

# Preaching to the Next Generation

*by Kyle Campbell*

The generation of twenty-somethings are sometimes referred to as the “lost” generation because of their attendance at worship assemblies on any given Sunday is so low. In fact, many have not “walked away from the church” because they were honestly never even there in the first place.

However, those who have walked away are not as cynical and uninterested as you might assume. Research has shown that only 18 percent of these “lost” young adults said they were neither spiritual nor religious. So it is somewhat encouraging that most of them consider themselves “spiritual.” Yet their beliefs are confused. For example, a majority of them (58 percent) do not see any difference between the God of the Bible and the gods or spiritual beings depicted by other world religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism.

Today’s “lost” generation in their twenties are actually closer to the historic gospel than the older, living generations who do not attend worship assemblies. For example, most of the younger crowd believes in Christ’s resurrection (66 percent). Yet this is not especially encouraging, because they simultaneously accept other contradictory belief systems, such as Buddhism or Mormonism.

However, they still need to hear the truth from God’s word. They lack a solid foundation of biblical history on which to build a proper understanding of God, sin, and the gospel. But the good news is that almost 90 percent of twenty-somethings said they would be willing to listen if someone wanted to tell them about the gospel. About 60 percent would be willing to study the Bible if a friend asked them to do so. Only 17 percent (1 in 6) would first go to church if seeking spiritual guidance. They prefer going to trusted individuals. That is where we, as individual Christians, come in.

What are some thoughts for teaching this age group? First, remember that God’s word is still the greatest help you can give anyone. Our primary responsibility is to share the truth of God’s word with love (Ephesians 4:15). This generation is willing to talk to us, if we can answer their questions with patience, compassion, and understanding. Know your Bible and provide real answers to their questions, whether they ask you about the origin of life, the veracity of the Bible, or death and suffering (1 Peter 3:15). Christians today fall short in this area more than any other.

Second, be intentional with your conversation. Talk openly about the claims of the scriptures. God is the Creator, who demands holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16), but offers mercy through Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Third, share the good news without compromise (Acts 20:27). We cannot leave out vital details that clarify the gospel. Just as Paul stressed in Romans 6-8, every generation needs to know that God created a perfect world, Adam’s sin introduced death on the whole world, and Christ has provided the only solution.

Fourth, love one another, “for by this shall all people know that we are His disciples” (John 13:35). Our love for one another, without hypocrisy, has a powerful effect on those who do not yet know the truth. This generation wants real relationships, not platitudes.

Fifth, show how the Bible makes sense of our world. The Bible is God’s eyewitness account of world history, giving us the big picture we need to understand science, history, and the problems of our day (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Sixth, be real and personal. Let others see that God’s grace is active in your life (Ephesians 2:1-9), as you serve and focus on the needy — both spiritually and physically (Galatians 6:1; James 1:27).

This generation wants to see authentic spirituality. Self-sacrificial, holy love is proof of your living faith. Furthermore, make sure your life backs up what you say (James 2:14-26). The twenty-somethings are checking to see if your life matches your words.

Seventh, invite them to worship assemblies or Bible study. Many of these young people are just waiting for an invitation to go to worship or a Bible study (but make sure it is a good one).

Eight, don't quit. Keep praying, and remind them about the compassion, mercy, and forgiveness that Christ displayed on the cross (Colossians 2:13-14).

This generation wants more than the same old entertainment and insufficient answers. They enjoy deep conversation. They also want meaningful relationships, and they want to find a spiritual force that will change lives and the world for the better. So Christians need to understand this generation and invest in them if they want to reach them. Devote your time, your resources, and your thoughts to engaging them, making time for them, and giving a reasoned defense (or "apologetic") of your beliefs with deep understanding and patience.

We expect surveys to reveal a closed, angry, anti-Christian attitude — but that is not reality. They are generally cautious — but open. And they are willing to talk about Christ and the gospel. The implications are exciting. The way to reach this generation is through sincere, truthful relationships that go beyond inadequate, lightweight approaches. Consistently, research indicates that this age group wants more than shallow talk; they want real answers to deep questions, and they want to wrestle through those questions together. They are seeking to find a depth of life, and they feel a responsibility to help the world and those within it. These attitudes are found in the character of the Creator and reflect what He wants the church to be. We need to implement what God has told us, for His call is clear. Psalm 79:13 says that we "... will give thee thanks for ever: we will show forth thy praise to all generations." It's time for the church of this generation to respond to God's call.

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## **The Cure for Despair**

*by Stan Cox*

Despair is a condition common to man. Even those who are strongest spiritually come across circumstances and times where they can cope only with the help of the Lord. The Psalmist felt this way, and said:

"To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock: do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit" (Psalm 28:1).

Can you imagine crying out to a God who has no concern for your welfare? To make your petition known, only to expect and receive no help? Fortunately, we know and understand that God loves His children. Those who are His can:

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

The Psalmist knew of the tender mercies of His God. In the midst of his despair he cried out, expected and received an answer from His God:

“Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him” (Psalm 28:6-7).