

The Church vs Culture War (or: why we should stop blaming everything else and start looking at ourselves)

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I'm privileged to speak with a lot of youth leaders and ministers who work with young people, and with a whole lot more who are concerned about the lack of young people in their congregation.

They all agree that young people seem to be harder and harder to engage with "church".

Well, whaddy know. This looks like an interesting quote:

"The church is bleeding out the next generation, not because 'the culture' is so opposed to the church's fidelity to the truth, but just the reverse.

"The culture often does not reject us because they don't believe the church's doctrinal and moral teachings, but **because they have evidence that the church doesn't believe it's own doctrinal and moral teachings.**

They suspect that Jesus is just a means to an end—to some political agenda, to a market for selling merchandise, or for the predatory appetites of some maniacal narcissist."

— *Dr Russell Moore, theologian and President of the Southern Baptist's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.*

Oof.

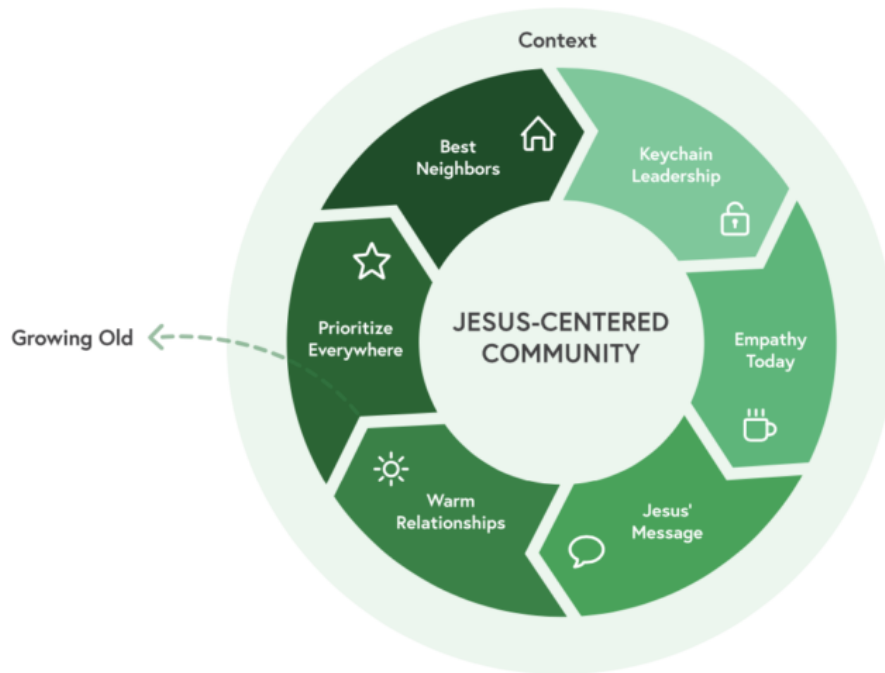
One of the greatest challenges in ministry with young people (particularly young adults) is working with congregations who have determined the best thing they can do is to be someone/some place cool or charismatic in an attempt to draw them into your building. After all, all those big, cool-looking churches have charismatic, cool-looking preachers who appear to be not much older than the many, many young people in their congregation.

This couldn't be further from the truth.

Don't get me wrong – speaking about issues that affect young adults, and helping them find answers in the Gospel to the questions they have and problems they face is absolutely the way to go. Having role models that live out a faith authentic to who God called them to be is vital.

Jesus only asks us to be authentic to who we are, and to the message he gives us.

The 6 Core Commitments of Churches Growing Young



Unlock keychain leadership:

Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.

Fuel a warm community:

Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

Empathize with today's young people:

Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.

Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere:

Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.

Take Jesus' message seriously:

Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.

Be the best neighbors:

Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.

The third of the six core commitments in [Growing Young – Taking Jesus' Message Seriously](#) – addresses this by encouraging congregations to welcome young people into a *Jesus-centred way of life* (not some programmatic check-box faith). The chapter talks about congregations living out the grace and love God freely offers us as we engage in God's mission in the world, and in doing so encouraging young people to be the authentic person God calls them to be by modelling that ourselves.

Loving God. Loving others.

This is the life Jesus spoke about and calls us to. When we wholly embrace these two powerful ways to live life we will experience the kind of life we're taught about in [John 10:10](#) – a life lived in fullness with God our Creator, deeply connected to God's mission.

How we reveal our connection to the doctrinal truths and moral teachings we live by, and address the reasonable judgement called on us, is by loving God and loving others—especially the young people in our churches and wider community. Loving them for who they are right now, and helping them see God at work in their lives. Living consistently the call of Christ in our everyday, and living life reflecting the truth that we are loved.

Young people are not afraid of truth. They live in a society and culture that has nurtured and cultivated many truths – each to their own.

We need to not be afraid to share with them the truth we know, deep in the very nature of our relationship with Jesus – that all of these young people are vital, valuable, and loved individuals by God; just as we are. Our response to God's love of us is to love them.

Living an authentic life with God expects more of us because we know what it is to be forgiven and loved, just as we are. Living an authentic life connected directly into the revelation of the resurrected Jesus is how we welcome young people into a Jesus-centred way of life...because this truth will survive all interrogation and connect them into the fullness we profess.