

Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture – by Walt Mueller

Discussion/Study Guide



Chapter 1 - Reality Bytes: Snapshots of a Crying and Dying Culture

1. Reread Derrick’s blog entry on p. 18. “To Derrick, hours spent in front of the computer afford him the best place to be open and honest... As horrible as Derrick’s words sound, the adults in his life don’t have a clue what lies beneath the surface of his seemingly ‘normal’ teenage life.” Do you think you have a “clue” when it comes to what lies beneath the surface of the lives of the teenagers that you work with? Does Derrick’s blog entry surprise you? Why or why not? What surprises have you heard from young people you know?

Walt Mueller

2. “Somehow I lost my mouth./ Somehow you lost your ears” (p. 19). What were your thoughts as you read Erin’s poem? Can you identify? What steps can be taken to remedy this reality?

3. Institutions that influence the values and behaviors of teenagers:

<u>1960</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>2000</u>
Family	Friend & Peers	Media
School	Family	Friends & Peers
Friend & Peers	Media	Family
Church	School	School

What is your response to this list? Do you see this as a reflection of the influence on the youth that you know? How? Where?

4. “Listening opens our eyes to the reality and depth of the needs of young people. And once we know the reality, we can communicate the gospel in ways that can be heard and understood” (p. 29). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What examples from your own life experiences support this statement?

5. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 11:28-29; Matthew 28:19-20. How has this chapter informed your reading of those verses?

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Chapter 2 - *There's Something Happenin' Here*

1. If you had the opportunity to speak to 300 graduating high school seniors at a Baccalaureate service, what would you hope to communicate to them? How would you communicate it?
2. “Because those of us who work with young people have grown up in a different world, we find it difficult to understand and relate to today’s youth. Thus we must approach our calling to work with young people as a crosscultural venture” (p. 42). What is meant by “crosscultural” venture? Why is it important to think in this way? What examples of this type of thinking/communicating have you encountered?
3. Review the three crucial steps for the crosscultural missionary and assess your own competencies in these areas. Where are you the strongest? Where do you need to improve? What steps can you take to become more proficient in each area?

Step 1: Know the unchanging Word.

Step 2: Know young people and their rapidly changing culture.

Step 3: Take the unchanging Word to young people growing up in a rapidly changing culture.

4. What is contextualization? Why is this an appropriate term to use when thinking about how to minister to young people?
5. Describe a “worldview” in your own words. What influences your worldview? What do you think most influences the worldviews of our youth?

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Chapter 3 - Postmodernism

1. What are the key characteristics of a premodern worldview?
2. What are the key characteristics of a modern worldview?
3. What are the key characteristics of a postmodern worldview?
4. What examples from our culture have you noticed that illustrate the shift from a modern to postmodern worldview?
5. “John Stott challenges preachers to become bridge builders by relating the unchanging truths of God’s Word to the existential situation of those longing to hear good news” (p. 78). Do you know any good “bridge builders” in our world today? Who are they and what makes them effective in ministry?

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Chapter 4 - *Welcome to Their Jungle*

1. Walt uses Time Square in New York City as a metaphor for describing adolescence. How would you describe adolescence? What metaphors would you use?
2. Why is it important to understand and study “generations?” Do you see differences between your generation and other generations? What are those differences? What are some of the similarities?
3. The emerging generation is the most targeted market segment in history. In his book *Creating Ever-Cool*, Gene Del Vecchio writes concerning the marketplace as a battleground: the “battle will be won by the company that best understands kids, their emotional needs, their fantasies, their dreams, their desires. Such knowledge is the mightiest weapon in a marketer’s arsenal to win a child’s heart.” What was your reaction to this statement? How do you think you can begin to counter the negative affects of marketing on the kids you work with?
4. Read over the “unique marks of the emerging generation” found on pgs. 89-108. Do you see the same “marks” with the youth you work with? Give examples. Would you add any other marks to the list?
5. At the root of the Millennial’s groan is a deep hunger for God that is a natural part of being made in God’s image. How have you seen this deep hunger for God manifest itself in today’s youth culture? What are some ways that the church can begin to meet the needs of the Millennial generation?

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Chapter 5 - Understanding Culture

1. “Those called to engage the emerging generations with the message of the gospel must approach their calling as crosscultural missionaries” (p. 110). Do you view your calling in this way? Why or why not?
2. Describe “culture” in your own words. Why is understanding culture important in order to connect with youth? Is discerning culture something that comes easy to you? What areas are difficult?
3. “Sometimes, our assumptions about the meaning beneath what we see can be totally off base, thereby jeopardizing our ability to connect” (p. 116). This is described as “misattribution.” What is meant by misattribution? Has this ever happened to you? Give examples. Review Bekah’s story starting on page 111. How would you have responded to Bekah? Would you have been in danger of engaging in “misattribution”?
4. In his book *Creation Regained*, Al Wolters offers helpful clarification as he differentiates between the “structure” and “direction” of culture (pgs. 125-126). What is meant by structure and direction? Use the “structure and direction” schema to think about the following areas of life: art, television, movies, sex, family, and sports. What are God’s good intentions and design for these areas (structure)? Where are they distorted by sin (direction)?
5. At the end of the chapter, Walt uses MTV’s Video Music Awards (VMA) as a way to illustrate how he analyzes the cultural soup that youth are swimming in (pgs. 127-133). Using the cultural identifiers listed on pgs. 118-119, and other helpful insights you have learned throughout this chapter, do a similar exercise. Watch a movie, television show, music video or observe youth at the mall. Write out your own reflections as you attempt to better understand the culture and then answer these questions: Was this difficult for you? Was it helpful? What were the most significant insights that you gained? How will this be helpful to you in parenting and/or ministry?

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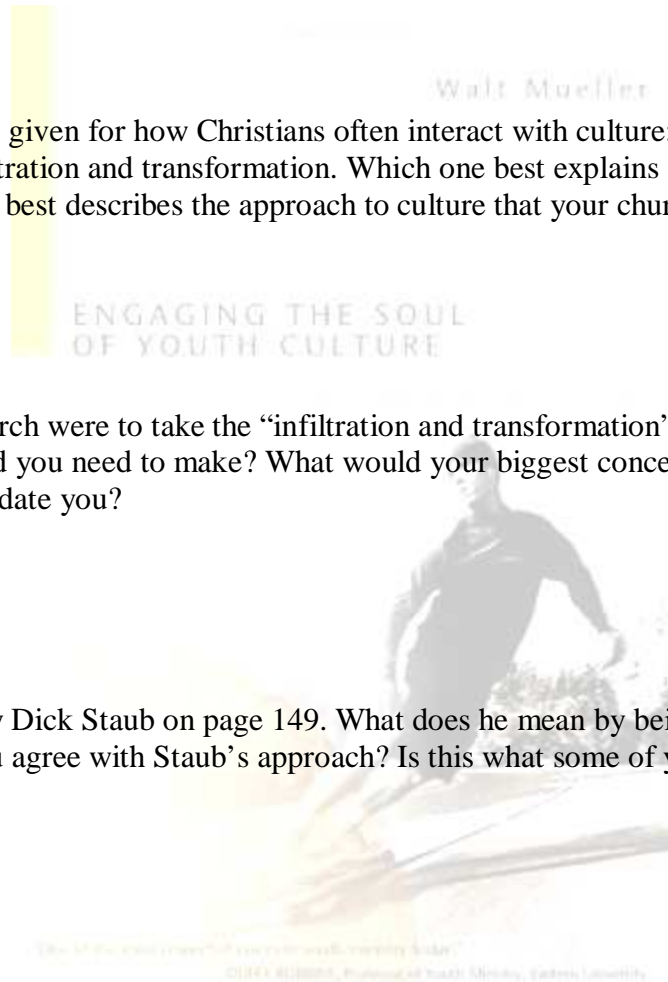
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Chapter 6 - *Understanding Our Place in Culture*

1. Walt begins this chapter by explaining what happens when he shows a “secular” video at the beginning of his seminars. Some attendees think that it compromises their faith. Do you agree? How would you respond?



2. Three responses are given for how Christians often interact with culture: accommodation, alienation, and infiltration and transformation. Which one best explains your approach to culture? Which one best describes the approach to culture that your church takes?
3. If you and your church were to take the “infiltration and transformation” approach to culture, what changes would you need to make? What would your biggest concerns be? Would this excite you or intimidate you?
4. Reread the quote by Dick Staub on page 149. What does he mean by being “too Christian and too pagan”? Do you agree with Staub’s approach? Is this what some of your friends would say about you?
5. Read Jesus’ prayer in John 17. What sticks out to you as you read? Why is this an important prayer to remember as you think through your approach to culture?

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Chapter 7 - *Getting Out of the Bunker*

1. What is meant by a “bunker mentality”? Where have you seen examples of this in the church?
2. Reread some of the biblical passages from the chapter: Ephesians 5:11-14; Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; and 1 John 2:15. How has this chapter changed the way you view these passages?
3. What is meant by “dualism”? Where have you seen examples of dualism in the church and in the lives of Christians?
4. How should we understand holiness in light of God’s word? What difference does it make when interacting with culture from a Christian perspective?
5. “... an R-rated film like *Good Will Hunting* can easily reduce us to tears and draw us closer to God by clearly revealing the reality, truth, depth and consequences of abuse among the emerging generations.” Has this ever happened to you? What are other examples where “secular” films, music, literature etc. has drawn you closer to God?

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Chapter 8 - *The Marks of the Twenty-First-Century Messenger*

1. The chapter opens with a story about a pastor who needed to “get out of his office and onto the sidewalk” in order to reach the youth around him. What “sidewalks” do you think you and your church need to enter?
2. Here are a few words to describe the Apostle Paul’s attitude toward evangelism: passionate, enthusiastic, single-minded, missionary zeal. Would these words describe your attitude toward making Christ known in the world? Why or why not?
3. “For those members of the emerging generations who need to hear the message of the gospel – those we’re called to reach – we’ve offered a disjointed faith that is anything but attractive, convincing and compelling” (p. 183). What is meant by *disjointed faith*? Where have you seen evidence of this in your own life and in the life of the church?
4. “If the message isn’t getting through because of dated methods, new ones should be prayerfully sought and adopted in order to effectively communicate the good news” (p. 187). Are there any “methods” that you are currently using that doesn’t seem to be “getting through”? What are those practices, and how could they be altered while remaining biblical? What methods have been working well and why?
5. On several occasions, this chapter mentions the importance of prayer. What have you learned about prayer? Why is prayer so important? Have you considered praying the prayer mentioned on p. 191? “Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” Why is this a “dangerous” prayer?

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Chapter 9 - Paul's Mars Hill Ministry for Today

1. Reread Acts 17:16-34. “Before examining how Paul responds to what he encounters, note what Paul does not do... there is no indication that his presence in this polytheistic culture compromises his holiness... Instead, his faith in Christ and his holiness demand his sustained presence in Athens” (p. 202). Does this surprise you? Why or why not? How does Paul’s response remind us of what we have learned about holiness?
2. Review the descriptions of the Epicureans and the Stoics on pgs. 204-205. Do you know of people who fit these descriptions today?
3. “The Mars Hill ministry paradigm is not a method but a model for living. It is a model for living that is both timely for our postmodern world and timeless in its ability to be used in any particular place and time.” Why is it important to remember that this is not a method but rather a model for living? Is this a paradigm shift for you? What changes do you think you would need to make in order to make the Mars Hill ministry paradigm your model for living?
4. What follows are the 7-steps to help you minister as Paul did in Athens. Watch a movie, TV show, music video or walk through the mall and follow this steps (found on pgs. 217-229):

Step 1: Prepare to walk through Athens.

Step 2: Close your mouth. Open your ears and eyes.

Step 3: Look for cultural characteristics and distinctives, including values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and problems.

Step 4: Look for evidence of a spiritual quest.

Step 5: Identify doorways of opportunity for connection, conversation, evangelism and discipleship

Step 6: Discern cultural elements that can be celebrated and embraced, and those that must be challenged and opposed.

Step 7: Apply what you have learned to your particular ministry with your particular audience.
5. What did you learn from this experience? What steps were easiest for you? What were the most difficult? Where else could you apply this paradigm to your life and ministry?

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