

# SPANNING THE GENERATIONAL GAP

## Engaging the millennials among us

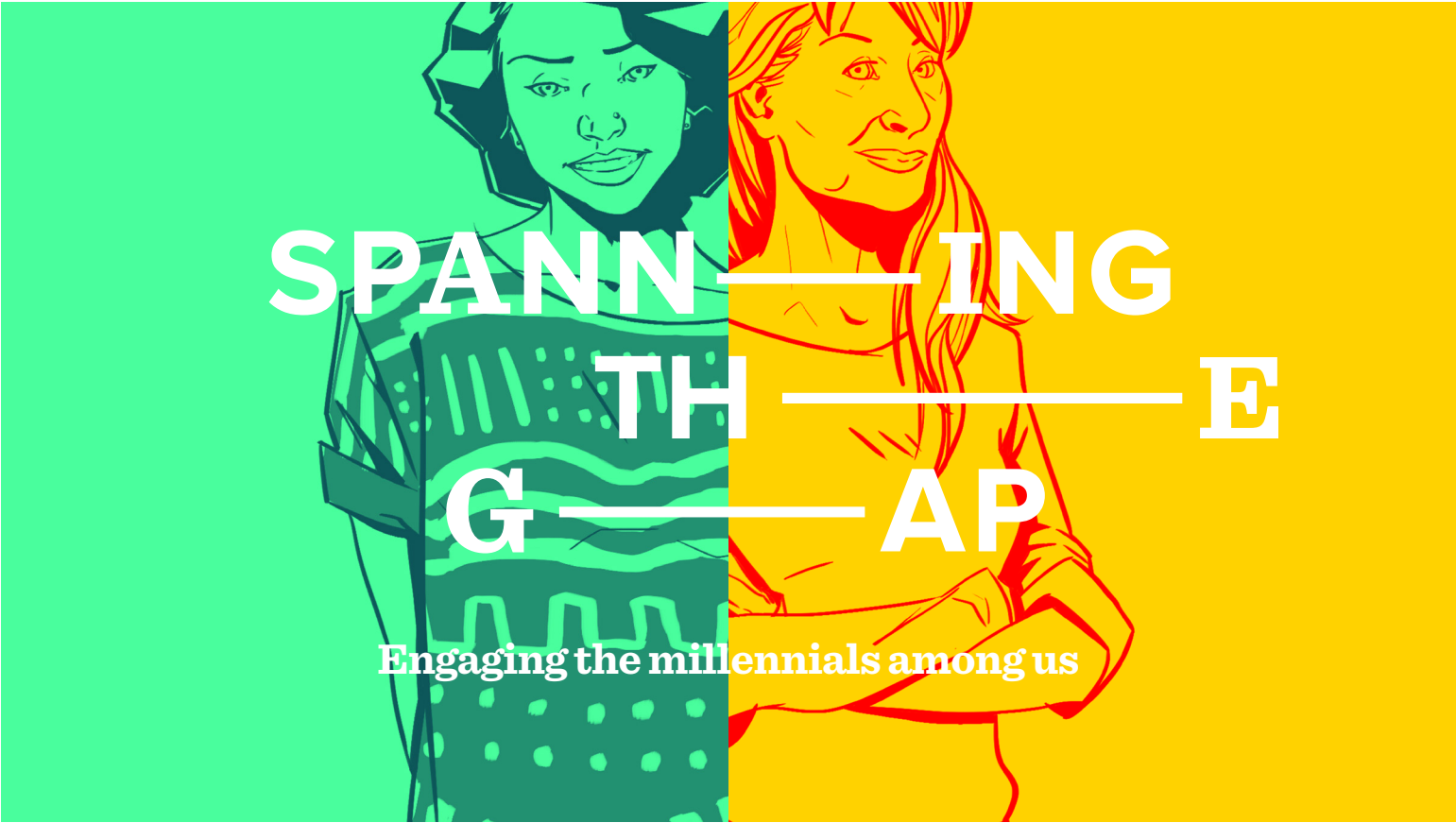
Like every generation before them, millennials will be the ones to lead the church in the future, if they feel invited to help shape it. How can *all* generations in the church listen to and learn from each other?

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# SPANNING THE GENERATIONAL GAP

Engaging the millennials among us

**I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A GENERATIONAL BOUNDARY SPANNER.** I can easily make friends and communicate with people of all ages. Perhaps it's because I'm an extrovert. Or perhaps it's because I sort of span two different generations myself. Born in late 1980, I'd be labeled by some as a Gen Xer, by others as a millennial.

Being a boundary spanner can be of tremendous value, especially in a church like mine: a 135-year-old congregation with adults representing four different generations.<sup>1</sup>

It's not uncommon for the boomers to look at me as an ambassador to "the young people" (my generation): "Meryl, we want more young women to come to this event. Could you and some of your friends be involved?"

Nor is it uncommon to also receive the older generations' gripes, especially about "the young people" not stepping up to lead.

Sometimes I represent the interests of the younger generations to the older: "If you moved this event to a different time, more young people might attend."

Being everyone's emissary can be frustrating, especially when the sending parties aren't all that interested in listening to one another.

Several months ago, about 50 members of my church participated in a workshop where we learned about four categories of church health: at-risk, stable, critical moment and healthy missional. The facilitator asked each of us to identify publicly where we thought our church fit and the direction we thought were heading.

As a budding ecclesial anthropologist—ever fascinated by church culture—I noticed a pattern: Older adults tended to see the church as healthier than younger adults. Honestly, I wasn't all that surprised, but the pattern bothered me.

If we truly care about church health, we have to press in—start talking and, more importantly, listening. Each gen-

eration ought to ask of the others, “What can you see that I cannot? Help me understand.”

In this issue, we’re focusing on the millennial generation inside our churches and all they have to offer as, together, we witness to the gospel of grace. We’re attending to what current research and church leaders (both young and old) have to say about this generation.

True, millennials aren’t the only generation whose insights the church needs. But they *will* lead the church in the future, if they feel invited to help shape it. And they also represent our strongest, most direct bridge to those millennials *outside* the church walls, outside the body of Christ. We’re far less likely to bring the gospel clearly and winsomely to them without the wisdom of *these* cultural boundary spanners.

Generation by generation, we engage both our world and our faith in different ways. Yet we stand on the common ground of our love for Jesus and our commitment to the Scriptures. And that’s the best place of all to begin a conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> You could have as many as six different generations in your church. (<http://www.npr.org/2014/10/06/349316543/don-t-label-me-origins-of-generational-names-and-why-we-use-them>)

# "YOUNG LEADER" IS NOT AN OXYMORON

**God is not one to say, “Wait until you are older. Then do great things with Me.”**

**BY COR CHMIELESKI**

His “compliment” came on a Sunday morning as I was making my way through a crowded hallway. Our elder team had just guided the congregation through a pastoral transition. And, amid those circumstances, my leadership had had a positive impact on him. “Cor,” he smiled, “you’re, like, really a pastor now.”

I didn’t know how to respond. He meant it as a compliment, but it was hard to hear it as such. Why? By this point, I had been fulfilling the role of pastor for a year and a half. But only now had he come to acknowledge that fact, after watching me walk through that difficult situation.

Sadly, I knew the reason for his earlier reluctance: I was simply too young, at least for his taste. At the time of the compliment I was 27 years old (almost 28!). This means I had become a pastor shortly after turning 26. I guess, in his mind, pastors are older.

He’s not alone in such thinking. How many of us have ever made similar judgments without getting to know someone’s heart?

I’m convinced that God uses people, regardless of age, whose hearts are directed toward Him. This is a personal conviction born out of biblical precedence.

The Bible—God’s complete revelation for salvation and His ultimate authority—shares plentiful examples of young people participating, and *leading*, under His direction. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God routinely uses young people whose hearts are turned toward Him. These young men and women set the stage for an important teaching from the apostle Paul: What matters most is not age but character that comes from Christ.

## THE EMERGING GENERATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Samuel was a young boy<sup>1</sup> when he entered into Eli’s service. The Lord chose to deliver important news to him: “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.”<sup>2</sup> It was not after he was grown but during his growing<sup>3</sup> that God verbally communicated with Samuel and “was with him.”<sup>4</sup>

David, likewise, entered service of the Lord from a young age. Samuel sought the chosen one of the Lord amongst Jesse’s sons. Jesse didn’t *think* to call the youngest, who was serving in the fields. Samuel clarified, “The Lord sees not as man sees.”<sup>5</sup> Whereby others look at height or age (or charisma or career status or years of Bible training), God sees the heart.

A young David was anointed by Samuel and received the Spirit of the Lord. Later, when David was disqualified to fight Goliath because of his youthfulness,<sup>6</sup> he made clear that he was old enough to have already killed both lion and bear.<sup>7</sup> Youthfulness did not disqualify David from participation in the Lord’s plans.

God utilized the emerging generation throughout the Old Testament. In other examples, Esther was a “beautiful

young virgin”<sup>8</sup> who ascended to the throne “for such a time as this”<sup>9</sup> and aided in the preservation of the Jews from genocide.

Josiah reigned in Judah beginning at age 8, one of the few kings who walked in integrity. Scripture records that at age 16, “he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year (at age 20) he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images.”<sup>10</sup>

Jeremiah resisted his prophetic calling, claiming youthfulness. To this, the Lord responded, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.”<sup>11</sup>

Elihu was the rare friend within Job’s company to rightly bite his tongue.<sup>12</sup> His wisdom, despite being the youngest of the group, was shown through temperance and a willingness to yield to those who were older—that is, until their counsel was lacking.

## GODLY YOUTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

At a time when betrothals could happen as early as 12,<sup>13</sup> Jewish tradition points to a teenaged Mary as the Lord’s appointed vessel for the Incarnation. Describing her as a virgin implies she is both young and unmarried.<sup>14</sup> Despite the absurdity of the angel’s pronouncement, a (likely) young Mary responds, “I am the Lord’s servant”<sup>15</sup> with a wisdom and a humility that we traditionally view as “beyond her years.”

Additionally, Jesus chooses the 12 to carry forth His message and start churches. Not much is known about the disciples, including their ages. Yet John’s early behavior shows errors in judgment that fuel our concerns of the emerging generation. John tells one who is casting out demons to stop,<sup>16</sup> asks Jesus for a chair of glory<sup>17</sup> and summons God’s judgment against a Samaritan village.<sup>18</sup> (Just as a quick aside, our young leaders will make mistakes. But will any of them summon heavenly judgment upon another, resulting in a burnt-down fellowship hall? It’s doubtful.)

*That* guy, and several other youthful men, was part of Jesus’ inner circle. They were responsible for perpetuating the gospel and would later write significant words for the New Testament.

Paul, in writing to his young apprentice, Timothy,<sup>19</sup> admonishes him: “Don’t 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.”<sup>20</sup>

John Chrysostom, an early Church father, stated that Paul’s words to Timothy sprang “from a common prejudice.”<sup>21</sup> What common prejudice? “Youth is apt to be despised.”<sup>22</sup> It was common then, as now, that youth were looked down upon simply because of their age.

To Timothy and another young apprentice, Titus,<sup>23</sup> Paul charges them and other “young men”<sup>24</sup> to “set an example.”<sup>25</sup> He does not say, “Wait until you’re older, and then set an example.

## WAIT UNTIL YOU ARE OLDER?

The clear implication is that something other than age is the litmus test for leadership. What is it? A key prerequisite frequently used by Paul in these three letters is godliness.<sup>26</sup> Christ-likeness is needed to lead. It is the character that Christ grows within the leader, regardless of age. It is God’s work, which permits them an opportunity to set an example “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.”<sup>27</sup>

Conversely, the absence of godliness in young leaders leads to their downfall. Setting aside well-publicized failures of modern pastors, the Bible is replete with such examples. Eli’s sons, characterized as priests and “young men,” had no regard for the Lord.<sup>28</sup> Scripture says it was their refusal to honor God, not their age, which incurred judgment.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, age is not the cure-all. When a 41-year-old Rehoboam assumed the throne of his father, Solomon, his arrogance (i.e. lack of character) caused him to repudiate the wisdom of his elders.<sup>30</sup> Scripture also states that when Solomon (with unmatched wisdom) “was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God.”<sup>31</sup>

Godliness, which Jesus cultivates from the inside out and which is demonstrated over time through a host of experiences,<sup>32</sup> is the thread that binds. Without it, leadership unravels, both young and old.

Nowhere is the importance of God’s inner working clearer than in Acts 4, when Peter and John preached the resurrection of the dead. The response caused such a commotion that both were summoned before the religious leaders to account for their words. Rather than shrink back, they courageously proclaimed Jesus, in His death and resurrection, as the only name by which we must be saved.

Scripture notes the response of the leaders: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”<sup>33</sup>

The most noteworthy trait of the disciples was that they had been with Jesus. What mattered was not their age, lineage, previous shortcomings or lack of rabbinic schooling. It was Christ, who had once been with them and was now in them. That was the defining characteristic.

And it still is.

Not every emerging adult should be in church leadership. Not every youth will glow with godliness. So it’s incumbent upon the church to get to know the next generation. For the church to truly discern which young people have been with Jesus, we will need to spend time with them. Without a doubt, some are ready to do—or are already doing—great things through God.

*Cor Chmielewski is senior associate pastor with Hope Community Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At age 38, he is not in the pool called the “emerging generation,” but he swims in those waters often at his church, where the average age is 26. He also directs the Leadership Development Institute, a nonformal, church-based internship aiming to raise up a bunch of young punks the next generation of Christian leaders, pastors and church planters.*

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11 Samuel 1:24, 2:11. Additionally, Eli’s sons are referred to as young men (2:17), while depicting Samuel as a boy still in need of annual robe adjustments due to his physical growth (2:19).

21 Samuel 3:11.

31 Samuel 1:21,26; 3:19.

41 Samuel 3:19.

51 Samuel 16:7

61 Samuel 17:33

71 Samuel 17:34-36.

8 Esther 2:2,3,4,7,9,13. The fact that Esther was young is communicated three times in three consecutive verses and six times in 12 verses.

9 Esther 4:14.

10 2 Chronicles 34:1-3.

11 Jeremiah 1:6-7.

12 Job 32:4-10.

13 Allison, Dale C., Matthew: A Shorter Commentary, p.12 Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004.

14 Manser, M. H. (2009). Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. London: Martin Manser.

15 Luke 1:38.

16 Luke 9:49.

17 Mark 10:37.

18 Luke 9:54.

<sup>19</sup> It is safe to assume Timothy is younger. Paul frequently refers to him as his spiritual son (1 Timothy 1:2,18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1). The letter's contents share wisdom from a mentor to his apprentice. Additionally, Paul speaks of three generations of Timothy's family. Tradition holds that Lois probably converted to Christianity during Paul's first missionary trip (Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (p. 1346). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.). This means Paul hadn't simply heard of the faith of a deceased relative, Lois, through Eunice and Timothy. Instead, Paul had met her. This requires Lois to be an elderly woman, which likely means Eunice is middle aged and Timothy is younger.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12.

<sup>21</sup> John Chrysostom. (1889). Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy. In P. Schaff (Ed.), J. Tweed & P. Schaff (Trans.), Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Vol. 13, p. 449). New York: Christian Literature Company.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> It is safe to assume Titus, like Timothy, is younger. This is seen in the book's contents where Paul, an elder in the faith, passes down wisdom to his younger apprentice (1:4). It is also observed in Paul's comment to once again "not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15), which mirrors the language to Timothy.

<sup>24</sup> Titus 2:6.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12, Titus 2:7.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Timothy 4:7,8; 5:4; 6:3,6,11; 2 Timothy 3:12; Titus 1:1; 2:12.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Samuel 2:12, 17.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Samuel 2:30.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Chronicles 10:8.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Kings 11:4.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Timothy 3:6.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 4:13.



# #ADULTING

## How will we harness millennials' angst, energy and great hope?

BY MERYL HERR

“Adulting.” It’s a phrase that businesses like All-State Insurance and T-Mobile have latched onto in their marketing to target a particular segment of the population. The Urban Dictionary defines *adulting* as “to do grown up things and hold responsibilities such as, a 9-5 job, a mortgage/rent, a car payment, or anything else that makes one think of grown ups.”

Follow *#adulting* on Twitter, and you will find statements like, “Today we’re getting a new washer and dryer,” or “Just made my first doctor’s appointment.”

Scroll through your Facebook or Instagram feed, and you may come across a hashtag or meme claiming, “*Adulting* is hard.” I am guilty of conveying the sentiment recently at Home Depot while shopping for carpet.

Who uses the term *adulting*? Millennials—the nearly 80 million young adults born in the early 1980s through the late 1990s. Is becoming an adult for us so different than it was for baby boomers and Gen Xers that it merited a new word?

The answer, in fact, is “yes.” Cultural and economic forces have led to a noticeable psychological shift in young adults, making *adulting* a popular term to describe their increasingly common experience.

Not all millennials use the term *adulting*, though. It seems to be more common among a particular subset of the millennials: emerging adults.

In the 1990s, psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett studied this psychological shift by interviewing hundreds of young adults. He concluded, “Longer and more widespread education, later entry to marriage and parenthood, and prolonged and erratic transition to stable work have opened up a space for a new life stage in between adolescence and young adulthood, and ‘emerging adulthood’ is what I have proposed to call that life stage.”

## OPTIMISTIC YET FEELING IN-BETWEEN

Emerging adults are those 18- to 29-year-olds who have not yet made what Arnett calls “enduring choices” like settling into a career or a marriage.<sup>1</sup> They exhibit common characteristics: exploring their identity, experiencing instability, desiring time to focus on themselves, feeling in-between, and brimming with optimism and hope.

Legally adults, expected to act like adults, but not readily identifying themselves as adults ... no wonder they’ve adopted *adulting* to so aptly describe themselves.

Currently, all emerging adults are also millennials. But all millennials are not emerging adults. Take me, for example. Born in late 1980, I’m sometimes considered a Gen Xer; however, I often think and act more like a millennial. I’ve long been out of emerging adulthood, though—married more than a decade with two children and the purchase of about 10 major appliances under my belt. In fact, I’m more likely to roll my eyes than empathize when I hear someone complain about *adulting*.

While the lifestyles and living spaces of older, more settled millennials like myself might differ from those of

emerging adults, the two groups' worldviews—and spiritual values—can be similar.<sup>2</sup>

I'm probably not the norm: I'm actively involved in church and even hold an M.Div. degree. I want to integrate my faith into every facet of my life. For emerging adults, though, religion "is just not that important to most of them," according to sociologist Christian Smith, author of *Souls in Transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*.

For many emerging adults, Smith adds, "the best thing about religion is that it helps people to be good, to make good choices, to behave well."

The 2010 Pew Research Center report, "Millennials: A portrait of generation next,"<sup>3</sup> claims that about one-in-five millennials who say they were raised in a faith tradition are currently unaffiliated with any faith tradition. Translate that to the church, and quite a few emerging adults who were raised in your congregation have walked away from the church and possibly the faith.

Instead of writing off an entire generation, the Church must consider *why* millennials are walking away, and pay attention. We must listen to millennials, seeking to understand their perspectives and offering correctives when necessary. Could millennials' view of religion shine a harsh but needed light on "the way things have always been done"?<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, millennials need to listen to the Church—a Church that authentically proclaims and embodies the beautiful, sometimes paradoxical, truths of Scripture; a Church with a history; and a Church full of wise elders who have wrestled with their own doubts and theological questions amid the cultural changes that shaped their youth and emerging adulthood.

The Church needs the elder generations—the "silent generation," boomers and Gen Xers—to stop complaining about "kids these days" and instead equip them for and model faithful kingdom work.

Yes, *adulting* can indeed be hard. But the Church also needs millennials to get over *adulting*, grow up and take responsibility for partnering with God in His redemptive mission. Christians, regardless of their age, must work together to proclaim, in word and deed, the power of the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Authors in this issue will use the terms somewhat interchangeably as they refer to the broader group of millennials, yet the two cohorts are not one and the same. Some individuals whose age places them in the millennial generation would consider themselves adults rather than emerging adults due to their life stage and life choices.

<sup>2</sup> "Is God Preparing a Spiritual Awakening Among Millennials?" by Mike Breen, May 18, 2015, *Discipling Culture* blog. <http://www.disciplingculture.com/is-god-preparing-a-spiritual-awakening-among-the-millennials/>

<sup>3</sup> "Millennials: A portrait of generation next," Feb. 2010, Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> My husband has a poster in his office that reads: "Tradition: Just because you've always done it that way doesn't mean it's not incredibly stupid"—or, in the viewpoint of millennials, completely irrelevant.



# THIS AUTHENTIC, LOVELY, INTRIGUING GENERATION

## My great hope for what they will accomplish

BY DAVID H. KIM

Twentysomethings are hard to pin down. No one mold explains what defines any generation. With that said, I see *hope* and *change* as two words characteristic of the current twentysomethings. Their optimism is amazing and energizing.

As millennials creatively use and develop technology to address so much of what they see as broken in this world, it is absolutely staggering to think about what they will be able to accomplish. Yet, my concerns grow when I look at the limitations of technology.

What technology will never be able to change is the disposition of the human heart in its potential for good and evil. With all the brokenness this generation has witnessed, will they be naïve about the nature of the human heart?

As with every generation, our deepest hopes for change have to be grounded not in human potential, but in divine grace that has been assured by the gospel of Jesus Christ. As simplistic as it may sound, the gospel alone has the profound power to change not only human hearts, but relationships, and larger societal structures and institutions that arise from these relationships.

In many respects, Jesus is the ultimate millennial. He defies all those who would try to label Him. He is the paragon of refusing to give up hope for change even in the midst of the gravest evil. Christ has a passion for change as evidenced by His willingness to suffer and die on a cross so we would have a hope that is certain. It is this hope anchored in Christ that will provide for this generation the most profound expression of all that is good, creative, authentic, and lovely about them.

I hope to live long enough to see the legacy of this intriguing generation and to see the world they will pass on to future generations.

*Excerpted with permission from "20 and Something: Have the time of your life (and figure it all out too)," by David H. Kim (part of the FRAMES series), copyright 2013 by The Barna Group.*

*David H. Kim, age 43, is executive director for the Center for Faith & Work and pastor of Faith and Work for Redeemer Church in New York City. "Even though I am not a millennial, I too am very hopeful. I have worked with enough twentysomethings to know the tremendous possibility and visionary potential of this generation."*



# WHAT DO 20-SOMETHINGS THINK ABOUT CHURCH?

## EFCA emerging adults speak their minds

*When you ask emerging adults in your life for their thoughts about spirituality and church, you'll hear honest, thoughtful answers—if, that is, you've created space for honesty to flourish. That's what happened when EFCA Today interacted with 23 young adults from Evangelical Free Churches across the country.*

*When asked about the significance of their spiritual faith (on a scale of 1 to 5) seventeen of them chose 5 (“very important to me: it defines me and my choices”), and the remaining six chose 4 (“important: it’s a priority but maybe not a consistent priority”).*

*When asked about the importance of church attendance, however, their answers varied more. The majority chose 5, yet others chose 4 or 3. And one young woman indicated 2 (“not important: I believe in the importance of church but honestly don’t pay much attention to it.”)*

*She isn’t alone among her millennial cohort in having struggles with the local church.<sup>1</sup> Today’s emerging-adult Christians want a spiritual family that lives out what it believes and offers a safe place to help figure out what they believe. And they seriously long for older believers to reach out and invest in their lives.*

*Hang onto your hat for honesty from a few of these young people—all of whom care deeply about their faith and desire greater authenticity and power in the church today.*

### EMILY, 25

The church has ceased to be bold. Be bold. Talk about things that matter. Yes, the Bible matters very much and should be studied and taught from the pulpit. But presidential elections matter too. Don’t tell me how to vote, but help me understand issues like immigration, marriage equality, abortion, death penalty, gender equality and so many others through a biblical worldview. Not everyone will agree, but that is a sign of a healthy church: that we can have good, hard and often challenging dialogue on important things. Connect with what is important to us; it is probably what is important to the majority of the congregation.

Engage us. Ask us to join the conversation. Care enough to talk about hard stuff. But also trust enough to preach truth rather than what you think will keep us in our seats. Millennials want to be pushed. We want to learn and walk rightly with God, so help us. Help us navigate life in this very broken world we live in. We have a lot to give and we want to give to the church.

## CARL, 22

Stop being so divisive toward other Christian churches/ denominations. Instead, please, work together to further the Kingdom of God. Many people in my generation come from broken homes and families and don't want to be broken within the body of Christ. My generation does not care how people choose to sing praises to God or if people are baptized—or about any other issue that isn't talked about in Scripture as required for salvation. Our hope is that, as believers, we'd focus on Christ and the sacrifice He made for all of us, and live out His ministry.

## ABBY, 25

Although millennials are very tech-savvy and utilize a great deal of technology, church doesn't need to be a flashy YouTube video or concert-like presentation. Too often it feels as though churches are attempting to cater to millennials and are losing their focus on being biblically centered. There is a balance between being up-to-date with technology and providing a modern atmosphere while keeping Christ as our center and worshiping God as our priority. Most of all we'd like to hear the Bible preached with boldness and authenticity. We want to learn, not be fed a watered-down, worldly message. Give us a purpose and role to serve in. We want to be involved.

## BILLY, 24

The churches that do a good job of connecting with millennials have people in leadership who are not that far removed from being young, or people who can relate to young people and seek to invest in their lives. Experience is important but can be overrated; it's more important to consider what kind of gifting people have. Are there younger, less-experienced but more relate-able and committed leaders in your community? My church does a good job of reaching out to young people, but it could do a much better job of reaching out to people of color by having leadership in the church who look like the community they're hoping to reach.

*Billy also added:*

We are an incredibly interconnected generation. We have a million things competing for our attention. We are more likely than other generations to interact with people who think significantly different from us because of the proliferation of diversity that is happening in our institutions of higher education. So we won't take what you think as fact in the face of contradictory evidence that we see in our everyday life. We do, however, care about what the generations before us say. We want those who are older to share their stories so we can understand their perspectives a little more.

## GLENDIA, 22

In many ways, the church has isolated itself from salient and present-day social issues such as abortion, gay marriage and race relations—issues that millennials care about. Thus the church makes itself appear out-of-date, distant and cold to the problems millennials find real and important.

We don't need to do the job of the Holy Spirit and make people believe one way or another. However, we can listen. For this reason, I think church leaders ought to engage these pressing, cultural topics. They need not preach on them every Sunday, but they certainly shouldn't act as if, suddenly, they don't exist once you walk into a church building. Maybe churches could have a "questions" night, where a pastor preaches on a certain hot-button topic, then opens it up for everyone to chat about their experiences with the issue and how those experiences line up with Scripture.

I think this would connect the church and the world in a way that is more electrifying and would keep church from being a secluded institution that is meant only for the pious, only for the holy, only for the sanctified.

If millennials saw that a church was actually friendly to sinners (ate, drank, talked with sinners about their lives and had discussions about their concerns), they might want to take a second look at the church. This second glance might show millennials that the church is actually what Jesus says it is: a group of people that has been *made* holy and *made* redeemed by His grace alone—not a group that is *inherently* pious, clean or sanctimonious.

What's actually really cool about this, is it doesn't just expose people outside the church, but people inside the church too. It frees them to say, "Hey, my life is imperfect. And I need Jesus and community. I am scared to expose this sin, but I know that you won't judge me." It gives relief to the tension/anxiety Satan creates when we face the door of repentance and light.

## AARON, 22

For my Christian friends who don't attend church, the main reason they seem to not bow their knee to the King is the overwhelming amount of faith it takes and the dismissal of much science, philosophy and pure intellect. To speak on science and other areas of intellect should not scare or intimidate us whatsoever. To know that our Lord has created all things should encourage us to talk about everything from soaring galaxies to subatomic particles. Not only this, it should drive us into a posture of wonder. To shy away from science and research is to misunderstand and devalue the intellect and curiosity that He's lavished on us, to graciously possess and use.

*Aaron also added:*

The church provides that first impression of God for all those who walk the earth. If we ignore those who need God, they will see God as ignoring them. If we seem cold, they will feel God to be cold. But if we can image God to our best ability, we've created the first in many wonderful stepping stones for those in and outside the church who are young, eager, zealous and simply trying to find God in all the wrong places.

We need people like those who sought me and showed me the love of Jesus. They were consistent, they were committed, they were loving and they never made me feel like I was worthless. They placed such an immense amount of value on my soul and my eternity that I couldn't say no. God looked so good and I felt so welcomed by the people of God that I had to think God was the same.

We need God. Help us see Him.

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<sup>1</sup> "Americans Divided on the Importance of Church," by Barna Group, March 24, 2014. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/661-americans-divided-on-the-importance-of-church#.VOX-W2bEi7A>

# THIS IS NOT MY CHURCH. IT'S YOURS.

## Are you setting up the next generation to lead?

BY RICK DUNN

"I have to ask—I hope none of you will be offended." The young pastoral candidate's cautious words were followed by an anxious, awkward pause.

"How did you get a church filled with college students and young adults, ..." he continued, hesitating, "when your senior staff leaders are, well, I hate to say it, *really* old?"

The question prompted smiles and laughter, not offense. Our senior pastoral team at the time consisted of one 40-something (who was absent from the meeting) and four others ranging from early 50s to mid-60s. To the young pastor, we were a gray-haired (or bald), well-worn collection of antiques. And yet, to his great wonderment, we were also leading a church largely composed of millennials.

How did we get there? How does a "really old" team find itself leading a "really young" church? To fully answer these questions, I have to begin with how I, a 55-year-old lead pastor, got here.

## MY ARROGANT, AMBITIOUS SELF

Twenty years ago, I joined the popular trend of writing a personal vision statement. Mine read: "to prepare and equip leadership for the 21st-century Church."

If I am honest, I expected to become the 21st-century church expert who showed others the way. It never occurred to my arrogant, ambitious self that I would not be the one to create the church not yet imagined. When I eventually realized that it was not to be, I was disappointed. I felt outdated, obsolete, irrelevant. Like a Blockbuster Video membership card.

Then I read David's response to not being chosen to build the Lord's temple (2 Samuel 7:1-18). Although God had hand-chosen David to lead when he was still young, this time—some five decades later—God was calling David to be the "set-up man." David was to gather resources, cast vision and prepare the way for Solomon. A next-generation leader would build the temple.<sup>1</sup>

David, with a heart of deep gratitude, replied, "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

Likewise, who are we, fellow seasoned veterans, that we get to gather resources, cast vision and prepare the way for the leadership of the church not yet imagined? Who are we to be the spiritual fathers and mothers of a generation that will raise up the 21st-century Church? Who are we to be given this honor—all with the motive of God's eternal glory rather than the fleeting personal glory of our "ministry success"?



## “LET ME SET YOU UP FOR SUCCESS”

When the idealistic pastoral candidate posed his awkward question, I truly had no formulaic list of steps to offer. As I have repeatedly communicated to our young staff and leaders: “This is your church to lead, in submission to Christ and in stewardship of the gospel. I am a 20th-century pastor who will, over time, intentionally transfer leadership to you, and the Holy Spirit will lead *you* in creating the 21st-century church we are called to become. I am here to set you up for success.”

As Fellowship Church (EFCA), we believe that we have been called to risk the entire present and future of our church on two specific foundational convictions.

First, we believe that our generation of church leaders—and every generation—is called, by Christ and Scripture, to be thoroughly faithful to entrust the gospel to the *next* generation, by His grace and for His glory.

Second, we believe that our “scoreboard” has nothing to do with the numbers who attend or the ministries we build. Our “scoreboard” is simply, solely, *faithfulness* to the gospel. We measure our effectiveness by obedience, not outcomes.

These two convictions have led to several critical leadership commitments by our elders, pastors and lay ministry leaders:

*We will value the gospel as greater than any other commitment.* Period. In 1 Corinthians 9:6, Paul writes, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.” Reaching and empowering a generation that’s growing up in social, moral, political and spiritual chaos demands that the church, including its pastor, be fully eclipsed by the person of Jesus. Woe to us, if we, even with good church intentions, fail to offer the gospel of Jesus to this generation. Unless the gospel eclipses everything in the church, millennials will choose anything *but* the church in their search for meaning and hope.

Practically, this means that we have fewer programs and “churchy experiences,” and that we pay less attention to whether our church “is working.” It also means that, in our large gatherings, we have multi- and multiple *everything*: multiple teachers, multiple worship leaders, multiple and diverse stories of the gospel at work in our people’s lives, and an emphasis on multi-generational expressions of the gospel in teaching, storytelling, music and art.

All of these are designed to minimize attention to and attraction to individual personalities and/or styles. It is not uncommon for someone new to our church to take several months to figure out that I am the lead pastor. No one and no one’s preferences are allowed to be front and center. We jealously guard that spot for Christ and His gospel.

*We will value the multiplication of disciplemakers as greater than the consolidation of church people.* My generation watched America super-size itself. Malls. Stadiums. Fast-food portions. Superstores. Mega-churches. “Bigger is better” we learned—but not when it comes to entrusting the gospel to the next generation. Disciplemaking is never mass production; it’s relationship, over time and across generations.

Practically speaking, we have adopted Paul’s four-generational vision for disciplemaking (2 Timothy 2:2). We are therefore investing increasingly larger amounts of money and time (the true test of what we value) in delivering disciplemakers into the world rather than inviting the world to our events and programs.

As one of our young pastoral staff members observed, “The church has to become more like a food truck than a restaurant.”



*We will value innovation as greater than preservation.* Blockbuster or Netflix? CDs or Apple Music? Walmart or Amazon? The world has moved—not is moving, but has already moved—to streaming movies, downloading books through apps, and delivering goods and groceries to your door. The present and future of all manner of commerce and service now belong to creative risk-takers who fear the certainty of stagnation more than the uncertainty of innovation.<sup>2</sup>

Acts 11:19 reports that the church scattered after Stephen's stoning. The gospel was thus carried into the world. The Jewish world that is. Then, in Acts 11:20, some crazy rogue guys, who evidently did not know any better, started sharing Jesus with Greek-speaking non-Jews. Pretty soon, all heaven broke loose.

Paul and Barnabas set up a one-year seminary experience. The disciples became known as "Christians." Missionaries were launched, Gentiles were saved, and the church distributed grace and truth to the whole world in the centuries that followed. The church once locked up in Jerusalem was now on the move, personally "streaming the gospel" to Gentiles in Antioch—and beyond.

Note, however, that it was not the original disciples or Barnabas or Paul who initiated the move. It was a group of anonymous Christ-followers who were in no way tethered to preserving the status quo.

Twenty centuries later, if the church is to be similarly on the move, it will be led by millennials unencumbered by ties to the status quo.

## STREAMING THE GOSPEL

In 2009 we presented our church with this challenge: "To reach a world not yet seen, we must become a church not yet imagined." Millennial disciplemakers will be the key leaders of that "not yet imagined" vision. The Spirit will lead them to become disciplemakers who relationally "stream the gospel" into the 21st-century world.

Practically speaking, we have therefore begun partnering with millennials to engage the world with gospel-inspired and gospel-grounded innovation. We empower them with love, wisdom, prayer and financial resources.

Young leaders on our campuses, for instance, are asked to not recreate the forms of disciplemaking and church they inherited from my generation. Rather, they are challenged to innovate and co-create with the Spirit of God as if they were missionaries in a distant culture—because they are!

We imagine their innovative churches will be more agile, more adaptive, more decentralized, more intimately engaged in their communities, less expensive and less professionalized than the 20th-century model we once deemed "successful."

The successful church model that was presented to my generation was one where a super-talented or super-cool teacher/leader drew and built a crowd. That's why my generation is so reliant on big churches and video venues—you have to use the big guns to get the job done. But that begs the question, "What is the job?" My generation's consistent answer (in practice if not in theology) was: getting people to church so they can know Jesus.

But here is the truth, like it or not: Millennials are not coming back to the church, at least not the church as we know it. So let's empower and equip millennials who know Him to carry the gospel of the Church outward *without* carrying all the external success baggage of 20th-century models.



I ask you, my baby-boomer generation peers, who are we, ministry relics like you and me, that we get to do this? May we be faithful to this gift of grace given to us to set up the millennial leadership of the 21st-century church. Moreover, may future leaders say of us what Psalm 78:72 said of David, shepherd-king: “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”

*Dr. Rick Dunn, 55, is lead pastor of Fellowship Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the co-founder and president of Sequoia Leadership Concepts Youth Development/Tennessee Fury, which uses competitive sports to develop young leaders. Rick's favorite ministry partner is his wife, Teresa. His favorite millennials are his three adult children and his son-in-law. And his leadership heroes are the men and women who, in the ways of His Savior, have come to serve rather than be served by the millennial generation of Christ's Church.*

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<sup>1</sup> Referencing David and Solomon in this context is a messy choice. David was denied the opportunity of building the temple because, in God's words, he had “shed too much blood in My sight” (1 Chronicles 22:8). Solomon was the very definition of a “mess” as a leader, although he was gloriously successful in the building of the temple. David rejoiced in God's favor in allowing himself, a flawed king, to prepare for his son's success. That joy provides a vision of the joy that I and others of my generation are experiencing as we prepare the way for millennial leadership of the church. (Which, by the way, is likely to be messy.)

<sup>2</sup> This balancing of certainty and uncertainty is a common discussion in entrepreneurial circles and a present-day, exciting challenge for the church.



# BEFORE YOU PREACH TO ME

**I'm an emerging adult. And I'm listening carefully.**

A compilation of advice from emerging adults and many who believe in them:

- Preach the Bible. Many of my friends cite “the Bible not being preached” as a reason they left a church. We need and want Truth.
- Connect ancient Bible truths with contemporary life realities. Convey how the gospel matters to our relationships, our work, our culture, our sexuality. Help us see how the gospel rightly intersects every area of our lives.
- But before you preach on tough issues affecting our culture, find out how others are wrestling with them. Perspectives different from yours may still be biblically formed and theologically sound. For example, a mature, pro-life, 25-year-old black Christian woman will likely have a different take on everything surrounding abortion than a mature, pro-life, 55-year-old white Christian man.
- Personalize it. Your content must pass through your heart and not just your head—pair the truth of Scripture with a personally meaningful part of your own spiritual journey. This is a matter of vulnerability and authenticity, not image and expertise.
- Communicate the why. If we don't know the *why* of your teaching, we will care little about the *what* and even less about the *how* of the application.
- Speak as if nonbelievers, new believers and questioning believers are present, because you hope that we are. And we may continue to return if we feel that our presence is noted and welcomed.
- Remember: You are the following partner in the dance of conveying the gospel. The lead partner is the Holy Spirit. Believe that He is at work in my life and that of my friends.

# THE WORLD NEEDS PIONEERING 20-SOMETHINGS

Bring on their energy, passion and love of experimentation

BY KATIE DUDGEON

I have served with young adults in different capacities over the years, and I work with many on our EFCA Reach-Global team in Berlin. In fact, the majority of our inter-generational team in Berlin right now is composed of millennials. That's a deliberate choice, because we are convinced that they are key to the expansion of the Church.

Every generation has something to offer, and we consider it our responsibility to steward the gifts of emerging adults, speak into their development, and ask them to share their skills and insights.

We also believe it is possible to do this while seeing incredible kingdom impact. Some of my peers and colleagues in the ministry world have told us we are crazy to integrate so many inexperienced 20-somethings into our vision for reaching a city—and that we will not get anything done with all the time required to invest in young adults.

Yet we have found the opposite to be true. We have seen emerging adults reach out to prostituted women in ways that a 50-something pastor never could. We have seen them share the gospel through music and hospitality, and disciple those new to the faith. We have even seen them restore partnerships through their willingness to serve. And they have moved our team vision forward through their unique gifts, insights and leadership.

Every generation (including yours and mine) has its blind spots. If we don't recognize our own generational weaknesses, we will not have the compassion or patience we need to work with the next generation. Personal humility and a commitment to personal growth must start with us.

So are we ready to leverage all that this generation has to offer?

**Unconventionality.** This generation defines stability differently and is not looking for the financial security of a lifetime career. If I were to ask most 20-somethings to serve with us in Berlin long-term, they would say no (in fact, they have!). But they are not scared of approaching work in new ways and want to invest their time in something meaningful. So we've learned to start with building a connection rather than asking for a commitment. When we offer shorter opportunities to connect with us—two-week projects, a summer of serving, a year-long ministry lab, or a two-year language and ministry lab—suddenly the personal connections and ministry opportunities they discover begin to overshadow their hesitancy of long-term commitment.

**Community.** Connectedness over shared interests, concerns or experiences ties this generation together. We try to build on this innate value for community by creating intentional rhythms for them to support one another and learn from one another. In addition to building community with each other, it has been significant to pull them into the team at large and invite them into casual environments where they can get to know those outside their age or life stage. Natural relationships form among those we never would've paired together, and the pressure is off of the supervisor or even mentor to meet all of the relational needs.

**Experimentation.** “Learn by doing” is their *modus operandi*—a natural way to discover millennials’ gifts, personalities and wiring in a ministry context. It means we need to be ready to let them lead and explore various experiences, and encourage them to step into opportunities that arise. Last winter I was preparing to lead a team from Berlin that would recruit at a large missions conference. When I was unexpectedly unable to attend, we asked one of our 20-something, two-year staff members to lead the team instead. She had never before stepped into something so visible and so significant for the future of our team, but she did an incredible job and felt valued that we saw her potential.

Yet not every time you give ministry away will it be done well. Another time, we asked a highly relational short-term staff member to do logistics and provide practical support for a two-week team, and she readily agreed. After the two weeks, we learned that she had not done much besides go to dinner with the group a few times, and that they had had to figure out all of the details on their own. Her gift set was less of a fit than *either* of us recognized, and it led to a poor experience with a significant partnering church. But it is all part of living out our value for developing young leaders, showing grace to one another and learning together.

**Passion.** Young adults are passionate about lots of things, one of them being the justice and compassion needed for a broken world. The good-intentioned, big-hearted—and often naïve—young adults arrive in an urban center like Berlin without a lot of discernment in how to channel their passions. Our job, then, is to come alongside them and instill a healthy view of the local church and sustainable ministry practices, especially in the areas of anti-human trafficking and ministry to refugees. When we can introduce them to best practices and mentors, or simply provide regular coaching so that they learn to make good decisions, we benefit from the incredible perspective they bring.

**Multiculturalism.** Emerging adults are better equipped than previous American generations to work with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. In team settings, we have found that they possess an almost innate sensitivity to ethnic, racial or socioeconomic injustices. Their exposure to different cultures and their awareness of paternalism is an asset when reaching out to people groups that have been marginalized and when developing ministry that elevates human dignity.

This generation is not like other ones. And that is a good thing! God is positioning them to have influence around the world and with their peers, through their passions and intuitive perspective. And He is using them to bring the gospel and build the Church in new places that have been unreachable to previous generations. We must continue to unleash their creative, unique voice for Jesus in our communities, our cities and around the world.

*Katie Dudgeon, age 38, is the assistant team leader for EFCA ReachGlobal in Berlin and served with an EFCA church in Fullerton, California, before moving to Europe. Equipping and mobilizing young adults has been an integral part of her ministry over the last 15 years, and she continues to be amazed by the impact they have in the United States and around the world.*

# STOP TRYING TO DEFEND EVERYTHING

## Advice for engaging emerging adults in conversation

BY GLENDA OWOR

*Glenda Owor, 22, is a legal assistant in the Minnesota Attorney General's office. She earned her B.A. in human rights and justice and Africa from the University of Minnesota. Glenda attends Hope Community Church (EFCA) in Minneapolis, where she's part of a vibrant small group.*

Many of my Christian friends who are not part of a church fall into three camps. Either (a) they do not want to tie themselves to a hierarchical, systematic-style institution; or (b) they believe that the church is outdated when it comes to their stances on social issues such as gay marriage, abortion, divorce and cohabitation; or (c) they've experienced disappointment and/or pain from the church.

I didn't grow up in the church, and so I find it easy to be friends with those who aren't part of the church or who aren't Christians. Because I have an openness and not a defensiveness about my faith, I'm open to hearing different opinions.

I think of a conversation I recently had with a friend. His father was a pastor, but he had left the church himself because he hadn't seen Christ exemplified in his parents. "There's a lot of deception in the church, people using God for their own gain, and I don't want to be part of it," he told me. "There also isn't space to doubt. Instead, there are exhortations: 'Why do you have questions? You just need to have more faith.'

"I don't have that much faith."

Even though he admits that "some type of higher power" protects him, he still resists going to church because of a fear of surrender—giving up his individual will and his affections. He said to me, "I look at your life and see I could never have that much faith."

I felt some pressure to have answers for him. But I also felt sad about his interpretations of church and of what it means to be a Christian. I wanted to say, "No, that's not how Christ views you."

Knowing you can't fix someone and giving them space to disagree with what you believe—that really opens up the discussion.

As Christians, we are often taught to have conversations that are super-pointed about the gospel. But pointed conversation takes away the fact that you are in a conversation with two people and what the other person has to say is valuable too. It feels unnatural, as if you're expecting a certain response by the end of the conversation instead of being willing to see how it flows. If someone has an agenda, I'm not open to listen to them, even if I share the same feelings. It seems as if they don't care about me—they only want to make their point.

Traditional methods of evangelism are legitimate, and people still get saved through them. But if this generation doesn't receive a pointed approach to evangelism well, then that method of evangelism becomes a stumbling

block. So it's not something worth holding onto. You're not compromising a core part of the gospel, only delivery, if you move away from a pointed approach.

We're often told that we need to defend and protect our faith. But defensiveness makes me want to cringe. We fall into defensiveness sometimes because the gospel is such a radical message and it's so weighty in its promises. If it's not true, then a whole lot unravels.

So the weight of its truth causes people to cling closely to what they know and not let go of it. But in defensiveness, you put up walls that say, "I'm right and you're wrong." It comes off that you are prideful and better than others, that you don't have doubts or questions. It turns people away.

If you look at other times when people act that way—a political pundit or someone trying to spread the word about veganism—you don't want to be part of it. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.



# PLEASE INVITE ME INTO YOUR LIFE

## Why it matters to have older believers who love me

*Although she's no longer an "emerging adult"—as a married woman now with a child of her own—Melissa, age 27, speaks eloquently of what it was like to be floundering and hurting in an abusive, spiritually hypocritical family until she met true believers who loved her well and accepted her just as she was.*

When I was young, my siblings and I went to church because my parents went to church, and it was expected that we go. After I turned 16, my dad said it was our choice. But still, if we wanted him to be pleased with us, we would go.

I eventually stopped going, mostly because of my parents' hypocrisy. I don't remember my parents praying or reading the Bible, but we were told we should read and memorize it. They talked about God but didn't have a relationship with the Lord. That was apparent from their mannerisms, which were the same as my nonbelieving friends and family members: no love, joy, peace, patience, goodness or gentleness.

So I had a season of not going to church. I knew the Lord was drawing me close to Himself, but I resisted. A high-school friend and her parents were genuine believers. I'd see them reading their Bibles and treating each other in a way that was loving and faithful. It was a stark contrast for me. Even as I'd party, they would love and accept me. They pretty much showed me the gospel.

I came to the Lord when someone challenged me to disprove God and that Jesus was raised from the dead. I couldn't deny the fact that Jesus was real and lived and died for me.

Once I made that commitment, I tentatively came back to church while in college. That church taught me the Bible and equipped me with the tools to study on my own. There was genuine relationship there, plus older believers who were intentional about building relationships with us young, really erratic people.

One older couple hosted a Bible study every Sunday night for students. It wasn't, "Come at 6 and leave at 7:30." Instead, we came at 5:30 and they provided a meal. We'd linger. They'd have a fire going. It felt like a home away from home. During the week, Cindy would check in with us or say, "I'll be home on Wednesday if you want to come over and have coffee."



When I think of Jesus, I think of Bill, her husband, who was tender and open and would love to hear you sit and ramble about your classes and how hard they were. He just cared. I hope to embody that and never get so busy that I'm rushing people or communicating that what they're going through is trivial.

Now, as a millennial with my own child, I cling to older believers who love the Lord and who've walked with the Lord through their lifetime. Their investment in me is the biggest catalyst in my faith—rebuilding the trust I'd lost for so many years.

My advice for older adults in the church is to not have a closed hand in regard to your relationships. We understand that you're kind of tapped out in the number of relationships you've already built. People care about attending church, about pursuing their career, about focusing on their family—so there's no extra room to invite people into your lives and walk intentionally with them.

Instead, please invite us: "Our life is a mess and we don't raise our kids well, but we're doing our best. Come on over and have dinner with us, we want to get to know you."

# ACTUALLY, YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO LEARN TOO

**Mutual mentoring means that we all bring something to the table.**

**BY KRIS FERNHOUT**

Over my 20-plus years in youth ministry, I've engaged in a lot of conversations with parents about their college-aged and post-college-aged children. Conversations where a parent says something like, "I didn't pay for his college tuition so that he could get some poor-paying job."

At the same time his son is confiding in me, "I want to do what I feel God is calling me to. Besides, why would I want to do what *he* does? He's been miserable his whole life."

Other times, a mom or dad just desperately asks, "Would you help point him in the right direction?"

I've also had a lot of conversations over the years with searching young adults. Their questions to me are more like: "How do I know if what I'm doing is really what God wants me to do? I just don't want to wake up one morning 15 years from now and feel like I've wasted half of my life."

The angst is real on both sides. Emerging adults are feeling the weight of life-long choices, and sometimes their parents aren't able to be the sole sounding boards for those choices.

Mentors are one powerful answer—wise, godly adults in the church who will walk alongside. But I would argue that in traditional mentoring relationships, the influence often flows only one way. What if, instead, we emphasized relationships that are rooted in equality and mutuality?

What do I mean by equality and mutuality? In writing to the Romans, Paul says that believers are children of God and have received the "Spirit of adoption" (8:14-17). At our spiritual birth, we are ushered into a family and are equally sons and daughters before Him.

Adoption, therefore, assumes that while some have much to teach others because of experience, we are all equal, all have value and therefore all have *something*. Adoption means there is "familial mutuality."<sup>1</sup>

This idea is reinforced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12: "The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (12:22). Relationships that emphasize learning from one another will not only help emerging adults but also help the church more fully realize a biblical ecclesiology.

When the church helps emerging adults become spiritually formed, the church is also becoming spiritually formed. The church serves as a place where spiritual gifts are discovered and given space to be practiced, further shaping the body. Failure to live into this kind of ecclesiology will at best result in emerging adults being nothing more than spiritual consumers and, at worst, result in an exodus from the church entirely.

When your mentoring relationships don't emphasize equality and mutuality, you run the risk of making any ministry for emerging adults feel like a youth group. Not to diminish youth ministry, but this age cohort does not need a youth group. Emerging adults are developmentally different from adolescents and therefore do not need a remix of the same music, same talks and same activities that have merely graduated from PG-13 to R-rated.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to releasing spiritual gifts, mentoring that's mutual invites emerging adults to add their voices too—voices that the church needs. Voices that I as a mentor need. These voices may question my church's traditions or my own long-held assumptions; they may help explore shifting cultural issues with grace and forgiveness; they may speak prophetically of a hopeful future when others are acting fearful.

Despite some honest angst, more than 80 percent of today's emerging adults do feel that they are living in an age of possibilities, with unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.<sup>3</sup> They have much in common with those whom Paul wrote about in Romans 5:2-5: rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, knowing that while the church may suffer, it produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope.

Finally, the church needs emerging adults, and I need emerging adults, because who better to teach us about our sophisticated changing culture than those helping to *create* it? In creating culture for others to enjoy and utilize, emerging adults are living out what it means to be an image-bearer of God—to be in relationship with and to be a co-creator with the Creator. I want to have a front-row seat for that, one that allows me to learn from them and to collaborate with them.

Yes, emerging adults in our churches need relationships with other godly men and women—to help navigate an unstable season of life (even while living in their parents' basement). They need the wisdom that comes from simply having lived life and walked with God for longer. No shortcuts can cut it.

Yet through mutual rather than hierarchical mentoring, we who are older can acknowledge and nurture gifts, passions and wisdom that will mentor us as well.

*Kris Fernhout (D.Min., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2014) has been a youth pastor for more than 20 years, most recently as student ministry pastor at Christ Community's Olathe campus (EFCA). At age 44, he calls himself "a Gen Xer who dealt with the same assumptions that plague millennials: slackers, narcissistic, cynical and afraid to commit to anything." Beginning in August 2016 he will direct Kansas City Fellows, a marketplace internship program (at Christ Community Kansas City) to help college graduates explore the intersection of faith, work and community.*

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<sup>1</sup> Chap Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2016), page 3.

<sup>2</sup> From "Seeing and Supporting Emerging Adult Spirituality," by Steve Argue, part of the April 19, 2016, Fuller Youth Institute "Growing Young" webinar.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "The Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults: Thriving, Struggling and Hopeful," 2012, page 5. <http://clarku.edu/clarkpoll>

# RESOURCES AND INSIGHTS

## Ways to fuel discovery and discipleship

### DIGITAL

Christian leaders who speak to millennial issues and offer valuable resources:

- David Boyd, managing director of EA Resources (<http://www.earesources.org/author/admin/>)
- Tim Elmore, president of Growing Leaders (<http://growingleaders.com/tim-elmore/>)
- Jolene Erlacher, consultant and strategic planner (<http://www.leadingtomorrow.org/>)
- Claude Hickman, executive director of The Traveling Team (<http://www.thetravelingteam.org/claude>)
- David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group (<http://davidkinnaman.com/>)

“Millennials, Boomers, and Leadership: Why can’t we all just get along?” by Katherine Jeffery, April 20, 2016, ReachStudents blog. (<http://reachstudents.blogs.efca.org/why-cant-we-all-get-along/>)

“Shaping or Being Shaped?” by Jana Sundene, May 28, 2014, Trinity International University Newsroom. (<http://news.tiu.edu/2014/05/28/shaping-or-being-shaped/>)

TED Talk, “Why 30 Is Not the New 20,” by Meg Jay. ([https://www.ted.com/speakers/meg\\_jay](https://www.ted.com/speakers/meg_jay))

“Blessed Are the Agnostics: How I learned to see my unbelieving husband through God’s eyes,” by Stina Kielsmeier-Cook, Her-meneutics Blog. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2016/may/blessed-are-agnostics.html?start=1>)

“We Are Hopelessly Hooked,” by Jacob Weisberg, Feb. 25, 2016, The New York Review of Books. (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/02/25/we-are-hopelessly-hooked/>)

“What Millennials Want When They Visit Church,” published by Barna Group. (<https://barna.org/barna-update/millennials/711-what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church#.VtRoERjEj6Q>)

*Sapientia*—digital periodical of the Carl F.H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. (<http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/sapientia/>)

### PRINT

*20 and Something* (FRAMES series), by Barna Group or the full FRAMES series

*Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating emerging generations into the family of faith*, by Chap Clark

*Arrested Adulthood: The changing nature of maturity and identity*, James Cote

*Artificial Maturity: Helping kids meet the challenge of becoming authentic adults*, by Tim Elmore

*Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why people are DONE with church but not their faith*, by Josh Packard, Ashleigh Hope

*Emerging Adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*, by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

*Generation Ex-Christian: Why young adults are leaving the faith ... and how to bring them back*, by Drew Dyck

*Generation iY: Our last chance to save their future*, by Tim Elmore

*Hurt 2.0: Inside the world of today's teenagers*, by Chap Clark

*Making Space for Millennials*, published by Barna Group

*Reclaiming Conversation: The power of talk in a digital age*, by Sherry Turkle

*Souls in Transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*, by Christian Smith with Patricia Snell

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

## We Stand at a Generational Crossroads

BY KEVIN KOMPEN

Emerging adults are not the future of the church; they are an integral part of the church today and are a key to what the church will become. Emerging adults need the church and the church needs emerging adults.

This is an extremely important issue. We are at a crossroads when it comes to meaningfully engaging emerging adults in gospel ministry in the context of local EFCA churches. Why is that?

Approximately 43 percent of lead pastors in the EFCA are over age 55. As I've traveled the country this past year and shared this fact, I have seen some people respond with deep concern about where we will be in a decade as many current leaders retire.

I have a different take on what this means for us: I see it as an incredible opportunity. After all, every generation has both the opportunity and the obligation to effectively invest in the generations that will succeed them.

If we are going to connect with this generation, we need to seriously consider advice from leaders like author Rick Dunn, who are actively taking risks to develop young leaders in their churches. It will take intentional choices.

During the decade of ministry that I spent traveling across Africa, I saw many young leaders underutilized and marginalized. This often led to angst in their lives and missed opportunities for ministry expansion.

I also saw some older leaders intentionally invest in and empower young leaders to step into ministry responsibilities that bore great fruit. Pastor Titus Davis, who was just elected to serve as president of the EFC of West Africa, is such a young leader. Older leaders saw capability, capacity and a clear servant heart in his life. They walked alongside him as he planted churches, started a school and initiated outreaches among refugees who had fled to his country.

As he grew, Titus took other young leaders under his wing, equipping them and casting a vision for them to multiply churches and other leaders. An incredible church-planting movement in three countries in West Africa has taken root as a result, even in the face of the surrounding Ebola crisis.

I first met Titus a decade ago and have been privileged to invest in his life. One of the great joys of my ministry in Africa was to walk alongside him and to have Titus call me his "coach."

In my own life I can look back at the leaders in my home church who invested in me and took a risk—letting me step into ministry opportunities that ultimately shaped who I have become today. I watched the same thing happen in the lives of my own children as they were given opportunities to do meaningful ministry.

Rather than being threatened by the presence and perspective of emerging leaders, those in my generation must take time to develop relationships with them so that we can listen, learn and understand the perspective they bring to shaping ministry for their generation. I love interacting with young leaders. More often than not I have more questions than answers, but I enjoy the process of prayerfully thinking these things through together.

My prayer is that each older leader in the EFCA would commit to walk the journey into the future with some of those who will lead when we step aside.