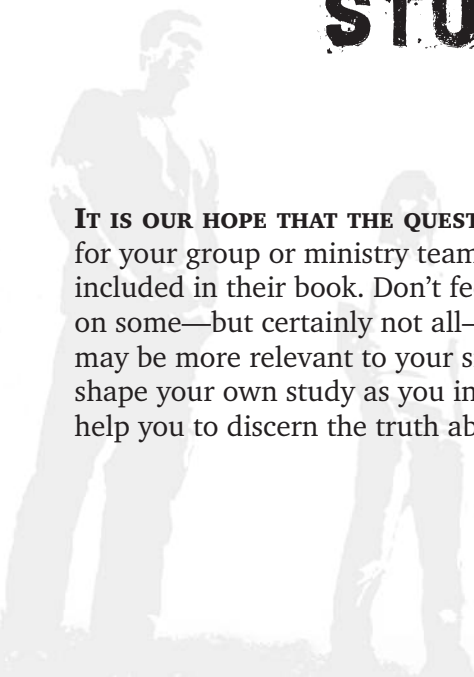




WHY WE'RE NOT EMERGENT

(BY TWO GUYS WHO SHOULD BE)

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE



IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THE QUESTIONS that follow will serve as conversation starters for your group or ministry team as you discuss the insights Kevin and Ted have included in their book. Don't feel limited to these questions. We've tried to touch on some—but certainly not all—of the key themes of the book, but other issues may be more relevant to your situation or needs. So by all means feel free to shape your own study as you interact with the content of the book and how it can help you to discern the truth about the emerging/emergent church.



**KEVIN DEYOUNG
TED KLUCK**

SECTION ONE

**INTRODUCTION: STILL SUBMERGENT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS (KEVIN)
MAYBE—THE NEW YES (TED)**

CHAPTER 1—JOURNEY: ARE THE PILGRIMS STILL MAKING PROGRESS? (KEVIN)

CHAPTER 2—REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE: WHAT IS WORTH SUBMITTING TO? (TED)

1. Attempting to accurately define the emerging/emergent church has been likened to “nailing Jell-O to a wall.” In what ways has that been your experience? And how has your reading of *Why We Are Not Emergent* to this point helped you to clarify your understanding of what it means to be emerging/emergent?
2. The book includes a somewhat tongue-in-cheek listing of indicators that “you might be emergent if” (see pp. 20-22). Which, if any, did you identify with?
3. The authors take issue with the emergent church on the question of whether God is knowable (p. 35 and following). What is your understanding of how the “mystery” of God is balanced with the reality of a God we can know and who speaks to us in a way we can understand? How have some in the emergent church confused *uncertainty* with *humility*?

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4. Often motivated by a desire to be loving and sensitive, some emergent leaders have avoided taking a stance on issues like homosexuality. From the examples in the book and your personal experiences, how can such avoidance actually be harmful to those you desire to serve?

5. There is no question that many Christians experience seasons of doubt, but in the emergent church, doubt is frequently upheld as a virtue—and we are urged to break free from “our rigid framework of certainty.” Kevin writes, “Christians, very often tremendous Christians, go through seasons of doubt. They question their faith. They don’t sense God’s presence. They doubt their salvation” (p. 50). But doubt is not a goal. “Being tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine is not the goal,” he adds. In what ways is doubt a good thing? Can and should Christians cast off their certainty?

6. How can the church be sensitive and responsive to the experiences, objections, and sometimes very real disillusionment of postmoderns, while at the same time helping them find what Ted says of his church in chapter 2: “a theology and a body that I could give my life to and entrust with my children”?

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER 3—BIBLE: WHY I LOVE THE PERSON AND PROPOSITIONS OF JESUS (KEVIN)

CHAPTER 4—THANK YOU FOR SMOKING: ON DIALOGUE, FUTURISM, AND HELL (TED)

1. Sermons that boil down Scripture texts to doctrines, principles and propositions are an unwelcome leftover from the modern/evangelical church in the eyes of many emergent leaders. How would you defend such preaching against the claim that postmoderns “find the doctrines and principles as interesting as grass clippings” (p. 72)?
2. What is your understanding of the term *propositional truth* and how would you respond to the claims of emergents who believe that postmoderns are “less inclined to look for truth in propositional statements and old moral certitudes and more likely to seek it in symbols, ambiguities, and situational judgments” (p. 73)?
3. “Christianity,” some emergents say, “is a relationship with a person, not affirming a set of propositions.” How could you use the Scripture texts Kevin cites on page 74 to respond to that idea?

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4. Chapter 3 discusses, with some concern, a redefined role for the Bible in the emergent church. “They don’t want to use the traditional terms—authority, infallibility, revelation, objective, absolute, literal—terms they believe are unbiblical,” Kevin writes (p. 70.). “They would rather use phrases like ‘deep love of’ and ‘respect for,’” he adds. How important is it to hold to a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible? What are the practical ramifications if we do not?

5. Is the Bible the very words of God? While the emergent church doesn’t say that the Bible is full of errors, it has “little patience with inerrancy” (p. 76). What do you find in Kevin’s comments—and the J. I. Packer quote on page 77—that could help you respond to the emergent’s discomfort with claims that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God?

6. In chapter 4 (pp. 97–98), Ted includes a series of statements—drawn from the books and blogs of emergent leaders—that express some of the relationship between emergents and the evangelical church. He writes, “I think it is safe to say that some emergents think:

- ... evangelicals don’t care about the poor. And don’t even get evangelicals started on diversity, which they clearly want nothing to do with.
- ... the evangelical church is about pushing right-wing politics. Jim Wallis aside, a good bit of emergent literature is laced with the Bush/church connection and how disastrous that particular connection is.
- ... evangelicals promote an “in or out” type of salvation experience.
- ... the evangelical church has participated in a variety of ills that it somehow hasn’t adequately apologized for.
- ... evangelicals are “fake” and for many the worship experience is somehow “inauthentic.”
- ... evangelicals are artistically challenged and uncreative. They watch lame movies, listen to lame music.”

To what extent, in your experience, are these characterizations accurate and/or fair?

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER 5—DOCTRINE: THE DRAMA IS IN THE DOGMA (KEVIN)

CHAPTER 6—A FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND: ON CHURCHES, STORY, AND PROPOSITIONAL LANGUAGE (TED)

1. In chapter 5, Kevin writes: “I have no doubt that non-Christians find some of the emergent literature very appealing. The literature often describes who they already are—non-dogmatic, ambiguously spiritual postmoderns interested in making the world a better place. But where is there mention of the hard edges of Christian faith—God’s holiness, divine judgment, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, human depravity, the necessity of new birth?” He adds, “Where is the offense in the gospel?”

What is the possible/likely outcome for the postmodern who is drawn to the “better life” offered by the emergent church—who joins in the “journey of trust and adventure”—but never encounters “the offense of the gospel”?

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2. On page 110 of *Why We Are Not Emergent*, we read, “Historically, Christians have affirmed the importance of both orthodoxy, right belief, and *orthopraxy*, right living. The emergent church often redefines the two so they are one. Or to put it more accurately, they conflate the two so that orthodoxy equals right living, and right belief, if it matters at all, flows from right living instead of the other way around.” The book goes on to examine the writings of a number of other emergent writers who emphasize right living over against right belief.

How is this thinking unbiblical and untrue? Why, do the authors say, it is also monumentally unhelpful (p. 113)?

3. Just as those in the mainstream of evangelicalism struggle to define the emergent church, some emergents themselves struggle to define their own theological boundaries—often shunning the whole idea of subscribing to any statements of faith. Two books that represent the extremes of this problem of “boundaries” are *A Heretics Guide to Eternity* by Spencer Burke and *How (Not) to Speak of God* by Peter Rollins. Which of the authors concerns about these writings (pp. 119–127) resonated with you?
4. While building “bridges” to reach postmoderns is clearly of value, there are also important reasons for the church to build and maintain “walls” around key points of doctrine. What value do the authors believe those walls have (pp. 127–128)?
5. If there is one characteristic that is most valued by the emergent church, it is *authenticity*. In chapter 6, Ted introduces his readers to a man named Joe, who offers a whole different look at what it means to be an authentic Christian. What do you imagine the emergent church would think of Joe? What does it mean to live a life of true authenticity?

SECTION FOUR

CHAPTER 7—MODERNISM: THE BOOGEYMAN COMETH (KEVIN)

CHAPTER 8—WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME: DIALOGUING FOR THE SAKE OF DIALOGUE (TED)

1. Chapter 7 begins with an extended discussion of the differences between modern/evangelical and postmodern/emergent churches. Which of these differences are most significant, and which are more a matter of semantics?
2. The practice of preaching as a primary component of worship services has fallen into disfavor among many emergents. They view preaching as a poor means of one-way communication employed by modern/evangelical pastors—scorned as lecturing that focuses primarily on the passing of information. But preaching long predated the modern church, going back to the days of the early church—and before that to the Jewish rabbis who were “given the task of instructing the people in the ways of faith, teaching them the laws, comforting, admonishing, and encouraging their listeners” (p. 158).

How does that compare with the new model of pastoral leadership—of Dorothy of *The Wizard of Oz*—espoused by a prominent emergent writer? of pastors moving “from broadcaster to listener”? from “problem solver to quest inspirer”? from “knower to seeker” (p. 160)? What consequences would likely follow a move away from pastor-as-preacher/teacher?

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3. “Emergent leaders, if they are to make a lasting contribution to evangelical Christianity, need a better grasp of history in general,” writes Kevin DeYoung (p. 160). Later, he adds, “The emergent church simply needs to do its historical homework” (p. 165). What are some of the key points where a more careful understanding of history would/could significantly reshape emergent thinking?
4. In chapter 8, Ted talks about how he hates holiday-letter time. What is it about those holiday letters that offers so much to hate? How does that speak to a sometimes legitimate criticism emergents have leveled at the modern/evangelical church?
5. On pages 176 and following, Ted’s narrative discusses a newspaper story about the emergent church. The story includes a listing of nine characteristics of emerging churches. Ted compares that list to the seven guiding principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Is that a fair comparison?

SECTION FIVE

CHAPTER 9—JESUS: BRINGER OF PEACE, BEARER OF WRATH (KEVIN)

CHAPTER 10—REAL TOPEKA PEOPLE: IN SEARCH OF COMMUNITY (TED)

CHAPTER 11—WHY I DON'T WANT A COOL PASTOR (TED)

1. *Thy kingdom come* is a phrase that has great significance to Christian people of all stripes—but how emergent leaders understand those words provides important insight into what they believe it means to be a follower of Jesus. What do some of the leading emergent writers cited in the book (page 183 and following) have to say about how they view God's Kingdom? What are the practical implications of those beliefs?
2. On page 187 we read, "What the emergent manifesto suffers from is an imbalance of too much 'already' and not enough 'not yet.'" What do you think Kevin mean by that statement?
3. Penal substitution—*penal* because Christ's death paid our penalty, and *substitution* because Christ died in our place—is "the heartbeat of the gospel," Kevin writes (p. 193). He adds, "It is not the heartbeat of the emergent gospel" (emphasis added). On what basis does he make that serious charge? What is the implication of emergent writings that equate penal substitution with "cosmic child abuse"?

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4. What is the significance of the emergent church's "soft-pedaling" of the "hard edges of Christianity," like God's wrath and a literal hell? How do you respond to the reasons listed on pages 198 and 199 describing why "we need God's wrath"?

5. No emergent leaders, we read, would be so bold as to deny Jesus' claim that he is "the way, the truth, and the life" (see page 200 and following). But what emergents mean by that is often very different from how those words of Jesus have traditionally been understood. What do you believe Jesus statement about himself means? How do some emergent writers interpret it?

6. In chapter 10, Ted writes about several postmodern churches he visited, including Westwinds (a community church in Jackson, Michigan), The Journey (a new downtown church in Grand Rapids, Michigan), and the well-known Mars Hill Bible Church (pastored by Rob Bell). He describes their efforts at ministering to postmoderns. Which of the programs and practices struck you as harmless? Did any seem clearly or potentially harmful?

7. In the chapter entitled, "Why I Don't Want a Cool Pastor," Ted tells about an encounter with emergent leader Tony Jones on the campus of Olivet Nazarene University in Kankakee, Illinois. The second half of the chapter moves to Passaic, New Jersey, where he connects with Cory Hartman (a longtime friend Ted describes as "not a cool pastor") who ministers to a small, aging congregation in an ethnically diverse, economically struggling area. Did you note any striking contrasts between the two men in their roles as spiritual leaders?

SECTION SIX

EPILOGUE: LISTENING TO ALL THE CHURCHES OF REVELATION (KEVIN)

1. *Why We Are Not Emergent* concludes with an epilogue that some have said is the most significant part of the book—worth the price of the book all by itself, according to one reviewer. Focusing on Revelation 2 and 3, Kevin notes that in addition to Revelation being a prophecy, it is also a letter, addressed to seven real churches. What is it about the content, and the common structure and specificity of the words addressed to each congregation, that underlines the fact that actual churches are being addressed?
2. What are the very real concerns addressed to the church at Ephesus that could accurately be leveled at many evangelical churches today—and which may be driving factors in the “emergence” of the emergent church?
3. Just as the letter to the Ephesus church offers warnings and guidance that would be well applied to some evangelical churches today, the letters addressed to two other churches carry warnings and direction that should be heard and heeded by some in the emerging/emergent church. What lessons from the letters from Pergamum and Thyatira speak to today’s emergent churches?

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4. What is the attraction of what Kevin describes as a “therapist-Christ”? In what ways is that characterization of Jesus insufficient and unbiblical?

5. In what ways is knowing God—in all his glory and attributes—vital to all churches, including the sometimes cold and unloving Ephesus church? to the undiscerning church at Pergamum? to the unfaithful church at Thyatira?

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