



BROADCAST TALKS

What Challenges Do We Face in Passing Our Faith on to the Next Generation?

by Josh McDowell



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Josh McDowell has been at the forefront of cultural trends and ground-breaking ministry for more than five decades. He has written or co-authored 151 books, including *More than a Carpenter*. He also authored *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, recognized by *World* magazine as one of the twentieth century's top forty books. Some of Josh's books have been translated into 128 languages. Josh and his wife, Dottie, have been married forty-eight years and have four wonderful children and ten beloved grandchildren. The website for Josh McDowell ministry is www.josh.org.

The following is adapted from a talk given by Josh McDowell on October 3, 2020, at a C.S. Lewis Institute livestream event titled *Defending the Faith for a New Generation*. The event featured separate talks by Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, Josh's son, who is an author and international speaker and an associate professor in the Christian Apologetics program at Biola University. One talk featured a conversation between Josh and Sean

BROADCAST TALKS presents ideas to cultivate Christ-like thinking and living. Each issue features a transcription of a talk presented at an event of the C.S. Lewis Institute.



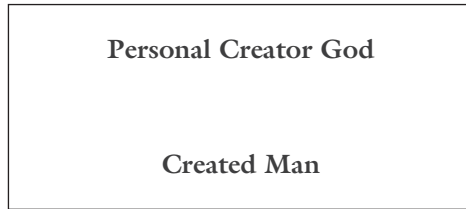
Every generation has challenges, both cultural and theological. There are three challenges we're facing to pass our faith on to the next generation. I will touch on one in a major way and two in a minor way.

An Epistemological Shift in Culture

First, to understand culture today and to be able to communicate to others, especially young people, we need to understand that we've had a complete *epistemological* shift in culture. You say, that's a big word, epistemological. Well, we get the word *epistle* from it. The word means the nature and the source of truth — what truth is and where it comes from. There's been a total change over the past years, and I want to illustrate this.

We've always had two generations, parents and youth/adults and young people but for one of the first times in history, and this is true of almost every culture in the world, we now have not only two generations, but also two distinct cultures between adults and youth. We need to understand how this has taken place; we have to understand it because so many adults are not communicating with young people. We're using two different types of language.

For hundreds of years, we had the following paradigm of truth: at the top, a personal Creator God in which all truth resided. At the bottom, below God, was created man. This is depicted in the accompanying illustration.



Again, all truth — scientific truth, historical truth, philosophical truth, theological truth, epistemological truth — was understood to reside in a personal Creator God. And beneath God, at the bottom of our illustration, is created man, who for hundreds of years, it was understood, responded to the truth that’s in the personal Creator God.

Then this understanding gradually started to change because of four movements in history. The first was the *Renaissance*, which began at approximately 1350. It came along and said, “We don’t need God, look how great man is.” The Renaissance brought the concept of a personal Creator God about a quarter of the way down our illustration and elevated man. It wouldn’t have gone further than that if it hadn’t been followed by the *Enlightenment*.

The Enlightenment began at approximately 1685 and it said, “We don’t need God, see how great man can reason” — mankind can reason through sin, can reason through the solution. The Enlightenment brought the concept of a personal Creator God another quarter of the way down our illustration and elevated man.

To understand this better, consider a painting that shows Jesus with His arm around the shoulder of the captain of an old wooden boat in a huge storm with the caption, “Jesus is the master of my destiny.” To tell the difference between that and the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment took the arm of Jesus off the captain’s shoulder with the caption now reading, “I am the master of my destiny.”

Then along came the *Industrial Revolution*. With the industrial revolution, people thought, “We don’t need God. See how great

man can create.” This was in the days of the huge machines that were developing and exploding in numbers just about everywhere in the world. The Industrial Revolution brought the concept of a personal Creator God another quarter of the way down our illustration, and elevated man.

Then came *Darwinism*. There were two questions that the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution couldn’t answer: the origin of man and the origin of the universe. Darwinism came along and gave an explanation of the origin of the universe and of man and said, “We don’t even need the concept of a personal Creator God.” And with Darwinism the concept that there’s a personal Creator God in which all truth resides fell out of the picture, leaving created humanity.

Out of this progression emerged three of the most influential thought patterns today. The first is *tolerance*. Now tolerance is described this way: All values, beliefs, lifestyles, and claims to truth are equal. So how could one person say to another person, “Your thoughts aren’t as good as mine; your beliefs are less than mine, because where’s your external reference point?” There is none, because to them a Creator God, in which all truth resided, fell out of the picture. Consequently, tolerance has become one of the main values of culture all over the world today.

The second is *multiculturalism*. Multiculturalism is the concept of tolerance applied to culture. Multiculturalism teaches that all cultures — all their values, beliefs, lifestyles — are equal, because how can one culture criticize another culture? Where’s your external reference point? There is none.

The third major belief in today’s culture is *diversity*. Now diversity is often misunderstood, even by Christians. Diversity means that in the midst of different values, beliefs, lifestyles, and claims to truth — all are equal. That’s what diversity means. Amidst all the diverse beliefs, they’re equal, because how can one belief say to another belief that one is better when there is no external reference point? There is none;

it's only your personal opinion, personal feeling, personal thought. So diversity is equality in the midst of diversity. It's tolerance applied to thought. All of this came out of this progression of history that there is no personal God in which all truth resides, so there's only humanity left. So how can one person judge another person?

Another implication of this is how truth is understood. For adults in about their early thirties and older, when it comes to truth, truth is discovered. As it says in Scripture, you should know this truth, you should discover the truth, and the truth will set you free. In other words, truth is external, it's objective, apart from yourself being subjective. You can discover that truth. But to the youth, many young people in this culture, all truth is created. It's all personal opinion, personal perspective, personal feelings, personal beliefs. Here you have the major difference between these two cultures: truth is discovered, and truth is created.

It would go something like this: One would say to an adult, "What did Jesus mean when He said this?" Whereas the youth would say, "When Jesus said that, what does it mean to you?" Do you see the difference? Adults, "What did Jesus mean when He said this?" In other words, it's external and you can discover it. But for young people, the question is, "What does it mean to you?" In other words, your values, your beliefs, your feelings are just as valid as whatever Jesus said. That's a result of this cultural progression.

Another is this: For adults, for older people, if it is true, it will work. For younger people, if it works it is true. For example, a pastor falls into sexual immorality. Adults would say his problem was that he was not living the truth. Truth is objective; it's true; you believe it or not. The problem is not with truth; the problem is with you. You're not living the truth. But to many youth, they would say, "Well, whatever the pastor taught is not true. Why? Because it didn't work." Do you see the difference? To adults, the problem is the person. To youth, the problem is truth, because all truth is personal. It's your opinion, personal feeling, personal ideas.



The Barna Group, in its 2018 edition of *Barna Trends*, found that truth is increasingly regarded as something *felt*, or relative, rather than something *known*, or absolute. This is a total shift from objectivity to subjectivity and emotions. Every year, new words are put into the dictionary. In 2016, a new word was *post-truth*. See how the dictionary defines post-truth — “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal belief.” We need to understand this if we’re going to pass our faith on to the next generation, that their emphasis is more on feelings and emotions, not objective truth.

The Barna Group in 2017 said a morality of self-fulfillment says each person’s feelings are the measuring stick for his or her own life, and many Christians have adopted this self-centered morality. In Psalm 89:14, it says that unfailing love (your emotions) and truth (objectivity) walk before you. And, “So give your servant an understanding heart to discern good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9). John 8:32: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

To wrap this section up, I mention a little formula I use when I come to an issue like God. Here are four questions I ask. First, what do you need to know about the subject to become a true follower of Christ? In other words, what does a person need to know about God? He’s a Creator God. He’s a loving God. He’s a righteous God, etc. Second, how do you know it’s true? The third question is, so what? How does it relate to me? Why is it even relevant to my life? This is where 63 percent of young adults said they would attend a church if the church presented truth in an understandable way that relates to my life now. The most amazing statistic that I’ve ever heard: 84 percent of Christians eighteen to twenty-nine years old said they have no idea how the Bible applies to their field or professional interest — 84 percent. This is why we must answer question 3. The fourth question is, how can I experience it? How can I make it personal in my own life, in a relationship with the Truth Giver and in relationship with others? That’s the thing we need to understand about our culture.

A Glut of Data and Information

The second of the three challenges I'm discussing, which I can touch on only briefly, is the massive glut of data and information that emerged with the internet. It's not that kids aren't as smart today, that they only have an eight-second attention span; the issue is that they're overloaded. We never imagined anyone could be overloaded in the brain, because the brain has such a capacity. I think we can now say the web is so huge it overloads the brain; that's why they've only got an attention span of eight seconds. Now think of this, the global internet, almost five billion users. Who ever dreamed twenty-five to thirty-five years ago, that you could have five billion people all connected by one item, the internet. The internet has total web pages of approximately 14 trillion. Whoa, 14 trillion total web pages. The amount of data being processed by the internet is so large our minds can't even begin to comprehend it. And yet it's going on around us all the time, especially in the lives of younger people.

The Cancer of Pornography

The third challenge is pervasive internet pornography. Pastor Chuck Swindoll said that pornography is the greatest cancer in the history of the church. The greatest cancer! We have never faced anything that simultaneously destroys so many people, so many pastors, so many youth pastors, so many marriages, and so many relationships. Simultaneously, in the world, in every culture, we've never had that accessibility. But pastors would say to me, "Well, Josh, look, we've always had pornography from writing on the walls of the caves, so what's the big deal?" Get real! The big deal is this; yes, we've always had pornography, but we've never had such a glut that is available to us constantly. Here's why pornography is more critical today and is doing more damage. Think of the difference between now and thirty-five years ago. Pornography is available, it's accessible, it's affordable, it's anonymous, it's appealing, it's aggressive, it's addictive, it's accepting, and it's arousing. Every one of those nine "a's" is true of



pornography; that's why it is such a destructive factor in the lives of Christians in Christian homes, churches, and among pastors.

How big is porn on the internet? In 2014, there were 2.3 billion pornographic web pages. Now that was six years ago, but here's the key, totally accessible immediately, one click away. We have never faced anything like that, so expansive, and so destructive.

Research shows 90 percent of U.S. college men and 60 percent of college women watched pornography before they were eighteen years of age. Thirty percent of all pornography is watched by children. Over 70 percent of all new pornography websites are for women. Do Christians watch pornography? One study showed that over half of the evangelical pastors admit they have struggled with porn, 57 percent. Another study of a large number of churches indicated that, on average, 42 percent of thirteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in churches actively pursue pornography on the internet.

We have a perfect storm. We've been hit by an epistemological shift of truth. We've been hit with knowledge that has produced more skepticism than ever in the history of the world. You say to a young person that something is true, they'll say, "How do you know? They could discover something new tomorrow." And pornography is probably the number one threat to ever passing your faith on to your children. This is what I have seen in working with young people.

Take it seriously.

Questions and Answers

1. How can we share the gospel in today's culture?

I find the first key thing is settling the issue of true truth with young people. I'll ask young people to define truth; most can't; most adults can't. I ask them to define truth, and so many say, "Well, whatever you believe, whatever you feel." And I'll say, "So truth is subjective, it changes all the time? Well let me ask you a question. In the 1980s Reagan was president for eight years. Was that true back then?" Well, yes. "Was that true ten years ago?" Well, yeah. "Is that true today?"

Yes. “In ten years, will it still be true, that in the 1980s Reagan was president for eight years?” Yes. “I thought you said truth changes.” There’s objective truth, and there’s subjective truth. There’s objective truth, and there are emotions. You’ve got to take in a person’s emotions, so I ask, “What will prove to you that something is true?” Then just let the person speak. I have found every time they would lay out two, three, four things; I could take those very two, three, four things and point them to Jesus Christ. “You said you accept this is true. Well, look at Christ. Here you said this is true,” so discuss truth. That’s the key.

2. How can you use feelings and imagination to share the gospel as objective truth?

One thing I do in this whole area is, I will ask a person, “What has been your spiritual journey?” People love to talk and tell you about their spiritual life. I say, “What is your journey?” I don’t interrupt them unless it’s to ask an informative question. When did that happen? How old were you? Who was the person? I listen to them. I’m amazed that they’ll bring in how they felt and everything. About 60 percent of the time, people say, “Well, Josh, what has been your spiritual journey?” If they don’t say that, I’ll ask if I could share my spiritual journey. No one has ever said no. Then I start out with my journey. I bring in my feelings, my emotions, how I wanted to kill my dad because he was trying to kill my mother, how much I hated, and everything. Then I tell them how I was introduced to Jesus Christ, how I looked at everything intellectually and tried to refute it, but I could not. There was a night toward the end of my second year in university, when I became a Christian. I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And then I share, nothing happened — no feeling, no emotion, nothing. In about six months to a year-and-a-half later, my entire life was changed. I will bring in two or three very specific areas where change involved my emotions and my mind. Coming to Christ is both intellectual and emotional. For the emotional, to get to a person’s mind, is to live the type of life that persons desire to have what you have. If they don’t really desire to have what you have, why should

they listen to you? If I don't like what you have, I don't want it. That's how I deal with the emotional issue.

3. How can we live our faith authentically?

As we become a true follower of Jesus. Jesus talked about love, Jesus demonstrated love; we should talk about love, we should demonstrate love. He talked about the care for individuals, He had compassion for individuals. If we're a true follower of Christ and following Him, we will have compassion for the lost, the poor, the maimed, etc. And if you don't live that out, why would I want what you have? I think one of the best testimonies I have is my forty-eight years of marriage, forty-eight years of getting better and better and better, and my relationship with my three daughters and my son. In the 139 countries I've lectured in, my relationships with my wife and with my kids have opened up more opportunities, opened more doors, given me more chances to share Christ than anything else in life. That's one reason why I talk about my wife a lot. I want every young person who hears me to know that a happy marriage is possible, that an incredible happy family is possible through Christ. If they see that in my life, then when I share the gospel they will usually listen.

4. How can we be an authentic witness for Christ in the midst of our own sins?

This is the beauty of Christianity, one beauty of Christianity. Most religions call you to love the lovable. Jesus called us to love the unlovable. Wow. We're all going to blow it; we're going to sin. Sin is anything contrary to the holy, just, righteous nature of God, and when we do this, the Bible says the first step is this: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us from all unrighteousness" [1 John 1:9]. When we confess our known sin, He even forgives the unknown sin. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Second, we need to recommit that area to Christ. Maybe it's a relationship, maybe it's money, maybe it's pride, maybe something else. We need to say to Jesus, I yield that area to you. Then the key is to walk with the Holy

Spirit. Our key for following Christ is nothing we can do in our own energy; it's the work of God, the Holy Spirit, through our life. The Holy Spirit is one person of the Trinity, of the Godhead. When sin enters my life, I confess it, and I yield that area and simply say, "Holy Spirit, fill me."

5. How can we break out of addiction to pornography to live authentically in Christ?

You can go to the website of Josh McDowell ministry. There is information on finding help at www.josh.org/pornography. There is also documented research. [*The Porn Epidemic Portfolio*, www.josh.org/resources/apologetics/research/.] You will find information on what is pornography, how big is pornography, what are the consequences of pornography, pornography in the brain, pornography and relationships, pornography and children, pornography and individuals. How do you overcome pornography? How do you keep overcoming pornography? Well, the first thing is knowledge. The first step is to understand how destructive it is, and how addictive it is. Second, don't try it alone. If you try to defeat pornography alone, you are not likely to be successful. Maybe 3 percent of the population will ever overcome it alone. This is why the Bible uses two phrases — each other and one another — 194 times. The more we are transparent to another person about pornography, the less grip it has on us; this is why I say every one of us, you, me, others, need two or three people around us who love us, who walk with Christ, who will confront us, who will share with us, who will be there when we're hurting — that's probably the top key, don't go it alone.

[Video of the complete version of this talk, as well as other talks from CSLI's *Defending the Faith for a New Generation* event, is available at www.cslewisinstitute.org/defendingfaith. The website for Josh McDowell Ministry is www.josh.org. Recommended books by Josh McDowell include *More than a Carpenter* and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. In the latest updated editions of these books, Josh is joined by Sean

McDowell. Recent books by Sean McDowell include *So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (co-authored with J. Warner Wallace), published in 2019, and *Chasing Love: Sex, Love, and Relationships in a Confused Culture*, published in 2020.]

Two classic books by Josh McDowell

More Than a Carpenter

Former skeptic Josh McDowell's timeless examination of the true nature of Christ and His impact on our lives is one of the best-selling Christian books ever.

Josh is joined by his son Sean as they examine the evidence about Jesus. Is He really the Lord He claimed to be? How can we know for sure? *More than a Carpenter* investigates hard questions about the reliability of biblical records, the resurrection and the relationship between faith and science. They also address questions raised by today's popular atheistic writers.

This book is perfect for giving to a skeptical friend or family member or to anyone who has questions about Jesus' deity, His resurrection and His claim on their life.

Evidence that Demands a Verdict

Named by *Christianity Today* as one of the top 50 books that have shaped evangelicals, the original *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* was a classic defense of the Christian faith. Josh McDowell gave Christian readers the answers they needed to defend the trustworthiness of the Bible, its teachings, and the core truths of Christianity against the harshest critics of that time. Over the years this extensive volume has encouraged and strengthened millions.

Now, with his son Sean McDowell, Josh has updated and expanded this classic resource. Featuring thorough revisions, updates, and all-new chapters, you'll have a powerful go-to guide for answering even the toughest questions posed by today's postmodern culture.

The C.S. Lewis Institute was founded in 1976 and endeavors, in the legacy of C.S. Lewis, to develop disciples who will articulate, defend, share, and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life. From its inception, the Institute has been inter-denominational, has worked closely with a variety of churches and sees itself as a servant ministry, assisting churches and pastors in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This takes the form of discipleship programs, area-wide conferences/seminars, pastor fellowships and resources in print and on the web.



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