



**Session One: BUILDING BRIDGES, NOT WALLS:  
A *Hope*, a *Life*, a *Reason*, and a *Way of Sharing*.**

**The Challenge Before Us:**

Since 1988, the General Social Survey has asked Americans of all ages their beliefs about God. Today, about 70% of **Silent** Generation [those 77 or above] said they “know God exists” and “have no doubts about it.” 63% of **Baby Boomers** [born 1947-1964] and **Gen Xers** [born 1965-1980] share the same beliefs. But **Millennials** [born 1981-1996] express more uncertainty. Only 44% have no doubts about God. **Gen Zs** [born 1997-2015] are even less sure. Only 33% express no doubts about God. **Alphas** [born after 2016] have lived entirely in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, are the stay-at-home Generation, raised by mostly non-church Millennials, and affected most by the COVID pandemic. Emerging evidence shows that they will be the most unchurched generation in American history, raised in a post-Christian or anti-Christian society.

[Ryan Burge, More Secular America is Not Just a Problem For Secular America, *The New York Times*, August 25, 2021]

**Revealing Stats about those under 40 years-of-age:**

- 166 million Americans are under the age of 40. [U.S. Census] If separated out, they would be the eighth largest nation in the world [Worldometer Stats]. 152 million are not followers of Christ [The Barna Group], making them one of the largest unreached people groups in history.
- Only one in five teens has attended church [The Barna Group]
- Those under 30 make up only 11% of church attendance [2022 Wall Street Journal Poll]
- 65% of church attenders drop out when they reach college [2020 Crossways Poll]
- Only 4% of church-going teens have a biblical worldview [The Barna Group]
- 90% of evangelical grandparents have one or more adult children who have walked away from the church and two or more grandkids who are lost to the Christian Faith [The Barna Group]

**The Spiritual Battle involved with evangelism to our Gen Z children and grandkids:** The Barna Group has compiled the most exhaustive polling and analysis of those 12-years old to late 20s. They live on their social devices, spending up to 11 hours a day or more, and are shaped by social media culture influencers who are mostly progressive, secular, and even anti-Christian. Here are some startling facts we must know if we are effectively to share our faith with the younger generations:

- As a whole, they are the most intolerant and judgmental of any demographic group in America. This group highly values diversity and is suspicious of anyone who says there is only one way to think about God, religion, or social issues. Ironically, these intolerant and judgmental generations are most put out by those whom they see to be intolerant or judgmental. [*James G. Martin Center for Academic Excellence, 2018*]
- Two-thirds of Gen Zs are “extremely” concerned about the future of LGBTQ rights [*2022 Survey Data from Toluna*]
- More than 20% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender [*2022 Gallop Poll*]
- Millennials and Gen Zs are much more likely to see key biblical doctrines on sexuality, gender roles, abortion, creationism, Jesus-as-the-only-way, and other orthodox views as exclusionist, anti-women, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, and out-of-touch with today’s world. [*Compilation of Pew Research 2019-2022*] **To share the gospel with younger generations we first have to remove significant roadblocks, and be prepared for significant pushback.**
- The **main issue** for teens is how can there be a good God and so much bad in this world. The **second** is what they view to be contradictions between the Bible and Science. The **third** is what they view to be hypocrisy in amongst professing Christians. The **fourth** is their view that evangelicals are aligned with the Republican Party, and too many voted for Donald Trump—for many an unforgivable sin.

**But Here’s the Good News:**

- Though they have largely abandoned traditional religion, the three younger generations are looking for transcendent meaning. Unlike the modern generation, these postmoderns believe in the supernatural, and are hungry for answers to life’s biggest questions [*Arthur Brooks, How to Make life more transcendent even if you’re not religious, The Atlantic, October 27, 2022*]

- They are eager to talk to “sages” about life’s biggest questions, as long as their elders don’t try to “fix” them, or shove religion down their throat, and will listen to their point of view. [*The Barna Group Research*]
- **85%** say their parents are the most important people in their lives, and **83%** say their grandparents are their favorite people. [*Barna Group*]
- There are **29 million** born-again US grandparents. Those over the age of fifty make up 60% of evangelical churches. They are the last generations in America who possess the biblical story of faith and its enduring values. They are in the fourth quarter of life, with all the accumulative wealth gained in the first three: time, wisdom, money, and enough energy to make a profound difference if they invest what they possess, and leverage the love of their grandkids, to evangelize and disciple them while there is still time.

## **So, Where Do We Begin?**

1. **Embrace The Biblical Mandate:** *“These Commandments I give you are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”* [Deuteronomy 6:6&7] *“One generation commends your faith to another; they tell of your mighty acts...”* [Psalm 145:4] *“So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those who come.”* [Psalm 71:18] *“[...] that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise to tell them to their children.”* [Psalm 78:6] *“All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* [Matthew 28:18-20]
2. **Recognize the Challenge:** *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.* [Ephesians 6:12] This battle is not against “flesh and blood”—people and their beliefs, the culture influencers of our day, the secular media, or even politicians. It is not a battle of flesh against flesh, or outthinking, outarguing, or outwitting the other person. It is won or lost in the spiritual realms. It is ultimately won on our knees in prayer, and in utter and final dependance on the Holy Spirit to do the work of changing hearts! Our responsibility is to share our faith; God’s work is to save the lost.

- 3. Do Our Biblical Work in a Biblical Way:** St. Peter shares that way in his first epistle: “...Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But always do this with gentleness and respect.” [I Peter 3:15]. Four things jump out: 1) We must first have **a hope**. 2) We must **live out that hope** in a way that causes people to ask about it. 3) We must be prepared to give **reasonable answers** for that hope. 4) We must do so in a way that is **gracious, winsome, and effective**. Let’s look at each of those four keys to sharing our faith in a woke culture.

### **WE MUST HAVE A HOPE.**

“...give a reason for the hope...” The biblical word for hope is all about certainty. A certainty that God exists and has revealed himself and his will for our lives—as well as a certainty about our destiny. Christian hope is grounded in biblical certainty. It produces a biblical worldview wherein every aspect of life (from abortion, to gender, to sexuality, to race, to politics, to economics) is clearly spelled out in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. There is nothing we face in this life that is not clearly covered in the Bible. **Therefore, people with biblical hope have a biblical worldview.** Yet, the evidence that this is waning amongst today’s Christians is overwhelming and sobering.

- Only 4% of professing teen Christians have a biblical worldview; about 11% of adult professing Christians; 13% of church children’s directors; 16% of church youth directors; and 23% of church pastors. [2020, *The Barna Group*] By any measure, this is a monumental crisis for the church in this culture.
- The Barna Group’s latest nationwide survey had this headline: 40% of Evangelical Christians are Pro-Abortion, Pro-LGBTQ Socialists. [*The Barna Group, 2022*]
- *World Magazine* [Sept. 27, 2022] in column headlined, “Do evangelicals still believe evangelical doctrines,” gave the results of a new nationwide survey showing a woeful ignorance of foundational biblical truths. 43% of those who label themselves as evangelicals say that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God. 56% say that God accepts the worship of all religions. 66% say that people are born in a state of innocence, which means that a Savior from sin is not necessary. In almost every area, evangelicals are biblically illiterate.
- That same survey, quoted by *World Magazine*, found that most evangelicals’ beliefs are more often shaped by cultural traditions, political pundits, media echo chambers, culture influencers, and opinions of their peers rather than the Bible.

Fundamentally, we can't give a reason for the hope we have, if we do not know the hope that we possess. In a post-Christian world, in almost every area of cultural thinking, the **Bible is counterculture** in its beliefs. If we do not know and embrace what the Bible teaches on these issues we will most often go with the flow of culture, thus losing touch with biblical hope. That's why St. Paul warns in Romans 12:2, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* And, the Apostle exhorts his disciple, *"Do your best to present yourself to God, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of Truth."* [1 Tim. 2:15]

**An Action Plan** might be to take some of the major issues of our day: the Bible and Science; the authority of the Bible; the deity and Lordship of Christ; the necessity of trusting in Christ's finished work on the cross for salvation; abortion; the new woke religion; my body, my choice; race; gender; sexuality; marriage and family; church and state; politics and religion; economics; and other hot button issues that polarize people today. Then put together some biblical passages that speak to those issues. In short, categorize your hope in relation to the issues that are shaping our culture and your children and grandkid's future. Then spend time studying and meditating on these hopes until they become part of your spiritual psyche. Mostly, they become part of your "hope memory" the more you share them.

## **WE MUST LIVE OUT THE HOPE**

*"...to anyone who asks..."* What makes people ask? They first observe our hope. How can they observe our hope? By watching it in action. This is a **hope lived out**. If it is to catch the attention or spark the interest of those who are part of the culture it will most likely be **radically counterculture** in nature. It has integrity rather than inconsistency or, even worse, hypocrisy. And here's the crisis for today's evangelical church:

- *The Barna Group* says teens are bailing out of church for six reasons (these reasons still hold 12 years later): 1) Christians seem to demonize everything outside the church. Their faith doesn't seem to grapple with the real issues of life; 2) Christianity seems shallow and boring. A dynamic relationship with God seems to be missing; 3) The church seems antagonistic to science. Christians don't seem to have biblical answers to the claims of science; 4) Christians are often judgmental and don't handle doubt in others well; 5) Christians are often hypocritical in that they don't practice what they preach; 6) Christians claim to have the presence of Christ, but, if he really exists in them, he doesn't seem to have the power to make their lives any different than those lived by nonbelievers.
- If Christians claim that the risen Christ is in them through the Holy Spirit, but their lives are not much different than nonbelievers, there can only be three alternatives for skeptics or cynics: 1) The Risen Christ doesn't really exist; 2) If he does exist, he has no power to change lives; or 3) If he does exist, and has power to change lives, he surely isn't in yours. **I believe this is the great crisis in evangelism today.**

- Watchman Nee, the Chinese Christian martyr, wrote in The Ordinary Christian, “Most Christians are so unordinary that when someone does the ordinary Christian thing, others say that they are extraordinary.” In short, we’ve lowered the bar.

**The key to remember:** Our hope is first of all caught, not taught. Integrity of life is the most important tool of evangelism. So, grandparents, if you want your kids and grandkids to take on your faith: 1) Love and serve your Triune God with passion and consistency. 2) Love and serve your spouse with passion and consistency. 3) Love your children with passion and consistency. 4) Love others (even those whose beliefs, choices, and lifestyles are abhorrent to you) with passion and consistency. Jesus said, “*All people will know you are my disciples if you love one another.*” John 13:35

## **WE MUST HAVE REASONABLE ANSWERS.**

“...*be prepared for anyone who asks to give a reason for the hope...*” The Greek word for *reason* is *apologia*. It was a word used in the courts: the arguments for the defense that convinces a judge or jury. They have to be reasonable and credible. To give a defense before a jury of skeptics requires preparation. “...*always be prepared...*” As St. Paul wrote, “*Study to show yourself approved, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed...*” Through our studies on hot button issues, we will arm you with reasons to be confident in our biblical hope. Here are a few things that are critical in giving a reason:

1. **Have confidence that your biblical hopes are certain.** Know what you believe. If you are hesitant or wavering, you will not inspire confidence in others. People might dispute your beliefs, but they will respect convictions lived with integrity. If those beliefs are part of the fabric of your life, they will convince others more than being like a ship adrift, tossed here and there by every changing wind or wave of public opinion or personal doubt,
2. **Begin where they are, not where you are.** We not only need to know the Bible, but we also need to know the culture in which our loved ones and friends live. We need to ask enough questions to understand them. We need to listen carefully, not only to their words, but also to their hearts. We need to listen with our eyes and hearts as well as our ears. A few years ago I listened to a series of lectures on how to share the gospel. They said that we should begin our gospel presentation by taking the other person back to the Garden of Eden. I was flabbergasted. The average person today believes that the Garden of Eden, and the story of Adam and Eve, are myths—fables from an outdated and irrelevant Bible. Rather, we should begin with their messed up world, and their feelings and longings. Then we can take them back to the Garden where everything went wrong. Remember how the Apostle talked to the Greeks on Mars Hill in Athens [Acts 17]. He started with their gods, their poets, and their beliefs. He met them where they were at, and then, over the next several days, took them back to the Hebrew Scriptures to answer the unanswered questions in their lives.

3. **Not only study the culture, but also the science.** God not only speaks through Scripture to the issues of our day, but through natural law. Truth is truth. Nothing that God says in his Word is contradicted by what *real* science says. For example, when we talk about abortion or transgender issues, we can be certain that the science backs up our biblical beliefs. Our next generation kids often mouth the mantra today, “The science says...” They really do want to follow the science, although much of what they believe is not backed by the *best* scientific data. So we should help them see the scientific inconsistencies in beliefs that are unbiblical.
4. **The ultimate end of our faith dialogues is not to prove a point, but to lead people to Christ himself, and salvation through trusting in his life, death, burial, and resurrection.** St. Peter prefaces his call to give a reason for our hope by saying, “*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord...*” [1 Pet. 3:15] Christ alone can change hearts. We must not waste our time or get distracted by trying to change their behavior first before they come to Christ. That is impossible. There is never enough flesh to overcome the flesh. Only the Spirit can transform the flesh. Christ did not come to make bad people good, or bad-thinking people become better-thinking people. He came to transform sinners. We might be surprised to know that when the Risen Christ takes control of a redeemed sinner, the things he chooses to change might not ever be at the top of our priority list.
5. **Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual.** After St. Paul tells the Ephesians that we are in spiritual warfare against powers in heavenly realms, he ends by telling us that we only have two weapons: the Sword of the Spirit [the **Word of God**] and **prayer** [the supernatural power of God]. **We must be dependent on prayer.** Even the worst presentations of the gospel, and the most stumbling and foolish arguments, can be used by God if they are Spirit-filled. Remember this: there are Three Persons of the Trinity involved in saving the lost, and you aren’t one of them.

## **WE MUST BE REASONABLE PEOPLE.**

“...but do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience...” We must not present the message of Christ in a manner that doesn’t reflect the person of Christ. Take some time to look at the way he dealt with nonbelievers. You might want to study Luke 15, and the way he dealt with tax collectors and prostitutes [the LGBTQ+ people of his day]. As Legacy Imperative has studied Millennials, Gen Zs and Alpha Generation kids, we have come up with six keys to sharing our faith in a “woke” culture [we believe that these also work with older folks who have embraced our secular postmodern values]:

1. **LISTEN RATHER THAN LECTURE.** If we want to build bridges instead of walls, we must become “other” rather than “self” focused, and work harder at understanding than being understood. Sadly, when talking across divides, we are too often intent on fixing others

instead of ourselves. We end up talking louder and past each other. So, listen instead. Only by doing this can we keep the channels open for continuing dialogue.

- 2. ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE GIVING ANSWERS.** When it came to conversations with others, no one asked more questions than Jesus. He probed beneath the surface to do heart surgery. He used questions to take people on a journey of self-discovery. Quick answers often shut off dialogues, whereas questions open up new avenues of conversation. They also show that you are interested in what the other person really thinks. Asking questions allowed Jesus to do the delicate surgery demanded in a heart transplant.
- 3. AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, BE SHOCKPROOF.** We can no longer afford to be naïve. We are living in times of dizzying change. In an age of unbelief and apostasy, we should be prepared to hear almost anything come out of the mouths of our loved ones. The last thing we need to do is drive them away by overreacting to that which breaks our hearts.
- 4. AVOID JUDGMENTAL WORDS OR NONVERBALS.** Our culture increasingly puts a premium on tolerance. We can't affirm unbiblical beliefs or lifestyles, but we can love those who hold them. If they are the lost children of our heavenly Father, they're our brothers and sisters. They may see us as their enemies, but we must never see them as ours. It would be better to bite off our tongues than to demean those whose views are abhorrent to us. To do so will only shut off future dialogue with those we most want to be with in eternity.
- 5. DON'T BE IN A RUSH TO CLOSE THE DEAL.** We are often too quick to set our loved ones straight, as if we alone stand between them and hell. Spoiler Alert: God loves them infinitely more than we do. He has more means of salvation at his disposal than we do. As much as we want to bring in the harvest, our calling may only be to plant some seeds, or water, or pull weeds. Pleading, nagging, cajoling, or arguing never produced spiritual transformation. Leave a bridge open to future conversations, and leave salvation to the Holy Spirit.
- 6. ABOVE ALL, LOVE THAT OTHER PERSON.** The Bible says, *"Love covers a multitude of sins."* [1 Pet. 4:8] You can love another person without loving their beliefs, choices, or lifestyles. They may hate your ideas, but Christ's love in you for them will have more power than all your arguments for the Faith or its values.

*Given By Dr. Bob Petterson, President of Legacy Imperative, January 11, 2023*