**9 Important Insights about Generation Z**

By [Sean McDowell](https://www.josh.org/author/sean/) December 8, 2016

While the name Generation Z seems to be the most widespread, they are also referred to as the “Selfie Generation,” “iGen,” “Post-Millennials,” the “App Generation,” and more. But regardless of the title, here are nine insights about this generation from my personal experience and research:

**1. Digital Natives:**While Millennials grew up in a technologically savvy and connected world, younger members of Generation Z cannot remember a world without the Internet. They grew up swiping an iPad before they learned how to talk and are the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones. Teenage members of Gen Z are connected nearly every waking hour of the day.

**2. Entrepreneurial**: Gen Zers have been raised with businesses such as Uber and airbnb, seeing how easy and simple it is to use your own time and resources to make money. 72% of older members of Gen Z want to start their own business.[[1]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**3. Diverse**: This is the last generation that will be majority white (52%). Between 2000-2010, the country’s Hispanic population grew at four times the rate of the total population.[[2]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2%22%20%5Co%20%22) The idea of a black president is not exceptional to them—its normal. Gen Zers have grown up experiencing diversity, and they feel overwhelmingly positive about it.

**4. Less Religious Identification**: In 1966, 6.6% of incoming freshman reported being unaffiliated with any religion. In 2015, nearly one-third (29.6%) of all incoming college students reported not identifying with any particular religion.[[3]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn3%22%20%5Co%20%22) The question is whether young people today are truly moving away from religion or just defining themselves differently than previous generations. I tend towards the latter explanation, although there is probably some truth in the first.

**5. Blurry**: Formerly distinct lines are now considered “blurry.” Technology has blurred the lines between home and work, study and entertainment, and public and private. Gen Zers have a different experience of family—same-sex households, working moms, stay-at-home dads, three-parent families, and couples choosing not to have kids. The nuclear family will make up less than a third of all families by 2026.[[4]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn4%22%20%5Co%20%22) And, of course, gender and romantic identities have become blurry as well. [[5]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn5%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**6. Overwhelmed**: In her interviews with teens for her article in *Time* magazine,Susanna Schrobsdorff says that “there was a pervasive sense that being a teenager today is a draining full-time job that includes doing schoolwork, managing a social media identity and fretting about career, climate change, sexism, racism—you name it.”[[6]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn6%22%20%5Co%20%22) 68% feel overwhelmed by everything they need to do each week.[[7]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn7%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**7. Lonely**: 3 million adolescents 12-17 have had a “major depressive episode” in the past year. There has been in increase in anxiety and depression among high school students since 2012. And this upsurge cuts across virtually all demographics—suburban, urban, and rural. [[8]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn8%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**8. Progressive**: Most Gen Zers plan to get married, have children, and buy a home—although probably later than previous generations. And they are less likely to drink, smoke, and take drugs. Yet they hold more progressive views on issues like the legality of marijuana and the morality of same-sex marriage. [[9]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn9%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**9. Individualistic**: Anne Fisher captures the forces that have helped create an individualistic emphasis among this generation: “Gen Z is used to having everything personalized just for them, from playlists to newsfeeds to products features of all kinds. They’ve grown up expecting that.”[[10]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn10%22%20%5Co%20%22)

There is a tendency to be either overly romantic or critical about new generations. The reality is that members of Generation Z face the same life challenges as previous generations, but in a super-connected and rapid-moving technological age. And let us not forget that they have the same deep needs for love, significance, meaning, and belonging as every previous generation.

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**Notes:**

[[1]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1%22%20%5Co%20%22) “6 Trends Among Gen Z In 2016” (Nov 23, 2016).

[[2]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref2%22%20%5Co%20%22) Alex Williams, “Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z” New York Times(Sep 18, 2015).

[[3]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref3%22%20%5Co%20%22) Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Joseph J. Ramirez, Melissa C. Aragon, Maria Ramirez Suchard, Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, The American Freshman: Fifty-Year Trends | 1966-2015, 7.

[[4]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref4%22%20%5Co%20%22) Marika Dobbin, “Four Things Making Generation-Z Miserable” (Dec 10, 2015).

[[5]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref5%22%20%5Co%20%22) Noah Michelson, “What’s A Skoliosexual?” Huffington Post (10/19/2015).

[[6]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref6%22%20%5Co%20%22) Susanna Schrobsdorff, “The Kids Are Not All Right,” Time (Nov 7, 2016): 47.

[[7]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref7%22%20%5Co%20%22) Erin Anderssen, “Through The Eyes Of Generation Z” (June 28, 2016).

[[8]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref8%22%20%5Co%20%22) Susanna Schrobsdorff, “The Kids Are Not All Right,” Time (Nov 7, 2016): 47.

[[9]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref9%22%20%5Co%20%22) The American Freshman, 29.

[[10]](https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/9-important-insights-about-generation-z%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref10%22%20%5Co%20%22) Anne Fisher, “Forget Millennials. Are You Ready To Hire Generation Z?” Fortune.Com (August 14, 2016).

Generation Z (those born between 1999 and 2015) are struggling today, and few understand why or what to do about it. Research reveals five common challenges, and though they’re nothing new, recent data shows that young people experience them in greater numbers than ever before:

* [**Mental Health Issues**](https://resolutionmovement.org/five-truths-to-know-about-mental-health/)
* **Shame and Emotional Wounds**
* [**Porn Use**](https://resolutionmovement.org/the-last-time-i-looked-at-porn/)
* **Loneliness**
* [**Lack**](https://www.christianpost.com/news/gen-z-is-the-least-christian-generation-in-american-history-barna-finds.html)**of a Biblical Worldview**

At [Resolution](https://resolutionmovement.org/) (a new initiative from Josh McDowell Ministry), Josh and Ben Bennett have started the *Resolution Podcast* to deal with these issues directly. We reexamine what God says in His Word, along with what we’ve learned from brain science, to find ways to help young people learn how to heal, thrive and live in wholeness. Learn more [here](https://josh.org/resolution-reaching-a-generation-with-wholeness/).

**What Are Gen-Zs Like?**

By Steve Cable, Apr 25, 2021 www.Probe.org

*In order to grow the number of Gen-Z Christians, we need an understanding of ways to build bridges from their pluralistic, secular worldview to seriously contemplating the unique grace of God. Steve Cable draws upon the wisdom of two pastors who are making a real difference in the lives of young adults to address this important topic.*

In this article we look beyond the Millennials to consider the latest generation and what they tell us about the future of Evangelicals in America. Gen-Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010. This year, half of the Gen-Z generation are 18 or older.

By the time they are all at least 18, the Millennials and Gen-Zs will make up almost 50% of the adult population. We will consider how this generation compares with previous generations. We want to understand this generation to truly communicate the good news of the gospel to them; to help them “to walk in a manner worth of the Lord.”[{1}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text1)

In their book, *So the Next Generation Will Know*[{2}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text2), Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace identified some key traits common among Gen-Zs. They are:

1. Digital Multitaskers – “spending nearly every waking hour interacting with . . . digital technology,” often while watching television
2. Impatient – quickly moving from thing to thing with an attention span of around 8 seconds
3. Fluid – constantly blurring the lines; making truth, genders, and family structures personal choices
4. Lonely – swamped in social media where personal relationships are minimized while personal troubles follow them everywhere. Sean points to “the availability of endless counterfeits that claim to be able to fill their hearts with meaning.”[{3}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text3)
5. Individualistic – individual feelings more important than facts while judging the choices of others is avoided. As James White points out in Meet Generation Z[{4}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text4), “the ability to find whatever they’re after without the help of intermediaries . . . has made them more independent. . . . Like no other generation before, Gen-Z faces a widening chasm between wisdom and information.”[{5}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#5)

Most importantly, most of these young Americans are thoroughly secular with little exposure to Christian theology. As White opines, “They are lost. They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post-Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. . . . They have endless amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors.”[{6}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text6)

As they enter adulthood, the culture around them will not encourage them to consider the claims of Christ.  In fact, the Millennials going before them are already seen leaving any Christian background behind as they age into their thirties.

**Gen-Z: How Are They Trending?**

What can we truly know about the religious thinking of Gen-Zs age 11 to 25? Pew Research surveyed teens and their parents giving us a glimpse into both[{7}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text7).

They found *one third* of American teens are religiously Unaffiliated.[{8}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text8) In contrast, their parents were less than *one quarter* Unaffiliated. Another Pew survey[{9}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text9) found more than *half* of young adult Gen-Zs are unaffiliated.  This group is easily the largest religious group among Gen-Zs.

Teens attend church services with their parents, but lag behind in other areas. Less than *one fourth* of teens consider religion very important. And on an absolute belief in God and praying daily, the teens trail their parents significantly.

Using an index of religious commitment[{10}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text10), almost *half* of the parents but only *one third* of teens rated high. In fact, almost half of teenagers with parents who rated high did not rate high themselves.[{11}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text11)

Perhaps the minds of teenagers are mush. Their views will firm up as they age. In reality, older Gen-Zs and Millennials also trail older adults by more than 20 points in believing in God and praying daily.[{12}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text12) Also, church attendance drops dramatically among these young adults who are no longer attending with parents.

If religion were important to teens, they would look to religious teaching and beliefs to help make decisions about what is right and wrong. But less than *one third* of teens affiliated with a religion turned to its teachings to make such decisions.

As George Barna reports,[{13}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text13) “The faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades.” It seems that Gen-Z will increase this gap.

**Gen-Z: Worldview and Apologetics**

Why have the Unaffiliated been growing dramatically over the last 25 years while doctrinally consistent Christians have been declining? At one level, we recognize the watered-down gospel taught in many churches encourages people to pursue other things and not waste time on church. That may have been the primary issue at one time.

But in this decade, we are seeing a real reduction in the number of Evangelicals as well. The self-professed Evangelicals[{14}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text14) among those ages 18 to 29 has reduced from 29% down to 20%, a reduction of almost one third.

One major driver is the dominant worldview of our young adult society. The worldview promoted by our schools, media, and entertainment industry has changed from a Christian inspired worldview to a worldview which is secular and specifically anti-Christian. As James White observes, “It’s simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely
incredulous that anyone would think like a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian.”[{15}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text15)

Almost all Gen-Zs have been brought up hearing the worldview of Scientism espoused. This worldview teaches “that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified . . . If something cannot be examined in a tangible, scientific manner, it is not simply unknowable, it is meaningless.”[{16}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text16) At the same time, most Gen-Zs have not even been exposed to an Evangelical Christian worldview. Consequently, apologetics is critical for opening their minds to hear the truth of the gospel. Many of them need to understand that the basic tenets of a Christian worldview can be true before they will consider whether these tenets are true for them. Answering questions such as: “Could there be a creator of this universe?” and “Could that creator possibly be involved in this world which has so much pain and suffering?” is a starting point to opening their minds to a Christian view.

Encouraging Gen-Zs to understand the tenets of their worldview and comparing them to a Christian worldview begins the process of introducing them to the gospel. As White points out, “I have found that discussing the awe and wonder of the universe, openly raising the many questions surrounding the universe and then positing the existence of God, is one of the most valuable approaches that can be pursued.”[{17}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text17) The Christian worldview is coherent, comprehensive and compelling as it explains why our world is the way it is and how its trajectory may be corrected into one that honors our Creator and lifts up people to a new level of life.

**Gen-Z: Removing the Isolation of Faith**

What will it take to reach Gen-Z? James White says, “. . . the primary reason Gen-Z disconnects from the church is our failure to equip them with a biblical worldview that empowers them to understand and navigate today’s culture.”[{18}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text18) If we want to equip Gen-Zs to embrace faith, we must directly discuss worldview issues with them.

The challenge is exacerbated as most Gen-Zs are taught a redefined tolerance: to not only accept classmates with different worldviews, e.g. Muslims and the Unaffiliated, but to believe that it is as true for them as your parents’ worldview is for them. As Sean McDowell states, “Gen-Zs are exposed to more competing worldviews—and at an earlier age—than any generation in history.”[{19}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text19)

The new tolerance leads directly to a pluralistic view of salvation. Christ stated, “No one comes to the Father except through me,”[{20}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text20) and Peter preached that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved.”[{21}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text21) Yet the survey of American teens[{22}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text22) finds *less than one third* believe that only one religion is true, broken up into *two-thirds* of Evangelicals and *less than one-third* of Mainlines and Catholics.

Compounding these issues is the growing practice of limiting the impact of religious beliefs on real life. Sean points out, “The biggest challenge in teaching worldview to young people is the way our increasingly secular culture fosters the compartmentalization of faith.”[{23}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text23) We need to help them see how a consistent Christian worldview applies to all issues. It is foolish to segregate your spiritual beliefs from your life decisions.

As an example, many Gen-Zs are enamored by a socialist view that the government should provide everything we need, equally distributing goods and services to all. Those who work hard and excel will have their productivity redistributed equally. It sounds like a possibly good approach and yet it has destroyed the economies of many countries including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. It fails because it is based on a worldview that “assumes greed comes from inequality in the distribution of material goods in society.”[{24}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text24) In contrast, the Bible is clear that greed is part of the fallenness of the human heart. As a result, any centralized function with no competition discourages productivity and becomes an inefficient bureaucracy.

**Reaching Gen-Zs**

Today, most Gen-Zs move into adulthood with little exposure to the gospel. The majority are either Unaffiliated, another religion, or have a nominal Christian background. Current surveys find that 98% of young Americans do not have a Christian worldview.[{25}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text25)

This sobering data does not mean giving up on reaching Gen-Z. But if we are not intentional about it, we are not going to stem the tide. As James White observes, “What is killing the church today is (focusing) on keeping Christians within the church happy, well fed, and growing. The mission . . . must be about those who have not crossed the line of faith.”

And Sean McDowell points out that we need “to teach the difference between subjective and objective truth claims and make sure they understand that Christianity falls in the latter category.”[{26}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text26)

Sean encourages a focus on relationships saying, “Relationships are the runway on which truth lands. Take the time to listen with empathy, monitor from a place of wisdom, and demonstrate your concern.”[{27}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text27) White agrees, saying, “If we want (them) to know the faith, we have to teach, model and incarnate truth in our relationship with them.”[{28}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text28) From a place of relationship, we can address challenges keeping them from truly hearing the gospel.

One key challenge is the role of media. As Sean notes, “Media shapes their beliefs, and it also shapes the orientation of their hearts.”[{29}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text29) To counter this pervasive influence, he suggests engaging them in a skeptic’s blog. Help them consider 1) what claim is being made, 2) is the claim relevant if true, and 3) decide how to investigate the claim.[{30}](https://probe.org/gen-z-the-generation-that-ends-christian-influence-in-america/#text30) By learning to investigate claims, they are examining the truth of the gospel. We should never fear the gospel coming up short when looking for the truth.

**Key ways White’s church is connecting with the Unaffiliated include:**

1. Rethinking evangelism around Paul’s message in Athens. Tantalizing those with no background to search for truth in Christ.
2. Teaching the grace/truth dynamic in quick segments consistent with their learning styles.
3. Being cultural missionaries – learning from those who have not been Christians.
4. Cultivating a culture of invitation by creating tools to invite friends all the time.

If we focus on growing the number of Gen-Z Christians, we could change the trajectory of American faith. If we devote ourselves to prayer, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and reaching the lost in America rather than continuing church as usual, God can use us to turn the tide.

**Notes**
1. Colossians 1:9.
2. Josh McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 2019, David C. Cook.
3. McDowell and Wallace, p. 66.
4. James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Baker Books, 2017.
5. White, p. 44.
6. White, p. 64-65.
7. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals, September 10, 2020.
8. These are people who self-identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. In previous surveys, we referred to them as the Nones. Calling them the “unaffiliated” helps us avoid the confusion between “Nones” and “nuns.”
9. Call out Pew survey from 2019.
10. The index of religious commitment looks at the answers to questions on church attendance, belief in God, prayer, and importance of religion and rates a respondents commitment from high to low based on their answers.
General Social Survey, 2018.
11. 42% of the teenagers with parents with a high index had a medium or low index.
12. General Social Survey, 2018
13. American Worldview Inventory 2020, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.
14. Pew Research surveys 2007, 2014, 2019.
15. White, p. 130.
16. White, p. 141.
17. White, p. 139.
18. White, p. 80.
19. McDowell and Wallace, p. 81.
20. John 14:6b.
21. Acts 4:12.
22. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens.
23. McDowell and Wallace, p. 87.
24. Ibid, p. 93.
25. American Worldview Inventory 2020.
26. McDowell and Wallace, p. 113.
27. McDowell and Wallace, p. 78.
28. White, p. 64.
29. McDowell and Wallace, p. 164.
30. Ibid, p. 173-4.

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**7 Habits of Generation Z that Your Church Might Be Ignoring**

By [Carey Nieuwhof](https://careynieuwhof.com/author/carey/)

T*his post is written by*[*Dillon Smith*](https://careynieuwhof.com/speaking/dillon-smith/)*, a Gen Z team member at Carey Nieuwhof Communications.*

There’s no doubt that Gen Z has some different habits than previous generations. Thanks to the internet and smartphones, the environment that we’ve grown up in is completely unique, and unlike any generation before. We spend more time online, go outside less, and care about wildly different things than our parents did when they were kids. You might look at these habits and think that these habits are “just a phase” or that we’ll “grow out of it.” We won’t. At the time I’m writing, I’m 22 and I still watch **A TON** of YouTube. Even post-graduation, my classmates still spend a ton of time on Instagram and TikTok. None of us plan on making any of these a smaller part of our lives.

So for the church: How do you become a bigger part of our lives online? Well, first, I think you need to be aware of how and why we behave and think the way we do. I’m seeing 7 habits of Generation Z that your church might be ignoring. Here’s the list:

**1. I Watch Who I Want, When I Want**

The internet has given me the freedom to watch exactly who I want, when I want. So, the only reason my friends or I are watching your church online is either because our parents are making us, or because we deeply care about what you have to say. There are just too many other appealing ways to pass the time for us to waste our time on something that isn’t helpful or fun to watch.

**So What Does This Mean For Teaching Pastors And Service Programming Directors?**

10 seconds of boring is enough to lose a Gen Z viewer. Every second of online content you produce needs to add value in an efficient and engaging way.

**2. If You Want Me to Follow You for A Long Time, I Need to Get to Know You**

Our spirituality is one of the most sacred and private things we have, and if you want Gen Z to trust you with our time and subscription, we need to trust you. And, a weekly sermon just doesn’t cut it for us. In this digital era, churches should be producing more personal content online, not less.

There are tons of Twitch streamers and YouTubers who are doing this well. As church leaders, it’s about time that we start learning from them. The single best YouTuber I’ve found at building a feeling of community and trust is a guy named Matt Carriker. Matt (who happens to be a Christian) has built three massively successful YouTube channels that have a combined total of 15.26 million subscribers. His [OffTheRanch channel](https://www.youtube.com/user/mlcarriker%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) is a personal vlog, and his fastest-growing channel that allows his viewers to see into his family, his hobbies, his character flaws, his ideas, and his work. By taking us into his real life, it builds more trust and community within his audience.

I think churches could do something similar. Lead pastors could take the vlog camera home and show some of how they parent, or the staff could bring the vlog to worship practice or community service projects to show how the church is run throughout the week.

It’s just an idea, but ideas like this are going to reach my generation. If you want more on how to create videos that people love to watch and engage with, [Sean Cannell’s Video Influencers](https://www.youtube.com/user/videoinfluencers) would be another great channel to check out. [Here’s Sean’s recent interview on Carey’s podcast.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW9PdqKfb6k)

**3. I’ve Been Trained to View Myself as A Brand**

Thanks to platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, I’ve grown up viewing myself as my own brand. I don’t think this mindset is healthy, but I do think it’s accurate. And as the church, we’re called to reach people where they actually are, not where we would hope they’d be. If you want to reach a “me-centered” generation, show us what’s in it for us. One biblical angle to take with this is to change your church’s focus from the Sunday experience to what the church is doing throughout the week. Show us how we can join your movement and not just build your platform. This might be a bit closer to how the church was designed to function anyway. 😉

**4. Gen Z Would Prefer to Avoid Our Parent’s Generation on Social Media**

When I look back at my time in school, new social media apps like Vine, YikYak, Kik, and TikTok would come up in popularity in phases. The life cycle of a new app would look like this:

1. A new app would release
2. It would become popular because our parents had no idea about it yet
3. Our parents would find out about it and create an account or have the school block it
4. We would all abandon it for the next app
5. Repeat

I think this is part of why TikTok exploded like it did, and why many of the young people I know are spending less time on Facebook and Instagram and more time on TikTok. **It’s still cool to avoid our parent’s generation online.**

So, for you and your church, I’ve got a few strategies to think about:

1. Even as new apps become popular, I still follow Craig Groeschel on Instagram and YouTube. I follow him because I trust him, and I’ll still watch him on those platforms because I know he’ll be there. If you’re a senior pastor, stick to where your people know you are, and double down.
2. For taking new ground on new apps (like TikTok), let a young staff member or young volunteer take the lead. Let the student ministry put effort towards experimental apps, and as the average age of an app’s users increases, begin to add adult-focused content.
3. No matter how old you are, don’t try to be someone you aren’t. If I see John Piper dancing on TikTok tomorrow, I’m going to be more concerned and less likely to follow him. No matter the platform, being authentically you is the best way forward.

**5. Diversity Isn’t Optional**

A couple of years ago, Greg Atkinson told me that if you want to reach the next generation, having a diverse church isn’t optional. He’s right. Our schools are diverse, our workplaces are diverse, and our friend groups are diverse. If your church isn’t at least as diverse as the school we grew up in, we will question you as an organization. As Derwin Gray and Darryn Scheske pointed out on a recent ChurchPulse Weekly podcast episode:

 *“Young adults aren’t leaving the church, they’re leaving the white church.”*

If you want more on leading a diverse church, [this interview is a great place to start.](https://churchpulseweekly.org/2020/07/derwin-gray-darryn-scheske/)

**6. My Mental Health Issues Aren’t Going Away**

One of the biggest issues facing the next generation is a sharp decline in mental health. Here’s the strange part: We’re fully aware of the mental health crisis, and what’s causing it, but our phones are too good to give up. The rewards of the internet outweigh the risks for us. So, how can you help? Sadly, a sermon series once a year isn’t enough to reach a generation plagued with anxiety. The church needs a better solution. Maybe it’s opening a counseling wing attached to your church. Maybe it’s making mental health a regular focus of your young adult ministry or small group or something else entirely. Whatever it is, this is a felt need that we have year-round that the church can’t ignore.

**7. When I Talk to My Non-Christian Friends About Church, I Usually Need to Lead with an Apology**

During my first couple of years of bible college, I was a server and bartender at a restaurant in downtown Omaha. All but two of my coworkers were 16 to 30-year-olds who were either atheist or agnostic, and almost all of them had stories about how the church had hurt them or their families. So, if I wanted to have any form of evangelistic/spiritual conversation with them, I had to first apologize (for something I had nothing to do with) and convince them that not every Christian is judgmental or abusive. This is true for most of the people my age.

If the church wants to reach the next generation, justified or not, you’ll need to apologize to most of the next generation first. I wish this weren’t true. And I wish it were just an isolated thing, but it’s not. As evidence that this wasn’t just my experience, I posted a tweet last week in a moment of stress that I would not be so quick to post again. The tweet said;

*“As a 22-year old Christian, too often it feels like I’m a Christian in spite of the Church rather than because of the church.”*

Again, if I could go back in time I don’t think I’d tweet this again, but one thing that **shocked** me was the response I saw. It was by far the most liked and retweeted tweet I’ve ever shared. And you know who did nearly all of the liking and retweeting?

**Gen Z Christians.**

They responded with things like

*“Oof, I feel this.”*
*“This is sadly true.”*
*“Same.”*
*“I would share if I didn’t think it would create a storm I’m not prepared to tackle.”*

This massive response tells me that the emotion I was feeling when I originally posted the tweet is hitting a chord with the rest of my generation. It’s telling me that the tweet might be more right than I know.

As the Church, we need to get ahead of this.

We need to follow Jeff Henderson’s advice and make sure our communities know what we’re FOR rather than what we’re against, and we need to apologize to those we’ve hurt, even if it wasn’t us who did it.

If we don’t do this, more and more irrelevance and hate await the bride of Christ.

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***So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World,* by Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace**

Review by John Stonestreet with Roberto Rivera

Here’s something you may not realize… officially speaking, the emerging generation are not “the millennials.” Anyone born after 1997 is part of the generation that has been dubbed, for reasons I’m not completely sure about, “Generation Z.”

The distinction is more than just one of different names. Millennials and Gen Z have been shaped by different experiences and ideas. Most Millennials can remember a time when the new sexual orthodoxy wasn’t orthodox, and people who opposed—or at least were ambivalent about it—weren’t called “bigots.” This is much less true of “Generation Z,” who even before Obergefell, were being catechized in the new sexual orthodoxy at school and by mass culture.

Even more important—and distressing—is that members of “Generation Z” are leaving the church at an unprecedentedly high rate. Now, I confess that I feel a bit like the boy who cried “wolf” even saying that, given the overblown and often unsupported claims of the rates of young people from previous generations leaving the faith. It’s always been “bad”—not as bad as you’ve heard—but let me be clear: it’s worse for Gen Z. And, I’d add, I have significant anecdotal evidence that older generations feel a greater generation gap between them and their Gen Z kids and grandkids.

All of this to say, we’ve got some serious thinking to do about how we can transmit the truths of the Gospel and the worldview that flows from it to Generation Z. To start with: what has worked for previous generations may not work for them.

Thankfully, two of the best thinkers and communicators I know have jumpstarted the conversation. Sean McDowell and Colson Center Senior Fellow J. Warner Wallace have just published a book, So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World.

Both writers are already well-known for their ability to make the case for the reasonableness of Christian truth and morality. And while there is some of this in their new book, it isn’t the primary focus. The focus is on what they call a “biblical way forward” to confronting the challenges posed by GenZ’s lack and/or loss of faith.

This “way forward” starts with taking into account the interplay between truth and relationships. As they put it, “doing a better job of teaching truth and making the case for Christianity” is “only part of the answer.”

To the “reasonable explanations” that we must offer young people, we also have to add “authentic relationships.” And that can be harder than we think.

First, there’s a strong temptation to emphasize the relationship part over the truth part. We can be so desperate to preserve the relationship that we’ll hesitate to speak the truth in love for risk of offending the person. For example, I do not know of a single biblical or theological authority who has changed their mind on any of the contemporary sexual issues of our day, who didn’t have a son, daughter, or close family member struggling with one of those letters of the acronym.

On the other hand, these kinds of authentic relationships take work, time, and patience. We can’t pre-empt the relationship part and think our job is done. McDowell’s and Wallace’s “way forward” requires taking this to heart. We must be willing to invest the time necessary and build the trust necessary to get at what the next generation is really thinking and feeling. That’s why this book about transmitting a Christian worldview to the next generation includes a section on something as important—and yet as simple as—eating together.

This book is a necessary read for parents, grandparents, pastors, educators—anyone invested in the faith of Gen Z.