



ACTS  
ONE  
EIGHT

... *persuading the lost, equipping the saints*

## BEING SONS OF ISSACHAR IN A CHANGED WORLD

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES ... IN THE CULTURE AND IN THE CHURCH

The sons of Issachar were men *who understood the times and had a knowledge of what should be done*, 1 Chronicles 12:32. In one generation, today's world has dramatically changed ... and that has deeply impacted our culture, teenagers, millennials, emerging adults (a new demographic), generational gaps, faith, church, politics, and education. Ezekiel 33:6 gives this stern warning, "*If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.*" This article is a response to those two Old Testament passages.

To understand our times, consider the millennial meltdown. Millennials, young adults born from ~1980 to ~2002, grew up in a digital and social media world. They were often the children of divorce in an otherwise child-centric society. Winning in sports and excelling in scholastics were subjugated to promoting their self esteem. They were kept-busy children with schedules. School attacks, 9/11, and terrorism shook their feelings of security. Tolerance was redefined. *Hate the sin and love the sinner* became politically incorrect hate speech ... as is the reiteration of Jesus' words, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me,*" John 14:6. Having replaced the timeless Word of God's absolute truth with a *whatever you feel is true for you is true* standard, sexual purity and gender identity were set adrift. They have lost confidence in the institutions of marriage, politics, business, and sadly even church. It is not their fault.

There hasn't been a slow leak of millennials from the church. It is a cataclysmic flood that has made the de-churched become the fastest growing demographic ... which in a decade or two will be lapped by the never-churched. Moreover, many millennials are in the house, but not in the family ... in the congregation, but not in Christ. Many very sporadically attend its functions, but are non-engaged pseudo-Christians who misunderstand the character of God and don't understand enough of the Gospel to be saved. A *let's be as much like the world as possible* model of ministry has left them without a genuine and powerful encounter with God or His Word. Actually, it has driven them away. They are stampeding away from ministry that encouraged, exhorted, and entertained them to believe, behave, and belong ... but never *equipped* them to do so. It is not simply their fault or the fault of their culture. They are the cultural and spiritual product of our previous generations. Actually, it is mostly our fault. I have watched this millennial meltdown over decades of life and ministry. And most recently, I have had my own observations re-enforced through extensive reading. Be assured that I am not an exaggerating alarmist. It is just that I am willing to say clearly that the Emperor has no clothes.

Ten important books on understanding the times (in the culture and in the church) are listed below. The authors are from varied religious camps ... from evangelical to Eastern Orthodox. They are strong on understanding our times and speak to the problems with a unified voice. One author, addressing our varied Christian denominations and church heritages, states that we are all standing on the same rapidly melting iceberg. Their critique is eye-opening and very convicting ... much like a team of doctors giving a diagnosis that finally explains all of your symptoms (even the ones you have been ignoring). Their prognosis is alarming and in some cases grim ... but all offer hope. However, their varied

prescriptions are sometimes off the mark and born from their religious experiences. As an example, all authors agree that Biblical illiteracy is a huge problem ... but one actually says that we don't need more Bible teaching. My response is that one very important part of what we need is effective teaching that actually equips millennial believers to be disciples. Others seem to promote the idea that if we repeat what we did in creating the problem (for the past 5, 10, 20, 30, or more years), but do it with more intensity and with a kinder face, we could fix the problem. That will not happen. Doing more of what we have done repeatedly in the past and expecting a different outcome is misguided. With these disclaimers stated, let me assure you that these books are *really* worth the read. I consider these authors and their writings to be the Christian radiologists offering their spot-on clear report on the current health of both the culture and the church in the West.

I strongly suggest that you read the first three books below. Then like the sons of Issachar, to gain knowledge in what you should do, read at least the first few articles on DiscipleOrBeliever.org before continuing with the other books in any order.

1. *Churchless* (George Barna & David Kinnaman) ... a practical and statistical overview of the relentless and mounting exodus from church.
2. *The Benedict Option* (Rod Dreher) ... an historical strategy for Christians living in today's post-Christian world.
3. *Abandoned Faith* (Alex McFarland & Jason Jimenez) ... why millennials are walking away from the faith ... importantly from the family perspective.
4. *You Lost Me* (David Kinnaman) ... why young people are rethinking faith and the church.
5. *UnChristian* (David Kinnaman & Gabe Lyons) ... what a new generation thinks about Christians.
6. *Soul Searching* (Christian Smith & Melinda Lundquist Denton) ... the religious and spiritual lives of teenagers.
7. *Souls in Transition* (Christian Smith & Patricia Snell) ... the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults.
8. *Lost in Transition* (Christian Smith & others) ... the complex, disjointed, and confusing dark-side of emerging adulthood.
9. *Almost Christian* (Kendra Creasy Dean) ... what the faith of teenagers is telling the church.
10. *Hurt 2.0* (Chap Clark) ... an alarming look inside the complex world of today's youth ... a must-read for parents of teens and tweens.

*No one of these books is a composite summary of the ten. Some are from the general evangelical camp ... some from the semi-secular. The author of this Issachar article whole-heartedly endorses the ten as an aggregate for diagnostic value ... but does not endorse any of them individually for prescriptive value.*

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