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## **How the Seeker-Sensitive, Consumer Church Is Failing a Generation**

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We don't need gimmicks; we need the gospel.  
Dorothy Greco, guest writer, Christianity Today

The millennial generation's much-talked-about departure from church might lead those of us over 30 to conclude that they have little interest in Jesus. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unfortunately, their spiritual coming of age has coincided with many Protestant pastors relying on a consumer business model to grow and sustain their churches. This template for doing church and the millennials' hunger for authenticity has caused an ideological collision.

Seeker-sensitive services originally promised to woo post-moderns back into the fold. Out the stained glass window went the somewhat formal 45-minute exegetical sermon, replaced by a shorter, story-based talk to address the "felt needs" of the congregants while reinforcing the premise that following Jesus would dramatically improve their quality of life.

Contemporary worship had already found its way into the mainstream, but their new model nudged the church further toward a rock-concert feel. Finally, programs proliferated, with programs for nearly every demographic, from Mothers of Preschoolers to Red Glove Motorcycle Riders.

None of these changes were pernicious or even poorly intentioned. In the case of my previous church, choosing the seeker model began innocently. The staff endeavored to create a wide on-ramp for folks who might ordinarily bypass the sanctuary in favor of Starbucks. (As an incentive, we provided fair-trade coffee and bagels each week.) Trained not to assume that everyone was on the same page politically or spiritually, we sought to have friendly, nuanced conversations with visitors.

Being aware of those who come through the doors of any organization is a good thing. I have walked out of many services without a single person engaging with me. However, many churches gradually, and perhaps unwittingly, transitioned from being appropriately sensitive to the needs of their congregants to becoming—if you'll permit some pop-psychologizing—co-dependent with them.

What does co-dependence look like within a church? Avoiding sections of Scripture out of fear that certain power pockets will be offended. Believing that repeat attendance depends primarily upon the staff's seamless execution of Sunday morning—rather than the manifest presence of God. Eliminating doleful songs from the worship repertoire because they might contradict the through line that "following Jesus is all gain."

Jesus was neither a co-dependent nor a businessman. He unashamedly loved those on the margins and revealed himself to all who were searching. He seemed quite indifferent about whether or not he disappointed the power brokers. Additionally, Jesus understood that the irreducible gospel message—that we are all sinners in need of being saved—was, and always will be, offensive. No brilliant marketing campaign could ever repackage it.