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# WHO AND HOW ARE **THE NEXT GENERATION?**

“BUT AS FOR ME AND MY  
HOUSEHOLD, WE WILL SERVE  
THE LORD.” (JOS. 24:15B)



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next  
generation  
series

2



# WHAT ARE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS?

## **NEXT GENERATION SERIES 2**

### **WHO AND HOW ARE THE NEXT GENERATION?**

*(Is the church losing the next generation?)*

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## **I. What are their characteristics?**

The next generation is living in a new technological, social, and spiritual reality; **this reality can be summed up in three A: access, alienation, and authority.**

### **\*Access**

**The first and perhaps most obvious change relates to emerging digital tool and technologies---the methods and means by which young adults connect with each other and obtain information about the world.**

Hardware such as personal computers, tablets, mobile devices, and smart phones, as well as soft technologies like web pages, apps, and software are providing the next generation (and the rest of us) nearly unlimited access to other people and their ideas and worldviews-at the instantaneous click or swipe of a finger.

The heightened level of access provided by these tools is changing the way young adults think about and relate to the world. For better and worse, they are sensing, perceiving, and interpreting the world---and their faith and spirituality---through screens.

**Simply put, technology is fueling the rapid pace of change and the disconnection between the past and the future.** The internet and digital tools are at the root of a massive disruption between how previous generations relate, work, think, and worship and how next generation do these activities. The next generation understands technology as part of their generational self-identity.

The next generation has been raised with the technologies in full supply, and influencing the world, as well as changing the way they think about the church and Christianity. **Technological access allow them to experience and examine content originating from nonbiblical worldviews, giving them ample reasons to question the nature of truth.** It generates extraordinary distractions and invites them to be less linear and logical in their thought process.

### **ACCESS-----Changing Technologies and Tools**

**New technologies and digital tools provide unprecedented information, analysis, opinions, relationships, and worldviews.**

### **Facts--- Recognizing Access**

- **The typical American consumes 34 gigabytes of data per day, an increase of 350% over 30 years ago.**
- **Information is mostly visual (television, movies, and games), written words account for less than one-tenth of 1% of the total info we consume.**
- **Young Christians, like other teens and young adults perceive and interpret reality through screens.**

### **Examples---Access in Action**

- **Teachers and pastors can be fact-checked in real time.**
- **People endure jobs, school, or church and enjoy their “real lives” in online games.**
- **Software brings customized content to users so they don’t have to go looking.**
- **Smartphones have apps for locating restaurant, checking the weather, watching movies, sending and receiving money, listening to music, shopping, blogging, tweeting, GPS.**
- **Personal news isn’t “real” until it has been shared on Facebook or Twitter.**

### **New Reality---Access and Spirituality**

- **Young people expect to participate as well as consume.**

- **“Learning piracy”—young people do not see the church as the sole arbiter of spiritual content.**
- **Constant access—everyone is expert—creates a “my-sized.”**
- **Increased global awareness and connection to others in remote places, in real time.**
- **Desire to stay connected at all time.**
- **Important to broadcast yourself to the world, to express yourself, to cultivate followers.**

### **\*Alienation**

The second cultural shift is how alienated today’s teens and young adults feel from the structures that undergird our society. We might think of alienation as very high levels of isolation from family, community, and institutions

**Alienation is rooted in the massive social changes that began in the 1960s:** the civil rights movement, student riots and unrest, Vietnam war, hippie culture, rock ’n’ roll, women’s liberation, birth control & sexual revolution, mainframe computer, Watergate, Woodstock, the Cold war, the moon landing.

In many ways, what we now know as **“youth culture”** was born during that era, as young people embraced new forms of music and art, unprecedented life styles, and anti-establishment thinking; the phrase **“generation gap”** was first used during this period. The generation gap is bigger today than ever but it is also a continuation, a deepening of the rifts introduced by the youth culture of the 1960s.

In the 1960s, however, the trends diverged and young adults began to show significant disengagement compared to older adults—a trend that has continued to this day. **What’s different now compared to the 1960s?**

- **Family: Father absence** is an example of profound social change introduced during the 1960s but much more common today. In the 1960s, 5% of live births were to unmarried women; currently, the percentage is 42. One of the most obvious that this generation has grown up in a culture that

affirms a **multiplicity of family types—traditional, nontraditional, blended, and same-sex partnerships.**

This has influenced their understanding of what it means to be a family, how healthy families should function, what it means to have a good heavenly Father in their lives, and how they can find meaning, trust, and intimacy in peers, family, and romantic relationships.

- **Adulthood:** Many young adults are postponing the complete to transition to adulthood. This transition, according to research reported one prominent sociologist, is characterized by 5 key developmental tasks: **Leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child.**

In 1960, 77% of women and 65% of men completed all of these tasks—had become adults—by age 30. In the most recent estimate, just 46% of women and 31% of men had completed the transition by the time they reached 30 years of age. **Think about that. “Settle by 30” used to be the normative, typical pattern for young adults in the 1960s.**

- **Institution:** A third mark of **alienating cultural change launched by the Boomer and amplified in the Millennials is skepticism about institutions.** Many young adults feel “lost” from our systems of education, economics, government, and culture.

The Millennials generation is skeptical, even cynical about the institutions that have shaped our society, and while they retain an undiminished optimism about the future, they see themselves creating that future mostly disengaged from the institutions that have defined our culture thus far.

Few institutions in our culture are immune to the impact of the next generation—from music to media, from the workplace to education, from politics to the church. **The generational churn at play within the religious establishment is, in many ways, part and parcel of the alienation affecting every segment of our society.**

**ALIENATION -----Changing Social Context**

**Unprecedented levels of disconnection from relationships and institutions.**

#### **Facts---Recognizing Alienation**

- **In 1960, 5% of live births were to unmarried women compared to 41% in 2010.**
- **1970 a majority had completed the transition to adulthood by age 30. This is no longer typical.**
- **Young people are among the least likely to vote, volunteer, and join to community groups.**
- **Traditional media, like newspapers and nightly news have little traction with the younger generation.**
- **The average young adult has worked for his or her current employer for 3 years, compared to 10 years among older adults.**

#### **Examples---Alienation in Action**

- **Freelancing and self-employment are on the rise among young adults.**
- **Instead of turning to parents or older adults to advice, the young generation consults peers.**
- **Recent college grads compete for jobs with millions of the unemployed older workers who have more experience.**
- **Rising cost of living and stagnant wage prospects keep marriage and kids out of reach.**

#### **New Reality---Alienation and spirituality**

- **Many young adults do not have a network of older adults to help them to succeed.**
- **Millennials approach marriage and family pragmatically (“what work for me”).**
- **Skepticism about “talking heads” (example: one-way lectures), denominations, and church structures.**
- **Many superficial acquaintances instead of a few intimate friendships.**
- **Tension between hopefulness and cynicism when it comes to politics, and activism.**

## \*Authority

The third factor of the cultural shift is the authority. Let's call this **skepticism of authority--new questions about who to believe and why.**

In the book, "**Will our children have faith**" by John Westerhoff describes how six different arenas of culture once contributed to the socialization of faith: **community, church, religious programming (such as Sunday school), public schools (which had prayer and Bible reading), popular entertainment (which was based on a biblical worldview), and stable family structures.** In other words, while far from perfect, Christianity was the culture's autopilot.

The cultural structures that carved deep channels for the faith formation of young people are no longer available to the church. Even though they may bear the Christian label, many families don't embody faith. The culture doesn't model or esteem it. Pop entertainment rails against faith in general and Christianity in particular. The education system does its best to be neutral religiously and to instill "values" but not biblical morality. **The next generation is growing up in a culture in which the authority of the Christian community and obedience to Scripture are much less present in their developmental experiences.** Millennials and Generation Z Christians face an environment in which Christianity's authority has been greatly diminished in both obvious and subtle ways.

There are several observations we could make about the emerging generations relationship to authority. Let's take a look at arenas impacted by their skepticism.

- **Scripture:** The Bible's influence on next generation is up in the air. Millions of young people believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. We also find that many young adults express an authentic hunger to learn from the Bible and to understand more clearly its meaning and import for their lives. But when we examine the generation as a whole, we see challenges. **Young people are skeptical the reliability of the original biblical manuscripts;** they tend to read Bible through a lens of pluralism; they seem less likely than previous generations to believe the Scriptures have a claim on human obedience.



- **Christianity and culture:** The next area of skepticism involves the role of Christianity should play in public life and the broader culture. Young Christians seem to sense that secular society makes little room for religious commitments. Questions about the proper role of faith in politics, sexuality, science, media, technology, and so on are simply being reframed to avoid debate---making people of faith irrelevant to the conversation. There is a sense, across the board, of benign apathy toward Christianity.

**How will the next generation of believers respond to the growing hostility of our culture toward people of faith?**

### **AUTHORITY-----Changing Spiritual Narrative**

**New questions about who and what to believe and why.**

#### **Facts---Recognizing Authority Shifts**

- **Young adults are friends with a more religiously diverse network of peers than previous generations Americans**
- **Young adults are among the least likely to name the Bible as sacred Scripture.**

#### **Examples---Authority in Action**

- **Christian leaders of the previous generation are virtually unknown to today's young Christians.**
- **Young adults are more likely to consult the internet than their pastor about a religious question.**
- **Millennials are tech savvy, but not necessarily truth savvy—"I found it on the internet" is a common claim for informational reliability.**
- **Everybody has an opinion, and it's hard to know who is trustworthy.**

#### **New Reality---Authority and Spirituality**

- **Relativism---"What's true for me may not be true for you."**
- **Peers play an increasing role as the moral and spiritual compass for decision making.**
- **Young Christians are exposed to a variety of religious content, often without a grid for evaluating it.**

- **Young people are interested in spirituality, but on their own terms.**

Today, an information revolution akin to the printing press—the easily accessible digitization of everything—is afoot. **Fatherlessness is nearly eight times more common today than it was fifty years ago, and young adults are far less likely to attain full "adulthood" by their thirtieth birthday.** And our hyper individualized, consumer-driven, pluralistic culture invites young people to become their own king or queen, the absolute authority in their kingdom of one.

**How could these changes not affect the faith journey of young adults?**

*\*Thanks for reading! Please check the 3<sup>rd</sup> series to continue to read.*