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NOT A HOPELESS CASE

6 VITAL QUESTIONS
FROM YOUNG ADULTS
FOR A CHURCH IN CRISIS

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE

Not a Hopeless Case

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Names and identifying characteristics of some individuals have been changed to preserve their privacy.

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THE WHAT

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Is it easy for you to ask questions? Why or why not?
2. Are there some settings in which it is easier to ask questions than others? If so, which ones and why?
3. Are you encouraged or discouraged to ask questions in your home or faith community?
4. If you are able to freely ask questions in your home or faith community, what does that tell you about the person willing to engage your questions?
5. When you receive answers to your questions, how well do you receive them?
6. If you are not able to freely ask questions in your home or faith community, how does that make you feel about those around you?
7. The answer to almost any question we can ask is at our fingertips through our phones, iPads, and computers. What are some questions you have that Google cannot answer? How important is it to your faith that they be answered?
8. What steps can we take in our faith communities to better understand the questions posed by young adults who are Christians?
9. What steps can we take in our faith communities to better understand the questions posed by young adults who are not Christians?

10. What kind of situation is best for tackling different questions (e.g., during a forum, in a discussion group, over a meal at a church member's home)? Why do you prefer this type of setting?

TWO

THE HOW

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why do you think so many atheists and agnostics were willing to discuss God and Christianity?
2. What surprised you most about what the focus group said?
3. Have you ever personally asked the questions they posed? If so, how did you resolve them and what was left unresolved?
4. Why do you think they despised Christianity as a whole, but when asked to describe Christians they knew, they described them in glowing terms?
5. What are the most important things we should do to repair the reputation of the church?
6. In what other ways or places do young adults seek spirituality apart from the church?
7. Do you think there is a community for unbelief? Why or why not?
8. What do you think of the group's advice on how to raise a child who will not depart from the faith?
9. Should Christians be involved in politics? If so, to what extent? If not, why not?
10. How could the gospel comfort the participant who said, "And also, we're not the center of the universe; we're actually really far off to a side. I mean, we're actually less than a speck of dust"?

THREE

THE WHO

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What cultural factors or world events do you think are driving the rise of the Nones?
2. Should the fact that the Nones were identified first in 1968, not in 2011, change the way we think about this group? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree that Nones are a weather vane that is showing us the direction the nation is headed? Why or why not?
4. If you are a believer, are there any beliefs you share with the Nones (e.g., the church is too political, etc.)? If so, which ones and why?
5. In what ways do you think the environment you grew up in shaped who you are today?
6. What factors (such as your culture, family, or faith) do you think most impacted who you are today?
7. Which events of the first two decades of the twenty-first century have influenced you the most? Why? How did these events influence you?
8. In what ways are you similar to your generational cohort? In what ways are you different?
9. What effect do you think “growing up in a pause” might have had on the development and coming of age of the eldest Nones?
10. What tools have you found most useful in helping you apply Scripture to your culture or life circumstances?

FOUR

THE WHEN

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. How do you think the tribe of Issachar's identity as laborers and scholars informed their ability to discern the times and know what Israel should do?
2. Which of the five approaches to Christ and culture outlined by Niebuhr do you identify with most? Why?
3. Are there other approaches you have read of or studied that might align more closely with your views? Which ones?
4. What do you think are the top three aspects of our culture that demand Christian rejection? Why?
5. What do you think are the three aspects that most need Christian transformation?
6. In what other ways do you think the instant gratification brought about by technology is damaging to our character?
7. Do you agree that technology has widened the divide between younger and older generations? Why or why not?
8. What are the possible ramifications of a growing lack of empathy on interpersonal relationships? On society as a whole?
9. What are other "morally neutral" aspects of culture that Christians should thoughtfully consider?

10. What habits does one need to put in place to offset the potential damaging effects of technology? Why is it so difficult to put these changes in place?

QUESTION 1

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What do you think are the main drivers of loneliness in Western society?
2. Are you surprised by the statistics on loneliness? Why or why not?
3. How do you think social media undermines our ability to forge real friendships?
4. How can we keep social media from affecting real-life friendships?
5. How do you think the hypersexual nature of our culture undermines our ability to forge real friendships?
6. How can we counteract the hypersexual nature of our culture, and all its detrimental effects, in our personal lives?
7. How do you feel when someone remembers your name or important details about you?
8. What changes could your church put in place to ensure more people are noticed and remembered? What can you personally do?
9. Young adults expressed a desire for churches to be “caring but not creepy”—in other words, a balance between remembering them and not being overbearing. What can your church do to strike that balance? What about you personally?
10. Do you believe that belonging is a core desire of all humans? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE 1

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Have you ever experienced feeling like an outsider, unable to break into a specific community? How would you describe that emotion?
2. What about the circumstances made you feel like an outsider?
3. Have you ever experienced feeling welcomed into a community? If so, how was that experience different from feeling like an outsider?
4. In what ways do you think the Christian faith compels us to welcome others?
5. Do you personally agree more with the Roman method of evangelism (believing before belonging) or the Celtic way of evangelism (belonging before believing)? Why?
6. What events draw young adults in your area? How can you or your church utilize these interests to engage them?
7. How important is hospitality to you or your church?
8. In what ways do you think you or your church could improve in the area of hospitality?
9. How important to you is it that others at your church know your name or something about you?
10. Do you think it is the responsibility of the congregation to remember and welcome others? Why or why not?

SEVEN

QUESTION 2

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why do you think suicide is on the rise among young adults today?
2. What do you think of the term *snowflake*? If you are a young adult, have you been called this? How did that make you feel? If you are not a young adult, have you ever thought of young adults in this way? Why?
3. Do you think young adults are less resilient than previous generations? Why or why not?
4. How would you resolve the conflict posed by social anxiety—the desire for intimacy but the simultaneous anxiety about being in social situations?
5. Why do you think young adults are hesitant to speak about mental health issues with older generations?
6. If you are part of a faith community, have you experienced people wearing “masks” at church? If so, how does that make you feel? If not, what is different about your faith community?
7. Do you agree with researcher Taylor Miskel that “vulnerability and love without shame is desperately wanted and needed for millennials to feel connected into a group or the church”? Why or why not?
8. Do you agree that purity culture stokes shame? Why or why not?

9. Why do you think vulnerability is so important to young adults?
10. Do you think nihilism, the idea that life is meaningless, is on the rise?
Why or why not?

CHALLENGE 2

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. There are many ways to escape, ways we can check out of our lives—drugs, food, even Netflix. What are some of the ways you have tried to escape?
2. What is the core temptation of the desire to seek oblivion?
3. Have you ever dealt with shame about your past? How did you cope with it?
4. What do the Scriptures say about shame? Why can it be so hard to let go of shame?
5. How can Matthew's joy over Jesus' acceptance inform us about how to let go of shame?
6. What are some practical ways your church can make space for people to be vulnerable about their lives?
7. Where are there opportunities for young adults to be useful in your faith community?
8. Does it surprise you to know that young adults in our study craved the input of their elders? Why or why not?
9. Do you think mentors are hard to find? Why or why not?
10. How can leaders balance authenticity/vulnerability with modeling the way of Christ?

QUESTION 3

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What do you think of the practice of grouping people at church according to age? What are the benefits and drawbacks?
2. How important is it to you to feel known at the church you attend?
3. What are some ways you think churches can help young adults feel known?
4. Should churches strive to create groups for every life stage and every potential circumstance (e.g., singles, divorced, etc.)? Why or why not?
5. If churches do not have the staff or volunteers to create such groups, what are other ways they can help people feel included and welcome?
6. What do you think of Timothy Paul Jones's opinion that churches should focus on training parents to disciple their own children? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks?
7. Why do you think intergenerational worship seems to be highly correlated to the faith development of young adults?
8. Why do you think it is difficult for churches to balance providing space for young adults and integrating them into the greater church body?

9. Does your church have a “greet your neighbor” period? What do you think of this practice?
10. Why do you think young adults might feel left out simply because the pastor never references the existence of young adult groups?

CHALLENGE 3

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What is the danger in pastors assuming a certain group of people is not in their church's neighborhood or not going to come to their church?
2. How is *acedia* different from "laziness"? How is it different from "sloth"?
3. How can a person who struggles with *acedia* also seem to be extremely busy?
4. Have you ever struggled with *acedia*? If so, did you manage to overcome it? How?
5. Why is it important to overcome a fear of failure?
6. How can the Scriptures help us overcome fear of failure?
7. Why do you think it is important that people who lead young adult groups have the support of senior leaders?
8. Why do you think a lack of this support emerged as such an issue in our research?
9. What are some ways that the congregation can ensure their pastors feel supported?
10. Do you think the tendency for churches to view Sunday service as a performance has a role in pastoral burnout? Why or why not?

QUESTION 4

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What made the disciples appear to be credible witnesses in the first century?
2. What makes the authors of the New Testament and the disciples they wrote about credible witnesses in the twenty-first century?
3. How do you think the recent scandals in both the Catholic and Protestant churches have harmed the credibility of Christians?
4. How does the credibility of Christian leaders affect the sharing of the gospel message?
5. What can churches do to restore the credibility of Christian leaders?
6. How can churches reach out and minister to the needs of those who struggle with "church hurt"?
7. How can churches strive to avoid hurting congregation members?
8. Do you think the purity culture caused too much shame for evangelical Christians? Why or why not?
9. How can we teach biblical sexual ethics without making the mistake of the purity culture?

TWELVE

CHALLENGE 4

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Do you think Bishop Myriel is an aspirational figure that Christian leaders should aspire to? Why or why not?
2. How can the kind of grace demonstrated by Bishop Myriel turn a person's life around?
3. How does the character of Bishop Myriel compare to the leaders at your own church?
4. Why are credible witnesses important?
5. Have uncredible Christian witnesses or leaders caused you pain or confusion? In what way?
6. Are you able to honestly share your fears, failures, and mistakes with trusted people at your local church? Why or why not?
7. Do you agree with the statement, "Instagram influencers and Christian organizations are often in the same business of selling better lives, and that requires a bit to a lot of fakery"? Why or why not?
8. Why is accountability important?
9. How can it help leaders at your church?
10. Do you think it is important for churches to evaluate their disclosure methods, erring on the side of transparency? Why or why not?

THIRTEEN

QUESTION 5

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What do the questions posed by people in the Scriptures teach you about them? About yourself? About God?
2. What questions keep you up at night?
3. In your personal faith journey, do you find it difficult to ask God certain questions? If so, which ones? If not, why not?
4. Do you struggle to *ask* sensitive or controversial questions in real-world settings (i.e., apart from online comments)? Why or why not?
5. Do you struggle to *address* sensitive or controversial questions in real-world settings (i.e., apart from online comments)? Why or why not?
6. What can you do to be more open to asking or addressing controversial topics?
7. What can your faith community do to be more open to asking or addressing controversial topics?
8. How often does your faith community provide forums or opportunities for the congregation to interact with leaders?
9. What are other difficult subjects or topics you think are important to address?
10. Why do you think churches are hesitant to facilitate spaces to address difficult issues?

FOURTEEN

CHALLENGE 5

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What are the “elephants” your church or faith community has yet to address?
2. Why do you think your faith community avoids these particular issues?
3. Of the four common reasons young adults believe churches do not address controversial issues (avoidance, fear, lack of support from senior leaders, lack of forum), which is most problematic in your faith community? Why?
4. What do you think of the concept of “brave spaces” instead of “safe spaces”?
5. What are the benefits of reframing hard conversations this way? The drawbacks?
6. What other guidelines do you think might be important for faith communities to follow as they seek to build brave spaces?
7. What does it take for you to feel respected? Why?
8. How difficult would it be for you to enter into meaningful dialogue with someone whose opinions diverge from your own?
9. What else does the church risk by not addressing elephants?

QUESTION 6

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. What are your thoughts about Haynes's commitment to "three or four city blocks"?
2. Do you think it is harder today for Christian leaders to think in those terms? Why or why not?
3. What are your thoughts about the issues young adults found important for the church to address? Are there any you would add or take away? Why?
4. Do you agree with Scot McKnight's comment, "Our deep calling is to love God and to love others or, in the words of Jesus, to love our neighbor as ourselves" and that we should strive to be neighborly and to "expand neighboring into 'faithful presence' in all the spaces we occupy"? Why or why not?
5. What is the relationship between charity and shame?
6. What are your ideas for helping others feel less shame about accepting charity?
7. Have you ever felt shame about receiving charity?
8. How do you feel when participating in giving?
9. How can listening alleviate shame?

CHALLENGE 6

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

1. Do you think it is the responsibility of wealthier churches to be aware of the needs of their poorer neighbors? Why or why not?
2. Should churches adopt a missional mindset? Why or why not?
3. What would a missional mindset look like at your church?
4. Do you know about the service opportunities at your church? Why or why not?
5. Are you able to work with your church to serve your local community on a regular basis? Why or why not?
6. What would you need to change in order to increase your volunteerism?
7. What do you think about the gap between the importance young adults put on volunteerism and their actual participation in volunteerism?
8. Why do you think this gap exists?
9. What are some ways that your church can help young adults increase their volunteerism?