a place where God cannot use them. Actually, God has placed them in a position to minister to their friends in a real and relevant way, in settings that pastoral ministers would never have

opportunity to step foot. Additionally, what better place to achieve one's identity than in

Jesus Christ? <sup>22</sup>

### **The Minister and the Grassroots Gospel**

It is the opinion of this author that the next big move of God will be unlike anything that has ever been seen before. It will completely dwarf anything imaginable. It will happen in such a way that no man, program or denomination can take credit for its inception, implementation or completion and in the end only One will get the glory!

This being said, how will ministers guide, pastor or shepherd such a movement? The beauty of grasping the truth of the Great Commission is that Jesus drives the car, it is His servants job to merely open the door and invite passengers to join, so to speak. However, there are some clear things that ministers can do to loosen the soil and allow the grassroots Gospel movement to take hold in their city. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Remember, the job of the minister is to empower God's people to do the work of the ministry and then to step back and allow God to do what only God can do.

### **Bursting the Bubble**

The harsh reality of ministry is this: some people see only two types of people, 1) ministers and 2) non-ministers. If they do not fall in the category of minister or clergy, then they relegate their missional responsibility to someone who is, in their mind, better trained and called to do such a task. The first hurdle to overcome when prepping the soil for the roots of the Gospel to grow is to pop the church bubble; to remove every division between what is viewed as secular and sacred.<sup>23</sup> The truth is that God has called

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<sup>22</sup>Santrock, *Adolescence*, 153.

<sup>23</sup>Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*.

everyone, not to ‘go’ and teach, but to teach as they ‘go.’

God has already divinely and uniquely positioned people everywhere to be His light in a dark world, to be on a mission for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Millions of people who would never darken the door of a church house, reside within the confidence of a close Christ-following friend. These friends are the people that God has placed in their path to reach them, not the pastor on Sunday morning or a television preacher after a late night talk show. The Commission of the Creator is that all would interact with the world around them and display before it a life that glorifies Him.

Somewhere along the way, there was a bubble placed around church members and they were suddenly ‘not allowed’ to interact with non-saved individuals. So, for the last several decades Christ-followers have remained comfortably ensconced in their holy huddle, being content to remain ‘undefiled’ by the world. The bubble needs to be popped and the church needs to realize that the very world that they are trying to be removed from is the world that Jesus died to save.

### **Breaking the Box**

“The idea that God has gifted people only for church jobs flies in the face of his redemptive mission in the world.”<sup>24</sup> The job of ministers, specifically those who minister to students who seem the most open to change, should be to emphasize that the pre-made ministry box needs to be broken. Ministers tend to plan ministry events and the like around their particular skill set and their followers begin to believe that God can only use

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(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 46.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 47

them when they are doing a particular activity. However, the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians that God is no respecter of persons and He has explicitly placed people with various skill sets in their respective places to take part in His redemptive plan.

When was the last time that anyone heard a young person say, “I want to be a television news anchor so that I can be a light for Christ in a dark place.” Such a thing has scarcely been thought, much less uttered. Again, somewhere, a delineating line was drawn between sacred and secular and only certain jobs were jobs that God could use. It is the opinion of this author that God calls people to be tax collectors, auto mechanics and bankers, just as He calls pastors, evangelists and student ministers.

What is the difference? In the eyes of God, nothing! Therefore, student ministers and all ministers alike should adamantly encourage their flock to maximize their passion, discover their true purpose and then unleash that potential to become God’s priests wherever they may be. If the opportunity to break the box is missed, it will cause the vision of God’s people to be shrink wrapped to the size of a particular minister or ministry. Take a look around, feel cramped?

### **Bringing Up the Bar**

Especially among the youngest of this generation, heightening expectations or bringing up the bar is where the majority of the rubber meets the road. When adolescents who were working in factories a mere hundred years ago, are now burdened with the responsibility to wait their turn to play the Nintendo Wii, something has gone seriously awry. Ask any manufacturing company how to increase the quality of their product and they will give two answers: 1) increase the quality of the material being processed, or 2) heighten the preciseness of the manufacturing process. In other words in the case of

option two, raise the expectations.

There is surprising power in expectations. No matter where the expectation level is set, it is innate human nature to exceed expectations. In the words of Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, “Whether you think you can or whether you think you can’t, you’re right.” The self-fulfilling power of expectations impacts teens in almost every area of their lives, so why not raise the bar regarding their walk with and service to Jesus Christ?<sup>25</sup> “Could it be that we’ve missed seeing the hand of God at work because we haven’t seen the potential of youth? It’s time to stop seeing youth as a liability and begin seeing them as central to the activity of God in our day.”<sup>26</sup>

“Where expectations are high, we tend to raise to meet them. Where expectations are low, we tend to drop to meet them.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, this is completely opposite of the instructions given in 1 Corinthians 14:20: “Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.”<sup>28</sup> Culture screams exactly the opposite, “Be mature in evil, but childish in behavior.” In his book *Thoughts for Young Men*, J.C. Ryle wrote, “Youth is the seed-time of full-age, the molding season in the little space of human life, the turning-point in the history of man’s mind.”<sup>29</sup> Meaning, who or what a student will become is largely determined by who he is allowed to be today.

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<sup>25</sup>Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 41.

<sup>26</sup>Alvin Reid, *Raising the Bar*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 53.

<sup>27</sup>Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 43.

<sup>28</sup>NIV

<sup>29</sup>Ryle, J.C, *Thoughts for Young Men*. (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1996),

Where is the bar?

This section could not be left without making mention of the rise of the “kidult.” In January 2005, *Time* magazine ran a story on “kidults, a new breed of adolescents in their mid- to late twenties and beyond.”<sup>30</sup> Kidults are described as “Full-grown men and women who still live with their parents, who dress and talk and party as they did in their teens, hopping from job to job and date to date, having fun but seemingly going nowhere.”<sup>31</sup> This is the same age bracket who, only a century ago, was the primary driving workforce of this nation. Having discovered this, there is little doubt that the bar is set too low, not only in matters related to the church, but clearly in society as well. It is often said, “As the church goes, so goes the nation.” If this is true, what better place to raise the bar than in the church?

### **Tradition Versus Movement**

“What got us where we are is not the same stuff that will get us where we want to go, so we must change.”<sup>32</sup> If there is such a need for social and religious change, why is it so slow in coming? The answer to this question is simply complex: because some are not willing to change. It is simple, because the answer is cut and dry, easy to understand and at the same time complex, because the living saints have seen and experienced

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<sup>30</sup>Grossman, Lev. “Grow Up? Not So Fast,” *Time*, 16 January, 2005, 47.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 49

<sup>32</sup>Barna, *Revolution*, 41.

change in the church and for the most part, it was not a positive experience.

A tradition, such as the American evangelical tradition has existed for several centuries and continues today. At the same time narrower evangelical movements have come and gone over time and again some still exist today.<sup>33</sup> For the purpose of this paper, a religious tradition provides believers a theological basis for which to interpret and interact with God and His Holy Word without changing over time. A movement, however, seeks change, either to recapture the past or to transform the future.<sup>34</sup>

The grassroots approach to the Gospel, whereby the perfunctory elements of the faith are passed down and around, by way of personal relationships; represents a new movement, not a shift in tradition. This movement embraces a change in methodology without compromising the foundational elements of the faith. It is also important to note that the methodological change will begin to happen more rapidly than ever before, as previous programs will begin to lose their impact, because they will cease to be culturally relevant.<sup>35</sup> Jesus Himself counteracted the cultural change and crossed cultural barriers by using one simple tactic: He met people at the point of their need not the point of His knowledge!

Could it be said that the reason that Christians are not reaching a lost and dying world is because of a lack of knowledge or teaching on the subject? Let this be answered with a resounding no. There are more teaching tapes, sermons, books, Christian seminars, conferences and retreats than ever before. Yet many in church leadership seem

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<sup>33</sup>Bruce Dreisbach, *The Jesus Plan*, 83.

<sup>34</sup>James Penning, *Evangelicalism: The Next Generation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 13.

<sup>35</sup>Ed Gungor, *Religiously Transmitted Diseases*, 32.

to be scratching their heads wondering why nothing seems to be working, why they cannot motivate their congregations to win the lost and why the lost are not flocking to their beautifully choreographed services in their magnificent edifices.

Again, the answer is simply complex and it is this: The church has forgotten that the Great Commission directs Christ-followers to do the work of the ministry as they 'go.' The modern church has adopted the mantra 'come see.' Displaying a plethora of programs and pamphlets, but denying the power that is desperately desired! When Jesus encountered the woman at the well in John 4, He began talking to her about well water, something that she was obviously familiar with. He did not give her a tract or whisper a silent prayer, He built a relationship with her, met her where she was and then filled the void that she had. Jesus often changed His method of delivery without compromising His message.<sup>36</sup>

### **Change Please**

It is often said that there are only two things that are certain, death and taxes. A third certainty could be added to this list and it is change. In the twenty-first century change has become a constant. The Mosaic generation comprised of adolescents in their teenage years have embraced, encouraged and even demanded change in their surroundings. These changes include but are not limited to – worldview, values, social and political structures, arts and institutions. Those institutions, products or ideas that are resistant to change are not likely to survive.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 45.

<sup>37</sup>Albrey Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry*

The idea of the grassroots Gospel will force many churches to make a choice. Either they will retreat into their fortresses and pull up the drawbridges in an attempt to avoid change altogether or “they will work to understand change, learn to live with it, and develop ways to use it to their advantage in ministry.”<sup>38</sup> This is stated with the understanding that this choice in many settings is not always an easy one. The fact of the matter remains this: the boomer and echo-boom generations which are the predominant fiscal supporters of almost any ministry are resistant to change, because of the mishaps that they have witnessed in Christian history. However, to reach the younger and largely unreached generation that cheers change would require a departure from the funding to enact the desired change.

On October 13, 1517, Martin Luther began what some would call a revolution. “It was a revolution and spiritual canon – a grass-roots revival that brought the freedom of salvation to thousands, even millions.”<sup>39</sup> This German monk, who was born a simple peasant nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle door and singlehandedly stood in open defiance of the religious hierarchy of his day. Luther cried out against the selling of indulgences which were purchased to release the soul of a deceased loved one from purgatory. Luther stood at a crossroads of history and pointed the way to truth.

The church today finds itself at a similar crossroads. Should the church steeped in its traditions that have seemed to work for generations, exchange them for what is viewed

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*for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 75.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 76

<sup>39</sup>Chad Taylor, *Why Revival Still Tarries.* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2005), 51.

as the tried and true to test the waters where no one has dared tread? To answer no, means that the church will continue its decline towards an obvious non-existence.<sup>40</sup> To answer yes means that things will begin to look, sound and feel different, but that the survival statistics, although not guaranteed, provide a much more positive outlook.

### **Hook Me Up**

*(Hook Me Up is street slang for “give me some of what you have.”)* The Mosaic generation, as any person who works with students knows has an urgent desire for genuineness. If an individual, church or organization only pretends to change, they will be labeled a fraud, or what this generation calls a ‘poser.’<sup>41</sup> To embrace change means that the church must attempt to understand culture if they have a genuine interest in reaching those individuals. Trying to reach a generation of young people without learning their cultural norms and values or to speak their language, would be the equivalent of sending a missionary from Germany to Korea without the least bit of training, information or language classes. Even with the call from God and a willing heart, without understanding and embracing the culture, they will be largely ineffective.

Culture is an intangible force that shapes and influences the life and beliefs of individuals. Most people are not even aware of the effect that culture has on their life. It is probable that your culture has influenced the clothes that you are wearing, the car that you drive, the music that you listen to, even what you had for breakfast. With the advent of multiple forms of media, including everything from the iPod, to the internet, satellite

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<sup>40</sup> Harris, *Do Hard Things*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

radio, laptop computers and the cell phone, students today are inundated with messages and pressures to fit in and be like everyone else.

For a church to understand the culture of this generation, they are going to have to give students equal voice, as well as equal responsibility within the church. Adolescents, when placed in an appropriate environment can give insight to church and lay leadership as to what can be done to effectively reach their peers.<sup>42</sup> And in turn the experienced adults can empower the students to do what they understand that God is calling them to do.

### **Conclusion**

In his book *The Tipping Point*, author Malcom Gladwell discusses the catalysts that make some trends tip and others flop. The basic summation of what creates the tipping point is that a few people get involved and are committed to see it through to success.<sup>43</sup> There is no magic formula, no hiring of a national advertising firm to get the word out, simply people being sold on a particular product and then fighting to the end to see it succeed. Is that not what the early church did when Jesus turned 11 men loose and they in turn flipped the entire world upside down?

Tipping the scale for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a world devoid of any sense of balance is quite possibly just the adventure that you have been waiting for! God has uniquely gifted you with a specific set of talents and abilities that He desires to be used for His Kingdom. You have been placed here for such a time as this and you will

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<sup>42</sup>Tommie Zito, *A Spiritual Awakening: How to Respond to the Emerging Hunger for God*, 109.

<sup>43</sup>Malcom Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 22.

maximize God's pleasure, when you realize your potential.

### **The New Breed**

As we have launched headlong into yet another millennia and staring into the face of even more epic challenges and cultural changes, “the thought that our contemporary methods are sufficient to reach the world around us leaves us with an uneasy feeling of insufficiency.”<sup>44</sup> A vacuum has been created in this generation by the failure of an iconic religious system touting sizzle but denying substance. Students are now turning to false facades created by technology and imagination, leaving God to seem dusty and archaic. The church seems no longer relevant, while everything this generation embraces the church calls unholy, thus deepening the chasm of mistrust.

Resonating with Paul who became all things to all people, the church needs to immerse itself into this culture in order to “discover the pulse and passion of their hearts.”<sup>45</sup> The socially and culturally shaped religion of the past offers no room for diversity or creativity. The church produces flannel-graph portraits of Jesus as the world promotes a 3D panorama of a seemingly better life. The religious adherence to tradition and the creation of a fairy-tailed world only reinforces their view of irrelevance.

Under the surface a revolution is brewing. The hearts of the masses are no longer satisfied with the status quo of religious tradition. The look, feel and vibe of the Gospel has changed, although the message remains the same. The Gospel message has gone grassroots.

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<sup>44</sup>Taylor, *Why Revival Still Tarries*, 93.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

No longer relying on the trappings of programs and retreats which rally only the emotion, but fail to sustain the soul, the Gospel is going out. But this time it is not carried by the manicured nails of a man high atop an ivory tower, this time it is inside the lunch pail of a factory worker, inside the briefcase of a business professional, under the fingernails of an oil stained mechanic and inside the backpack of a student at a coffeehouse. The life changing message which has been stuffed inside a steeple is finally being dispensed to the broken, abused, downtrodden, chief of sinners and innocent of children.

This grassroots Gospel message, unlike religion tradition of the past is proven to be no respecter of persons, creed, income, job title, marital status, nationality, age, gender or personal history. It takes the worst of stains, deepest of scars and cruelest of hurts and restores them to new. This Gospel empowers, encourages and equips its messengers, all while requiring that they be nothing more than obedient.

How could it be that such a small preposition could make such an astonishing difference? “As you go...”

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