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UNHAPPY AND UNHEARD: WHAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TELLING US

A growing body of global research is uncovering what many of us in ministry already know: something is deeply off. Young people across the world—especially in post-industrial nations like the U.S.—are reporting record lows in well-being, meaning, and emotional connection.

In *The Atlantic*, columnist and scholar Arthur C. Brooks digs into this crisis in his article “Why Are Young People Everywhere So Unhappy?” He references the Global Flourishing Study, which found that the typical upward arc of life satisfaction has collapsed for today’s young adults. It no longer starts high and dips—it begins low and stays low until midlife. But why?

Brooks points to an erosion of meaning, belonging, and spiritual grounding, especially in wealthier, more secular societies. His data confirms what ministry leaders have witnessed: without real community, face-to-face connection, and a sense of purpose rooted in something deeper than performance, young people are being left to navigate life in emotional isolation.

This isn’t just about mental health; it’s about spiritual displacement. And if the Church is paying attention, this is also a sacred opportunity.

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We don't need to be a perfect church. We just need to be an honest one. Let's build communities where young people don't have to choose between their questions and their faith—between their mental health and their belonging—between surviving and actually living.

Let's respond to this moment not with programs alone, but with presence, purpose, and a whole lot of grace.

Scripture Anchor: John 10:10 – “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Suggested Practices:

- **Meaning Map:** Have participants map their week—then label what's life-giving, draining, or performative. Reflect on what needs to shift.
- **Theology of Unfollow:** Guide a reflection on social media habits and identity. Who are they following, and why? What shapes their worth?
- **Story & Stillness Retreat:** Pair youth and elders for story-sharing, followed by 30–60 minutes of silence and journaling.

Discussion Questions:

- Where are you pretending to be okay when you're not? Explore how internalized expectations of strength or “being fine” cut us off from healing.
- When did you last feel truly seen in a faith space? Reflect on the difference between visibility and vulnerability—and what safety makes possible.
- What parts of your life feel full—and what feels empty?

RECLAIMING OUR BODIES: GENDER, SHAME, AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Many young people—especially trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth—hear the message (directly or indirectly) that their bodies are wrong. Churches often perpetuate shame around gender, sexuality, and embodiment, even when claiming to “love everyone.”

Our sacred texts declare that every body is made in the image of God—not in one mold, but in glorious diversity. This is a call to embody liberation, not just preach inclusion.

Suggested Practices:

- **Open The Doors:** Invite a local queer faith leader to share their story of embodiment and faith.
- **Read Genesis 1:26–27 alongside Psalm 139:13–16:** Explore the thought of what “fearfully and wonderfully made” really means.

Discussion Questions:

- What messages have you received about your body from faith spaces?
- How can our ministries move from tolerance to celebration?

MAY BOOK

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life** by Tish Harrison Warren: Helps readers connect daily habits with spiritual formation—ideal for leaders guiding communities into intentional discipleship.
- **The Just Kitchen** by Derrick Weston & Anna Woofenden: Explores food, faith, and justice—ideal for those in community care ministries.



TERM OF THE MONTH: SACRED CURIOSITY

Sacred Curiosity is the courage to ask the real questions—the ones that don't always have tidy answers. In a culture that often rewards certainty, faith sometimes gets flattened into formulas: believe this, behave that way, belong here. But the Bible is full of people who questioned, wrestled, doubted, and wondered.

From Nicodemus approaching Jesus at night with uncertainty, to Mary asking the angel, “How can this be?”, sacred curiosity shows up when people lean into mystery rather than run from it. It's what allows faith to grow beyond fear. It's what makes room for theology to meet lived experience. And it's what makes our faith spaces safe for those still searching.

When we honor sacred curiosity, we teach youth and young adults that questions are not a threat to God—they're an invitation.

Scripture Anchor: Luke 1:34 – “But Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be...?’” **Also see:** John 3:1–10 (Nicodemus), Genesis 32:22–31 (Jacob wrestles God).

Suggested Practices:

- **Questions Wall:** In your youth room or group chat, let participants anonymously submit questions about faith, identity, or life. Use these to guide open discussions
- **Lectio Curiosa:** Choose a short Bible passage and invite everyone to respond with one question the text raises rather than one interpretation.

Discussion Questions:

- What questions about God or life have you been afraid to ask?
- How does your faith community respond to curiosity?
- What might it look like to follow Jesus as a learner, not just a knower?

GRADUATING TO LIFE: NOT BEHIND—JUST BECOMING

Graduating into adulthood can feel like stepping into a fog with a flashlight. You're told this is the time to “launch,” but what if your next step isn't clear? What if all the options feel like too much—or not enough?

Young adults often internalize the message that everyone else has it figured out. From career paths to relationship goals, social media can make you feel like you're already behind. But here's the truth: there is no “right” timeline. Becoming is personal. It's not about performing adulthood—it's about growing into wholeness.

Let's release the shame that comes with uncertainty. Let's reframe this time not as being stuck, but as being in progress.

Scripture Anchor: Ecclesiastes 3:1 – “There is a time for everything...”

Suggested Practices:

- **Write a “Permission Slip” to yourself:** What are you allowed to not have figured out right now?
- **Start a “Progress Journal”:** Not about goals reached, but about lessons learned and courage practiced.
- **Scripture Check-In Ecclesiastes 3:** Read the passage and ask: What “season” are you in right now—mourning, planting, resting? Reflect on how naming your season honors where God has you.

Discussion Questions:

- What expectations are you carrying that don't come from God?
- Who helps you feel safe enough to be honest about your journey?
- What does success look like to you right now—and how has that changed over time?