

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

CREATING A MILLENNIAL GENERATION CONTEXTUALIZED CHURCH  
CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

### CREATING A MILLENNIAL GENERATION CONTEXTUALIZED CHURCH CULTURE

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The Millennial generation, or Generation Y as some people know them, is the biggest generation in the United States of America history. As they flood schools, universities, and the job market it is easy to see that there are major differences between them and previous generations. Simultaneously, the church in America has hundreds of individual churches each year closing and tens of thousands each year declining; most churches are ceasing to grow. The inability to reach Millennials is one of the reasons for this decline. This thesis purposes to give a snapshot of the Millennial generation, overview a few of the key authors who are helping to reach them and will give churches and pastors practical components to work into their church culture to make churches and the gospel more appealing to the Millennial generation. This work is not a comprehensive solution to the problem of the church or the Millennial generation but a tool to help pastors who hope to reach the next generation.

Abstract Length: 165

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Two gentlemen I would truly like to thank are Dwayne Carson and Dr. Tim Elmore. Dwayne taught me the necessity to study the generation you are trying to reach. Tim has been the leading assimilator of information and brains on the millennial generation. This thesis and my effectiveness in ministry are directly tied to the impact of these two men.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

Because of their sheer number, the Millennial generation is one of the most discussed focus groups in churches and education. Like every other generation they come with their own unique set of habits and characteristics that is necessary to understand if the church is going to be effective in reaching them. Many people are writing books, holding conferences, blogging, preaching and discussing how to reach this group of people, which make up over half the world's population. The authors desire to offer what they present as new and improved methods of making the message of the church more palatable to the Generation Y. The problem is that too few churches are implementing the necessary changes to actually reach the Millennials. At the 2012 Southern Baptist Conference Convention, it was reported that within the last year over 800 Southern Baptist churches closed and over 10,000 had no baptisms, which means they are not winning any converts. This writer believes it is because the church as a whole is not reaching the Millennial generation. They are not reaching the Millennial generation because they expect this unique, but massive, generation to conform to the patterns and traditions of older generations instead of trying to change the culture of their church to be more appealing to them. The Millennials live in a world where everything has been catered for them. Right or wrong, it is reality and the church is pushing people away from having an experience with God because of old methodology. These pastors struggle to define, in part or in whole, the components of the Millennial generation that make them



unique except to say that they are spoiled and selfish. They do not know them and are not reaching them.

On the other hand, you have churches who have built everything on just reaching Millennials and are driving away and not attracting new boomers or builders. These two groups make up a large part of the tithing force in most churches. With a new book releasing every week on the Millennial generation along with so many ideas, some churches are abandoning everything that looks like tradition and trying to pick up every new tip, trick, and method along the way. The church is only going to be healthy if it is multigenerational and committed to reaching the next generation. Sadly, most churches are not; they are declining and dying. The Millennial generation is the largest generation in America and they are the future of the church. If Christians and pastors do not get serious about reaching this generation, while maintaining its multigenerational foundation, the church will be in trouble.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The central aim of this thesis is to present necessary components of church culture that will equip a church to be intentional to contextualize the gospel in a method that will reach the next generation. There are so many books written and so many ideas that exist, a current pastor could get lost trying to figure out what is really a necessity in transitioning a church culture to be inviting and engaging to the Millennial. This thesis seeks help the pastor with limited time find those answers and start a transition that will propel him into the lives of the next generation.

The author will examine Generation Y, also called Millennials, to see the things that make them unique and help lead readers to the same opinions of the authors of the multitude of writings as to why their methods are so vital to reach this group of people. From this understanding of the generation the discussion will move to unpacking Howe and Strauss', Elmore's, Sweet's, and Rainer's ideas on reaching the Millennials. The climax of the thesis will be a summation and exhortation from these Millennial authors and the writer who himself has over a decade of ministry experience with the Millennial generation at the world's largest evangelical university. The summation will not include every idea proposed by the supporting authors, but rather it will narrow down the ideas into a few necessary components for a pastor and a church to transition their culture to be attractive to Millennials by contextualizing the gospel and the Christian life into a portrait they can understand.

### **Statement of Importance of the Problem**

This topic is extremely vital considering that half the world's population falls into Generation Y, yet churches are only reaching a small percentage of this group. The passion and calling in the life of this author is to reach the Millennial generation. He hopes to help as many people as possible understand the Millennial generation and be intentional to contextualize church to reach them. The bottom line is that if the church is going to fulfill the Great Commission, then Christians must intentionally learn how to reach this people group. Understanding how to create a church culture where Millennials desire to be involved will better help pastors and teachers for the following reasons: (1) Millennials are the future of the church; (2) Churches are already dying and will continue

to die if they do not change to incorporate Millennials into their strategic plan; (3)

Transitioning a church to reach the Millennials will cause older generations to experience spiritual growth and leadership.

### **Statement of Position on the Problem**

If the church is going to be effective, continue to advance the Great Commission, and reach those whom God loves, then understanding how to effectively connect the message of Christ and his life changing ministry with the largest group of individuals in the world is vitally important to this desire. Millennials are the future of the church and of the disciple making process. Churches must transition to reach them before it is too late. Paul contextualized the gospel for the people he was reaching as he went on each of his missionary journeys. Each letter he wrote had a theme and a purpose, usually a problem he was combating, that personally contextualized the letter to the recipients. Paul studied culture and spoke to the church. His message did not change but his presentation did. Many churches are still functioning as the grandparents of the church wish it to function and while they may be happy, the church is not growing or reaching new people. As the grandparents go to be with the Lord, the church dies too. It is vital that the principles of Millennial church culture be adopted in every church that seeks to fulfill the Great Commission and actually reach the next generation. The future is here and Millennials can be reached, but it will take a commitment to reach them and a transition from tradition.

### **Limitations**

For lack of time and space this paper cannot look at the complete depth of the writings and articles on reaching Millennials. In painting a picture of the generation, the author will use selected sources from a multitude of disciplines and then this thesis will narrow in on four specific authors and their methodologies, as the discussion is unpacked.

### **Research Methods**

The method that will be employed during this thesis will be library research that compares and analyzes the data. It shall be in part descriptive, while adding unique thought to the material being analyzed.

### **Outline for Thesis**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Statement of the Problem
- B. Statement of the Purpose
- C. Statement of the Importance of the Problem
- D. Statement of Position
- E. Limitations
- F. Research Methods
- G. Outline for Thesis
- H. Chapter Divisions

#### **II. A DESCRIPTION OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

- A. Introduction
- B. Meet the Millennials
- C. A Comparison to the Previous Generations
- D. Conclusion

#### **III. THE NEW METHODS PROPOSED TO CONTEXTUALIZE ENTERTAINMENT, THE BIBLE, THE GOSPEL, AND CHURCH CULTURE FOR THE MILLENNIALS**

- A. Introduction
- B. William Strauss and Neil Howe's Discussion

- C. Leonard Sweet's Acronyms
- D. Tim Elmore's Handles
- E. Thom and Jess Rainer's Research
- F. Conclusion

#### IV. THE PROPOSED MEANS FOR MILLENNIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

- A. Introduction
- B. Major Elements of the Church Culture
- C. Major Components of a Church Service
- D. Conclusion

#### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Chapter Divisions**

Chapter one will serve as an introductory chapter. It will clarify the purpose and problem addressed by the thesis.

Chapter two will first seek to define the Millennial generation and their differences from other generations. It will survey a multitude of different authors in hope of gaining a portrait of the generation.

Chapter three will look at four different authors and their suggestions of contextualization for entertainment, the Bible, the gospel, and church culture for this generation. This chapter will set up the context of who must be reached and how as the gospel of Jesus Christ is advanced.

Chapter four will be the assimilation of major components for reaching the Millennial generation. The writer will piece together ideas from the four authors surveyed and his decade of experience in working with the Millennial generation. He will suggest

culture changing ideas to move a church to a place where he believes it will be effective in reaching and growing Millennial disciples.

Chapter five will provide a summary and conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

#### **Introduction**

The first step in reaching or connecting with any foreign culture or generation is to understand them before building any strategy. Millennials have grown up in a new and different world than even their predecessors, Generation X. If a church is going to reach Millennials, they first need to know who they are and what makes them tick. The first section of the chapter will briefly examine and introduce the reader to the Millennial generation. While there is far more information than can be covered in this thesis about the Millennials, this writer will give the readers a picture of this group of individuals who make up over half the world's population. Jimmy Long says, "If we are going to transition the church to the next generation, both existing and emerging leaders will need to understand and appreciate each other's values."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, in an effort to help better understand the Millennial generation, this chapter will look at some key characteristics of the generation in comparison to previous generations so the readers can fully grasp why a new method would be needed to reach them.

#### **Meet the Millennials**

As this section is started, the fact that this author is going to stereotype this generation of students is completely against their wishes. While Generation Y wants to be connected to all kinds of people and be a part of numerous organizations, their greatest

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Long, "Determine Your Ministry Age: Do Your Assumptions About Leadership Reflect the Values of Your Generation?" *Leadership* 30, no. 3 (June 2009): 39.

desire is to be an individual. They are team-oriented in action but individualistic in description. Despite their wishes, it is necessary for this generation to be described and explained. While everyone agrees that Generation Y has an age range of 20 years, depending on which author you read, will determine when that period starts and ends; The Rainers say the generation started in 1980<sup>2</sup> but Elmore says the generation did not start until 1984<sup>3</sup>. This author has read, studied, attended conferences, and currently works in the middle of this generation on a daily basis. For this paper, Generation Y will be defined as those students who were born between 1982 and 2002. So if you are doing your math, they are primarily the kids of the Boomer generation. They are the largest generation to have ever lived on the face of the planet. Hobert and Sendek reveal that Generation Y makes up over 25% of the country's population.<sup>4</sup> That is a staggering reality that one quarter of the country falls into the category of Generation Y. Ron Luce claims there are 71 million Millennials and "our national destiny is in their hands."<sup>5</sup> If churches in America are going to be successful in the Great Commission and growing true disciples, they are going to have to spend time learning this generation. Churches will need to change or die. If one watches television or surfs the Internet, they are going to see many different names for this group of people. They have been called "Millennials, Generation Y, Generation Tech, Generation Next, Generation.com, Echo Boom, Boomer

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Elmore, *Generation I*, (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 13.

<sup>4</sup> John W Hobart and Herb Sendek, *Gen Y Now*, (Novato, CA: Select Press, 2009), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ron Luce, *Battle Cry for a Generation: The Fight to Save America's Youth*, (Colorado Springs: NexGen, 2004), 31.



Babies and Generation XX.”<sup>6</sup> This writer has heard them in different situations called the Cupcake Generation and Screenagers. Ron Alsop calls them the Trophy Kids, because they are the pride and joy of their parents; they grew up with getting trophies and ribbons for just participating so no one felt left out.<sup>7</sup> They have been tied to the post-modern shift throughout the world and many believe that understanding this movement is the key to unlocking this generation.

Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book *Millennials Rising* expound on this generation by giving seven main character traits about them and the way they were raised. They will use these seven characteristics in the rest of their writings as they help producers sell to consumers who are Millennials. In reviewing many books for this thesis, it was clear that these seven characteristics are some of the most quoted in describing this generation. The first trait they use to describe this generation is they are “special.”<sup>8</sup> Since their conception, they have been pampered. Signs with “Baby-Onboard” have cluttered the windows of parent’s cars. They have been told they could be whatever they wanted to be. Parents have revolved their schedules and lives around these most-important children. Millennials have grown up believing that life is all about them. They are the center of attention. Tulgan says, “making children feel great about themselves and building up their self-esteem became the dominant theme in parenting, teaching, and counseling.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Alsop, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 7.

Being that special to their parents has resulted in this generation becoming ‘sheltered.’<sup>10</sup> Millennials are and have been the focus of making things safe. From car seats to sports equipment to moms running around with bottles of hand sanitizer so that babies do not pick up any hint of a germ, Millennials have been protected and pampered to the point where life for most of them is very safe. This sheltered mentality has created an environment in which Millennials are not allowed to fail. They have been put in situations that are fail proof and if it seems like they may fail they have been yanked from that opportunity. The third characteristic used to describe them is that of being “confident.”<sup>11</sup> They have been put in places of success and been told they are special; Millennials have a very optimistic view of the future. This writer has heard hundreds of Millennials, over the last ten years, believe their generation can fix the problems of society and change the world. This confidence also makes it very hard for them to accept criticism. Many of them are under the impression that they do not know how to make mistakes and to be corrected is something new for them. The next attribute used by Howe and Strauss to describe them is that they are more than any other generation, “team-oriented.”<sup>12</sup> They have grown up in a world of relationships. Their parents want to be a part of their lives; peers are more than friends but advisors and colleagues in accomplishing goals. Along the road, classrooms have moved to more group learning; Many Millennials play a sport, are in a band, and are involved in 13 clubs. If one couples that with their connection to social media, it is easy to see the relational and team-

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<sup>10</sup> Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

orientation Millennials master. The fifth characteristic given of this generation is that they are “achieving.”<sup>13</sup> Honestly, not just achieving but high achieving. They have been told they are special and set in environments not to fail. They have been told they should all go to college and most get a masters degree. Presidents to parents are setting these students up to be successful and the truth is that they are smart. Many of them are high achieving because they are also “pressured.”<sup>14</sup> As Alsop already revealed, they are Trophy Kids. Mom and Dad want their children to become even more successful than they were. They want them to have every opportunity so they pressure the Millennials not to just do well, but be the best. The last trait that Howe and Strauss use to define the generation is that they are “conventional.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike past generations, the Millennials are ok with social rules and norms as long as they can be a part of creating them and as long as those rules do not get in the way of success or solving the problem. They are not really as rebellious as their older brothers or even their parents when they were their age. They want to understand reason and purpose behind what they are asked to do but will typically submit to the rules if they can swallow the reasoning.

Michael McQueen, says, “Generation Y is simply different. They come from a different era and are a product of the time into which they were born.”<sup>16</sup> The world they grew up in has helped to shape every aspect of who they are. Howe and Strauss did a survey with a number of students of the high school graduation class of 2000, which

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Michael McQueen, *The ‘New’ Rules of Engagement: A Guide to Understanding and Connecting with Generation*, (Garden City, NY: Morgan James, 2010), 47.

would have been the first wave of Millennials, and asked for the events that made the biggest impression on them. They list these top ten: 1) Columbine (which was closely followed by a Kentucky school shooting); 2) War in Kosovo; 3) Oklahoma City bombing; 4) Princess Di's death; 5) Clinton impeachment trial; 6) O. J. Simpson trial; 7) Rodney King riots; 8) Lewinsky scandal; 9) Fall of Berlin Wall; 10) McGuire-Sosa homer derby.<sup>17</sup> Not to forget other major events that happened in their life like 9/11, Virginia Tech massacre, Desert Storm, and the War on Terror. Tragic situations, lack of integrity in authority and pressure all around help one see why they would be special and sheltered.

Two of the major factors in the life of a Millennial are globalization and technology. Bruce Tulgan says, "Globalization and technology have been shaping change since the dawn of time. But during the life span of Generation Y, globalization and technology have undergone a qualitative change. After all, there is only one globe, and it is now totally interconnected."<sup>18</sup> That changed things for Millennials and those who were raising them. The Millennial generation uses and understands technology quicker and easier than most generations. "They have more technology exposure than any previous generation."<sup>19</sup> They have grown up with technology in their homes and hands since day one, while other generations have been forced to integrate technology into their preexisting cultural model. Newman says, "Connectivity in the form of the internet, instant messaging, blogs and multi-media formats play yet another role in shaping the

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<sup>17</sup> Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets A Trophy*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Jackie L. Hartman and Jim McCambridge, "Optimizing Millennials' Communication Styles," *Business Communication Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (March 2011): 24.

multi-tasking attribute of Generation Y.”<sup>20</sup> This technological globalization has raised their ability to be more diverse as a group. The lines of race and color are much less of an issue in the mind of most Millennials. Crappell says, “As the world grew smaller, or rather, the population density increased, globalization produced a generation more attuned to diversity than any previous group.”<sup>21</sup> They want to cross the cultural lines because they want to erase them. Bannon, Ford, and Meltzer report to CPA managers, “Millennials are a diverse and inclusive generation, often seeing a world without boundaries. They can be ideal and willing candidates for international assignments, having gained experience through personal travel and study-abroad programs, as well as through the experience of having friends on social media who reside in countries around the world.”<sup>22</sup>

Technology has incredible benefits but it can also have negatives as well. Newman goes on to say, “Generation Y’s communication style has been shaped by their techno-savvy environment and curiosity. Interpersonal communications have been redefined by Generation Y.”<sup>23</sup> They speak their own language that to most adults has the same familiarity as one trying to read Morse Code. They do not prefer face to face communication and will respond quicker to *facebook* or text than a note, phone call, or email. Gavatorra reiterates, “In fact, the Gen Y’ers are accustomed to using digital and

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<sup>20</sup> Jill M. Newman, *Leading Generation Y*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2008), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Courtney Crappell, "Millennials In Action: Playing To Our Strengths," *American Music Teacher* 61, no. 4 (February 2012): 16.

<sup>22</sup> Shele Bannon, Kelly Ford, and Linda Meltzer, "Understanding Millennials in the Workplace," *CPA Journal* 81, no. 11 (November 2011): 65.

<sup>23</sup> Newman, *Leading Generation Y*, 10.

mobile devices as their primary means of communication. This is where I see the biggest gap between the generations: effective direct communication skills—that is, old fashioned, one-on-one, face-to-face human interaction rather than heavy reliance on email, texting, and phone calls.”<sup>24</sup> They think about the world differently. And technology has changed everything for them, including the way they learn. Paul Jacobs says, “Contemporary methods of instruction are not limited to books and lectures, but now include PowerPoint slides, video, and websites.”<sup>25</sup> Technology has also allowed for instantaneous feedback from followers in their lives. They can post something on *facebook* or *Pinterest* and seconds after hitting the post button they have likes and comments. That has followed over with them as they enter the workplace. Meister and Willyerd discuss in their article “Mentoring Millennials” in the *Harvard Business Review* that Millennials want constant feedback. They even talked about “microfeedback.”<sup>26</sup> Microfeedback is real time analysis of the Millennials performance in small doses like one would receive through *Twitter*. They reported that Millennials loved it. A Millennials mind is programmed to think and use technology.

Technology has also led to rise of the importance of music in this generation. While music has been around for a long time and important to some people, it really has become a staple in the Millennial life. They do not just need a radio or music television to listen to music. They can get it on the computer, iPod and even their phone. They can listen to CDs, mp3s or stream music from the internet. They can download a song or

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<sup>24</sup> Steve Gavortorta, "It's a Millennial Thing." *T+D* 66, no. 3 (March 2012): 61.

<sup>25</sup> Paul D. Jacobs, "Teaching New Dogs Old Tricks: Reconsidering Theological Education in a Postmodern Society," *American Theological Inquiry* 1, no. 2 (July 2008): 138.

<sup>26</sup> Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd, "Mentoring Millennials.(cover story)," *Harvard Business Review* 88, no. 5 (May 2010): 70.

album quickly or listen on *YouTube* over and over. Music is having an influence. Vukich and Vandergriff say, “music is important to teenagers’ identity and helps them define important social and subcultural boundaries. The results of one survey of 2760 fourteen- to sixteen- year-olds in ten southeastern cities showed that they listened to music an average of forty hours per week.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus said what you put into your heart will affect the way you live. Music is such a big part of their life and who they are.

With their draw and need for music it would make sense that this generation is more right brained. Right brained people tend to think less linear and logical and more artsy and experiential. The rational world of left brainers has become dull and boring. Right brain people tend to be more in tune with emotions and feelings. Millennials base much of life off the way they feel more than the truth of a situation. Because of the right brain thinking and seeing things differently than most of generations before them, they think about work differently. According to Pink, the Millennial generation does not rate “money as the most important form of compensation. Instead they choose a range of nonmonetary factors – from ‘a great team’ to ‘the ability to give back to society through work.’”<sup>28</sup> Millennials want to change society and help the poor. Feelings of injustice drive their personal and professional lives to make a difference.

It has long been said and proven that males mature slower than females. That happens on a physical level as well as a mental level. It seems that males are falling even further behind in the Millennial generation. Dr. Tim Elmore in his book, *Generation iY*,

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<sup>27</sup> Lee Vukich and Steve Vandergriff, *Timeless Youth Ministry: A Handbook For Successfully Reaching Today's Youth*, (Chicago: Moody Pub, 2006), 23.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 136.

speaks about the special challenges that face the male population in his chapter entitled “Lost in Neverland.” In this chapter he equates the boys of the Millennial generation to those of the Lost Boys in the movie favorite *Peter Pan*. The boys of Neverland had no desire to grow up and wanted Wendy to continue to look after them. They were care free and refused to stop being boys.<sup>29</sup> This generation seems to exhibit the same problems. Elmore suggest if something is not done, the future leaders of homes, families, and societies are in trouble.

Maybe one of the reasons Millennial boys have such problems growing up is that they are close to their parents. They are much closer than previous generations. The New Strategist editors rely on the data collected by the federal government in a number of different ways. They state, “Many teens think their parents do a good job of making them feel important and loved.”<sup>30</sup> Parents are a large part of what makes students turn out the way they do. Howe and Strauss say, “The only reason their Millennial kids must be buckled, watched, fussed over, and fenced in by wall-to-wall rules and chaperones is precisely because adults today hold their own freedoms in such huge regard.”<sup>31</sup> Erwin reminds, “Raised by protective parents, they were consistently told that their generation would create great change. Consequently, Millennials have strong ties to their parents and are conditioned to seek help and feedback.”<sup>32</sup> The reality is that Millennial parents have tried to do the best they knew how for their children. They read the multitude of books

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<sup>29</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> New Strategist Publications, Inc, *The Millennials: Americans Under Age 25*, (Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Publications, 2001), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> Alicia Erwin, "Millennials at Work: How to Implement the Millennial Work Style," *Campus Activities Programming* 42, no. 1 (May 2009): 11.



written on how one should raise a child and watch Oprah discuss the best techniques. They have worked hard to give the Millennials things and opportunities that they did not have but in the process they have neglected some big character traits which they gained from their parents. Dr. Elmore has characterized the Millennial generation as not truly having had to learn the balance of autonomy and responsibility. Many of them have the freedom to act independently but they do not have true responsibility and adults and parents have swung in and saved the day.<sup>33</sup> Remember that most children are who they are because of the parenting style they receive, good or bad. Another balancing act that Elmore says many parents have not always walked well is between responsiveness and being demanding.<sup>34</sup> A parent, to help their child grow up and be prepared for life, must give a student equal amounts of acceptance and support while having expectations that are challenging the child to grow and be an adult. Most Millennial parents have set up camp on one side or the other of this beam. The good news is that for the most part the Millennial parents are involved. The bad news is that the style of involvement may not be so healthy. Probably one of the most talked about parenting styles in the Millennial generation is the helicopter parent. They are called that because they hover over their children. Children are not given opportunities to make bad choices or fail because a parent is there in every aspect. They continue to hound on kids until projects are completed. They fight with teachers over lower grades. It is almost if the child was an online character that the parents are controlling. Because of this Millennials are paralyzed when big decisions are left up to them and they struggle with the idea of failure much less

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<sup>33</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 67.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

the reality. There are many more styles of parenting, all which for the most part have good intentions but fall short in what they actually accomplish. The reality of why the Millennials are the way they are is that parents, educators and pastors have made them that way.

Millennials are spiritual in nature. They are not opposed to God. Smith in his research found that 52 percent of 13-17 year olds claim to be Protestant and 23 percent claimed to be catholic.<sup>35</sup> That means that three quarters of teenagers are at least claiming to have some sort of religious affiliation. While this writer nor Smith believes that everyone of these 75 percent are actual Bible believing, blood bought Christians, the research shows that they are not against God nor are they knee deep in far out religions. Faith is important to them. Smith goes on to report, “about half of teens said that faith is very or extremely important in their lives; only about 8 percent said faith was not important at all.”<sup>36</sup> Again, this writer nor Smith is suggesting that every Millennial is excited about God or ready to change the course of their life based on following him, but they are interested and even willing to identify themselves with God. That is a huge start. Smith wrote *Soul Searching* in 2005 after compiling all the research. They followed a number of the students who were a part of the initial study for five years and he continues to update his findings on this generation with his book *Souls in Transition*. In summation of what Smith and Snell find they say, “In short, while moving into emerging adulthood, many youth remain in the religious tradition of their teenage years, but many others shift to some other religious tradition or to become nonreligious altogether. A great deal of

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<sup>35</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). 31.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

religious change happens. But that is also counterbalanced by a larger amount of religious continuity.”<sup>37</sup> While change occurs as students move from teenager into adulthood, there is a place for religion and faith in the lives of the Millennial generation; they are just looking for truth.

### **A Comparison to the Previous Generations**

In understanding the Millennial generation it is so useful to understand their similarities and differences from that of previous generations. A good example of understanding that fact is one of this writer’s favorite statements on the Millennials that comes from Bruce Tulgan. He says, “If you liked Generation X, you are going to love Generation Y. Generation Y is like Generation X on-fast-forward-with –self-esteem-on-steroids.”<sup>38</sup> It is very easy to see the high energy, high achieving world of a Millennial, especially in relation to their older brother Generation X. It has often been said that parents raise their children as a reaction to the flaws they found in their own upbringing.. One of the most helpful tools this writer has seen in distinguishing between previous generations and the Millennials is this chart by Tim Elmore.

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<sup>37</sup> Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 108.

<sup>38</sup> Tulgan. *Not Everyone Gets A Trophy*, 6.

**Figure 1: FIVE GENERATIONS<sup>39</sup>**

	<b>SENIORS</b> "Greatest Generation"	<b>BUILDERS</b> "Silent Generation"	<b>BOOMERS</b> "Pig in the Python"	<b>BUSTERS</b> "Generation X"	<b>MILLENNIALS</b> "Generation Y & iY"
1. Birth Years	1900-1928	1929-1945	1946-1964	1965-1983	1984-2002
2. Life paradigm	<i>Manifest destiny</i>	<i>"Be grateful you have a job"</i>	<i>"You owe me"</i>	<i>"Relate to me"</i>	<i>"Life is a cafeteria"</i>
3. Attitude to authority	Respect them	Endure them	Replace them	Ignore them	Choose them
4. Role of relationships	Long term	Significant	Limited; useful	Central; caring	Global, 24/7
5. Value Systems	Traditional	Conservative	Self-based	Media	Shop around
6. Role of Career	Loyalty	Means for living	Central focus	Irritant	Place to serve
7. Schedules	Responsible	Mellow	Frantic	Aimless	Volatile
8. Technology	What's that?	Hope to outlive it	Master it	Enjoy it	Employ it
9. Market	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences	Transformations
10. View of future	Uncertain	Seek to stabilize	Create it!	Hopeless	Optimistic

While virtually every author who writes about the Millennial generation compares them with previous generations, Dr. Elmore has sought to give nuggets of comparison in 10 areas across the five living generations. This guide helps one to not have to spend hours and pages describing the difference. There are just a few that will be highlighted for the purposes of this thesis.

Many employers are starting to see some similarities between the boomers and the Gen Ys. Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg point out, "More important, Boomers and Gen Ys are together redefining what constitutes a great place to work. As we will show, they tend to share many attitudes and behaviors that set them apart from other generations. These shared preferences constitute a new center of gravity for human resources

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<sup>39</sup> Elmore, *Generation IY*, 24.

management.”<sup>40</sup> They continue to talk about being more flexible in a work environment and have the ability to do greater good for the society are things that drive both groups. And it does make sense, most of the Millennial children are being raised by boomer parents. Since parents are trying to fix what their parents did wrong, it makes sense that Millennials would have some shared values with their parents, especially as close as they are to their parents and family.

As one reads the chart above, a factor about the Millennial generation that is very different from previous generations, and extremely refreshing from Generation X, is that they are optimistic. Millennials believe their future is bright. “This generation has been bombarded with positive messages. They have been told they can do or be anything they want. They are optimistic, self-reliant, braced for change.”<sup>41</sup> They believe the best is yet to come and since they on average have had what seems to be pretty good childhoods, they are excited about the future. They believe they can change society and the world. They are confident they can end poverty, sex-trafficking, child soldiers and AIDs. They can make a difference with their life. Rebecca Huntley says, “Yers resist getting specific about their plans for the rest of their 20’s. Despite this, their feelings about the future are largely positive, a sharp contrast to the youthful attitudes of their predecessors.”<sup>42</sup> They have lived in a stable world and while there is concern, their desire is to fix the problem instead of worry about it. Stier, in his book *Outbreak!*, says, “Today’s young people are

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<sup>40</sup> S. A. Hewlett, L. Sherbin, and K. Sumberg, "How Gen Y & Boomers Will Reshape Your Agenda," *Harvard Business Review* 87, no. 7 (July 2007): 71.

<sup>41</sup> Jim Schmotzer, “The Next ‘Next Generation’: Born After 1980, The Optimistic and Community-Oriented Millennials are Your Up-And-Coming Church Leaders,” *Leadership* 25, no. 3 (June 2004): 65.

<sup>42</sup> Rebecca Huntley, *The World According to Y: Inside the New Adult Generation*, (Crowns Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 178.

tired of the cynicism of the previous generation. They believe they can do something that will make a difference.”<sup>43</sup>

Another major difference in the Millennial generation from all of the other generations is the way knowledge is transferred to and from them. Previous generations required books and teachers for knowledge to move from one person to another. That is not the case anymore with the Millennial generation. They are the first generation in history that does not need a personal instructor to give them knowledge. If they have a question or need a fact, theory, or procedure all they have to do is grab their computer, phone, iPod or iPad and Google the information. In seconds, faster than most teachers can speak, the Millennial knows their answer and continues to move forward. They still need instruction and seek it, but they view the internet as a more efficient and often trustworthy source. James Davis in his book *Gutenberg to Google* talks about these challenges. He says, “The greatest advancement in language communication since the Gutenberg press made the Bible available to everyone 500 years ago is the Internet that is making virtually everything available to everyone. The emerging world of Googlers is far different than that of the Gutenbergs. The Gutenberg generation is finding it hard to communicate with the Google generation and vice versa.”<sup>44</sup>

The last difference that this writer wants to highlight in this generation from previous is their desire to fight. They would rather be known for what they are for than what they are against; while they want to change society, they want to do it differently than tearing down things with which they do not agree. All a person has to do is look at

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<sup>43</sup> Greg Stier, *Outbreak!: Creating a Contagious Youth Ministry Through Viral Evangelism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 153.

<sup>44</sup> James O. Davis, *Gutenberg to Google*, (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Resources, 2009), 25.

the back window of their car or the cover of their computer. This factor makes it hard for previous generations to quickly get Millennials on their war paths, even if the cause is a great cause. Millennials would rather free sex slaves than fight whether homosexuals should be allowed in the church. It is not a doctrine issue for them but a divisive issue. It takes longer to help them see the need for something because they want to be known for what they support and if it seems to cause major division they might be apprehensive.

### **Conclusion**

The Millennials are a different breed. Book after book is continuing to be written for teachers, pastors, and employers to help them understand and better connect with them. They are special, sheltered, team-oriented, pressured, achieving, confident and conventional. The differences from generations before them are as numerous as their names. They are optimistic. They are driven. They are here. They are the future. They must be understood if anyone desires to reach them with the gospel.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NEW METHODS PROPOSED TO CONTEXTUALIZE ENTERTAINMENT, THE BIBLE, THE GOSPEL, AND CHURCH CULTURE FOR THE MILLENNIALS

#### **Introduction**

A much different generation than those before creates a new set of challenges in building a church that will work for them. As the largest generation in on the face of the planet, they are used to things being changed for and adapted to them. The reality is that what previous generations put up with in church, the Generation Y will not. But what will work and what will not work? Are there proven methods that will connect with Millennials? This chapter will unpack four different groups of authors who have written major works to define and reach the generation. Those authors are Dr. Leonard Sweet, Neil Howe and William Strauss, Dr. Tim Elmore, and Dr. Thom and Jess Rainer. Each of these groups of authors has written multiple books on the Millennials or designing churches to reach the next generation. The chapter will dive further into their research of the generation and then look at their suggestions for contextualization of this group of young people. From these suggestions and what is known about the generation, chapter four will seek to put together elements that contextualize a church for the Millennials.

#### **William Strauss and Neil Howe's Discussion**

William Strauss and Neil Howe are two men who have devoted large portions of their lives studying generations. They have written book after book on connecting with current generations and many on this generation. Unlike the other men that will be



highlighted in this chapter, Howe and Strauss do not approach this topic from a Christian standpoint but are primary sources that the other authors have used. Howe and Strauss have written in order to help many sellers reach Millennial consumers. *Millennials and the Pop Culture* is one of their works on how to bring television, music and culture to the emerging largest generation ever. Throughout the book they look at the seven major characteristics of the Millennials, which were covered in chapter two of this thesis, and they give specific strategies based on those characteristics to bring culture to a point that Millennials will buy. This author is not suggesting that the church is selling Jesus or that the church should be seeker friendly in the sense of watering down the gospel, but he does believe if these strategies are what culture is using to keep people interested in music and entertainment, church will be extremely dull and uninviting if they are not at least considered..

As discussed in the last chapter, Millennials are defined by several characteristics, the first being ‘special.’ In light of this, Howe and Strauss suggest “present a purposeful world.”<sup>45</sup> Millennials care about the future and they believe there needs to be a purpose behind what they do if they are going to change it. They are not afraid to ask the big questions. Secondly, if you are going to reach special Millennials, Howe and Strauss suggest that you “harness the high Millennial regard for their own generation.”<sup>46</sup> Approach them as individuals but also as a whole. They are relational, team oriented and they believe their generation is special compared to other generations, so appeal to it. Howe and Strauss also suggest that for entertainment to reach them, they need to “depict

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<sup>45</sup> William Strauss, Neil Howe, and Peter George Markiewicz, *Millennials and the Pop Culture*, (Great Falls, VA: LifeCourse Associates, 2006), 122.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 123.

Millennials as better-behaved than older people.”<sup>47</sup> They have been told they are special their whole life, so it make sense to them to be depicted as smarter, better, or funnier than previous generations. The last hint they give for reaching special Millennials is “make them feel as special as the star.”<sup>48</sup> They have been the stars of their homes now they need to feel like the stars of society.

Due to the ‘sheltered’ characteristic ascribed to the Millennials, Howe and Strauss suggest that you, “understand that Millennials tend to avoid needless risk.”<sup>49</sup> Millennials have become accustomed to warning labels, such as television rating systems, and are now less willing to take risks that have large unknowns. Risk can paralyze Millennials because they do not want to fail and have not been allowed to for most of their life. The next two strategies that are presented are very similar. They are “co-market to both Millennials and their parents and assume that youths value parental (and other) adult involvement in their lives.”<sup>50</sup> Millennials are closer to their parents than previous generations and seek their parents often as advisors; Millennials seek their parent’s approval. If something is going to reach Millennials, then it should also appeal to their parents, who need to believe the ideas will makes their child happy. The last idea for sheltered Millennials is to “create messages that address the Millennials’ new health problems.”<sup>51</sup> Millennials struggle with health problems that are created either by

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 124

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 137-138.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 138.

themselves or by their parents' protection of them, like ADD or obesity. Deal with those issues empathically.

The third attribute that Howe and Strauss use to describe the generation is that they are confident. These are the four strategies they give for dealing with confident Millennials. First, "tell stories within the framework of an optimistic future."<sup>52</sup> That does not mean that everything has to end well. It does not mean that every story has a happy ending. What it means is there has to be a reason for trying, for giving the effort. Secondly, they suggest "craft stories about a newly confident male style."<sup>53</sup> As already addressed with Elmore's portrayal of the Lost Boys, the male gender seems under attack or at the least devalued. It does not mean they are looking to imitate John Wayne or Clint Eastwood but they want to be that type for their generation. Find the qualities these men like and aspire to be and highlight them. Thirdly, they recommend reaching the girls as well. One should "craft stories about ambitious young women."<sup>54</sup> From these two suggestions, one major thing can be seen; craft and use stories about people who are doing what they want to do or are on the same journey as them. The final strategy to reach this confident generation is "treat Millennials as active users of culture, not just as passive consumers."<sup>55</sup> Get them involved in the culture and entertainment as much as possible. Think about shows like *American Idol* that allow the viewers to vote and decide outcomes. The more a Millennial feels as though they are playing an active part in the entertainment and in the culture, they will be hooked.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 154.

The next attribute that Howe and Strauss deal with is Millennials being team-oriented. The strategies they list for this attribute starts with “market to, and portray, Millennials in groups.”<sup>56</sup> Millennials do things in groups. Companies cannot just sell to individuals but it must come across as something a group needs. They see groups of Millennials changing the world. Movies and Entertainment have fewer individuals and more people along on the ride. Even if it is the story of one person it ends up being a group of heroes. One just thinks of *Harry Potter*, *the Power Rangers*, *Batman*, or *the Avengers* . The next tip offered is “mainstream Latino, Asian, and mixed-race characters and themes.”<sup>57</sup> Millennials look at race and culture much differently. They see the melting pot mentality of the United States of America versus what most of the generations before them saw as a salad-bowl. They want multi-cultural, multi-ethnic families not just neighborhoods or shows. *Facebook* has allowed them to connect and feel comfortable with people from all across the globe. The last two strategies Howe and Strauss advocate are “take on issues of money and social class and tell stories about the defense or restoration of civic life.”<sup>58</sup> Millennials see a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and it bothers them. While, in this writer’s estimation, most of them do not want to give up richness they simply want to alleviate poverty and civic wrong. If producers are going to reach Millennial consumers, Howe and Strauss believe creating entertainment where the underdog wins and poverty and injustice loses need to be the focus of reaching team-oriented Millennials.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid 167.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 168-169.

“Millennials push toward the center harder than toward any edge.”<sup>59</sup> That statement is how Howe and Strauss start their discussion on the Conventional generation. They then offer these tips. First, “Respect the new norm and beware pushing too hard toward the ‘edge.’”<sup>60</sup> Millennials are right brained and creative but they are more likely to stay with the trends than try to create new ones. This is important to understand as people try to reach those who live in an ever changing world. Millennials want creativity and they desire to be trendy, they are not looking to be edgy. It use to be the movies and entertainment and pushed the societal boundaries of Hollywood that sold. The rebel is out. Entertainment needs to be creative but it can still follow the norms and be trendy. It is in. Secondly, “tell stories that define or reinforce societal norms.”<sup>61</sup> These students have grown up with rules and for the most part do not feel like they hurt or hindered them. They are thankful for all their parents have done to help them in their lives. Being the rebel is not appealing to them. They are not looking for a person who has the guts to do what they lack the gumption to do. They want someone they can follow and trust. The third thing Howe and Strauss suggest for the Conventional Millennial is “focus on the entertainment ahead of the artist.”<sup>62</sup> Millennials are right brained thinkers and dreamers. The technology and the experience is more important than the actor and sometime even more than the story line. Great music or great special effects can make up for a no-name actor or a weak theme. Focus on those elements and sell experiences. The fourth suggestion for these conventional thinkers is “help Millennials democratize the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 186.

culture.”<sup>63</sup> Ask for the Millennial’s involvement. They are already altering music, movies and pictures with standard programs that come on their Mac or PC computer. One should not discourage but employ that creativity in asking them to buy in with you.

Millennials as defined by Howe and Strauss are a pressured generation. They offer these tips to the entertainment world on reaching Millennials with music, television, and games. “Present realistic stories about Millennial stress at home, in school and on the job.”<sup>64</sup> The Millennials have real problems and real stress. Too many people have tried to down play their problems or focus on only the extreme cases. Millennials are looking for stories with which they can connect. Next Howe and Strauss suggest “depict stories with characters who face high stakes choices in high-pressure situations.”<sup>65</sup> Millennials feel they are in a world of pressure and the entertainment that reaches them are people with that same pressure but the character steps up to the plate, like Frodo in the *Lord of the Rings*. The next suggestion is to “cast comedic light on the stress of life.”<sup>66</sup> Use real life situations for comedy. It does not need to be made up but should take stressful everyday activities and instead of having the effect of wanting pulling one’s hair out it helps one to laugh. It helps reduce the pressure. The last tip for the pressured generation is “target Millennials as multi-taskers.”<sup>67</sup> The Millennials pride themselves on their ability to watch TV, listen to music, talk on the phone, chat, look at *facebook* and complete their homework all at the same time. So sell them that opportunity.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 202.

The last of the seven major traits that Howe and Strauss use to describe the generation is that they are an achieving generation. The first strategy they give for reaching them is “portray the Millennial world as full of smart and aspiring achievers of all back-grounds.”<sup>68</sup> As talked about earlier, Millennials want to see all people do well and not just one race or class. They love the story of the underdog who, against all odds, makes it. Movies like *Homeless to Harvard*, *August Rush*, and *The Blind Side* keep them riveted and happy. Show the generation in that light though not just as individuals. Secondly, “feature late-wave Gen Xers who embody Millennial aspirations.”<sup>69</sup> Millennials want role models and heroes. They want people they can look up to and follow. Find people from the generation before them who are living out what Millennials hope to accomplish and put them in front of them. Third, “give focus, and voice, to the most gifted Millennials.”<sup>70</sup> It seems as though most Millennials want to excel, especially in the area of entertainment. Do not make everyone equal but give the best the shot they deserve. The last suggested strategy that Howe and Strauss give is “make use of literature, and other curricula, that Millennials have studied in school.”<sup>71</sup> They have studied and excelled in all these areas. Incorporate what they know into what is new. Connect the books and the stories they know with new facts and new stories as the connection point.

### Leonard Sweet’s Acronyms

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 214.

Dr. Leonard Sweet is a post-modern thinker. He likes to call himself a postmodernity thinker that relates current culture back to the beginning of church history. He has engrained himself in the study and reaching the next generation. He is a noted author of over 20 books, the founder of SpiritVenture Ministries, the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University, and a distinguished visiting professor at George Fox University. Dr. Sweet writes and speaks universally on contextualization of the gospel for the Millennials. Sweet has added out of the box thinking in light of the Great Commission and a desire to reach the world. While he has added many ideas to the discussions of reaching Millennials, in this writer's mind, his most notable creation is the conception of a simple acrostic that has had revolutionary impact on teachers and preachers as they minister to a young generation. He first published this acrostic in 2000 in his book *Post-Modern Pilgrims*. Sweet states that his book presents a "model of doing church that is biblically absolute but culturally relative."<sup>72</sup> In this first book he lays out his EPIC acrostic and people started to believe him, grasp the principles and run it. It worked so well that he wrote a second book in 2006 on taking the acrostic not just from a church culture mind set but to a personal evangelism and Christian living mindset. In his book *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, he looks at one of the most successful companies in that decade and shows that they do more than sell coffee. They sell an EPIC experience.

EPIC stands for "Experiential, Participatory, Image-based, and Connected."<sup>73</sup>

Sweet says, "unless churches can transition their cultures into more EPIC

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<sup>72</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), XXI.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 30.



directions...they stand the real risk of becoming museum churches, nostalgic testimonies to a culture that is no more.”<sup>74</sup> These are powerful statements on the necessity to change something about the way church is done and how to reach people with the gospel. So the next task of this thesis is to unpack the acrostic EPIC.

The E in EPIC stands for experiential. Sweet reminds readers that people spend more on a cup of coffee at Starbucks than they do on a gallon of gasoline and willfully stand in line to spend that money. Why? “A cup of coffee fetches such a high price because people aren’t buying a cup of coffee. They are buying an experience of coffee...Starbucks did not set out to reinvent coffee. They aimed to reinvent the coffee experience,”<sup>75</sup> declares Sweet. Millennials are over things. They have been given plenty of things; they have always had the latest things. Millennials want an experience. If one just stops and even thinks about simple things like birthday parties. No longer are they just parties. Friends don’t just come to the house with a few presents; blow out some candles and goodnight. Birthday parties are experiences, whether it is a pony, laser tag, crafts and for sure goodie bags, because no child should be left out, they are all creating an experience. Apple computers and i-gadgets are doing the same thing. It is not all about the product, it is the experience of being a Mac person now. Video gaming systems are wireless and it is no longer just hitting a button but swinging the sword, spiking the volleyball or shooting the bear, they have become experiences. Sweet declares, “The product is no longer king, it’s the experience that surrounds the product that brings

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Leonard I. Sweet and Edward H. Hammett, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 32.

people in the door.”<sup>76</sup> This writer would add that it is experiences that keep Millennials in the door. There are large churches in America who have come to so understand this point, that they stopped calling their gatherings “Services” and started calling them “Experiences.” Millennials are seeking a real experience. They want something true but they want it to be not just something they come sit through. If you ask them about their favorite teachers, most of them are not going to tell you about someone who stood and lectured for hours but about a teacher that got them involved. Sweet declares, “Postmoderns literally ‘feel’ their way through life.”<sup>77</sup> The rational world of generations before them is gone. Church has to be more than just sitting and thinking. It has to involve experience. The high currency in the mind of a Millennial is not the things they have but the experiences they have experienced. The suggestion is that church should be an experience they cannot miss each week, just like their favorite show or the three hours they spend on *facebook*.

The P in EPIC presents the need to be participatory. Sweet says, “Authentic experiences, ones that draw us in, insist that we join ourselves to the experience.”<sup>78</sup> You cannot just go to Starbucks and order coffee. The sizing is different. The words are hard to say. It is a culture you learn to participate in and quickly become an insider not just an outsider. Not only do Millennials want an experience they want to be involved. They want to be a part of the process not just a receiver of the results. Sweet declares that television viewing is down in this generation while computers and video games are

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 63.

surging.<sup>79</sup> Millennials want to be a part of organizations and clubs. They do not just want to listen to music, they want to play it. They want to be involved in *Kid's Choice Awards* and *American Idol*. Church will be the same way for them. They do not just want to come and sit in a service, stand up for a couple songs, listen to a speaker and then leave. No matter the value of what that speaker has to say, they want to be involved. The internet is a large driving force behind this participation. Through *facebook*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest*, *Skype* and *Facetime* Millennials are immersed into a participatory world that is immediate even though distance is large. Students through phones are playing *Scrabble* and *Pictionary* over 1000s of miles. Sitting on the bench has never been fun no matter what generation one grows up in, but while other generations were happy to just be on the team or have the uniform, Millennials will not stand it. They want to be participating. Church, like Starbucks and so many other companies, must create environments for Millennials to get involved. Sweet is suggesting that churches allow Millennials to get involved. Outreach is a must.

The I in EPIC reminds pastors and teachers of the need to be image-based as they reach out to the next generation. Years ago in this nation, branding started to be a huge issue. Each company or manufacturer had a logo or image that connected the product to the company. This is the same today except in the world of a Millennial, images connect more than just companies to products. It is true that for most Millennials, if you say apple, most of them think of a computer instead of a round piece of fruit but images also connect hard concepts, lessons, and interest to people. The social website *Pinterest*, is merely an online collage of people's interest in certain areas. Millennials are having whole conversations in pictures instead of words. Images are everywhere. Millennials are

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<sup>79</sup> Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 61-62.

absorbed in them. Sweet declares, “images generate emotions, and people will respond to their feelings.”<sup>80</sup> This is a massive transition from previous generations who valued words and books over creativity and art. Millennials want art in everything they do. If one simply thinks about the commercials or billboard ads they see they would realize the complete saturation of images in the Millennial’s world. Sweet reminds readers that it is not images or words but images and words.<sup>81</sup> The images help the word.

The next author this thesis will overview, Dr. Tim Elmore, believed so greatly in this image-based tool Dr. Sweet speaks of that he wrote a series of books called *Habitudes: Images that Form Leadership Habits & Attitudes*. In these books he presents an image, like an iceberg, and then teaches a whole lesson on leadership from the iceberg. He says, “The iceberg represents your leadership. The 10% above the water is your skill. The 90% below the water is your character. It’s what’s below the surface that sinks the ship.”<sup>82</sup> Millennials get that and have probably seen Titanic and understand what he is saying to them. The reality though is that Millennials are hooked on images. The church has to be willing to use images for incorporation and for teaching the gospel.

The last letter in Sweet’s acrostic EPIC is C and it represents the need to be connected. This at first seems like one of the hardest principles to understand and apply, but it really is as simple as it sounds. Millennials want to be connected. Sweet is suggesting new levels of community and connection if the church is going to continue to reach the next generation. Any person who hangs around a college age Millennial,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 107.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Elmore, *Habitudes #1: Images That Form Leadership Habits & Attitudes*, (Atlanta: Growing Leaders, 2004), 1.

especially in a Christian context, has heard the term ‘community’ over and over. *Facebook* calls all of the people who make it up, the *facebook* community. Millennials want to be connected to things, things that are bigger than they are, but they also want to be connected with individuals. Sweet talks about the coffee experience and how many people go to a Starbucks to get their cup of joe, but more than that, to connect with others. Even the friendly face of a barista who remembers someone’s regular order has met their need for connection. Sweet says, “What is it people want most? What is it we all are searching for most desperately? The answer is one word with a million meanings: connectedness. If you question that all people are seeking connection, all you need to do is log on to the Internet.”<sup>83</sup> The number of singles websites and social media platforms continue to explode. Video games are now played over the internet with friends in different towns and countries. The Millennials have grown up in a world of connection and continue to have the need and desire to be in communities of connectedness. The church must offer that in multiple ways if it desires to succeed. Sweet says, “There are times to be literal and times to be figurative. It is time to get literal about human connectedness. The church has talked the language of interconnectedness, but it has been a sappy, figural connectivity.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Tim Elmore’s Handles**

Dr. Tim Elmore’s, the founder and president of Growing Leaders, passion is to mentor and equip the next Generation and those who lead them. Elmore is committed to

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<sup>83</sup> Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 129.

<sup>84</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 187.

helping the next generation to succeed all over the world. As Elmore offers opinions on reaching the next generation, he thinks primarily in mentoring relationships. One of the greatest needs of this generation is mentors that would step alongside them and help walk the generation out of the mess they are in.” Dr. Elmore champions this idea in his book *Life Giving Mentors*, “Mentoring is an essential element for students to not only survive but to thrive in the world they’re entering.”<sup>85</sup> Elmore sees mentoring as the means that will transform this generation. He believes that the big events hold value, but he sees mentoring as the path to get them on track. The authors of the New Testament had similar ideas when they told the old men to train up the young men and older women to raise up the younger women. Mentoring cannot be dull and boring. Elmore reveals that throughout history there have been two distinct tracks that one can take as they mentor others. The first is the Greek model, also termed the classroom model.<sup>86</sup> This model is academic, passive on the part of the learner and theoretical as one never really interacts with the information. It is like plugging a thumb drive into your computer and copying information from one drive to another. This is the way that most teaching and mentorship is done today in our society. But Elmore says that the “cry of the new generation” is for something more, they want the Hebrew Model.<sup>87</sup> The Hebrew model he defines as the Coaching Model.<sup>88</sup> This is not a model of just information transfer but of life transfer. It is hands on and relational. You do not just tell them information, you let them experience information. They learn and experience things step by step. Elmore argues that our

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<sup>85</sup> Tim Elmore, *Life Giving Mentors*, (Duluth, GA: Growing Leaders, 2008) , 12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 5.

mentoring has to start looking this way if we hope to connect and change the Y generation. Another important thing to note is the word handle. Elmore regularly speaks at conferences where he emphasizes his application in what he calls putting ‘handles’ on it, like on a mug or an object that seems impossible to grasp, the Millennial generation. This section is going to look at his research and offer some of his handles.

In his book *Life Giving Mentors*, Elmore presents a list of conclusions to keep in mind as one communicates with this generation. First on the list, he says, “Students learn on a need to know basis.”<sup>89</sup> A communicator must provide the need for them to know the information, if they feel they already have the answer or are not sure why they need what you are teaching them, they will struggle to pay attention. Secondly, “the less predictable your words, the more memorable they will be.”<sup>90</sup> Millennials do not want to hear the same information the same way over and over again. Many speakers, pastors and mentors believe in the old statement, “repetition leads to retention.” While that statement is true, especially in behavior or sports, when used concerning words and statements Millennials will not retain because they will turn the speaker off in their minds. This author had a conversation with the recording artist David Crowder. In that conversation, the topic of how he got to where he was as an artist was discussed. His words were so insightful that they ring true years late, and still with a thick Texas accent, “We were playing music in Waco and the students just weren’t getting it. I got the band together and I told them we need to find a new way to say the old stuff.” Crowder has been doing that now for the better part of two decades. He and his band have set the standard for creativity in contemporary Christian music, but on every one of his albums are hymns. He did not

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

need to say something new. He believed Solomon when he said there is nothing new under the sun. He just had to find a less predictable way to say the timeless truth. Crowder did and has sold millions of records. Those who work with the Millennial generation have to do the same thing. They have to find a new way to say the old stuff. Third, Elmore says, “the first four minutes must grab their head or heart, if you want to sustain their interest.”<sup>91</sup> As already mentioned, this generation is so effected by technology; they will make a decision about your communication quickly. You must connect with their head, even better their heart, or they will change the channel. The next point he gives is incredible to think about because most people have tried to stray from doing it in the Millennials life. He lists, “the more ‘in your face’ your words are, the more trust you will earn.”<sup>92</sup> It is incredible the response that a person will get from being blunt with a Millennial student. If one thinks about many of the speakers who are really popular with this generation, it is because they are blunt. If you are going to communicate with a Millennial, you cannot sugar coat things. The fifth thing on his list reads, “If you challenge the status quo, they will hunger to take a journey with you.”<sup>93</sup> Millennials are not go with the flow individuals just for the sake of it. This is not rebellion, as some view it, but a question to ask if what is practiced is the best or is does something better exist. They want to know that people are thinking and trying to see the world through new glasses. They want something new and real. Number six on the list for communicating to Millennials is, “They grew up loving images, so give them a metaphor.”<sup>94</sup> This was

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



covered extensively with Leonard Sweet. Seventh, he says, “Once you prepare your message, you must find a way to twist it to exceed their expectations.”<sup>95</sup> He compares it to movies having differing levels or layers of story. Though this seems very close to the second point, they are different in that the second point is looking for a new way to say things and this point looks to add more to what is going on. Twist the plot again. The eighth point revolves around change. He says, “For your message to be retained, keep the pace of change high, and call them to change.”<sup>96</sup> Millennials are used to change. The things they are involved in are changing rapidly. This author talked to evangelist Dave Edwards, who speaks primarily to youth, to gain some insight on connecting with the generation. Edwards revealed that he constructs his messages like a television program; He provides five to seven minutes of meat, the show, and then has a story or joke to break it up, the commercial. A message to Millennials cannot be the same all the way through. There has to be change. The ninth idea that he offers is simple, “teach less for more.”<sup>97</sup> Speaking can have two approaches. The shotgun method shoots with a bunch of points that hopefully spread out and catches somebody. It is admitting there are points that will not be for everyone but if one pays attention long enough there will most likely be a point that hits home. The rifle method of communication takes one theme or thesis and then drills down on it, hitting the same place on the target point after point. Millennials want the message to be for them and shot them right to the core not just throw so ideas their way. The last principle for communication that Elmore gives is “walk the balance

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

between nurture and challenge.”<sup>98</sup> The students want a speaker to be in their face but they do not want to feel like that person does not believe in them or thinks they are completely wrong. A communicator needs to nurture them and then challenge them to be what the communicator believes they can be. This list of ten observations can be powerful if those working with Millennials will do the hard work of incorporating them into their talks, sermons and church environments.

In another list of ideas in *Life Giving Mentors*, Dr. Elmore shares ideas on how to work with this generation. In that list he first suggests that they want to be different than previous generations, so let them be.<sup>99</sup> Too many people may see some of the flaws of the Millennials and desire to change them, but that change looks like conformity to a prior generation than actually helping better them. Help them change not conform. Secondly, Elmore advises, “help them make and keep short-term commitments.”<sup>100</sup> This generation is often called the non-committal generation. They have great desire to help others and the world but you just cannot count on them. If you are going to mentor Millennials, a large part of that work must be with their commitment level. Elmore’s next suggestion deals with the life of a Millennial. He says, “work with them to simplify their lives.”<sup>101</sup> The world of a Millennial is complex and crazy. They keep up with *facebook*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest*, *iTunes*, *Instagram*, email and texting. They are involved in 37 activities and groups. Elmore suggests if one wants to mentor the Y Generation to be great, they must learn to simplify their lives; focus on just a few things to master. Encourage a Millennial

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

to be involved in one or two teams at church and help make quality moments their instead of enabling them to be involved in 10 different things with less commitment. The next point that Elmore gives for mentoring the Millennials is it to help them see the value in small tasks.<sup>102</sup> The Millennials want to change culture and the world but understanding how keeping up with their receipts is going to help them do something monumental in the future. They do not see the value in the small task and if they have to push paper in an organization or get coffee for the boss, they want to quit because they are not helping and are being undervalued. A great mentor will seek to help a Millennial understand that the small things aid the big things: give them the big picture. The next two points are similar and will be combined into one for this discussion. Elmore suggests that one should help them set realistic goals and focus to complete them.<sup>103</sup> In conversations with young students, one will find that they want to be and do everything by the time they are 35 but this scattering actually leads to being or doing very little. One needs to help them set realistic goals that they can achieve and then teach them to focus on each goal until it is complete. The next tip in mentoring that Elmore suggests is to help students develop personal values.<sup>104</sup> Most Millennials want to be themselves and do not want to be forced to conform to previous generations but the problem is that most of them do not really have a good grasp on who they are and what they stand for. A great mentor helps them find that. The last thing Elmore offers for mentors to understand is that because this generation is so relational, a mentor must be “genuine and accessible.”<sup>105</sup> They want

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

someone they can trust. As these students get older they feel more lied to and they are seeking truth and authentic people in their lives. It is why they are often drawn in wrong directions because at least those people are real. They also are looking for people who are available. This author, having worked for over ten years with this generation in a ministry capacity, has had student after student report on how people were supposed to pour into them but they could never get in touch with them. This generation will wait in line for hours to say thank you, get advice, or even just an autograph. Mentors have to be available when the Millennial needs them most.

Dr. Elmore wrote an article where he gave some catch phrases to describe the generation. This author thinks those phrases might be helpful as one talks about connecting with the generation. Here they are: 1) Hear me out; 2) Keep it real; 3) Let's have fun; 4) My way now; 5) Make it count; 6) Let me know; 7) Plug me in; 8) Just do it.<sup>106</sup> Again one must keep in mind that the generation has been told they were special, probably rarely heard the word no, are over connected and do not need the previous generation to pass information along with their ability to *Google* and *Wikipedia* anything. If you think about those things then the statements make a lot of sense getting the generation involved.

Dr. Elmore wrote a book in 2010, where he took a more in depth look at the Millennial generation and steps to start saving their future. He entitled it *Generation iY*. Dr. Elmore feels this generation is getting stuck in adolescence. For too many he says, it

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<sup>106</sup> Tim Elmore, "A Crash Course in Understanding Generation Y," *Growing Leaders*, <http://www.growingleaders.com/index.php/articles/127.html> (accessed March 29, 2011).

has become a roadblock instead of a tollbooth.<sup>107</sup> He thinks that is part of their problem, so he offers some handles in helping a student move from child to adult. There are a few that would be healthy to put into the fabric of a church. First, is to place the Millennial in atmospheres that cross generations.<sup>108</sup> Millennials need to spend time with people from other generations. Churches and even event groups should not continually be only with their generation. They are connected to other Millennials, maybe over connected as already stated; they need opportunity to serve alongside persons from their grandparents' generation. They need to spend time in the nursery or children's church. A church should be multigenerational with intentional opportunities for those generations to cross. Secondly he suggests that there should be frequent opportunities given to the Millennial generation for service, even starting at a young age.<sup>109</sup> This generation wants to serve but many times has trouble finding those opportunities in their community. A church that is committed to connecting and discipling Generation Y is going to incorporate into the fabric of who they are the expectation of service from the body of Christ to each other and out to the community. Elmore suggests that to help them move into adulthood, they need to be offered "opportunity to practice maturity."<sup>110</sup> Remembering from what Elmore talked about in the "Meet the Millennials" section; He characterized the Millennial generation as not truly having had to learn the balance of autonomy and responsibility. Many of them have the freedom to act independently but they do not have true responsibility as adults and parents have swung in and saved the day. These students need

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<sup>107</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 54

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

the opportunity to have the responsibility. Mentors and Churches should offer this Generation delegation and accountability to live out their potential.

### **Thom and Jess Rainer's Research**

Thom Rainer is one of the most notable authors in the seminaries today because of his research based tactics. He is the president of LifeWay Resources and a Distinguished Professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Thom Rainer and his son Jess wrote a new book on generation Y called *Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* where they revealed the findings from the 1200 Millennials they surveyed in a variety of areas of life. While many of the other authors that have been researched and quoted for this thesis have raised several large red flags declaring something must change or the generation is doomed, Thom and Jess are “optimistic and hopeful about this generation.”<sup>111</sup> They admit that the generation has faults but they believe the Millennials have the ability to make a difference in the world. But how does one harness that potential and engage the mind that has far more information than any previous generation before them? The even bigger question to every pastor and teacher is how does one connect with them so that the gospel comes alive and starts to change their life?

In chapter five of their book *Millennials*, the Rainers discuss the motivating factors that drive the Millennials. If you want to motivate a Millennial, these are the dynamics you must understand. The number one thing that motivates them in their lives is relationships. Thom and Jess say, “This is truly a relationship generation. If anyone fails

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<sup>111</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 23.

to grasp that reality, they have failed to understand the Millennials.”<sup>112</sup> So a strategy to connect them with the Gospel is going to include a highly relational and extremely connected core that drives it. They also see an overwhelming trend that Millennials believe that they can do great things and many are motivated to do something with the society.<sup>113</sup> A plan to reach this generation with the gospel and sustain them as active members in the body of Christ is going to have to offer them the opportunity to make a difference in the world and in society for Christ. They will be tied to social agendas and if the church is not willing to meet the needs of the poor and hurting, Millennials will not understand or want to be a part of that kind of organization. Thom and Jess make another important discovery in their research. This generation is highly connected to their parents. When they need an ear to listen, shoulder to cry on or an extra dose of encouragement, this generation tends to turn to their parents or spouse. “They are not so arrogant to think they have all the answers. Indeed they are open to learning from a variety of sources both formal and informal. It will be interesting to see if older generations embrace their noble ambitions.”<sup>114</sup> In a later chapter in the book about the “Mediating Generation”, Thom and Jess state, “Religion is thus viewed by many of the Millennials as just another divisive force in the world. More specifically, they see problems with organized and institutional religion. The Millennials are the mediating generation and, from the perspective of many, organized religion leads to negativity and conflict.”<sup>115</sup> Because the Millennials’ desire is for the world to get along, many times the internal fighting in church, which Jesus is

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 116-117.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 171.

against as well, and the external judging of the world tend to drive them away. The Rainers also go on to point out that Millennials are truly connected with technology, as has been pointed out by many people. It is important to point out though as one thinks about connecting with them, they must use technology. “Music, Internet, and television each outranked religious beliefs, a spouse, and a boss in terms of influence.”<sup>116</sup> Because of this, attention spans are dramatically reducing and the preacher just talking will not connect to affect true life change.

Understanding the religious state of the Millennial generation is important if pastors and church leaders hope to connect the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Thom and Jess devote a whole chapter to this called, “Their Strange Religious World.” While they would argue that most of the people they interviewed did not have the exact same belief system, they state two similarities between all, “First, a Millennial is more likely than not to have a syncretistic belief system. He or she tends to take portions of belief from various faiths and non-faiths and blend them into a unique spiritual system.”<sup>117</sup> It sounds like an uphill battle to connect and reach this generation with the life-changing gospel. While many of them had no clue about the afterlife, many of them did make statements that they prayed. 65 percent of the Millennials defined themselves as Christians in the Rainers’ study but “based on the 20 percent who could affirm the basic “born again” tenets, and based on the 6 percent who strongly agreed with the Evangelical statements, we would surmise that 10 to 15 percent of Millennials are true Christians.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 231-233.



In this chapter, Thom and Jess write about the religious influence of parents on the Millennials. They first remind the readers that parents are by far the most important factor in their life. That translates into religion as well. “Millennials tend to follow the examples of their parents in matters of faith, but they also tend to take the level of commitment one step further.”<sup>119</sup> What an incredible thought! The Millennials will go one step further in whatever direction the parent is going. If the parent claims Christianity and even attends church but has little life change, the Millennial will break from it completely. If a parent has a passionate love for the Lord, then a Millennial will dive in even further. The Millennials who are born again Christians and on fire for the Lord want to do something about it. Thom and Jess compare them to the 120 disciples who changed the world. They believe in the Millennials as much as the Millennials believe in themselves. But they warn readers about the Millennial believers, “They have no patience for business as usual. They see the urgent need to share the gospel and to start new churches. And they will not wait on tired, established churches to get the work done.”<sup>120</sup>

So how do Thom and Jess Rainer propose that pastors and churches connect and reach the Millennial generation? They start with this warning; “They will connect with churches only if those churches are willing to sell out for the sake of the gospel.”<sup>121</sup> Millennials see what most churches do as a waste of time and do not want to be a part of it. So a church asking these questions must be ready to change things. The challenge of reaching Millennials is twofold. One must connect with those already in a relationship

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid, 245-246.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 255.

with Christ but then one has at reach those who are not. The Rainers break the discussion into these two distinctions but encourages readers that, “some of the actions churches can take to reach the Millennial Christian will likely prove helpful in reaching the non-Christian portion of this generation as well.”<sup>122</sup> They start by focusing on connecting with the Christian and defining the norm for a true believer in this generation. Comparing them to Acts 2, they state, “The radical nature of Millennial Christianity thus includes the desire to forfeit material gain for the sake of others, a fierce devotion to Bible Study (“the apostles’ teaching”), an intense prayer life, and a total commitment to reach and minister to others in their communities and among the nations.”<sup>123</sup> From that starting point, Thom and Jess are going to describe what a church then needs to look like to draw a Millennial Christian into their flock.

According to the Rainers, The first key component to building a church that will attract and connect with Millennials is the church must “become radically committed to the community.”<sup>124</sup> As already described, Millennials want to change the world around them and they want to be actively involved. A church that is not committed to making a difference in its community will quickly lose the interest of Millennials. They say that two words define the way Millennials look at this part of their church and spiritual life: “missional and incarnational.”<sup>125</sup> Missional is a word the generation uses to speak about being on a mission from Christ to demonstrate His love while incarnational means to

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 260.

actually be in the community as a representation of Christ.<sup>126</sup> The Millennial generation leans toward the social gospel in that they see people as those Christ wants to help not just a way to raise church memberships or baptisms. If a church desires to connect and incorporate the Millennial generation into their flock they must be concerned for the community just as Jesus had compassion on people. They must be actively involved and challenging members to show their Christianity through their lives as they connect daily with those around them.

The second component that Thom and Jess give as key to creating a church a Millennial would want to actively be a part of is to “go deep in biblical teaching.”<sup>127</sup> The Millennials have a hunger to learn. When they choose something they are all in. Mediocre, shallow preaching that does not truly teach the Word of God is not appealing to them. A pastor must really look like one of the disciples who devoted themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word. It is not just the pastor though. Sunday school, youth groups, small groups and Bible studies all have to instruct people in what they believe and challenge them to live it out. Millennials can sense fake and try their best to stray from it. It is not surprising to this author that in 2001, Thom Rainer wrote a book entitled *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* where he found this point to be overwhelmingly true in the reason for the unchurched returning to church after having visited once. Rainer surveyed and met with over 400 people across the country and he reveals that almost twice as much as any other reason for an unchurched person to make a second visit to a

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 260-261.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 261.

church were two key factors: strong exegetical preaching and clear, sound doctrine.<sup>128</sup>

Two separate studies, completed over 10 years apart, both reveal the necessity for any church to reach the unreached and connect especially Millennials that the church must be going deep in Biblical preaching.

The third key to designing a church that will connect and keep Millennial believers is that the church has to “love the nations.”<sup>129</sup> While Millennials applaud giving money to missions and to the world, they want to get their hands dirty. They want to be on the front lines. Think about it; How long has the idea of sponsoring children from other nations been popular? This writer would submit that it is directly in connection with this generation’s growth and desire to do something that it has increased incrementally larger than the previous generations -They want to adopt Orphans. They want to go feed the hungry and clothe the naked. If a church is not interested in those things and is not offering opportunity to be involved in those things, this generation will find one that is doing it. The fourth component that Thom and Jess discovered is very much tied to factors one and three; Millennials want to see that a church is “directing revenue outwardly.”<sup>130</sup> Millennials want to know that money given to the church is not just going to make church members happy. Is it going to actually reach the community and the world for Christ? They want to see good stewardship. The Rainers say, “they will be unwilling to stay in churches they perceive to be irresponsible with money entrusted to

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<sup>128</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 56.

<sup>129</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 264.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 266.

them. But the good news is that Millennial Christians will be attracted to those congregations that show wise stewardship of their funds.”<sup>131</sup>

The last key issue that Thom and Jess discovered as they worked through their research is that Millennials are looking for churches and specifically church leaders to “demonstrate transparency, humility and integrity.”<sup>132</sup> The Millennials abhor people who are fake and people who are liars. To many church leaders pretend to have it all together or that he or she is the greatest thing since the apostle Paul. You will not see a Millennial that willingly submits themselves under that type of leadership. They want to follow pastors and church leaders who are real, people who will confess their struggles and admit their failures. They are not looking for a failure, but they are looking for someone with character. The Rainers declared that though they did not actually count it, they believe that the number one attribute of church leaders that Millennials are looking for is humility.<sup>133</sup> Church leaders will play a big role in connecting with the Millennial generation.

What about the non-Christian Millennials? Since they are the overwhelming majority, what are the key issues a church must understand to be effective in reaching them? The first issue that one must understand is what Thom and Jess call “the indifference factor.”<sup>134</sup> They go on to state, “we are noticing a significant attitudinal shift with the 85 percent non-Christian Millennials. Their attitude toward Christians and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid 268

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 270.

churches is largely one of indifference.”<sup>135</sup> Millennials do not see the need for an organized religion in their life. They are not against God, but they are against the way most church do church and present God, so they do not see the value for organized religion. A church must understand that they are not in a fight but trying to build a relationship with these Millennials. Thom and Jess suggest, secondly, a powerful component to getting the unreached Millennials to church is that of a personal invitation from someone close to them.<sup>136</sup> Millennial are relational and those relationships can be leveraged to invite them to events or church services. This should be engrained into the culture of the church. The connection of Millennials to their parents is extremely high as well. The Rainers state, “when asked if parents were a regular and key source of advice and guidance, 86 percent of the Millennials responded positively.”<sup>137</sup> If churches will continue to stress the connection of the parental generation on their children, especially in the area of spiritual matters and church, there could be a huge connection that takes place. Millennials want to be a part of organizations that change communities and the world. As already stated, most of them do not see the church as one of those entities. The next key that Thom and Jess give to reaching the non-Christian Millennial is that a church must “demonstrate the deep meaning of following Christ.”<sup>138</sup> A church must teach how a life changed by Christ has real meaning and impact to it. It is valuable and they now have the ability to do something greater in society that will outlive them and last for eternity. The last two keys that Thom and Jess share for a church to incorporate to connect with non-

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 271

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 273

Christian Millennials are the same as two of the point to connect with Christian Millennials: Show concern for others, primarily community and nations and demonstrate transparency, humility, and integrity. They wrap up their thoughts on reaching and connecting with Millennials with this statement, “Churches could make radical changes necessary to connect with both the Christian and non-Christian parts of this generation. If such significant changes take place, churches in America could see their best days ever.”<sup>139</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Millennials are a different generation than those before them. These authors continue to suggest it is going to take new methods to reach them. These four groups of gentlemen all have one desire, contextualize to reach Millennials. Howe and Strauss look at making entertainment marketable for the Millennials. They look at those seven major characteristic of them and build a strategy from those. Sweet is declaring that in the church or in personal Christian living and evangelism that Christians must be EPIC – Experiential, Participatory, Image-based, Connected. He believes the Christian culture needs to be built around those ideas. Tim Elmore is giving a list of handles for mentoring Generation Y. He believes they need adults in their lives to guide them to maturity. The Rainers are the most excited about the potential of the Millennials and offer ideas based on relationships and outreach to win them over in a church. This writer has read a number of books on the Generation and has attended many conferences. He has taken the men and methods he believes in and has witnessed the effectiveness of their theories to be the primary source of his research and focus. That is not to discredit others ideas but put

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 276

stock in the men he chose. Now that the ideas and methods have been overviewed, the next step is to form them into a culture and experience called church. Chapter four will synthesize what this writer thinks are the major components of a church and church service that will reach and sustain Millennials.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE PROPOSED MEANS FOR MILLENNIAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

#### **Introduction**

Often this writer has heard Dr. Tim Elmore say, “Relevance is using what is cultural to teach what is timeless.” The writer also shared already in this thesis about a conversation he once had with one of the most successful Christian artist, David Crowder. Crowder told him, “We were trying to find a new way to say the old stuff.” This section is not a degradation of the truth or of God’s word. It is far from that. It is looking for a way to take the timeless truth of God and help the Millennial generation connect more fully with it. It is not changing the story but telling the story. For heaven’s sake, much of the New Testament is stories and letters. This is not a thesis on the necessity to preach the word. That is a given. Without the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, there is no life change or purpose in church. This thesis is about the presentation of that Word and of the church in a way that immediately connects.

While one would be foolish to think that all of the proposed thoughts and methods of the authors overviewed could be synthesized into one culture based on the magnitude of that task alone, this writer also does not believe that every piece is a necessity. This chapter is not designed to be a comprehensive church overhaul or church planting strategy. That would take more pages than the writer has afforded in this thesis. What will be accomplish in this chapter is that the writer, based on the Millennial student, the surveyed authors who have been most helpful in the discussion and his decade of experience ministering to Millennials, will provide what he believes are the core

components that must make a church culture and church service if the church intends to reach the over 70 million Millennials. They are the future of the church and Christianity in America. The honest truth is that most churches are not doing a good job connecting with this generation. With hundreds of churches closing every year and thousands of churches on the decline, it is time to try something new.

### **Major Elements of the Church Culture**

If church is going to reach a Millennial, it has to be an experience not a ritual. For too long, church has been based on coming, going, numbers, and giving. Millennials seek something that will transform their life. Church has become a place that people begrudgingly attend, out of obligation instead of excitement. Millennials want to be excited about going and when they get there it has to be more than just attendance. This starts from the impact of the scenery, the greeters and even what is happening or available before the service starts and after the service concludes. What are they involved with and who can they connect with before the service starts? The Millennials were a protected generation by their parents and the safety of nurseries and children's programs will be important to them. Does the experience portrayed excite the family to be at church or is it like taking down wallpaper to try to get the children to stay with the children's program. The idea is not fun daycare but purposeful excitement and experience for children and adults. Many churches are moving to lobbies that have ample room for fellowship and many of them have coffee and snack shops in the middle of them, the best ones are even free. Remember that the Millennial generation has been told they are special and they have been catered to their whole life. The church has to help people

experience the special feeling as people walk in its doors. The truth is, the church knows why they are truly special and wants to share that with them. A Millennial seeks experience in everything they are involved in, so church must provide it. Experience does not mean everything has to be over the top, but intentional and purposeful in making church more than just a long sermon on Sunday. It means a community that actually has time and place to be community instead of checking off a box on a spiritual checklist. Millennials want to wear shirts that say, "I love my church." They do not want to tell their friends, "You have to visit my church." They want to express, "You have to experience my church." More will be talked about with experience as the chapter moves from church culture to church service.

Part of the experience of the church will be the relational culture that exists. Every author that writes on the Millennials talks about their relational quality. They are a relational people. Thom and Jess Rainer talked about how the church will have to return to the relational aspect if it hopes to reach the Millennials. Millennials may choose large churches but it will be large churches where they can quickly connect with other people. Church is a place to experience God, but it is also a place to connect with friends and family. The church culture will have to be relational. Pastors must be available and authentic. It demands people who will be visitor friendly, but not just the greeters or the people who smile and wave, but people who connect in the parking lot, people who say more than just welcome in the lobby and intentional time of connecting during the service. Another major component of being relational in a church, is giving people the opportunity to hear other people's story. Whether that is a testimony, a video, or a written story on a wall, the more people know about each other the easier it is to connect, find

points of commonality, and build community. The power of a personal invitation to church is incredible in the Millennial generation. The relational side of them explodes when someone takes the time to be personal with them and invite them to something. While advertisements and gimmicks might get some people to the church, the culture of church trying to reach Millennials has to be based on personal invitation. The chances are exponentially higher for them to attend. This leads to other one of the major components of relationships in local churches, small groups. Millennials want the big experience but they also love the small organic feel of people gathering together to study the word of God in a coffee shop or someone's home. The early church understood the necessity of both the corporate worship, which happened every day, and the small group as they met in each other's homes and fellowshiped with each other. A Millennial church culture will include and push small groups as a key to the fabric of the church.

Another important but tricky part of building a Millennial church culture, is that it must be multigenerational. First and foremost, this is a Biblical model to an extent. While nowhere in the Word of God does it say churches must be multigenerational, there are many exhortations for old men to train younger men and the same with ladies. There are demands from young men to respect and learn from the wise. So it is a necessity in the body of Christ to be healthy. Beyond that, Millennials more than any generation before respect their families and older generations. They do not want to be put down by them or told they do not know what they are doing but will gladly learn and grow alongside of an older person who they believe has their best interest in mind. This is where it gets tricky though. A multigenerational church must have older generations that are less concerned about pleasing themselves than reaching the next generation. They must buy into the

mindset of being intentional to reach who is next, just as the Millennials will have to have the same mindset with the next generation when they hit the workforce. It has to be a culture of the church that reaching the next generation is more important than pleasing the current. Grandparents have to buy into that. This author knows of a church that approximately every five years does a campaign in the church around the idea of “what if God is not done with us yet?” In this series they play multiple stories of people who have experienced the church and been changed. Then the lead pastor shares what the church leadership believes are some of the key components over the next five years to continue reaching people with the Gospel. The builders and boomers believe in reaching people and the church continues to grow by the thousands yearly. If multigenerational culture is going to work there has to be buy in from all generations and mentorship that happens. Older people need to purposefully take younger people under their wings and practice biblical mentorship. It continues to connect people and helps to raise up Millennials to actually live their faith. The multigenerational culture needs to be seen in all the areas of the church. Churches should ask Millennials to be involved in their areas of expertise, like music, technology and art but also in the other areas. There should be Millennials as greeters, child workers, on stage, preaching, working the parking lot, on the deacon board and in every area. Get them involved. Train them and then delegate the task to them to excel. Recognize them for the work they do and provide lots of opportunities for guys to get involved.

Not only does the church need to be multigenerational, it needs to be multicultural. While this author understands that different ethnic groups prefer to worship in different ways that are not always as popular or enjoyable to other groups, a Millennial

church culture is going to provide opportunity to celebrate and cross those cultural lines. Diversity in the generation is a huge part of who they are and the main lines that they have worries about in their life are with Ethernet cords not ethnic line. They have friends from every culture and race and want to be able to invite a friend to their church experience and have the friend feel welcome. That means the experience must be multicultural and relational.

The Millennials are connected, some believe they are over connected. Where the boomer or Gen X student may have encountered a foreign exchange student in high school or college, the Millennials have grown up with a much smaller world. They have been on mission trips since they were twelve and have *facebook* friends from all over the world that they chat with in the evenings. God's heart beat is for the world and reaching the world and so are the Millennials hearts. They see hopelessness and poverty and want to change it. They have supported a kid since they went to a concert where Compassion International did a presentation and they write that child weekly. They desire to free every child soldier and sex slave and get every orphan adopted. They have a picture of the world and just giving to a Lottie Moon Christmas offering or any other church giving program is not good enough for them. They want to see a church that loves the nations the way God loves the nations and is doing something about it. A Millennial church culture will have a true love for the nations and a heart to reach them. They will provide opportunities to give and chances to go.

While a love for the nations is incredibly important to the Millennials they also want to be involved in a church that is radically committed to the community and civic problems like poverty, homelessness, abortion and kids. The big word here is

incarnational. They want the gospel, like Jesus, to show itself in the flesh. They want to be involved in church that does not just use the money it has to take care of members but also directs revenue outwardly towards the community of which they are a part. A Millennial church culture is going to give them the opportunity to be involved in projects but more than that exhort them as a young generation to come up with the projects that will change their community and world. Give them the responsibility to come up with the involvement and then the mentoring to actually complete the task and make a difference. Also encourage the church to support and rally around them. Millennials believe that Jesus met the needs of those around him. They believe it as truth when the Bible says that pure religion is to take care of widows and orphans. And while sometimes a Millennial will sway more to a social gospel mindset, what a church is doing in its own community will play a large part as to whether a Millennial will be a part of it.

The last major component of a church culture and also true of a church service, which will be attractive to Millennials, will be the use of technology and the arts. For a long time those two have not been connected but the Millennials are a generation of individuals who have connected these two pieces. For many of them, technology helps or produces art. Art can be defined a multitude of ways from the paint scheme of a church to an abstract drawing on the stage during worship. It includes images and music; theater and poetry. A Millennial church culture is going to understand the need for both. Foley says, "Given the dynamic force of technology today, it seems at least a lost opportunity, if not an educational failure, to overlook the theological import and implications of the digital age for the ministerial enterprise and future mission."<sup>140</sup> Millennials are born with

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<sup>140</sup> Edward Foley, "Theological Reflection, Theology and Technology: When Baby Boomer Theologians Teach Generations X & Y." *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (January 2005): 54.

technology and ever increasingly becoming right brained. The church culture must incorporate these aspects into all that it does. While one is not calling for technology overload, Millennials speak technology better than English. A church must leverage this, whether with a *facebook* page or *Twitter*. They need it in the services and in the lobby. The more connection a community has the closer it becomes and technology is an incredible tool to create that. It does not mean that the senior pastor of the church has to be the technological mind or muscle behind creating it, just understand the need and hire a Millennial to do it.

### **Major Components of a Church Service**

To say that a church service is not a part of the church culture would be a preposterous statement. The service more than anything embodies and declares the major cultural trends of the church. The fact that the two are divided in this thesis is not an effort to try and divide them from each other but focus on each more specifically. The elements that are talked about in this section are as necessary to the culture of the church as anything from the previous section and add to the components not compete with them.

One of the biggest parts of a church service is the pastor. Millennials are about their speakers. This writer has seen that first hand. While there are lots of things that happen in the church culture and service that are important to a Millennial, the pastor is one of the greatest components. Again, Millennials live in the world of technology where they can listen to any pastor they want three or four times a week. While they do not expect their local pastor to be Mark Driscoll, John Piper, Craig Groeschel, or John Maxwell, they do have high expectations. When they speak of their church, one of the



first elements they will talk about is the speaker and the attendance of the church will be proportional to the ability of the communicator. Even the non-Christians walking in the door, according to Thom Rainer's study, say that the pastor and his preaching are the number one factor as to whether they return to that church. Millennials are looking for an authentic man of God who will accurately and doctrinally break open the word of God. If the Bible is truth, they want deep biblical teaching that does not just hit the surface but actually helps them know and experience God more. Millennials do not have authority issues, but they will not follow people they do not trust and believe in. They are looking for pastors who demonstrate transparency, humility and integrity. They want men who are authentic and available. The Pastor is a big part of the Millennial church culture, and his openness and deep biblical teaching are a must.

In this author's opinion, Leonard Sweet's EPIC acrostic is one of the easiest tools to use when looking at creating a service to reach Millennials, and the great thing is that other generations do not mind that type of service either. While some purposeful tradition in a church service is not bad, too many places are steeped in tradition and are not looking to change or reach new types of people. The service and the sermon must look for ways to be EPIC. For too long the church has been "come and see" versus "come and experience". A service that is designed to reach Millennials must be experiential. Experiences involve emotions more than information. Most experiences are described by the way they make you feel. A great experience will transfer information of some sort, and maybe lots of it, but will be remembered because of the feelings it produced. This means pastors have to not only ask the question of "What do I hope the congregation will truly learn this week?" but "How will the pew-person interact with God?" While this

author is a speaker and feels that speaking is important in the church service, the overall experience must be in focus. How does it all work together to create a remembered experience that draws people to God. Sweet's next letter stands for participation. This generation lives in a world where everything is participatory, so figure out how to get the congregation involved. Powerful worship and open altars are a strong start in this direction. When a Millennial feels like they are singing their guts out to the Lord and have the opportunity to respond as they feel led, it provides a sense that they are a part of the service not just attending a performance. A time of reflection at the end of services with opportunities to respond at the altar is powerful for the Millennial generation. From time to time offer the church prayer stations as they come in, alternate ways of response and other participatory invitations. Keep the Millennial involved. A third idea represented with this acrostic is the idea of being image-rich. Use images and videos to continue to help make the connection to the principles of God you are trying to teach. The stage setup and backdrop use images to start the experience of what is about to happen. Videos help them to connect their feelings with where the pastor is going and images provide them a handle to hold on to and remember the things they were taught. Churches should use a variety of images from graphics to paintings. Have someone sculpt while the worship is happening to continue the worship experience. Millennials live in a world of technology and art so use it and make them feel more comfortable. The pastor needs to learn to connect hard concepts of the Bible to images through metaphors and analogies that help Millennials understand. The C in EPIC stands for connectedness. Millennials want to feel connected. Connected to each other; connected to the speaker and more than anything they want to be connected to God. A major way of creating this in a church is allowing

Millennials to be Millennials. There should not be a strict dress code in your church. Let them be them. That does not mean the pastor has to wear v-necks and skinny jeans but it should not be frowned on if a Millennial does. Pastors need to remember that Millennials are over connected and they are going to be on phones, iPads or other gadgets. Do not be offended or frustrated as they may be tweeting how much God is saying to them right now or tweeting a quote the pastor just said. As the pastor speaks and interacts, the Millennials want to know him and connect with him. His stories must be relevant to them and his exhortation must work in their lives. This writer has watched numerous speakers over the last decade try to connect with thousands of students. The ones that truly have connected on stage also connected with students off the stage too. The most respected men of God would stand and talk with Millennials for hours after the service to connect with them. While many pastors are tired after a service and many of the questions seem fluffy, Millennials do not need the answers to the questions, they desire the personal connection with a pastor. A pastor needs to be available to Millennials inside and outside of the service. Not only does the pastor have to be connected but Millennials want and need to be connected with each other. The service must provide opportunities and a culture that allows it. One simple idea is if a church has multiple services, do not schedule them so close together that people do not have time to communicate before or after the service. Allow them to connect. The sermon and the service need to be EPIC if it wants to reach and grow Millennial disciples.

While the acrostic EPIC covers what this writer believes to be the basic components of a church service, one other part where this author would like to give some suggestions based on the research from the authors in chapter three and what he has seen

connect well with Millennials is when it comes to a sermon. Before offering these suggestions, the writer would like to first say, “Be yourself and teach the Bible!” Millennials can spot a fake a mile away and while these communication tips can help you connect to a Millennial, if they change you from being you and it seems forced you will do more harm than good. Figure out how to incorporate them and still keep yourself. Also, teach the Bible. The words of God have been presented to man. Focus more on God’s words than on your words. The primary role of a pastor, in this writer’s opinion, is to present God’s words in a way that connects with those listening. It is what Jesus, Peter, John, and Paul all did as they lived and wrote the New Testament. It was the job of the Prophets. The pastor is to not change God’s words but help them connect to those listening like an ambassador helps a foreign country connect with America. These suggestions are in no certain order but will provide some assimilated guidelines to look through as one constructs a sermon. The first few tips will deal with the presentation of the sermon and the last few will deal with the meat of the sermon.

Millennials have thousands of ideas, concepts, and products thrown at them daily through the internet, phones, and television. A technique that a Millennial connects with is simplifying the sermon. For many years preachers have used what is called the shotgun method. They pull the trigger of the sermon and go in a multitude of different directions hoping that different points will hit different people. The Millennial are all ADD and this method is almost impossible for them to follow. They want sound preaching on the word of God and would rather have a rifle that goes in one direction and penetrates deep. As the pastor drills down on the theme he needs to help the Millennial understand complex theology in their terminology and offer realistic goals to achieve the desired outcome.

When it comes to the rifle effect, Andy Stanley, in his book *Communicating for a Change*, suggests that the effective communicator with any generation, but especially with Millennials, will pick a major point he wants the audience to get, then he will repeat that point and drive it home so the person walks out with it.<sup>141</sup> A pastor find the one thing he wants his audience to experience and unpack it. Teach fewer points and spend your time developing and painting the picture of the main point.

Millennials learn on a need to know basis, so speakers need to make sure they spend time building the “why?” Why does a Millennial need to listen or know what you are about to say? In this writer’s opinion, the biblical author Paul used this same method. In most of his books he spent the first half of his book defining doctrine and then the second half telling people the way they should act in light of that doctrine. Millennials want to know why. As a pastor tells them why and then presents the knowledge, he needs to not beat around the bush. Millennials appreciate bluntness. They are drawn to people who will tell them the truth even if it hurts. This does not mean that one is to be rude, crass, or graceless in their presentation, but it does mean that one can say what really needs to be said and not fear that Millennials will hate them. They want the status quo to be challenged and they do not want to come hear things they already know. They want to be challenged that the way of life you are painting is worth giving up what they have to follow it. One cannot achieve that by being timid. Challenge them but at the same time nurture them. Let them know that the pastor believes in them and that he cares to grow them in their faith and to look more like Jesus. Balance the responsiveness with the demanding.

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<sup>141</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 111.

Another powerful tool that this writer has seen used in communicating to Millennials is the predictability factor. Tim Elmore when lecturing often says, “the more predictable you are, the less memorable you will be.” This writer has heard him say that quote probably 20 times. As speakers and pastors prepare their sermons, there needs to be a level of unpredictability. Do not do things the same way all the time. This does not mean to scare people. There is no need for shock and awe. People do not need to create a timid feeling because they never know what is coming next. A pastor can lose people’s trust if he is not careful, but he can put them to sleep or in a zone if they always know what is coming. Fluctuate the sermon, the speed, the tempo, and the length. Use videos. Make statements that catch people off guard but do not try to offend them. Millennials will remember sermons contrasted with less predictability and will stay with the pastor longer. Remember that they do not usually focus on one thing at a time so be intentional to help them stay with you. Remember Dave Edwards’ method of mimicking a television show. He said that is the way many of these Millennial brains are programmed, so when he speaks, he talks for five to seven minutes then he tells a story or a joke to break things up then back into the content. Be less predictable.

Preach the Bible. Go deep into biblical teaching. Those are the first things that Millennials want as they come to church but there are some things you also talk about that will help connect. Talk and address issues that matter to them and their generation. As a pastor plans his preaching, plan it with prayer and a calendar. Think about what is going on in the world and in the life of a Millennial. Talk about issues that matter to them. Find out what the Millennials in the congregation are dealing with and speak to those things. Read *Christianity Today*, *Relevant*, and similar magazines to see what

Millennials are writing about. Pastors should be mindful of the calendar year issues and of issues that seem to stress and excites the Millennials. Many pastors have soapboxes they like to preach on, make sure that the soapbox helps a Millennial stand up.

Millennials want to help and make a difference not fight and tear others down. Talk about what they need to hear. As one preaches on what Millennials are interested in, connect what one preaches with what they know, stories from school, plays and movies, and even science. The Millennials are highly educated and connected. They have worked hard in school and learned much more than previous generations. One should use what they have learned to help explain what he wants to teach them. Use stories, stories, and more stories. One should tell stories that will connect to them and the principles from God's word he is trying to teach. Don't use them all in one place but use them as a tool or stepping stone to further understand and connect with truth.

As a pastor teaches and preaches to Millennials, he should deal with personal values. He should help them know what the Bible says is truth, not his opinion or tradition. He should show them people who have acted on that truth. Do not down play their pressure in life. Millennials are a pressured generation. For many of them, that pressure is huge, even if it seems pale in comparison of what the pastor went through at their age. Connect with them through empathy while helping them learn to deal with and laugh at stress. Pastors should show high risk decisions and situations from the Bible. Millennials feel that they are always facing high stress situations and many times it paralyzes them. Teach them Esther, Daniel, and David. More than anything a Pastor should present a purposeful life. Sermons in the church must present purpose and a reason for giving everything over to God. Rick Warren understood that when he wrote

his book *Purpose Driven Life*, which is one of the best sellers of all time. He states that people have been searching for purpose for thousands of years with no resolve.<sup>142</sup>

Millennials are searching for that purpose and the world is telling them it is in different things. A pastor needs to provide real purpose and passion for living the Christian life.

### **Conclusion**

The church, if it is going to continue to grow and fulfill the great commission of making disciples of all nations, is going to have to change the way it is going about reaching the next generation. Millennials want to know truth and they want a life of purpose, but most of them are tired of the way boomers and builders do church. Simply put, they are bored. They have been told their whole life they are special only to attend church and find nothing is catered to them. They want something fresh and experiential. They want to experience God more than just know about God. This chapter has looked at ways to take the foundational truth of God's Word and God's church and build a bridge between it and the Millennial generation. It has talked about church culture and church services. While it does not lay out piece of the puzzles, it does provide some necessary components and helps to build the outside edges.

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<sup>142</sup> Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 17.



## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Millennials are here. They have shown up on the scene in overwhelming numbers. They have been pampered and catered to their whole life. Hundreds of churches have closed over the last year. Over 10,000 churches did not baptize one new believer. Many churches are missing the Great Commission because they are missing the largest generation in the country. The future of the church rests on Pastors' and elders' abilities to understand and reach this generation. Pastors must take seriously the task of reaching and discipling Millennials. This thesis has sought to accomplish three goals. The first goal was to help summarize and define the Millennial generation. Many people live among Millennials on a daily if not hourly basis but really do not understand how they tick. If they were asked to sum up the generation, it would be a vague description and would include mostly negative terms. The generation is much more complex and important to understand. This thesis overviewed the seven characteristics coined by authors Howe and Strauss. It overviewed the balancing acts that Elmore sees as a problem and compared them to the previous generations. The reality is that the Millennial generation is a product of their raising and they are valuable and important to the future of the nation and the church.

Secondly, this thesis overviewed the proposed methods of contextualizing life for the Millennials from four sets of authors who are leading minds, writers, and speakers on the generation. The four groups of authors were Howe and Strauss, Leonard Sweet, Tim Elmore, and Thom and Jess Rainer. Each of them approach the generation from different points of view but all of them desire to help others connect in powerful ways. The

methods of research and summation were different but they came to conclusions based on study, observation, and assimilation. The authors are four of the most quoted authors on the subject of Millennials and each of them provide sound ideas and methods to incorporate as one seeks to connect with Generation Y. This author has used parts of all of their studies to help his ministry to Millennials over the last decade.

The third and ultimate desire of the thesis was to provide a framework of principles that pastors could incorporate into their church culture to facilitate the ability to reach Millennials. The books and articles that discuss reaching Millennials are numerous. Pastors could get lost in trying to find what works. The thesis provided what this author believes based on research of the four survey authors and practice of the writer, is the necessary components to transition a church culture to reach the Millennials. It looked at the church itself to start, highlighting the need for experience, relationship, multigenerationalism and multiculturalism. Millennials are looking for a place that loves the world and the society in which the church functions. Millennials speak technology and art so there is a need for that in a transitional church. From there the chapter talked about the pastor and his need for authenticity and availability. The connection of the church to anyone including Millennials will hang on the strength of the pastor. The service needs to be EPIC: Experiential; Participatory; Image-based; Connected. The sermon needs to be deep in the Bible and teach what Millennials need to know and are facing regularly.

Millennials have been seen as children for a long time and though adolescence is stretching further into future in the Millennial generation, it is time for the church to view the Millennials as the future. While full scale abandonment from previous generations is

not the call of reaching the Millennials, taking them seriously and building a church culture that is relevant and appealing to them is the cry. If churches do not change they will die and the church of Jesus Christ will reduce. Paul declared he would use any means necessary to save a few but churches are holding on to their tradition at the loss of a multitude. The church must reach the Millennials. The future is now.

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