

# 6 COMMON TRAITS OF GEN Z

Often when you hear an “expert” speak or write about reaching a particular generation, it will inevitably be someone from an older generation. For example, you’ll have a baby boomer or Generation X-er talking about how to connect with millennials or Gen Z.

In no way am I saying this is an ineffective approach. In fact, there is a plethora of resources out there done in this particular way that are extremely helpful. However I wanted to take a different approach.

Over the last year, while speaking at student camps, DiscipleNow weekends, conferences and young adult worship services among other events, I took the opportunity to sit down and ask these young people some probing questions. One of the things I love the most about young people is if you want to know what they’re thinking, all you have to do is ask them.

Sometimes, you don’t even have to ask! Instead of adults telling other adults how to reach students, I decided to ask students, “What do adults need to know about your generation, known as Gen Z?” It was an incredible journey. I became a student so that I could hear ideas from this generation about reaching their generation.

With that in mind, here are six things we need to know about Gen Z in their own words:

## 1. They want more out of church than potluck dinners

This generation wants to be a part of “doing” something. They’ll want more out of their church than sitting in

a pew, listening to sermons and going to potluck dinners while waiting on the “Rapture Bus” to swoop down to pick them all up. They are not scared to die young; they are terrified, however, to die at a ripe old age while not having done anything significant with their lives in their own eyes. They are not typically impressed by a church’s size or budget. They’re interested both in being noticed relationally and in what the church is doing outside the walls of the building. Let’s mobilize a generation. They will make mistakes, but so do we. That’s why grace is so amazing.

## 2. They are not ageist

People tend to think that students don’t want to have anything to do with the older generation. Gen Z is in desperate need for older generations to invest in them. This is largely a fatherless generation. They often seek out or are more open to discipleship or mentorship than we tend to think. But they won’t know how to ask for it. They may ask you to “hangout” by using some other word that sounds like gibberish to you. Nevertheless, if this generation wants to spend time with you, then they are giving you the most valuable thing they have to offer and that you have to give — time.

## 3. They largely value the “why” over the “what”

Students are not typically open to doing something just because it’s the way it’s always been done or because it’s what their family has always known. They are not driven by heritage. For example, students are not going to be Southern Baptist just because their parents were. If we can’t answer their “why” questions or we get defensive over their questions, we’ll lose them. Be ready

to answer their honest questions with love, patience and kindness. Their experience with something or someone will often dictate their views more than history will.

#### **4. They don't want to be seen as the future of the church**

Remember, the younger generation is not the future of the church; if they've been redeemed with the blood of Jesus, then they're the church of right now. Let them have some ownership of the ministry, and be patient with them when they mess up ... possibly a lot. A great way to keep students engaged in the ministry is by constantly communicating, illustrating and empowering participation in the vision and mission of the church. Sometimes, we'll schedule an event to reach Gen Z using all older generations to plan it, then plead with students to bring their friends. Then we get upset, when they don't show up. Want them to show up? Want them to invite their friends? Then let them have a voice in planning it.

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#### **5. They want authenticity and transparency**

Nearly all students grow weary of gimmicks and “sleek presentations” very quickly. The more transparent and vulnerable a communicator is the more students connect. There was a time when speakers/teachers were

told not to use themselves in personal illustrations. This generation, on the other hand, wants to hear those personal stories. As adults, if we act as those who have it all figured out and are not in desperate daily need of God's grace, we'll lose students' attention. They won't believe that we're “being real” and they'll think our faith is unattainable for them.

#### **6. They know brokenness at an earlier age**

They are exposed to more violence, graphic images and evil at an earlier age. Exposure to these things on the internet, in media coverage and through broken homes is unfortunately the norm for far too many. They don't know a world without the fear of mass shootings and terrorism. This is also a pornography-saturated generation where the average age of first exposure is 11. The fastest growing demographic for internet pornography consumption is females age 15-30; 70 percent of guys admit to interaction with internet pornography, and 50 percent of girls. This generation is looking for solutions at a much earlier time in their lives. They know they're broken. Thank God for the Gospel because it is mighty to save Gen Z. Share it with them. They're starving for it, whether or not they know it.

I'm personally encouraged by this generation of students. Even as an adult, I resonate deeply with their views. According to a recent Wall Street Journal survey, 30 percent of Gen Z says, “religion is very important to them,” the lowest in U.S. history. But 78 percent say, “living a self-fulfilled life is very important to them.” This should be extremely eye-opening to us. That's the threshold to cross in communicating to Gen Z. Help them see that a “fulfilled life” only comes from Someone outside of “self.” [»](#)



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