

Millennials and the church

By Matthew R. Ozment

Until a couple of years ago, my story was typical for my generation. I was raised in a Christian home and was in church every time the doors were open. I went to youth group, went on a few mission trips and believed in God. Growing up in the rural South, I heard the line over and over, "All you have to do is accept Jesus to be saved." I prayed the prayer and I was saved.

Then I went to college. I learned that for anything to be "true," it had to be based on proof. I thought critically about everything around me. I also learned that Sunday mornings were better spent in bed than at church after a Saturday night in Athens, Georgia.

After college, I went to law school. Law school was like college with the flame turned up: more academic pressure, more booze, more girls and no relationship with God. After a few years bouncing around the Pee Dee as a young lawyer, I moved to Charleston. That is when my story changed. I came back to God and His church.

Young adults are leaving Christianity in droves. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, one in three millennials identifies as a "none," i.e. atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular. These "nones" are growing. Among adults born in the 1980s, there has been an almost 40 percent increase in the number who identify as "nones" during the last seven years.

We do not need statistics to tell us this. Look around your church on Sunday. With a few exceptions, at most churches you see few college kids or young adults in the pews. If you start looking at the leadership and ministries of the church you will see even fewer.

One statistic is notable. Only one in five millennial "nones" identifies as an atheist. The other four out of five are agnostic or "nothing in particular." In other words, they are searching. How do we reach those that are looking? For that matter, how do we effectively evangelize today?

For what are young adults searching? Everyone makes a wager with how they live their life. Whether a person is a Christian, a Buddhist or a "none," he is acting on faith that he has chosen a path that will reach a suitable destination when he dies. Believing that there is no God or that we all will end up in heaven in the end cannot be proven by empirical study. In the same way, I cannot prove that God the Father sent his Son to die on a cross for my sins only to rise again and send his Spirit to guide me on a daily basis. Every person chooses how to live his



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life based on his belief of an afterlife or lack thereof.

Millennials have been raised to doubt. We have to "know." We search because we cannot find a worldview that can explain everything with the requisite proof.

The path to Jesus, or back to Jesus, is different for every person. What millennials often see in Christianity today is unfortunately not Jesus. We read narrow-minded posts

on Facebook and hear hypocritical political arguments all under the banner of "Christianity." It reminds us why we left the church in the first place.

To bring young adults back, the church needs to model Christ. As Christians, we need to show love, not judgment or condemnation. In John 8, the Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus who has committed adultery. They tested Jesus by telling Him the law; the woman must be stoned. After a pause, Jesus answered them, saying, "Let anyone without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." One by one the Pharisees walked away. When they had all left, Jesus, who was without sin, did not throw a stone. He did not argue with her on why her relationship was wrong and sinful. He did not hold up a sign stating she was going to Hell. He did not tell her she needed to do something to make up for her shortcomings. He told the woman He did not condemn her and for her to go and leave her life of sin. In other words, He pointed her to a life with the Father through Him. He showed love and compassion that have no price.

No one was ever brought to Christ by condemnation or being proven wrong. The gospel is not advice for how to live. It is good news. The ultimate good news. It tells us what has already happened and how we are redeemed through Christ. To bring millennials back to church, we need to show love as Jesus did and convey the message of the gospel.

Matt Ozment is a husband, father and lawyer in Charleston, South Carolina. His wife describes him as having too many clothes.

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The emotions of divorce and what the Bible says

By Debbie Martinez

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you, plans to give you hope and a future." — Jeremiah 29:11

When I was going through my divorce, I hung on to every word in this scripture passage because it told me that I didn't have to be afraid of what lay before me: God had a plan and was in control. In my practice, I have found three prevalent emotions — fear, loss of hope and revenge. In the midst of a divorce, these emotions run rampant and can cause great emotional, mental and spiritual harm. The Bible addresses how to handle these, and I would like to discuss each one.

First: Fear can keep you up at night. As the night creeps in, so do your thoughts and they tend to stem from fear — fear of how you will make out in the divorce, fear of finances, fear of what people will say, fear of how your ex will treat you, fear of how your children will do and fear of your future, but God says in John 14:27, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." In Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." The devil wants you to be afraid so he can swoop in and use your fear against you. It may appear that your ex is out to get you, but Isaiah 54:17 says clearly, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." Replace your fear with faith. As it is written in Matthew 7:34, "So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time," so shall it be.

Second: Revenge is a human, natural emotion we all feel when we have been severely hurt or betrayed, but Romans 12:19 makes it abundantly clear, "Dearly be-



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Debbie Martinez.

loved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'" Holding onto the feeling of revenge will only hurt you so take comfort that there is a force greater than you that will set things right. "For I will contend with him who contends with you," says Isaiah 49:25. Have a peaceful heart knowing that what others mean for your harm; God will turn it around and use it for your good. "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

asks Romans 8:31. He's planning a new season for you. He has empowered you so focus on this and expect His favor.

Third: Hope walks hand in hand with faith. When faced with a major life transition such as a divorce, hope walks right out the front door with your spouse and despair comes to roost. In the blink of an eye, your world is turned upside down and you are convinced in that very second that life will never be the same — and you are right. It won't be the same, but hope and faith lets us know it will be better. Isaiah 52:12 says, "I will go before you and make the crooked paths straight: I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and the bars of iron." When you have hope it is because you have faith that God is at work in your life. Things happen for your highest good even if at the time it doesn't appear so. In your darkest hour, ask God to shine His light on your thoughts and make them thoughts of hope and not despair. Surrender all to God; He is writing your life so let Him continue.

Divorce does not define you; how you walk this path does. If you walk it in God's light and knowing that He is with you, you will emerge victorious. I leave you with this proverb: "Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly."

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