This lesson is not written from the perspective of an old man yelling at kids to get off his lawn…but it may sound that way.

In last week’s lesson we discussed a Gallup poll showing that for the first time since Gallup began polling., less than 50% of Americans considered themselves to be members of a church, mosque or synagogue.  In other words, more than half all respondents had no affiliation with a religious institution.  The group least likely to have a religious affiliation were the youngest people polled.  There was a direct correlation with older age and church membership.  The older the person, the more likely they had a religious affiliation.  And vice versa.

Those in the majority (i.e. without a religious affiliation) are not necessarily irreligious or disbelieving of God.  Some respondents identified with the “spiritual but none” category.  I suspect we have perhaps seen in our own families the challenge of our kids’ faith.  I don’t mean to overgeneralize, but statistically speaking it is likely that some of our kids have “left the faith” in which they were raised.  Without regard to any individual, the question is why?  What is occurring societally that is leading to the declining trend of religious affiliation among all groups, but particularly the youngest?

In 2011 David Kinnaman of the Barna Research Group write a book entitled “You Lost Me.”  The book explores trends in religion and offers ideas about why things occur.  It seems to me his observations – now 10 years old – were prescient of what see occurring today.  What he observed in 2011 as actually occurring is likely only being accelerated today.

Below is a series of statements from the book which I think are the basis for good discussion.  I do not agree with all of the statements but do think each one raises interesting issues.  Think particularly about people you know (even if not your own kids) who may be experiencing doubt or even rejecting religion.  How do the statements below apply to them?  And, is it too late to get them back?

1.           “A generation of young Christians believes that churches in which they were raised are not safe and hospitable places to express doubts.”

2.           “The Christian community must rethink our efforts to make disciples.”

3.           “We need to recognize the generational shifts from left-brain skills like logic, analysis and structure to the right-brain aptitudes of creativity, synthesis and empathy.”

4.           “We must reexamine the substance of our relationships and the shape of our institutions.” kids / young adults /, .the individual had a set of beliefs but did not believe in affiliating with a church.  Last week was Good Friday, the day commemorating Jesus’ death.  The following Sunday we celebrated Jesus’ resurrection through the Lord’s Supper.  But last week made me think of what happened right after Jesus’ death and resurrection.  What can we learn from that?

5.           Speaking of Germany in the 1920s, “the First War and the subsequent depression and turmoil had brought about a crisis in which the younger generation, especially, had lost all confidence in traditional authority and the church.”  [How does this apply to a generation that was born around 9/11, experienced the Great Recession, and lived through the pandemic?]

6.           “The next generation of Christians has a similar crisis of confidence in institutions, including government, the workplace, education, and marriage, as well as the church.”

7.           “As a faith community we need a whole new mind to see that the way we develop young people’s faith – the way we have been teaching them to engage the world as disciples of Christ – is inadequate for the issues, concerns and sensibilities of the world we ask then to change for God.”

As you think about these statements, a bit of caution is in order.  Paul, when speaking to Timothy in a slightly different context, instructed him to “let no man despise thy youth.”  (I Tim. 4:12).  Paul said the same thing to another young man, Titus in Titus 2:15 (“let no man disregard you”).   These are good reminders of how we are to approach these questions.

Kevin