

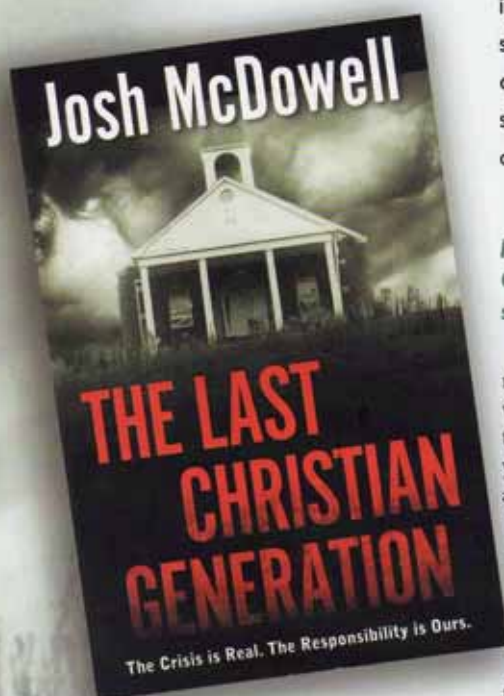


Rebuilding the FOUNDATIONS

An Interview with Josh McDowell



Renowned speaker and author Josh McDowell never intended to be a defender of the Christian faith. In fact, as a skeptic, his goal was just the opposite until he learned that the Bible was the most historically reliable document in all antiquity. His discovery that Christ's claim to divinity was true changed the course of McDowell's life forever. Josh has since spoken to more than ten million youth in 84 countries and on 700 university and college campuses and is convinced they have never needed his message more than now. His new book explores the impact of a cultural view of Christianity that has distorted how our youth understand God.



*I'm reading **The Last Christian Generation**. Isn't the title a little sensational?*

Yes, but with substance. I'm trying to raise the alert level. I'm saying we'd better wake up. I wish to God I never had to write this book, but over the last ten to twelve years I've sensed trends and realized that as a church we are in trouble. This is a definitive statement on the condition of the church and the optimistic solution to it. The problem is not with the kids; it's with their parents and leaders. It's not about North America; it's about the church. In North America we saw the last Christian generation years ago. But now we're

seeing the last Christian generation within the body of Christ.

Still sounds sensational.

It's a crisis. Right now within twelve months of high school graduation over 80 percent of our kids are walking away from the church. If we keep doing what we're doing it will soon be 90 percent. According to Barna 65 percent of our church kids either suspect or believe there is no way to tell which religion is true. In 1994 half of evangelical Christian kids said, "there is no truth apart from myself." Now it is a staggering 91 percent. If there is no truth, then you cannot say that Jesus Christ is *the* Son of God; only that he's *a* son of God. Francis

The Crisis is Real. The Responsibility is Ours.

Schaeffer said that our culture had become post-Christian. I believe now he would say it's become anti-Christian.

You say that only 33 percent of church youth say the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home?

In other generations it's never been lower than 55 percent. If we don't make some drastic changes, once this generation marries and has children they will not return to the church the way the Buster generation has to a certain extent.

What surprised you the most about the statistics in this book?

The effect of relationships upon a child's belief system. It blew my mind.

Why are our young people turning their backs on the church?

They've been raised with programs and events, not with a process-driven ministry where the Word of God was internalized into their lives. We have a lack of relationship with Mom and Dad, with leaders in the church, with significant adults in their lives. What engenders beliefs? It's our relationships. What causes a young person to want to believe your truth and follow it? It's relationships. In Psalm 26:3 David said, "I've been constantly aware of your unfailing love and I have lived according to your truth." If he had not seen that unfailing love, he would not have lived according to the truth. Research shows that parents have a 300 percent greater influence on a child's spiritual or theological belief than their pastor or youth pastor. So a lot of it comes down to the parents. In Psalm 86 David prayed a prayer that every parent in the church would hope their child would pray: "Teach me your ways, Oh Lord that I may live according to your truth." Now what is the motivation for that? David said, "For your love for me is very great." That's why David prayed that prayer. That's why he wanted to believe. Belief in the truth followed the relationships. It's the same today. If kids do not have those relationships at home it will have a direct effect on their belief system.

What are some practical things churches should address to change things?

First, a pastor needs to study books like "The Last Christian Generation" and "Beyond Belief to Conviction." We must understand the condition of the church or our solution will miss the bull's eye. Second, we must realize we're losing our kids, not because they're not hearing truth, but because we're not building relationships with them. Third, we can't raise children programmatically. We've got to raise them with process. There are three dimensions to biblical truths. God is passionate about his relationship with us and a child needs a relationship with the truth giver. Then, is that truth credible? Is it truly true? Young people have to be convinced of that. Third, how does that truth affect me in my experience and relationship with others? Jesus said, "You will know that they are my disciples," not by their convictions, but "by their love for one another." Truth was given to be lived out in relationships but we have failed to show kids how that can happen.

When you look at these things, do you ever get a sense of hopelessness?

Yes, I really do.

When?

When we do a pastors' briefing and the overwhelming majority of pastors sit there and take no notes. If ever there's a time when I just want to throw up my hands and walk away, it's then. My heart goes out to senior pastors. They've got to be everything to everyone and still try and hold their families and marriages together. I do everything I can to inform them what's going on and trust God the Holy Spirit to do his work. My optimistic approach is that if we can get back to teaching truth as a relational process, we will have a revolution.

What advice would you have for parents?

Build a relationship with your kids. God's Word without relationships leads to rejection. Rules without relationships lead to rebellion. You can be the greatest

teacher of truth in the whole world, but if in the depths of their hearts, your kids do not believe that daddy loves them, they're going to walk. You've also got to be able to show that 'truth' is credible. I can hardly ever find anyone including senior pastors who can give me one intelligent reason they believe the Bible is true or historically reliable or why they believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. With your children you'd better be able to explain to them why the Resurrection is true, why the Bible is true and historically accurate, why you can trust it.

What are you hoping this book accomplishes for the kingdom?

I hope God will use it to wake up the church. We're asleep. I want to see a revolution take place that will take us back to a biblical paradigm of truth where pastors and parents will start teaching relationally. If we do that I guarantee we will see a change.

I asked you sixteen years ago what you would like to be remembered for. Has that changed?

I still want to be remembered most of all as a man who loved his wife and spent time with his children and lived out his faith. Then I pray that I've been able to influence an entire generation toward truth. I want my legacy to be people. Out of people will come organizations, buildings, programs, process. I don't want to leave buildings. I'm not concerned about leaving a big legacy. I'm concerned about being faithful. If I can challenge others to love the Lord with all their heart, mind and soul, my life is complete.

by Phil Callaway

Used by permission of Servant magazine, a ministry of Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, Alberta Canada. Artwork courtesy of Green Key Books, Holiday, Florida.