

**Oregon Trail Theology: The Frontier Millennial Christians Face—And How We’re Ready**  
**Eric Atcheson, Church Publishing Inc., 2018**

**100% Dysentery-Free Discussion Questions for Groups, by the Author**

Chapter One: “Matt’s General Store: What We Bring with Us”

1-What do you find yourself bringing with you to church, either on a given Sunday or the last time you attended? What did you bring that you felt good about? What did you bring that you wish you could change? What did you bring that you want to leave behind?

2-What are some of the defining events for your generation? How did they define both you as an individual and your generation? What would you want other generations to know about those formative events?

3-If you are a millennial, how do your economic circumstances affect the life choices you make, such as where you live, what church you attend, where you go on vacation (if you even get paid time off), and so on? If you are not a millennial, what aspects of the millennial generation’s economic narrative resonate to you, or are reflected in your own life experiences and choices?

4-Eric uses this chapter to both unpack the economic and spiritual context of many millennials and how the Church has kept itself in denial about those contexts. How have you witnessed or experienced a church in denial of the local community around it?

5-What do you think most needs to happen to adequately address the widespread generational, racial, and gendered economic inequality that the twenty-first century faces, and why? How can the Church be a part of addressing this inequality?

Chapter Two: “Leaving Independence: The Joyful Surrender of Community”

1-What does surrender to God, or the Spirit, or a higher power, look like to you in your life? What have you tried to surrender to God or your higher power, and how did it go? What have you had an easy time or a hard time surrendering to God?

2-What are the most important functions that community serves for you in your life? How has the Church acted as a community in your faith and life, for good and/or for bad? What has hindered your pursuit of community? What has helped?

3-What are some ways that you think the formation of communities has changed over the past ten to fifteen years as the millennial generation has begun to come of age? How do you feel about those changes?

4-Eric uses the term “toxic homogeneity” to describe the insularity and uniformity of segments of American Christianity. Have you experienced such toxic homogeneity yourself? What are some ways in which you think toxic homogeneity is harming the Church?

5-What are some preferences that you wish your church or community might be willing to sacrifice for the sake of forming deeper community? What effect do you hope such a sacrifice will have?

### Chapter Three: “Fording the River: Plunging Forth into New Territory”

1-How does your spending reflect your values? Do you believe there is room in your financial budget to sufficiently express your values? What might limit your ability to express your values through your spending?

2-In what ways can the church encourage and support the more nomadic younger generations that have been unable to settle down, purchase homes, raise families, or go through many of the other rites of passage of young adulthood?

3-If you are a member of a church, what would you say to a millennial who has left the church and asks you why you stayed? If you have left the church, what do you say when people ask you why you left?

4-Eric uses the history of the different Great Awakenings to suggest another may be needed for the church. What does a Great Awakening look like to you? Do you see any connection between the term “Great Awakening” and the Genesis imagery Eric uses to open and close the chapter?

5-What is the frontier the church—or your church—faces in the coming years? Do you feel prepared to face it? What would help you to feel more prepared?

### Chapter Four: “Hunting for Food: Two Hundred Pounds of Spiritual Nourishment”

1-What are some ways you have either seen or experienced people (possibly yourself) being pushed out of traditional spiritual communities like brick-and-mortar churches?

2-How has social media helped or hindered your spiritual life? How do you think it may have helped or hindered the spiritual life of any religious communities you belong to?

3-In what ways can you see online spiritual communities replacing brick-and-mortar communities? In what ways do you think online communities cannot replace the brick-and-mortar communities?

4- How do you find balance in “screen time” versus face-to-face interactions? What does balancing the two look or feel like to you in your day-to-day life?

5-What similarities and differences do you see in the sorts of toxicity in online communities and social media compared to in-person communities like churches? What more should be done to address this toxicity?

### Chapter Five: “Bartering and Bargaining: When and How to Repair Our Brokenness”

1-How has the church been a source of healing you, or for those close to you? How has the church been a source of pain for you, or for those close to you?

2-What are some of the factors that you think has contributed to the climate of distrust in the church, especially in the millennial generation? Is there one factor that stands out to you?

3-What are some concrete steps the church can take to both improve its capacity to help people heal and repent for the ways in which it has harmed others? What are some concrete steps that you personally can help the church take?

4-Eric suggests expanding our traditional understanding of prayer to encompass actions not necessarily thought of as prayerful, but which still communicate values. What sorts of actions do you take in your life that you can approach as prayers, or as prayerful?

5-How might moving from a paradigm of conversion to one of cultivating mutual respect change interactions between Christians and non-Christians? How might it impact the church's relationship in your community?

#### Chapter Six: "Rafting the Columbia River: Handing Control Over to New Generations"

1-What do you think makes a habit healthy or unhealthy? What healthy spiritual habits do you have? How can habits become ruts or toll roads that keep on being followed?

2-What are some of the sacred cows you have seen the church—or your church—worship? Do you have any sacred cows of your own, and how do you resist the temptation to worship them?

3-Eric uses the term "time capsule churches" in this chapter as a way to describe communities that spiritually remain in a past era. If you have experienced time capsule churches, what are some common characteristics you have seen?

4-What steps can the church take to diversify its leadership, including intergenerationally? What steps can institutions outside the church, like governments, take to do the same?

5-What values do you hope to see elevated as leadership in the church changes over from one generation to the next? What values do you hope to see be left in the past?

#### Chapter Seven: "It's Not Manifest Destiny: A Church for All"

1-How have the consequences of the 2016 election impacted you personally? Has the election impacted any of your relationships with your friends/family/church?

2-What should the church do to acknowledge its history of not just being used as a partisan tool but as an instrument with which to oppress persons of color, women, and LGBTQ persons?

3-How do you expect future generations like the millennials and younger Generation X-ers to act as leaders? In what ways might they be similar to current leaders? In what ways may they differ?

4-In Chapter Two, Eric shared a story of colleagues being asked to name the collective experiences that defined their respective generations. What do you think your generation's collective experience of the current presidency is, and how do you think it might affect your generation going into the future?

5-What role does memory or the carrying of stories play for you and the formation of your own worldview? Are there particular stories of your own, or stories belonging to a friend, relative, or ancestor, that are especially important for you to share?