

Goodmorning, my name is Ricky Cates, and I'm a senior at Wesleyan Christian Academy. I'll be attending North Carolina State University in the fall and have recently been looking for a Methodist church near Raleigh. I've recently come across some very startling statistics from the Barna Group Study, though. The study found that only two in ten millennials deem church important and more than a third take an anti-church stance. Rachel Held Evans recently wrote an article attempting to explain this phenomenon. She asserts that young adults shy away from church because we rarely find a genuine Christian community. Many older church leaders think that they simply need to add edgier worship or add to the "cool" factor in some way, and Evans responds by saying, "Having been advertised to our whole lives, we millennials have highly sensitive BS meters, and we're not easily impressed with consumerism or performances." She holds that because we as a generation are not easily impressed by showy advertisements or some hip new worship experience, authenticity and preaching true Christianity is the biggest issue. While those may be big issues, I believe there is a more pressing matter facing young Christians. Among my peers, I have noticed a growing enmity toward a misrepresentation of the Christian faith. Millennials continually take issue with everything that skews Christ's message, from the crusades in the early eleventh century to present day judgemental, pretentious preachers who teach Christianity as a mere religion. I recently came across a video showing Matt Chandler, a famous evangelical, addressing this particular topic with incredible fervor and astonishing accuracy. He talks about how, often times, the church, knowingly or not, fought against conversion instead of encouraging it. For example, in his freshman year of college, he took a single mother engaging in an extramarital affair to a sermon at a local church. This particular sermon, however, was on adultery, and to drive his point across, the preacher took out a rose and pointed out how beautiful and aromatic the rose was. He

then threw it out to the crowd and told everyone to pass the rose around and smell it. While the rose was being passed around, the preacher proceeded to give his sermon, which Matt describes as “fear mongering at its best.” After the rose had made its way around the crowd, the preacher instructed someone in the front row to bring him the rose, and he points out how the stem is now broken and the petals are falling off and the rose has lost its former beauty, and his big climactic ending was to ask the audience, “Now who would want this?” and Matt is sitting in the pew, filled with anger and barely holding back the urge to stand up and shout, “Jesus wants the rose!” He goes on to talk about how this was simply one of many examples of a perverse teaching of the gospel by older church leaders. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 warns, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond with their deeds.” Scripture says that Satan and his followers can be easily mistaken for the righteous and pure. Millennials aren’t leaving the church solely because we want more authenticity, but because we don’t see Jesus in the church anymore. We see strict sets of rules and religion-fueled animosity in the church rather than a search for truth and love and mercy. Instead of being too shy or timid to ask “taboo” questions, we should search together for the entirety of the truth because God is truth and not merely a set of rules. Fortunately for the class of 2016, we have grown up in a very accepting church, with leaders that never shy away from tough questions and always answer them honestly. I would like to thank Jay Bowers, Rick Stanco, Betty Fields, and Dana Bird for never dismissing questions and always supporting my peers and me. As we move forward into this next chapter of our lives, I would like to encourage all of us with an excerpt from 1 Timothy. Chapter four verse twelve says, “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young,

but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.” Next year we will have no parents or youth leaders around us to help us represent the cross. I encourage all of my peers and all of you, as well, to always lead by example, in every aspect of life, so that others may come to know truth.