

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

good promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans
I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to
harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call
on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will
seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

WHY THE BIBLE MIGHT BE

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give
you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am
gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

NOTHING WE EXPECTED

conscience,
being judged
part in the
denounced

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to
have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in
any and every situation, whether well off or hungry,
whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this
through him who gives me strength.

YET EVERYTHING WE NEED

why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all
for the glory of God.

MICHAEL & LAUREN MCAFEE

than money to my mouth. 104 I gain understanding from your precepts.
105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. 106 I have not
followed your righteous laws. 107 I have suffered much: preserve my life

think that godliness
But godliness v
r we brought n
ke nothing out

If you've ever had questions about how relevant God's Word is to your life, you need this book. Michael and Lauren not only understand your hesitations but come alongside you to process your questions while uncovering the ways Scripture can become a personal lifeline.

—**LYSA TERKEURST**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author; president, Proverbs 31 Ministries

Lauren and Michael offer in this accessible work a hopeful vision for millennials and gen Zers who are skeptical of the Bible's claims. May this book encourage you to read and consider with an open mind the most important book in history.

—**RUSSELL MOORE**, president, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Engaging. Timely. This book invites skeptics and seekers alike to a renewed understanding and embrace of God's Word. Michael and Lauren are wise and trustworthy guides, encouraging us to find our story within the greatest story of all.

—**LOUIE GIGLIO**, pastor, Passion City Church; founder, Passion Conferences

Lauren and Michael have been friends with my wife and me for some years. Their willingness to listen and welcome challenging perspectives tells me a lot about their character. They value truth over their biases and aren't afraid of the uncomfortable questions. That is why they are so well equipped to share what they've found in this book.

—**ANDY MINEO**, hip-hop recording artist

Not only millennials but readers from every generation will benefit from this fresh perspective on the Bible. This book creates space for the skeptical or casual Bible reader to address the hard questions head on. We need that now more than ever.

—**GABE LYONS**, president, Q Ideas; author, *Good Faith*

Conversational, clear, compelling, convincing—here's a winsome and insightful invitation to experience the most profound and controversial book of history. Are you willing to read this book by the McAfees with an open mind? If so, great surprises—and rewards—await you.

—**LEE STROBEL**, bestselling author, *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Miracles*

If you are a millennial who has never considered the Bible, drop everything and read this book. Michael and Lauren dare you to see things you may have overlooked about the most popular book in history.

—**ERIC METAXAS**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author;
host, nationally syndicated *The Eric Metaxas Radio Show*

Michael and Lauren offer historical, biblical, and practical advice for their generation and future generations to come. You will walk away with a better understanding of the millennial and gen Z generations, and your love for the Bible will deepen in the process.

—**ROBBY AND KANDI GALLATY**, authors,
Here and Now and *Disciple Her*

This book invites the millennial generation to shake off their preconceptions about the Bible and explore its pages for themselves. Michael and Lauren provide thoughtful encouragement in this welcome read.

—**BOBBY GRUENEWALD**, founder, YouVersion Bible App

I encourage you to order a stack of copies of this book and pass them to young people in your life that you care about, as well as reading it for yourself. Together, we can reconnect the next generation with the Word of God.

—**MATT BROWN**, evangelist, author,
founder of Think Eternity

Michael and Lauren are a much needed voice for biblical inerrancy in the millennial generation. They challenge all of us to face our questions about the Bible head on and not to dismiss the Bible before reading it. Any of us who care to see our faith transferred to the next generation must read this book.

—**ESTHER FLEECE ALLEN**, speaker;
author, *No More Faking Fine*

The McAfees have articulated an insightful and helpful explanation of how millennials are colliding with the Book of All Books. It will help you, as it helped me, to gain a greater understanding of millennials in your congregation and community.

—**DR. CHRIS WALL**, senior pastor, First Baptist
Church of Owasso, Oklahoma

ZONDERVAN

Not What You Think

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For Mom
<(o)> <3 U
—*Michael*

To Mom and Dad,
without whom this book
could not exist (literally)
—*Lauren*

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FOREWORD

You have in your hands a unique book.

First, it is unique because of who is writing it. There is more skepticism toward the Bible among young people today than there has been in any previous generation in our nation's history. There are certainly books written by older authors who (usually rather sternly) lecture younger adults regarding the attitude they ought to have toward Scripture. What we have not had is a volume like this one. It is written by two who are millennials themselves and so are immersed in their generation's experiences and culture, who have wrestled with their own relationship to the Bible, and who have emerged to introduce the Bible to their peers with fresh and hard-won appreciation for it.

Second, it is unique because it is several books in one. You can certainly find books on the cultural characteristics of the millennial generation. You can also get good books—and very big and long ones—on how to answer common objections to the trustworthiness of the Bible, on the basic teachings of the Bible, on how to read and interpret the Bible, and on how the Bible can be a foundation for spiritual experience of God. The McAfees have read many of these. They have brought many of

Foreword

their seminal insights together and expressed them in the most accessible way. And they address the concerns and questions that millennials would have with it all.

Finally, Michael and Lauren do not examine the Bible in an academic way but connect it closely to Jesus himself. It is a book about Jesus and it is the book of Jesus.

In a class I teach, I ask my Christian students to each interview a friend who does not believe in Christianity. Two of the interview questions are, What to you is the most attractive thing about Christianity? and, What to you is the least attractive or most objectionable thing about Christianity? As might be guessed, the most problematic issue is the behavior of the church in various times and places in history. The most attractive thing to the interviewees, however, is Jesus, his character and teaching.

As the McAfees observe, millennials are turned off to the Bible because they are turned off by the church. The remedy for that is not, of course, to make any excuses for the church. Rather, millennials will be helped the most in their attitude toward the Bible if they see the strength of the connection between the Bible and Jesus.

If you read the accounts of Jesus' life in the Gospels, you will see that almost ten percent of his statements are quotes from Scripture. You will also see that Jesus didn't just talk about Scripture in a detached, philosophical manner. When he encounters Satan in the wilderness, he uses Scripture. When he is facing arrest and torture, he's quoting Scripture. When he is dying in agony, he quotes Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus did not merely believe in the authority of Scripture; he lived it. With it, he made every decision, interpreted every event, and got the strength to face

Foreword

every challenge. It was the mainspring of his life. Everything was understood through the grid of Scripture. Everything was done through the power of Scripture.

What does this mean? It means that it would be impossible to embrace Jesus and reject the basis for everything he believed and did. To respect Jesus, you must respect Scripture, and to make Jesus the basis of your life, you must accept the basis of his. Michael and Lauren make this case in a winsome and lucid way. This is a book we need.

—*Tim Keller*

A WORD TO NON-MILLENNIALS

From the time George Washington was sworn in as our first president, the United States has by and large had a love affair with the Holy Bible. For the vast majority of our nation's history, the Bible has been dominant in affection and unrivaled in influence. With the recent sharp rise in skepticism leading many to hostility toward the Book of Books, it is likely that there are more Bible skeptics living in America today than in all previous generations combined. With Bible hostility on the rise, at the center of the confusion is the young adult generation—millennials and generation Z.

Unashamedly, we wrote this book to millennials and generation Z. They have come of age at the dawn of the internet. While the technology age has brought about a wealth of new information, we believe that something was lost in the transition from analog to digital: the Bible's timeless message. As millennials ourselves, this book is a plea to our peers not to dismiss the Bible before giving it a fair chance.

Although this book is aimed at young adults, it is also for

A Word to Non-Millennials

parents, pastors, and anyone who cares about future generations. Our hope is that it will become a resource for you to better understand us. Along with growing your compassion for the largest generation in American history, we hope also to equip you to recognize why we have real problems with the Bible before dismissing our reservations as immature and uninformed.

Millennials have become the punchline of countless jokes. This should not come as a surprise. Every generation goes through a season of hazing when they are ostracized for their youth, a rite of passage as the established generations bemoan the changes in the world around them and blame the children they raised for the perceived decline in culture. With this comes frustration both for millennials who are trying to make their own way in this world and for non-millennials who don't understand the paths we've chosen to take.

This book is an appeal to young adults from young adults, for us to reconsider our place in the world and the Bible's place in ours. Many books have been written to appeal to young adults to reconsider their views on organized religion, especially Christianity. We want to have a conversation about Christianity, the church, and Jesus himself, but we are content here to focus on the Bible. Why? We believe that if we read the Bible for ourselves, we might find that it is nothing we expected, yet everything we need.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are far too many people to thank in a brief acknowledgments page. First, our families who have raised us and supported us in all things. We love you and we like you. Second, our church family, Council Road, and the pastors, leaders, and people who over the years have invested countless hours in our spiritual formation. We couldn't imagine life without this community. Thanks to our employers, Hobby Lobby and Museum of the Bible, and the leaders at both of these organizations, who love the Bible. It is an honor to work alongside of you. We are grateful to God for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary community and the many professors and leaders there who have invested in us over the years to shape the way we think about the Scriptures. Thanks to Barna and David Kinnaman for the outstanding research which shaped many of our thoughts in this book. Thanks to Zondervan for editing and publishing this book. And thanks to countless others who have encouraged us in our writing and sharpened us with their feedback.

Finally, and most of all, thanks to Drew Griffin. When we moved to New York City, knowing almost no one, Drew became a fast friend. While doing everything from watching 4-D movies

Acknowledgments

in Manhattan to fly fishing in Oklahoma, we had countless conversations about life, our generation, the Bible, and secular culture. Drew was not only an indispensable sounding board for this book but also the cowriter of the first draft. This book would not exist without his encouragement and taking notes on things we were processing, adding more research of his own, and putting structure to our jumbled mess. Thank you for your tireless work to make this book possible. And thank you Emily and Charlotte for giving Drew space and time to escape to a monastery to finish the writing.

PART 1

WHO WE ARE

The Shaping of Millennials

CHAPTER 1

ARE WE MISSING OUT?

The unexamined life is not worth living.

—SOCRATES

The countdown began, and I (Michael) was gripped with fear.
Ten. Nine. Eight.

While everything worked out fine in other places, what would be our fate?

Seven. Six.

I turned to my parents for comfort, but they had wide smiles and bright eyes as they stared at the clock.

Five. Four.

I scanned the room for help, yet no one was aware of my panic or the doom that was certain to fall on us all.

Three. Two. One.

I shut my eyes and slammed my hands to my ears as everyone around me screamed.

“Happy New Year!”

I am just one of billions of brave survivors of the Y2K almost apocalypse.

If you are a few years younger than us, you might not remember this cataclysmic event, so allow me to explain. During the 1990s, the world shifted at a breakneck pace to being run by computers and the internet, laying the foundation for some of the greatest technological advances of all time. But there was one massive oversight: every computer was programmed to record dates using a scheme of three two-digit numbers. So when the clocks were about to roll over to 01-01-00, scientists lost their minds wondering what would happen when computers weren't able to register that “00” meant 2000—not 1900,

Are We Missing Out?

before computers even existed. The threat of a shutdown caused mass hysteria, but mainly just in the canned food aisle of your local Kmart.

The rise of technology was not immune to Ron Swanson-esque resistance from a slew of doubters from our parents' generation who did not understand the potential that technology offers us. Are there drawbacks to becoming isolated or dependent on technology? Sure. But tech curmudgeons overlooked its power to shape our lives for good. While there are some dangers of misusing technology, the internet provides us a platform to accomplish amazing things if we use it well. Yet there are still people who are blind to the good opportunities afforded us by the internet and our smartphones; they've dismissed the internet before ever engaging with it because of stereotypes formed by the abuse of the internet by a minority of users. Earlier today I attempted, yet again, to persuade my grandfather that he would enjoy Facebook. Not necessarily because we use it all that much anymore but because his friends do. At least this past year he has started to text, so that's a step in the right direction!

The global seismic shift that occurred during our lifetimes has drastically changed the way we relate to the world around us. And we're not just talking about tossing our CDs and DVDs. At our fingertips we have free access, anywhere on the planet, to nearly limitless knowledge. As of 2017, more than half of the world was internet connected. When we all survived New Year's Day in the year 2000, that number was less than 5 percent.¹

While the rise of the internet has given us opportunities our parents never could have dreamed of, there are definitely some risks: we can suffer from information overload; we can become distracted; we can be slaves to the immediate rather than

Who We Are

thinking for the long term; we can quickly dismiss anything that is not the latest and greatest, because newer is better!

We (Michael and Lauren) fear that something has been lost in the transition from the old internet days to the new. Something that is so foundational to our story that it is *the* story that makes sense of our story. It is the narrative within which all humankind can find their way. It is an epic that is being written through our lives. Yet we, as a generation, have disregarded the tale because we have yet to understand its power to shape our lives and our communities for good. We (Michael and Lauren) fear that our generation has dismissed the Bible before ever reading it and allowing the Book to stand or fall on its merits.

The Bible is valuable because it is not new but timeless. In the same way your grandparents or even your parents may have blown off the internet before testing it for themselves, people from our generation have rejected the Bible before giving it due consideration. This book is our appeal to you to be open-minded about the Book. Occasionally, we will use the term book to refer to the Bible. To help clarify that we are referring to the Bible and not the book you are reading, we have capitalized the word Book. Hopefully, this will help you disentangle the Book from the people who have used, misused, and abused it.

If you are adventuresome enough, we invite you to journey with us. But we ask that you come with an open mind and bring your authentic questions. We will share ours. At the end, if you do not feel the Bible is worth exploring, that's a decision we will respect. Our hope in these pages is to disentangle the Book from bad experiences with religion and church, and we freely admit these experiences are real and to be lamented. If you are game, we believe you might find the Bible is not what you expected but everything you need.

WHAT ABOUT US?

You may be wondering, “Who are these writers and why should I consider their perspective?” To start, we have a confession to make: we are biased. We are both millennials. We’ve both grown up around the Bible like we grew up with the Olsen twins. That doesn’t mean we have always had a perfect relationship with the Book. The older we get, the more we have encountered legitimate arguments to chuck deuces to the Bible. Maybe you can relate. Between experiences with Christians who give this Book a bad name, personal experiences that raise doubt, compelling critical arguments, and a culture that pushes against many of the Bible’s core tenets, it is difficult to understand why this Book should matter and how it is relevant to our lives. Yet despite the criticism the Book receives, we are pulled back in, like a Taylor Swift song you cannot stop humming. With all of its complexity, the Book holds wisdom we cannot escape. And it makes truth claims we are unable to ignore. Our hope is that you will be open-minded and committed to exploring the Bible with fresh eyes. We’re not here to coerce you to share our convictions. We simply want to invite you to come and see for yourself.

Here’s the thing: we are a little uncomfortable exposing our Bible loyalties before we have much of a relationship with you. The reason has nothing to do with the Book itself. If the Bible is all it claims to be, it can take all our criticism. The reason we hesitate to give a defense of the Bible is probably the same reason you are skeptical about reading the Book yourself. It has little to do with the words on the pages. The reality is, the Bible has been misused for centuries. Because it is considered a source of encouragement and advice, it has been used as a weapon to manipulate and abuse vulnerable people searching for hope.

Who We Are

We know we are not alone in our generation. Most of us share a complicated relationship with the Bible.

As of this writing, Lauren and I have recently crossed the threshold from our twenties into the big three-zero. We are millennials who have come of age in an era of unprecedented technological and cultural change. We share with many of you generation-defining milestones and events. Our lives have been shaped by social media, informed by the internet, marred by divorce, and impacted by religion. We are millennials writing to millennials (born 1980–1995) and our younger siblings, generation Z (born 1996–2010), as well as anyone who cares about the future of these generations and their engagement with Scripture.

That said, we know that every generation instinctively resists being branded and lumped in with others simply because of the year in which they were born. Just last week, our friend Phillip, from an older generation, asked if we could explain to him the millennials' obsession with avocado toast. We were appalled. Avocado toast is not a millennial trend, it is just tasty! Not even a week later, we were sitting at a table in a trendy coffee and brunch spot. We each took a few bites of our delicious, avocado-smothered toast before we realized the irony. Michael took an obligatory selfie and texted it to our friend. We were caught being millennials.

We've been teased by our parents for taking selfies, but once they learned how to take them, they behaved no differently. We've been judged for our hypersensitivity to FOMO, yet just like every generation, we value getting the most out of life. And we are laughed at for wanting craft coffee, but that is only until the laughers recognize that Starbucks coffee is a burnt disaster. While we appreciate the humor in all this, we also

Are We Missing Out?

know what it's like to be stereotyped in more consequential ways because of our age. Like you, we have had to grapple with generational prejudice and miscommunication. Neither of us want to contribute to a judgmental conversation or add to the negative stereotyping of our generation. Every day we witness, in the lives and struggles of our friends and contemporaries, traits that inspire us to change the world for the better and encourage us to believe we can.

This book isn't just about the largest generation on earth today. It's also about the most influential Book in history and how the two collide. And that's where things start to get interesting.

Since 2013, we have traveled the country, speaking on behalf of the Museum of the Bible. I (Lauren) was one of the first employees of the museum. My dad, Steve Green, is founder and board chairman of the museum. When the idea for the museum was being formulated, I was completing my undergraduate degree and looking for a job. I was lucky enough to have my dad hire me for my first full-time gig, and I helped out as a curator for the newly formed museum collection.

It is not just Lauren whose career has centered on the Bible. I (Michael) showed up to my first-grade class on career day wearing a blazer and carrying a Bible. I boldly declared amid a sea of my peers wearing Michael Jordan jerseys that I would grow up not to become a professional athlete but to be a preacher. Since high school, I have held a paid job at a church in some capacity. Even now, while working full-time at Museum of the Bible, I remain a teaching pastor at the same church where I met Lauren when we were seven years old.

After a few years of both of us working at Museum of the Bible in separate departments, there was an opportunity for us to work together on a new awareness campaign. The museum

Who We Are

was within a year of opening in Washington, D.C., and it was time to share the news and invite people to support the mission. We were thrilled at the opportunity to serve the museum in this way and work more closely together in the process. The new role meant we were traveling to a new city almost weekly. We were speaking at events, setting up booths at conferences, and sharing with communities this vision to invite all people to engage with the Bible through the museum.

During that time, we met fellow millennials and heard their stories and discovered that our generation typically falls into three camps when it comes to Bible engagement. The first group is what we will call *Bible-readers*, people who as a result of heritage or conversion hold the Bible in high regard and interact with it frequently. They are interested in the Bible to the point of reading the Bible. As you may have gathered by now, Michael and I are firmly in this first group. We met in Sunday school as children, led Bible studies as early as high school, and have read countless books about the Bible, underlined and highlighted to prove it. Don't get us wrong, we are total hypocrites most days, but we are committed to the importance of the Bible in our lives and attempt to read it daily.

While some of you might be astonished to learn that anyone in our generation would live this way—perhaps you are ready to set this book down or use it for your next campfire—we know there are a lot of you who are exactly like us. We may be a minority in our generation, but there is a quiet, flourishing remnant of twenty- and thirtysomethings loyal to the Bible and the historic Christian faith. According to the latest research, 27 percent of all millennials read the Bible at least once every week.²

Whether or not you are in this group, you may be surprised that so many twenty- to thirty-somethings read the Bible so

Are We Missing Out?

frequently. This is not even counting the millennials who read less frequently but want to read the Bible more. There is a significant minority of millennials who are Bible readers. Yes, we are outliers in this sense. We have more Bibles than we have video games. We read books about the Bible more often than we attend great concerts. We have dedicated our lives to the story hidden in the pages of this book, even to the point of sacrificing nights and weekends to pursue doctoral degrees—centered on the importance of this ancient Book—and to writing the book you are reading now. We are obsessed with the Bible’s amazing story. And we think that if you had a fresh perspective, you might catch a glimpse of its wonder as well.

The second group we call *Bible-open*. These are millennials who were perhaps raised around church or are familiar with Christianity and the Bible but currently have little to no interaction with the Bible. Many of our friends are in this second group, so we get why some might disengage from the Bible. There is so much we love about this group! They represent the vast majority of our generation and have a positive or at least neutral view of the Bible.³ Nearly two out of three millennials believe the Bible was written by God. Nearly three out of four millennials consider the Bible a holy book, and 56 percent of us agree that the Bible contains everything you need to lead a meaningful life.⁴ But familiarity can lull us to sleep, like Jigglypuff on *Super Smash Bros.*, which only sets us up to be home run smashed off the screen.

The third and final group we refer to as *Bible-closed*. This group is no longer open to considering whether the Bible is a transcendent, divine word to humankind. Some have read the Bible and dismissed it. However, from our experience the vast majority of this group has dismissed the Bible based on the

information provided to them from others and have not read the Bible to consider its claims for themselves. They may claim to be atheists, agnostics, spiritual, adherents of another religion, or one of the growing number of “nones” who have opted out of religious identification altogether.

It is our hope that this book will inspire conversation between members of these three groups and encourage individuals to ask questions about their interactions with the Bible.

Both of us grew up in the church, were raised by Christian parents, became Christians at an early age, and now work in Christian contexts. No book has had a greater impact on our lives than the Bible. Some of you, like us, have had similar experiences with the Bible. But we realize that to a certain extent we are outliers in our generation because we have wrestled with our doubts about the Bible and Christianity while continuing to read the Bible. Many of you read about our experience and cannot relate. The Barna Group found that in 2016, Millennials (11 percent) are half as likely as Elders (25 percent) to be Bible engaged and twice as likely to be Bible skeptics (26 percent vs. 13 percent).⁵ And because they read less than previous generations, teens are even less likely to be Bible engaged (7 percent).⁶

Let’s face it: for most people, the Bible is at best a curiosity, at worst a weapon of manipulation. Some of you may have little experience with the Bible, and aside from laughing at the farting preacher on YouTube or that time you accidentally started a conversation with a missionary, you may never have even read a verse or heard a line of biblical text.

We get it. There are fair reasons to be skeptical about the notion that the Bible is more than you think. The Bible is a difficult book to read. We are talking about a book that is not just vintage but *ancient*. People have been studying it for centuries

Are We Missing Out?

and still struggle to understand some of its meaning. It was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic by various authors, from diverse contexts and backgrounds, over hundreds of years. It is a sacred text to many and a dangerous text to some. But both of us have witnessed firsthand its impact for good and firmly believe that when the Bible has been properly applied to life, it makes the world a better place. Not only has it changed the world in the past; the Bible has the power to transform our modern world as well.

But the Bible's greatest impact that we have experienced has been personal, not cultural. The Bible has shaped the world and transformed not merely life itself but billions of individual lives. It impacts people and cultures on every continent. And it has impacted our lives in countless ways we will share throughout this book. The Bible is a record of the story of human history that gives it a timeless influence on all of humanity. However, not every generation relates to its importance in the same way.

Every faith and philosophy reaches for an understanding of the mystery of God. Christianity is different: it's a faith in which God reached out to humankind. He still does. God came to us in the person of Jesus and through the testimony of his life and work found in the Bible, a work that continues to touch and shape and encourage people every moment of every day.

The Bible is a personal story set on a universal stage. While it was written in a different time and in a different language, God gave us this timeless message to speak to our story in our day. The Bible not only is set apart as a compelling tale but also claims to be *the* story about everything. Including you and me.

Let's get something straight from the start: this book is more about our questions than our answers. We are there with you,

Who We Are

exploring and wrestling and discovering together the value of the Bible and what it might mean for your life and our lives. We are not put off by your objections and doubts. We share some as well, and throughout this book we will tell you how we've wrestled with them. But in the midst of legitimate uncertainty about the Bible, we have discovered it to be a dazzling oasis of beauty and wisdom. We are grateful for our experiences and history with the Bible, but we recognize that many young people with the same experiences and histories walk away from the Bible and never look back. What we want to know is why. Why have so many millennials raised within Christianity turned away from viewing the Bible as authoritative and necessary? And recognizing that this is the case, what appeal can be made to our generation to invite them to reconsider the Bible?

I (Lauren) have felt the pull at various stages of my life to either be engaged with the Bible or ignore it. When I was young, it was easy to believe the Bible for what it claims to be—God's Word. But as I got older, I had my doubts. As a high school student, I sometimes felt that following the Bible meant living a life that was less fun for a life that was moral. Was that what I wanted? Then as I entered my twenties and faced greater hardships, I had to wonder whether God really cared. Why would he let me and those I loved experience the heartbreak of broken trust, caused by someone closest to me? Or why would the God of the Bible allow some of my deepest longings to go unfulfilled? When I moved out of my parents' home, I found that many people were willing to challenge the assumptions I had held—from professors to colleagues who were textual critics who cast doubt on the Bible's validity.

I remember, one day at work, leading a meeting with a number of brilliant scholars we had partnered with. Four of

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them had traveled to our office, while a few more were joining from various countries via videoconference. The group was meeting to discuss different aspects of research projects concerning biblical texts that were going on around the world, and my team was helping to manage logistics for these projects.

I was in my midtwenties, and I recall looking around the room and realizing that each of these colleagues had a PhD and spoke multiple languages and that many of them knew the languages that the biblical texts were written in. I was exposed to conversations and questions about the Bible's history and narrative that I had never encountered before. Seeing new, complex, and even difficult facets of a Book I had known my whole life created questions about the Bible I hadn't considered before. Believing in the Bible was no longer as easy as naively agreeing with whatever my trustworthy authority figures—mainly my parents and Sunday school teachers—were telling me.

Maybe you've also felt the Bible's foundations shaking beneath you, or maybe you've never found yourself truly Bible engaged to begin with. While my doubts were centered on the text that I had been engaged with for years, many millennials come to their doubts from a different perspective.

Among the Bible-open and Bible-closed, we have found some common objections to engaging with the Bible and believing it matters. These objections typically fall into two categories: cultural perception and personal experiences. Many people are wary of engaging with the Bible because they feel the culture at large has a negative perception of it; the Bible is viewed as being intolerant, outdated, and out of step with American cultural norms. To read the Bible or to live your life by it would mean pitting yourself against culture and isolating yourself from the mainstream.

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Others are hesitant to engage with the Bible because their experiences with religion have been less than stellar. They grew up in a religious household or in the Bible Belt, and because of something a parent, a pastor, or a community said or did, they want nothing to do with the source of that old-time religion, the Bible.

It was with these questions and objections in mind that we felt led to write *Not What You Think*. This book is divided into four sections and twelve chapters. In the first section, we want to look at who we millennials are. In chapter 2, we will focus on the traits that characterize our generation—the good, the bad, and the misunderstood. In chapter 3, we will set the stage for the conversation by looking at our generation’s struggle with defining truth and at the Bible’s claim that it is truth, which together create a collision between millennials and the Bible. And in chapter 4, we will see how to view both the story of the Bible and our connection with this story. It is in this section that we look at what makes our generation unique and why that matters for understanding the Bible.

Part 2 is devoted to tackling the problem of cultural perception; this section is called “Where We Are From: The Bible and History.” In chapter 5, having defined millennials, we now want to look at our history, how our views of and engagement with the Bible differ from those of past generations. Chapters 6 and 7 are focused on the impact that the Bible has had on culture and what makes its impact unique.

In part 3, we focus on personal experience. This is the millennial mind on the Bible. In chapter 8, we look at the importance of reading in general and find great encouragement in the reading habits of our fellow millennials. Chapters 9 and 10 delve into the personal nature of the story and message of the Bible and its impact on our spiritual development.

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Finally, part 4 provides suggestions on how to begin a journey of Bible engagement. Chapter 11 answers the question, How do we read the Bible? Then we end with chapter 12, which issues a challenge to our generation. In our experience, we have found that if we millennials are who we claim we are, then we will be open-minded in this exploration of the most influential book of all time.

As millennials, we are all about clarity and transparency. We (Michael and Lauren) are not gurus, elite academics, or pundits. We are simply trying to ask questions, seek answers, and spur conversation. So here are some clarifications about what this book is and what it is not, which we hope will help you as you consider whether to continue with us on our journey of discovery.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS

- This book is an honest attempt by two millennials to tackle a controversial issue with sensitivity and kindness.
- This is a book written by two millennials for millennials and our generation Z siblings and those interested in knowing our generation and its relationship with the Bible.
- This book assesses where our generation is in reference to the Bible, and how we are similar to and different from previous generations.
- We hope to commend the Bible to millennials and gen Z and to challenge our generation to put its skepticism aside and give the Bible an opportunity to stand under scrutiny.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

- This book is not a how-to guide for reading the Bible, though we offer some helpful starting points and guides throughout the book. There are better books on that topic, and at the end of this book you will find a few listed. While reading books about the Bible is a *good* use of time, reading the Bible is a *great* use of time. We hope that no one neglects reading the Bible for the sake of visiting other people's thoughts on the Bible. Instead spend some quality time with the Good Book yourself!
- This is not a cross-generational rant about millennials. We are you! We are part of this generation. YouTube is full of TED talks and Facebook is covered with posts of interviews and lectures by members of other generations critical of millennials and our future. Unlike many, we have great hope for our generation, excitement about our potential, and confidence in the work we are already doing.
- Finally, this book is not an answer to all your questions about the Bible or a rebuttal to every argument you have ever heard that might cause you to be skeptical about the Bible. Rather this book is a challenge to you to have the kind of open mind that our generation is known for and to apply that mind to investigating the Bible's claims.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS A MILLENNIAL? THE FIVE I'S

This is your life. Are you who you want to be?

—JON FOREMAN, SWITCHFOOT

Gene Kranz was in turmoil. He stood in a room filled with rows of sophisticated computer consoles, operated by a group of the nation's most brilliant minds, and was sweating bullets over the possibility of losing three astronauts during the Apollo 13 mission. Kranz oversaw NASA's mission control center in Houston, Texas. After four days of pressure, an amazing feat of human ingenuity and massive computing power brought those three crewmen home alive. You know what's even more amazing? You have more computing power in your pocket than Kranz had in his mission control room. Technology has advanced so quickly in our lifetime that it has impacted many aspects of the millennial generation.

No technology in the past five centuries has shaped our world more than the internet. We (Michael and Lauren) have experienced two generation-defining moments that shaped our conception of who we are, as millennials, in this culture. Both of them centered on the internet, and both occurred in college. The first was purchasing our first iPhones. These small, sleek, simple, and powerful devices opened up a world of connectivity. The iPhone changed the way we communicated with each other as a dating couple in college and the way we related to the wider world around us.

The second generation-defining moment was when we received our college email accounts, for then we could finally register for an account on Facebook. Although we had been active on Xanga and had given Myspace a chance, Facebook

Not What You Think

Why the Bible Might Be Nothing We Expected Yet Everything We Need

By Michael & Lauren McAfee

So, you're skeptical about the Bible . . . well guess what: you're not alone.

The Bible is seen by many contemporary readers as intolerant, outdated, out of step with societal norms at best, and a tool of oppression at worst. In this earnest and illuminating read, millennial thought leaders and aspiring theologians Michael and Lauren McAfee are here to say: fair enough. But they're also here to raise a few questions of their own: What if we cleared the deck on our preconceptions of this book and encountered it anew? What if we came with the understanding that our questions are welcome? And what if these pages presented less of a system to figure out, and more of a story to step into — a story with more surprising plot twists than we might think?

Not What You Think not only blows the dust off dated misperceptions of this ancient book, it engages the problems of this book head-on — the parts that make modern readers squeamish, skeptical, and uncertain. Join Michael and Lauren as they explore the nature of the Bible — an ancient mosaic of story, literature, history, and poetry — and what it means for this generation and its relationship with God. Ultimately, *Not What You Think* is an invitation to come and see, and be surprised.

Available at major retailers including:

