



The Next Christians: Seven Ways You Can Live the Gospel and Restore the World

By Gabe Lyons

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—**Chuck Colson**, founder of *Prison Fellowship*

“Provocative, yet massively optimistic!”

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Gabe Lyons is optimistic that Christianity’s best days are yet to come. His best-selling book, *UnChristian*, revealed the pervasiveness of culture’s growing disregard for Christians. Now, in *The Next Christians*, Lyons shows how a new wave of believers are turning the tide by bringing the truth of the Gospel to bear on our changing, secular society.

“Restorers,” as Lyons calls them, approach culture with a different mentality than generations past. Informed by truth, yet seasoned with grace and love, these believers engage the world by drawing it to the sensibility and authenticity of the Christian life.

You can be one of these “next” Christians and change the negative perception of Christianity by living a life that is faithful to the Gospel, yet credible and coherent to your friends and neighbors.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Next Christians* and Gabe Lyons

“Gabe Lyons leads an important group of younger Christians who are seeking to avoid both the triumphalism as well as the cultural withdrawal of former generations of believers. We all have a long way to go as we think out how Christ relates to culture in our day. As we do so, we would do well to consider many of the significant insights that Gabe offers in this book.”

—Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

“*The Next Christians* is a revolution tightly packaged within a book. As a pastor, it was game changing for me and the people of my church...every person should read it. This is the future!”

—John Ortberg, best-selling author and pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

“Gabe Lyons is one of the brightest young Christian leaders I’ve worked with and mentored. I’ve challenged his thinking; he has challenged mine—as he does again with his latest book, *The Next Christians*. I recommend this book, which will give you great insight into the hopes and aspirations of the next generation of Christian leaders.”

—Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview

“If I had to pick one leader for the next generation for Christians, it would be Gabe Lyons. If I had to pick one chapter from this book, it would be ‘Relearning Restoration.’ If I had to pick one sentence it would be this one: Christ didn’t come only to save us ‘from something. He wanted to save Christians to something.’ Gabe Lyons gets it: restoration is the vision for the Next Christians, and I’m cheering them on.”

—Scot McKnight, New Testament scholar and author of *The Jesus Creed*

“*The Next Christians* is the best book you’ll read this year. Filled with stories of hope and grace, it’s a passionate call to join followers of Jesus everywhere in restoring the faith. You can’t afford to miss it!”

—Margaret Feinberg, author of *Scouting the Divine* and *The Organic God*

“At a time when a central challenge to faith is to be both faithful and fresh, Gabe Lyons’s is a voice I always listen to and benefit from enormously.”

—Os Guinness, cultural historian and author of *The Last Christian on Earth*

“It seems an impossible task: restore a 2,000-year-old religion so that it no longer rejects, no longer chases, but actually leads a modern, pluralistic culture running at the speed of Twitter. Gabe Lyons offers hope for Christianity’s next one hundred years by profiling the next set of Christians transcending this epic challenge. I found his preview of Christian innovators inspiring post-Christian America persuasive and one of the most encouraging views of Christian faith in recent years.”

—Kevin Kelly, cofounder of *Wired* magazine

“*The Next Christians* is a must-read for anyone seeking to engage a broken world with the healing power of the Gospel. Provocative, yet massively optimistic, Gabe Lyons’s message challenges the ‘Christianity vs. Culture’ paradigm of the recent past with the hopeful template of ‘Christ as restorer of humanity,’ worked out through a new breed of Jesus followers, who are unashamedly running into the darkness—broken-yet-

loved ambassadors for the One who makes all things new.”

—**Louie Giglio, pastor of Passion City Church and founder of the Passion Movement**

“What Lyons gives us here, in spades and with proof texts, is the good news about the state of the Good News in tomorrow’s America. Those who have despaired that even the label ‘Christian’ might be tarnished beyond credibility, much less affection and influence, will find a thousand reasons to rejoice here. Chock-full of examples and stories, Lyons’s work also is full of brilliant insights and piercing applications of traditional verbiage to new ways of being in this world.”

—**Phyllis Tickle, founding religion editor, *Publishers Weekly***

“We’re in an important time in Christianity. Leaders are considering the Gospel, its implications, and how we might live faithfully in the world we find ourselves. Gabe Lyons is an important voice in that conversation. In *The Next Christians*, he sets out a vision for Christians making a difference in the world. You should read this book and wrestle with his ideas as we consider together how we might be faithful to the Gospel in today’s world.”

—**Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research; coauthor of *Transformational Church***

“*The Next Christians* is not about rehashing stale debates or reliving the culture wars. It is not about empty ideologies or even about branding a movement—it is about reading the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other and listening to God say, ‘Come change the world with me.’ ”

—**Shane Claiborne, author, activist, and recovering sinner**

“Gabe Lyons articulates a fresh and inspiring vision for bringing Christian faith forward in the new cultural paradigm of 21st-century America. May this become the predominant expression of Christianity for an up-and-coming generation of ‘next Christians’ and those of us who are counting on them.”

—**Tom Krattenmaker, USA Today’s Board of Contributors and author of *Onward Christian Athletes***

“Gabe Lyons is a contemporary innovator who possesses relevant insight and profound foresight relative to Christ, culture, and the next generation of Christians. This must read book will inspire you and guide you to a new place of purposeful passion!”

—**Charles Jenkins, senior pastor, Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church**

“The prophet Isaiah declared that God would do a new thing. In *The Next Christians*, Gabe Lyons frames the narrative of a new Christian movement emerging in our lifetime. While addressing the challenges before us, Gabe presents the facilitative platform for the followers of Jesus to reconcile righteousness with justice under a canopy of compassion and love. This book will challenge us to embrace change as we welcome a fresh move of God’s Spirit.”

—**Sam Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference**

“The Lord has given a great mind and incredible wisdom to Gabe Lyons to be able to speak with such clarity and such understanding of the times. You will be greatly blessed and will desire to turn the next page, only to come to the end and then wish to pass this book along to a good friend so that others can be as informed as you are.”

—**Pastor Johnny Hunt, president of the Southern Baptist Convention**

About the Author

Gabe Lyons is the founder of Q—a learning community that mobilizes Christians to advance the common good in society and co-author of the landmark book, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*. Prior to this, he cofounded Catalyst, the nation’s largest gathering of

young Christian leaders. As a respected voice for a new generation of Christians, he has been featured by CNN, the *New York Times*, *Fox News*, and *USA Today*. Gabe, his wife, Rebekah, and their three children live in New York City.

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Part I

The World Is Changing

One

Shadows of the Past

Seven years ago, I was twenty-seven years old and embarrassed to call myself Christian. This was especially odd because I was raised in a Christian home, graduated from a Christian college, and then served as vice president of a prominent Christian organization. By all accounts, I should have been one of Christianity's biggest fans.

Unfortunately, I began to notice that the perceptions my friends and neighbors had about Christians were incredibly negative. In fact, their past experiences with anything labeled "Christian" had sent them running in the opposite direction. Ironically, I came to empathize with their views. Having grown up in a Christian bubble myself, I witnessed countless instances when the lives of Christ followers were incongruent with Jesus's call to be loving, engaged, sacrificial, unselfish, and compassionate contributors to culture. The angst these experiences created would scare anyone from taking a second look at Jesus.

I was deeply burdened by this trend and about the loss of Christian influence in our culture. So, with just a few months of savings in the bank and our second child on the way, my wife, Rebekah, and I decided I should quit my job and pursue a new vocation. We resolved to launch a nonprofit organization and make our first project the commissioning of research that would help us understand the perceptions that sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds have about Christians.

The study confirmed many of our fears about the negative perceptions I had experienced. An overwhelming percentage of non-Christians sampled said they perceived Christians as judgmental, hypocritical, too political, and antihomosexual, among other things.

In the truest sense, the research revealed what happens when Christians act unchristian. The study was released in a book by the same name. It soon became a bestseller, confirming that our findings resonated with the general public.

But it also exposed something bigger that has been going on. The Christian faith is quickly losing traction in Western culture, not only as a result of unchristian behavior, as significant as that is, but because we haven't recognized our new reality and adapted.

In years since, our nonprofit has convened rising Christian leaders at various locations across America to have conversations about what they see occurring in the Christian movement and how they are uniquely living out their faith. We began to ask important questions about the role Christians should play in society:

What does mission look like in America in the twenty-first century?

How should the message of the Gospel go forward?

What does it mean to be a Christian in a world that is disenchanted with our movement?

Every generation must ask these questions as they seek to confront the unique challenges of their own eras. In modern times, thinkers like Richard Niebuhr, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Os Guinness, and Lesslie Newbigin have reflected on the relationship between Christians and culture in the twentieth century. Even now, a diverse group of future-thinking leaders are offering insight into how the next generation might navigate our current cultural waters.

Research shows that over 76 percent of Americans self-identify as Christian.¹ Yet I wonder how many of us are proud to carry that label. Are we hiding our faith in our back pockets? My guess is that many feel much like I did at twenty-seven when they encounter non-Christians at work, in coffee shops, on campus, in their neighborhoods, at weekend parties, or working out at the gym. You may be dumbfounded that there are 76 percent of "us" and yet little unity in what we collectively represent.

After observing cultural trends, collecting data, and having hundreds of conversations with Christian leaders, I see a new way forward. There is a whole movement of Christians-evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Orthodox, Pentecostals, and others-asking these same questions and offering meaningful answers. They want to be a force for restoration in a broken world even as we proclaim the Christian Gospel. They want the label Christian to mean something good, intelligent, authentic, true, and beautiful.

During a gathering convened by our nonprofit, I was offered a rare invitation to visit the home of Billy Graham in nearby Montreat, North Carolina. Typically, it's best to keep an experience like that to yourself, where its magnitude will never tarnish, but I feel compelled to share it with you here because of the significance of what took place.

The slow ascent up the winding mountain driveway in Montreat mirrored my rising anticipation. Going to meet with this great evangelist in his storied log cabin home nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains didn't feel real-I was rapt with expectation.

The leaves were changing color and produced a kaleidoscope of hues-from green to brown, yellow, orange, and red-on the surrounding mountain faces. After passing through the entry gate protecting his mountaintop home, we were greeted by an older woman, a caretaker of sorts. That day, she had taken it upon herself to care for us as well. Her kind but weathered hands served up one of my favorites-chocolate chip cookies and an old-fashioned bottle of Coke. It felt surprisingly warm and hospitable, like a weekend trip to Grandma's house.

While waiting to be led back to Mr. Graham's study on this crisp autumn day in September, we sat in old rocking chairs on the back porch. (I later learned these chairs had been gifts from President Lyndon Johnson from his ranch in Texas.)

Taking in the picturesque view, I could understand why Montreat had been the place this man chose to call home for more than fifty years. The quiet, pastoral scene was splendid. With no other man-made structure in sight, it was an ideal place of respite for the family of a world figure. The simplicity of his log cabin, meadowlike backyard, well-worn antique furniture, and pictures of family and friends playing together gave me a glimpse into this beloved saint's humanity.

I couldn't help considering the countless accolades assigned to his life. He had audience with the world's most powerful leaders, providing spiritual counsel to seven U.S. presidents. His generous tone and compelling life have marked everyone who's known him. He shaped our world very personally by leading tens of millions of everyday people to Christ. Having traveled the world many times over, the eighty-nine-year-old evangelist had witnessed what God was up to in the world. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to converse with one of the most sought-after, respected, and revered leaders of the twentieth century. Our time together didn't disappoint.

As we walked back to his study, his companions-five dogs that kept him company day and night-greeted us. Though his body was undeniably old, his mind was sharp. Hearing had become a chore for him, so we raised our voices to introduce ourselves. I sat down in front of Mr. Graham in a chair whose previous occupants included world leaders, famous entertainers, and-just two weeks prior-a presidential candidate hoping to gain his support.

I came prepared to learn. I had no intention of saying much, planning instead to glean his wisdom. For what must have been thirty minutes or so, I quietly listened until I finally gained the courage to speak.

I carefully explained our work to educate and expose church and cultural leaders to the changes in our world, and more important, what opportunities lay ahead. Mr. Graham seemed genuinely curious to hear about what we do. I continued by telling him about some of the leaders our organization convened regularly, innovators within every sphere of society. From the arts to medicine and education, I explained that they were young and the best at what they did. I described how these leaders were leveraging their talent for the benefit of others-creating microfinance banks that were lending hundreds of millions of dollars to the poor, building wells throughout the third world, developing media campaigns to increase awareness about adoption, and so forth-and were serious about restoring culture. I had a hunch that these remarkably likeminded individuals were the next wave of Christians in the world, but I wanted to know if he agreed.

He reflected on everything I had been sharing with him before a smile walked the sides of his face. "Back when we did these big, large crusades in football stadiums and arenas, the Holy Spirit was really moving-and people were coming to Christ by hearing the Word of God preached," the evangelist said. "But today, I sense something different is happening. I see evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in a new way. He's moving through people where they work and through one-on-one relationships to accomplish great things. They are demonstrating God's love to those around them, not just with words, but in deed."

As he spoke, something began to crystallize inside me. It was as if all the observations I'd collected over a decade were being summed up in the sage words of this iconic figure. He had seen the best of what twentieth-century Christianity had to offer, yet was in tune with something new.

I left Montreat with a quiet confidence that day-not only because I had been in the presence of a great and godly man, but also because he had confirmed in succinct terms the things I'd been observing. Reflecting on his words challenged me to continue cultivating this mind-set throughout the body of believers across our developing landscape.

Not long after my conversation with Graham, Rebekah and I celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary with a trip to Europe. Since it was the off season, we were braced for the wet, dreary weather typical of London and Paris at that time of year. However, to our amazement, the region experienced a run of the warmest days on their calendar in a century. Instead of being wet, bundled up, and longing for the warmth of the cozy Hôtel

du Louvre, we enjoyed long walks in the cool breeze-wearing sweaters and scarves, leaving the coats behind. It was enchanting. The architecture, museums, and cafés were brimming with energy. Experiencing millennium-old culture that was still full of life refreshed my soul.

One portion of our travels that I was particularly excited about was our rail trip from London to Paris on the famed EuroStar. I had read about its top speeds of 190 miles per hour as it glides under the English Channel and through the French countryside en route to Paris's Gare du Nord. When we boarded the train, I knew we were in for a great experience.

As I leaned back in my seat, the headrest curved perfectly around my neck-like an apparatus designed for intense flight, somehow befitting such a modernized tour of these storied countries. The ride across Britain was routine and somewhat metropolitan. Then as the train entered the Channel Tunnel, it picked up speed. The blur of lights gave the impression of flying through space. By the time we emerged in France, I felt transported. Leaning back in my seat, I stared out at the countryside as it sped past me like an abbreviated survey of French history. I'd flown over this landscape at high speed before, but never through it.

The foreground was an imperceptible blur of vegetation broken only by the occasional buildings and bridges. My eyes were drawn to the horizon as a steady succession of towns and villages rose into view along the way. We passed through Calais, then Lille, as we made our way toward Paris.

A pattern seemed to be emerging. In each community I saw a town center surrounded by trees and an occasional cottage. And at the heart of every town I could see a church steeple appear among the treetops and above the storefronts. It was consistent with what I knew of ancient urban architecture, that the steeple was designed to be the tallest structure in a city, representing the sacred belief that the church should be the closest point between heaven and earth, God and humanity.

Miles apart, those communities now seemed lined up almost side by side, as if to make a collective statement for my observation: The church used to occupy the center of culture in the West. For a brief moment, I reminisced about what once was. Not too long ago, children would frequent their church for much-needed education and moral training. In this prime location, new families were welcomed to town and volunteer needs were addressed before singing and prayer meetings would resume. Houses of worship were also places of great artistic and musical innovation. Many of history's greatest creative minds birthed their monolithic works within these hallowed confines.

Indeed, where the church in Europe once held a place of significant influence, by the end of the twentieth century it was almost completely irrelevant.² Even the design of their communities bore evidence to it. The steeples that once stood for spiritual enlightenment have been reduced to minor tourist attractions. They better serve the needs of visiting amateur photographers than the lost souls of the people in their own communities.

Some culture watchers say that when we survey the contours of Europe's religious landscape, we are staring America's future in the face. While there is no way to verify these predictions, from my experience and all the evidence I've collected surrounding the church and citizens of our country, America isn't far behind.

What began as a creeping intuition that led me to launch a new organization had become a nagging reality that significant changes were under way. My trip to Europe and Montreat seemed to represent the two ends of our current situation. In Montreat, I met with a vanguard from Christianity's past who recognizes how the faith is presently shifting. In Europe, I seemingly caught a glimpse of America's more secular future. Positioned between these poles was the empirical research we had commissioned and the hundreds of

conversations with a new generation of Christian leaders. Each situation echoed the sentiment that many Christians have lost confidence in their faith. Our movement, as a whole, was quickly declining in the West.

I believe this moment is unlike any other time in history. Its uniqueness demands an original response. If we fail to offer a different way forward, we risk losing entire generations to apathy and cynicism. Our friends will continue to drift away, meeting their need for spiritual transcendence through other forms of worship and communities of faith that may be less true but more authentic and appealing.

Maybe you know someone like my friend Dan. He grew up around the church and considers himself a Christian. At the age of thirty-four, he finds himself at the center of huge international business deals. Dan's a rainmaker type, and when his complex transactions are successful, they can raise the GDP of entire nations! But as we were catching up on our lives that day, he dropped a bomb on me. He said, "I hope this won't shock you, but I don't call myself a Christian anymore. I follow Christ as faithfully as I can, but I don't ever want to be associated with what that word, or that 'brand,' has come to represent in the world."

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From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Margaret Wright:

Now a day people who Living in the era wherever everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources inside it can be true or not require people to be aware of each details they get. How many people to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Studying a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information especially this The Next Christians: Seven Ways You Can Live the Gospel and Restore the World book since this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Lisa Vazquez:

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