

# Man in the Mirror Bible Study

## Speaker Series presents...

### Jeremy Schurke

## Sleeping Giants: Millennials, Boomers, and the Future of Men in the Church

Rough Transcript

Jeremy Schurke

#### **Jeremy Schurke:**

Thanks, Pat. All right. Is this on? Can you all hear me? All right. Good morning. How's everyone doing? Great. I'm glad to be back. Pat, that was a great job of whittling down all that stuff better than I could explain it. So, I appreciate that.

So, like you said, yeah, I'm thankful to be here. I'm excited to be with you guys. We're in a series called Reconstructing Manhood, which seems like a big topic, right? It's saying, one, that something needs to be reconstructed, something is broken. Two, that we know or know of someone or something that can tell us what manhood is. Three, that it's important for now, that this is a big topic.

As I was preparing for this and thinking through it, what I should talk about, Pat gave me free rein, which is dangerous. I thought before we even get into this reconstruction conversation, I think men, at least from what I'm learning and what I'm seeing, we need to be awakened. So, before we reconstruct, we need to wake up.

My talk today is called Sleeping Giants: Millennials, Boomers and the Future of Men in the Church, which is also a pretty big title, and it's good that it's called Sleeping Giants, and God has a sense of humor because last night, two of my four kids were up a lot. So, I feel like a slumbering giant this morning. So, bear with me if I fall asleep standing up, but, yeah.

When I'm thinking about these two massive groups, why Sleeping Giants? Well, Millennials and boomers are the biggest generations ever, right? Boomers came along as you all know, the biggest generation of all time in human history. Recently, millennials have passed you as the biggest generation. From everything I'm learning and reading, it seems like the relational gap between the two is just as big. So, how do we deal with that moving forward as the church?

Like Pat said, I work at a department of Man in the Mirror called Mirror Labs. Mirror, which is deep reflection, we want to look at what's really going on, and labs is we're in an interesting spot culturally

that we need to start actually taking new experimental approaches and trying new things because some of the things that we've done before is not working now.

So, this morning, what I want to start off with is since it's called Sleeping Giants, I want to give you giant statistics, these three landmark statistics that I've found this year have stuck with me and have probably been most influential to me and what I've been learning about, and what I think everyone in this room should know about, too.

So, here's number one. Gallup came out this year and said 47% of American adults said they are members of a church, mosque or synagogue based on polling last year. The synagogue and the mosque part of it is less than 10%. So, the majority of this they're talking about the church.

What's interesting about it, it's the first time since they started polling in the '30s that church members have been the minority in this country. As you can see, I don't know, do some of you guys do stocks? Most men say no to stocks. They dabble in stocks, but this is not a stock that I would want to invest in because it's curling down. This is really important to know because we're on a trendline over years and years and years curling down away from the church.

So, when I see something like this, my initial question is, "Well, where are they going? Where are they landing? What's happening?"

So, this is the second statistic that I think is really important for us to know, and it mirrors the first statistic, and this is the growth of religiously unaffiliated people in this country. The church members are falling down and religiously unaffiliated people who say they have no religion at all are curling up in the exact same manner, which is interesting, right? What does this mean? Well, when I see this, I think, well, my next question is, who are these religiously unaffiliated people?

The last statistic we should see is more young adults are unaffiliated than in the past. So, some people have said, "Well, this happens in life. You graduate school, you do your thing, you move away from the church, but then you get married, you have kids, and then you come back in because you need the church and everything else," but statistics are showing that that's not the case and every decade, the number is increasing significantly on people who are unaffiliated religiously.

So, to summarize this, we have a giant problem. The religious landscape in America is shifting dramatically. So, in the past 20 years, church members have decreased by 20% of the total population and religious nones have increased by 11%. A religious none again is someone who says, "What religion are you? None," right? So, they identify as atheist, agnostic, nothing in particular.

What's interesting about this is the nones are the fastest growing religious category in the United States over the last 20 years, and now they are the second largest religious category in the US. As we could see from the trendlines, they're going in that direction more and more.

How big of a problem is this? Why is this even important to know, right? So, I've made friends with several social scientists and sociologists. There's two guys that I really like, Paul Jupp and Ryan Burge wrote a book called Religious Nones. He's probably the foremost sociologist on this topic. Right now, they are trying to get funding. They've done preliminary studies, but they're trying to get funding to do the biggest dechurch study ever in American history.

They say this current dechurching trend is not only massive but it's unprecedented, if we have nothing to compare it to. For reference point, we can take the Great Awakening. Do you all remember the Great Awakening? Not to say that you were there, but the Great Awakening was this religious revival in British America, in the British-American colonies. It was between 1720 and 1740-ish. So, 20 years and there's some key players, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley that tightens in our faith.

Out of this period, we called this The Great Awakening, why? What happened? Well, over that 20-year period, church membership rose 10% out of the whole population. That was enough for us to be like, "This is a great ..." That changed culture. That changed America.

What we're seeing in the past 20 years is it's changed 20%, twice as much as that, and not only is it unprecedented, it's the biggest religious shift in American history and it's the first time it's away from Christianity. This is reality today.

I don't know about you guys. I'm the kind of guy where I just want to know what's true. I don't care how bad it is. Just tell me what's going on and let me figure out what's the foundation baseline with where we are.

So, that seems to be the reality. So, the future. What does this mean? Why do these stats matter for us here today? Why we even need to be talking about it? Well, young men are leaving the church and they're becoming more and more religiously unaffiliated. They're being lulled to sleep by culture and they're being lulled away from Christ and the church. Not only are they being lulled away and lulled to sleep, but they're doing that at alarming rates. It should be sounding alarms in all of us. So, we're moving from let's say that Great Awakening to fast asleep. We're out, we're looking at other things, and we're just wandering off lost sheep on our way.

On the flip side, our elder statesmen seem to be unsure what to do, "What do we do about this?" and maybe even apprehensive at the severity of the problem. When I'm talking about this and showing things and working through it, I get a lot of apprehension like, "Well, it's probably not as bad as you think. God's still in control," which is true, but Christians are pretty hopeful people because we know what happens at the end, right? We know the big revelation at the end. Christ return and there's a new heavens and new earth, right? Sometimes that turns into blind optimism about the present, and we're not willing to face the hardships and the reality of what we're dealing with right now.

So, in my work, I've seen that boomers not only struggle how to figure out how to engage the dechurched young men, which makes sense. This is a new thing, but they're also struggling with how to engage the young men at their church. There's a local pastor in town I was talking to just the other day. He's telling me a story that he has man who he respects, who's awesome, 65 years old, he's an elder at the church, and this guy is probably 35.

Some younger guys at this church came up to the pastor and said, "Hey, we went to the elder and he's so humble. We just love him so much. We said, 'Hey, will you disciple us?' and he said, 'No.' So, we're just telling you as our pastor that's weird. So, maybe check on him. I don't know."

So, my pastor friend went to this elder and said, "Hey, I heard some of the guys in the church gave you pretty much a softball question. They came to you. They asked you to disciple them and you said no. Is everything okay? Should I be worried?"

He said, "Oh, no. Everything's fine. Honestly, I just don't know what to do. I don't know what to do and I don't want to waste their time."

So, my pastor friend was like, "It was one of the most sinking feelings I've had being a pastor because I'm like, 'What kind of pastor hasn't equipped his elder to disciple people in his church?'"

So, yeah, but this is a common phenomena. A lot of older men seem to not really know what to do with these younger guys. On top of that, I think there's also this apprehension to accept the reality of the severity of the problem mainly because this is happening on their watch.

Older men, my elders might have fallen asleep in the watchtower a little bit and had this problem grow over the past 20 years to the point where it's at a tipping point. This ongoing problem now, just now, is seemingly now catching church leaders napping, and they're trying to come to grips with this reality.

So, Sleeping Giants, dechurched millennials, disconnected boomers, how do we face this giant problem for the future of the church in America and the future of men in that church? What do we do? How do we wake up generations of men?

Well, I'll flip the question on you, guys. Let me ask you this. What causes us to wake up in the morning? Yeah. That happens a lot. Had enough rest, an alarm. This man knows the truth. Daylight. Scientifically, the answer is daylight. Secondly, our temperature can rise. That can wake us up. We can detect movement, but, really, what it comes down to is the optic nerve in our eyes we sense morning light. So, it awakens us.

Here's something interesting about light. In 2017, these guys right here, American scientists, they're the most scientist scientists I've seen in a long time. They won the Nobel Prize, and they won the Nobel Prize for discoveries of molecular mechanisms responsible for our circadian rhythms. Is everyone still awake or did you fall asleep when I said that?

So, our circadian rhythms, we're not going to too much detail. Basically, they prove that we have an actual biological internal clock, a physical part of our brain that links us to the natural rhythms of creation, specifically through light. It's really fascinating when you start to look into it.

So, in the natural world, sunlight is the strongest time cue to set our internal clocks for rest and activity, and that makes sense because from the beginning of time, you get up with the sun and you go down with the sun. Our bodily processes are matched to daylight so that when the light diminishes, our bodies actually start preparing us to sleep. They trigger melatonin. Then when this same light intensifies at dawn, our bodies are triggered to release cortisol and adrenaline to increase alertness.

Why is that important? Why are we even talking about this? This seems such like a left field curve ball. Well, while it proved that we are made to be in sync with nature and creation, it also proved that when this clock is out of sync, our bodies break down. So, from the beginning of time, we get up with the sun, we go down with the sun. Then we control fire, so then as the sun goes down and the embers cool off, and there's the moon and the stars above, then we fall asleep. Then it goes from sunlight to firelight, to gaslight, to electric light. Now, we can have light 24/7. We control the power of light.

They're starting to think and see that maybe this onslaught of the issues we face health-wise, whether it be obesity, cancer, all these problems might be because we're not resetting our circadian rhythms, our internal clock to nature. When that gets out of whack, the problem, it compounds on itself and unbelievable issues arise, depression, anxiety, all the things.

So, as this guy I know likes to say, "Here's the big idea about that," the light around us signals to our bodies when it's time to be active and when it's time to rest. We have discovered that when we do not receive the right light, we cannot thrive. Humans cannot. If it's artificial, we cannot thrive. Our bodies start to break down. When we see and absorb the correct natural light, our minds and our bodies flourish.

So, how do you wake up a sleeping giant? How do you wake up a generation of men? Humans cannot make a light strong enough and big enough to wake up all these people. It's literally impossible. Yet, they claim to have this all the time. They say, "This is the way. This is how you move forward. This is how you wake up from all your issues and depressions and all these things."

There's only one light big enough for that. It's the one who says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Who's heard this since they were a kid? Me. It doesn't really hit the same like you're saying, "Okay. We have the light of the world. We have candles. We do something, singing maybe, at Christmas." I don't know, but if you look at the context in which Jesus dropped this bomb, it hits a lot harder.

So, the feast of tabernacles was this week long fall festival commemorating basically the 40-year journey through the wilderness of the Jews. So, on the last day of that week of this festival, they would end with this light ceremony called the illumination of the temple. It was on autumn equinox when the day and the night were at equal time. So, it looked like this at the temple.

So, basically, these priests would light these huge balls of oil to remember and celebrate God's deliverance from Egypt when they went out to the Promised Land by that pillar of fire. So, they lit up the whole temple. Jewish literature tells us that it was so bright and so lit both physically and party-wise that it would light up half of Jerusalem. It would light up half of Jerusalem because there was no large scale lighting after dusk. So, almost all of Jerusalem was lit up.

They would say that the men of piety and good works used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands singing songs and praises and countless Levites played harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets, and musical instruments or instruments of music. So, it was a party. It was a light party.

I mean, I love seeing group of men act like this. They're acting the full out here because they're remembering something that was crazy, that this pillar of fire led their ancestors through the wilderness for 40 years into the Promised Land.

It makes me wonder sometimes like, "Do they know something that I don't know because I don't get with my friends and do that?" If we did, people would think we're crazy, but these men would dance until dawn, until the sun actually rose. They would effectively shut down the club. They would go until dawn. They would shut down the temple.

It was in this place, under these lights at the treasury of the temple, under these huge, see those four up there, these huge flaming candles that they were as high as the walls. They had ladders to get all the way to the top. These basins had 65 liters of oil on each one. These oil fireballs burning bright the whole city of Jerusalem that Jesus gathered everybody's attention and said, "I'm not only the true light of Jerusalem, I'm the true of the light of the whole world."

If we talk about a mic drop moment, this is wild. Who has the audacity to all these people celebrating their God in the way that they were led out of the wilderness to say, "I'm the true light"? It's wild.

Not only does it say that he's the light, but that whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but they will have the light of life. The Israelites in the wilderness, they had to follow that pillar of fire and that was the only way they could see, and it not only led them out of the wilderness, but it led them to where they were going, to the Promised Land.

So, Jesus is saying, "Follow me and I will lead you to real life, eternal life, the good life."

So, this light of Christ wakes us up. It leads us forward and it gives us life. I'm here as one person to share with you guys that I think we are officially in the wilderness again. We are a minority as Christians in the country. So, we would do well to heed from the lessons of our Jewish ancestors in the faith. No matter how dark the night, when they were under this luminous cloud, there was no stumbling, no confusion, and no fear.

So, I'm asking everyone who's listening here this morning and will be listening in the future online, wake up. For the love of God, we need to wake up.

So, here's what I'd like to say to millennials. I want to echo these scriptures. You are all children of light, children of the day. You are not of the night nor of the darkness, so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

I don't know about you guys, but I can fall asleep really quickly. I'm talking physically. I can literally fall asleep really quickly and my wife thinks it's a problem. She sometimes wonders if I have narcolepsy. If it was an Olympic sport, I could probably make the US trials in falling asleep if I put my mind to it.

It's gotten me in trouble, I'll be honest with you. At the end of the day being on the couch and after getting the kids down and my wife is recounting her day, and that couch turns into a, I don't know, king size 10,000 count plus bed as I'm trying to stay awake and listen. It's difficult. It's difficult.

I mean, I'll be honest. I've fallen asleep on a date before. We were eating sushi. She was telling me something, and I just ... If you want to get in a fight with your wife, fall asleep over dinner on a date night. It will be real juicy.

So, I think I fall asleep because I'm tired. I'm exhausted. As a 36-year-old, I have four kids under six. I'm trying to figure out how to be a parent. I've been married nine years. I'm trying to figure out how to be a husband. I'm trying to figure out my career, how I'm going to build a life. I'm just in the throws of it, right? I'm tired.

As a millennial, I can vouch for most of us and say, "We're all tired," and that's why we need to be careful because when we're tired, we wander. When we're tired, darkness makes us sleepy. Artificial lights make us crazy. When we're tired, we're vulnerable.

So, living in this darkened world, this broken world, when we lose sight of the light of the world, the light of life, we either stumble into darkness and fall asleep as millennials or we try and find a substitute light to live by and try and stay woke.

If we don't surround ourselves with other men to help us stay alert and sober, we literally are like that bug going into the artificial light zapper. It's not going to end well for us or those fish at the bottom of the sea that see the light and it's hanging off that monster fish that's gobble them up. I mean, to the millennials, I have to say don't sleep on Christ.

Now, for everyone else in the room, to the boomers, raise your hand if you're a boomer. Hey, welcome. Glad you're here. This is what I echo to you from the scriptures. Wake up from your sleep, climb out of your coffins. Christ will show you the light. So, watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times. The church needs you."

We as young men need you. I personally need you. What do we need you? We need you guys to invest, not just financially, but in all ways, in every way. I've been working on this theory that God divides our lives into thirds. The first third of your life, it's all about consuming. You're consuming knowledge. You're figuring out how to grow. Your body is growing. You're just figuring out how to exist in this world.

Then you move into the next third of your life, which is creating. You're creating a family. You're creating a career. You're building it out. Then the last third of life is about giving. You're taking all the things that you've consumed and created off of that and then giving it back.

This I think is how humans are supposed to function. The middle, creators, are creating the pathways for the consumers, the first ones, and then the givers are giving back, and they are overprotecting them. They're over these consumers. Then the last third are the givers, and they're under supporting the middle creators, these middle-aged people.

Unfortunately, I see from time to time that we live as consumers, creators, makers, and go back to consumers. We go back to being retired and just taking it all in for ourself, and we're not actively trying to give everything we have away. I can imagine a more fulfilled life than to be on my deathbed in a natural death saying, "I have nothing left to give. I gave it all away. I gave all of my wisdom, all of my experiences, all of my time, all of my energy to the future of the church, the future of my children, the future of young people. I wish them well. Now, I get to see the face of God."

If you're in the last third of life, I want to say this. In my view, you are literally in the golden age of discipleship. You were made and you're alive now for this moment to disciple younger men. That's the biggest reason God still has older men here is to disciple and help us because I'm telling you, we are treading water. We are trying to figure everything out. We need help.

I've told people this. I've told older men this. Like I said before, it gets this response of like, "Well, what do I do? I don't know what to do."

Well, I'm glad you asked. Here's Jeremy's quick tips on how to develop intergenerational relationships. So, I'm going to break these down because if these tips can help you guys break through these age-related stereotypes, pass on faith from generation to generation, and help the church lay down a better foundation for the future, then we're all winning.

Okay. Here's six things. Remember your motivation. Why are you doing anything you're doing? Well, God's not through with you yet just like he's not through with me yet. He still cares about you and the question is do you care about what he cares about, right? I know most of the men in this room would say, "Yes. Absolutely." Well, God cares about the great exodus of young men leaving the church. That's a fact. It's his bride, and young men are leaving in droves. So, if you care about that, please take initiative.

Secondly, intentionally pray for young people and have them pray for you. When you pray for young people ... Are there anybody in your life who's younger, who needs help, who God has put in your path, and are you intentionally praying for this person? Also, have them pray for you.

The best way to me to connect with somebody is to go to someone and say, "Hey, are you a praying person? Do you pray because, honestly, I could use some help? Here's what I'm struggling with. Would you pray for me?" It offers invitation for relationship.

Number three, form more interest groups and less age groups. All these are just really practical. I know a lot of us get in to people our own age and just cling there and get in that, I don't know, that tunnel of group think, but I'm sure a lot of guys in here have interesting hobbies, passions. I'm looking around. Definitely some of you guys are into cigars, maybe whiskey, maybe fishing, maybe football games, house projects. Maybe you build motorcycles. I don't know what you guys are into, but you're all into something and I'm telling you there's something for everyone. So, if you form groups around your interest, then you will have younger guys show up.

Fourth is know your story, share your story. I actually first put share your story, but I think it's better to know your story because like with my dad and his friends, I really want to know them. I'm not interested in the shallow day-to-day mundane stuff. I actually want to know the good, the bad, and the ugliest parts of his life. Why? Because I'm experiencing the good, bad, and ugliest parts of my life day-to-day, and I need help and, "How did you weather that? How did you get through that?"

You can't share your life with someone unless you do the deep work of better understanding your life story. So, I know there's a stigma with older men, with counseling and working through your life, but you got to get over the stigma because we need to know the deepest parts of your life to help us survive the hardest parts of ours.

Fifth is just this little mantra. In conversations with people, listen, connect, and help. I was working on a project a few years ago with an organization. This came up and it's the best, most simple, straightforward way how to connect with someone. If you're in a relationship with someone and having a conversation, listen, connect, and help. Actively listen to what they're saying. Don't even say any comments, just only ask questions. Ask further clarifying questions.

I was in this experiment one time where this guy said, "I can know someone's deepest issues in their life in 10 minutes," and everyone's like, "That doesn't even makes sense."

He's like, "It's really actually simple. You just have to ask a question."

So, he brought someone on stage, this woman, and they have this two chairs, they're talking to each other. He said, "I'm just telling you right now, I'm only going to ask questions, and I'd love for you to answer honestly."

You can direct wherever.

He was like, "How are you?"

Within eight minutes, she was balling crying telling some of the hardest things that have ever gone in her life. He wasn't prying. He was just following up actively listening to what she was saying with more clarifying questions of what's going on. Eight minutes, that's all it took.

In listening, we can connect, "Oh, I know that person. Oh, I've been there. Oh, I like that thing." Then in the connection, offering help like, "Hey, do you need any help with that? Can I help you work through that? I also struggle with that? Can I help you?" Listen, connect, and help.

The last thing is just serving together. Is there a worthy cause that you and someone else both have a passion for because in serving together, when we struggle together, we bond together. As men, that's how that works.

If multiple generations of men would worship, work, play, and serve together, things would change. That's what I'm fully convinced of. That's what I'm here today to say. If we did all these things together, things would change. We would course correct and not in our own strength, of course, but by acknowledging and repenting how we've fallen asleep and then embracing the light of the world.

The truth is we may have to do church a little differently in the future. That's okay because when all ages are regularly interacting and loving one another, God's honored or satisfied, and this broken world will come flocking to the light on the hill. So, to you men today I say please wake up. Arise. Oh, it's not on there.

Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon each and every one of you." Thanks.