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THE NEXT CHRISTIANS

THE END OF CHRISTIAN AMERICA

READING ASSIGNMENT BEFORE THIS SESSION:

Chapter 1: "A Fading Reality" and **Chapter 2:** "The New Normal" of *The Next Christians* by Gabe Lyons

A CHRISTIAN NATION?

DISCUSS (15 minutes)

ing as a child and/or teenager? If so, what denomination or tradition? What do you remember most about it?			
Spend a few minutes sharing with your group.			

1. What is your religious background? Did you grow up going to church frequently, occasionally, or not at all? Did organized religion play any role in your upbring-

 THE NEXT CHRISTIANS	

- 2. Consider some of the examples and statistics that Gabe shares in *The Next Christians* about the changing ethos of our nation:
 - → The removal of Judeo-Christian symbols, like the Ten Commandments, from public spaces (p. 15)
 - → The influence of atheists like Christopher Hitchens and his best-selling book God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything (p. 16)
 - → A Hindu chaplain leading prayer in the U.S. Senate in 2007 (p. 22)
 - → Fifty-one percent of Protestant teens said they left their childhood religion because their spiritual needs were not being met (pp. 22–23)
 - → Thirty-one percent fewer young people are regular churchgoers today than in the heat of the cultural revolution of the 1970s (p. 23)
 - → In light of this, Gabe concludes that "few will argue that our country as we know it today can still be labeled 'Christian America'" (p. 22)

Do these changes worry you? What challenges do they present for Christians?

SEA CHANGE

WATCH (15 minutes)

View interviews with the following people from *The Next Christians DVD*. Record your thoughts on the following pages.

PHYLLIS TICKLE is founding editor of the Religion Department of *Publishers* Weekly, the international journal of the book industry, and is an authority on religion in America. In addition to lectures and numerous essays, articles, and interviews. Tickle is the author of over two dozen books on religion and spirituality. most recently The Great Emergence and How Christianity Is Changing. She is also the general editor of *The Ancient Practices* series.

LOUIE GIGLIO is the founder of Passion Conferences, a movement dedicated to seeing spiritual awakening come to the college campuses of the nation and the world. He also heads sixstepsrecords and founded Passion City Church, a community of faith in Atlanta, Georgia.

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THOUGH	TS			
REFLECT on vide	eo and following	questions (25 m	inutes)	
•••••				

"I THINK YOU HAVE TO MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA, WHICH IS GROWING, AND CHRISTIAN AMERICA, WHICH CLEARLY IS NOT."

"TO MOURN A FORMER FORM OF EXISTENCE IS NATURAL, BUT SOMETHING NEW IS BEING BORN AMONGST US."

"BECAUSE WE'RE NO LONGER SOCIALLY
ACCEPTABLE OR POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE,
WHEN WE CLAIM OUR CHRISTIANITY AT THE
STREET LEVEL, WE HAVE CREDIBILITY IN A WAY
THAT WE DIDN'T HAVE FOR A WHILE."

"PLURALISM HAS CONSCIOUSLY AND SUBCONSCIOUSLY ERODED ANY SENSE OF A PATH."

"THERE HASN'T BEEN IN RECENT HISTORY
A MORE ENGAGED, CAUSAL GENERATION OF
PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SEE A GOSPEL
THAT IS INTEGRATED INTO CULTURE,
THAT DOESN'T STAND ALONE OR EXIST
SEPARATE FROM CULTURE."

5. Phyllis Tickle made the statement: "You never want to be part of a religion that is socially acceptable or politically acceptable; it's bad for your soul."				
Do you agree with this? Why or why not? In what ways can being part of a religion that is socially or politically acceptable be bad for your soul?				

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6. In <i>The Next Christians</i> , Gabe asserts that American culture is not only be coming pluralistic and post-Christian, but also postmodern: an ethos of skep
cism and suspicion toward authorities that claim absolute certainty (pp. 23-
Would you consider yourself "postmodern"? In what ways are you cynical or
skeptical toward authorities?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

APPLY (20 minutes)

'. In a pluralistic culture where tolerance and religious liberty are championed, now can your own local faith community be influential in your city?					

8. Christians believe that truth can be found in the person of Jesus (John 1 and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). In a postmodern can	-	
and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). In a postmodern converse where people are skeptical toward those who make absolute-truth claims about God or morality, how can you find common ground with non-Christians in your sphere of influence who do not accept your own views about truth?	• •	THE NEXT CHRIST
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Give some specific examples.		
Give some specific examples.		
		Give some specific examples.

O. In a post-Christian culture where Christian beliefs are not explicitly or implictly endorsed by those in power, how can we learn from the early Christians in the irst, second, and third centuries who lived in a similar context? How was their culture similar to ours, and what models do they give us?			

CONCLUDE

Spend every morning this week praying this simple prayer: "God, please open my eyes to the ways that my culture is changing. Help me to empathize with those outside the faith who do not understand our beliefs or convictions. Today, give me the grace to be patient and the wisdom to know how to stay grounded in my convictions while also presenting a gospel-centered worldview that is winsome and credible to my neighbors, friends, coworkers, and peers. Amen."

BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION, READ:

Chapter 3: "A Parody of Ourselves" and

Chapter 4: "Relearning Restoration" of *The Next Christians* by Gabe Lyons

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- → Have an intentional conversation with a non-Christian friend and ask him or her what perceptions he or she has of Christians.
- → Watch one of the *Zeitgeist* films online to get an idea of postmodern skepticism.
- → Read The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries by Rodney Stark.
- → Attend a religious service at a synagogue, mosque, Hindu temple, or with another religious group to learn about other religious ideas that are influencing your culture.