

Growth Points

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Why Focus on Generations?

Interest in generational cohorts has been a major area of research ever since the Baby Boomers burst forth in 1946. America's largest generation is now between the ages of 40 and 59 years old, and continues to be a driving force in our society.

Our interest in the Baby Boom generation spawned research into what is now called Generation X and Generation Y. Gen Xers were born between 1965 and 1976, although some researchers prefer to include those born up to 1983 in this cohort. This generation includes between 43 to 66 million people depending on which dates are used to bracket it.

Gen Yers were born between

1977 and 1994 (some would include those born up to 2002). This generation is America's second largest and includes around 75 million people.

While study of generations is clearly a popular subject, some in the church ask Why should we be interested in generations? We should study generations because . . .

(1) God recognizes the existence of generations.

The Bible uses the words "generation" and "generations" two hundred and one times.

In some places the word describes entire families, what we today would call a family tree. For example, Genesis 5:1 states "This is the book of the generations of Adam." However, in other places God recognizes generations in the same way be think of them today, that is as cohorts of people bounded by events and dates. For example, Ecclesiastes 1:4 notes "A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever."

(2) God recognizes some generations as evil and some as righteous. To the people over the age of 20 years old, God said "Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 1:35). Later the psalmist declared "God is with the righteous generation" (Psalm 14:5).

(3) God expects each generation to communicate the Good News to other generations.

Through the psalmist God writes, "One generation shall praise they works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

(4) God indicates that we each have a special responsibility to reach our own generation.

This is inferred in Paul's statement regarding King David: "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). David evidently had a special responsibility to his own generational cohort, and it is implied that we all have a similar responsibility.

(5) God declares that we should expect a natural succession of generations.

"A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Why study generations? In part because God recognizes the existence and differences of generations, and by implication we ought to be aware of them too.

10 Top Radio Genres of Generation Y's

Current Hits	50%
Hip-hop/rap	42%
R&B	22%
Alternative	19%
Hard rock/heavy metal	19%
Country	14%
Classic rock	10%
Christian	10%
Oldies	8%
Dance/techno	6%
Soft rock	5%
All-sports	3%

Source: Teenage Research Unlimited

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Gen Y and the Future of Ministry

Why they are important — Why they are challenging

Generation Y is often called the Millennial Generation due to the fact that they bridge the transitional years from the twentieth century to the twenty-first century. Their median age is about 16 years old, and some report that less than five percent of them claim to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord (see research by Thom Rainer for further information).

Gen Y is, however, the second largest generation American has seen. They comprise nearly 75 million people, just a few million less than their Boomer parents and grandparents. In a few short years they will be planting and leading many of our churches. It is crucial that we disciple them today for Jesus Christ.

Gen Ys have different values and priorities than older church leaders who are developing programs and focusing on long range ministry plans. Let's face it. Most of our churches are led by pastors and church leaders who come from the Baby Boom generation. The new models of ministry we started in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (think Saddleback, Willow Creek, Calvary Chapel, Vineyard and others) are now old. Gen Yers think of Maranatha and Vineyard music as "hippie music", and they do not care for it.

The new so-called "emergent" church is an effort to develop fresh models that appeal to Gen Yers, and some Gen Xers as well. However, reaching, winning, and mentoring Gen Yers will never be easy. No one-size-fits-all strategy will work.

First, they are a diverse generation. Thirty-eight percent of them are non-white (twenty-seven percent of Boomers were non-white). Fifteen percent of this young generation are African-American, while fourteen percent are Hispanic. More and more identify as multiracial. The strategy of targeting homogeneous units of people that worked so well to reach Boomers is not as effective with Gen Yers in today's context.

Second, demographics don't help as much today as in the past. In the twentieth century it was often said that "demographics is destiny." This is no longer true with Gen Yers. They celebrate individuality, and resist being seen as a demographic group. Demographic studies will tell us where this age group resides, but not as much about their behavior.

Third, they do exhibit some common characteristics. They are multitaskers who enjoy constant activity. Entertainment (movies, television, the Internet, music, etc.) is important to them. They value education, fun, activity, friends/family, and respect for others.

Fourth, they are experts at filtering out ads directed at them. For the most part, they do not appreciate being targeted by advertisers or churches. Having grown up in a high tech marketing world they filter out the "noise" of direct mail, ads, and marketing calls directed toward them.

Fifth, they are sophisticated shoppers comfortably shopping via the Internet for clothes and other items. They search for churches in the same manner. Church web sites designed specifically for Gen Ys are an emerging way to connect with them for future ministry.

Sixth, they want to "hit-the-street." Gen Yers appreciate organizations that are making a difference in society. In a similar manner they are attracted to churches that "hit-the-streets" in ministry to hurting and needy people.

Seventh, they desire community. Nothing is as important to Gen Yers as friendships. They want to listen to your story and share their own story. In the midst of community they are also open to God's story.

Finding ways to build connections with Gen Yers today will prove fruitful in making disciples in the future.



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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