

Week 1: Discussion Guide for *The Next Christians*



For Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church
Small Groups
January 2012

January 8, 2012
Negotiating a Changing Culture

Reading Assignment
Chapters 1-4
Pages 3-48

Getting Started

This guide is intended to lead you through a thoughtful discussion about this book. To fully participate in the discussion, you should read the relevant chapters prior to the group meeting, however if you haven't had a chance to do that, you can still benefit from the discussion.

This guide is meant to help individuals and groups answer four key questions:

- What does the scripture say?
- How is the book interpreting the scripture?
- What does the scripture mean to me/us?
- How can I/we apply the scripture to our lives?

Keep in mind that it is often through prayerful consideration, over time that God speaks to us about how He intends for us to utilize what we've learned.

Theme: *The culture of which we are a part is rapidly changing. We are no longer a culture dominated by Christianity. Christian values, priorities and perspectives no longer dominate our society. As Jesus encourages in this text, we should not pass judgment, but we must figure out new ways to engage the culture and share God's perspective and influence. We have some "image management" to do. We need to change the way we engage this changing culture.*

Opening Question

1. What is your religious background? Did your family attend church regularly, occasionally, or not at all? Did you associate with a particular denomination? What did you like most and least about it?

I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

- Mahatma Gandhi



Discussion Question

2. How do you think Christians are viewed in today's society? How does that make you feel about being a Christian?

Reflect on the Scripture

3. Read the verses on the right. Have a few group members summarize the passage in a sentence or two.
4. Christians believe that the *only* way to eternal life is to trust in Jesus (Jn 17:3). In a post-modern culture, where people are skeptical towards those who make absolute truth claims, how can you find common ground with those who do not accept our views about truth?

Matthew 7:1-6 (from *The Message*)

A Simple Guide for Behavior

¹⁻⁵ "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

⁶"Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

Additional Discussion Questions

5. Do you agree with Pastor Tim Keller that there's a tension between speaking the truth of the Gospel (evangelism) and the acts of kindness and social justice that are so important to the younger generations?
- As a church community, should we accent one over the other as Pastor Keller recommends?
 - What about your personal emphasis?

Issues of All Times

- *Poverty*
- *Health Care*
- *Violent Human Conflict*
- *Environmental Stewardship*
- *Educational Inequity*



Closing prayer themes

- Sensitive to culture changes
- Empathy for those outside the faith
- Wisdom to stay grounded in biblical truth
- Grace for others who do not share my view
- Ability to present a credible, gospel-centered worldview

The world should be better because followers of Him live in it.

6. Gabe Lyons provides five categories of ways that Christians interact with culture. Which one or two categories do you think Elmhurst CRC most leans towards? (Chapter 3)
- Insider** – live in a Christian subculture
 - Culture Warrior** – fight against those who threaten our Christian heritage
 - Evangelizer** – focus on winning souls for Christ
 - Blender** -- keep faith personal and blend in with the rest of the world
 - Philanthropist** – focus on doing good work to the exclusion of a holistic approach
7. What specific challenges does the local church face in a society where more and more things are tolerated and religious truth is not clearly defined and agreed upon? How can we overcome these challenges?