

THE CONVERSION SPECTRUM

1 Chronicles 12:32 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: BRING UP FIRST SLIDE OF PETER AND PAUL... Christianity was born in Israel, specifically in the city of Jerusalem. It was born into a distinctly Jewish context. It was built on the foundation of the Old Testament.

- So in **Acts 2**, on the day of Pentecost when Peter preaches the first sermon ever FROM the church - he grounds his arguments on the claims of the Old Testament, stories they were very familiar with and had accepted as true.

Think about it - there were certain presuppositions that they all held in common.

- There is one God - they were monotheists.
- God had spoke through the Prophets as recorded in the OT canon.
- God promised to send a Messiah to rule and reign as King.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, makes a case for Jesus being the Messiah and 3000 people are converted on the spot.

- Later, in **Acts 17** we see Paul taking to the city of Athens to people who had no Category for MonoTheism, much less the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - nor the long anticipated Jewish Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as Paul stood on **Mar's Hill** to address the Men of Athens, do you expect he will do so in the same way Peter preached on the day of Pentecost? Not at all, in fact the two sermons were radically different because the crowds were different.

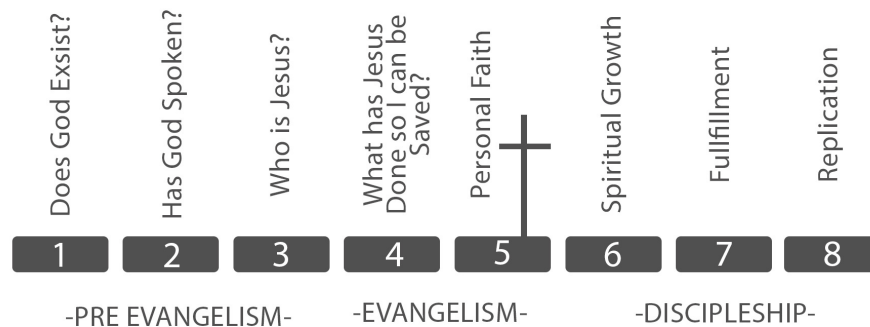
- Paul begins with the concept of **ONE GOD** who created the world and everything in it, as opposed to a Pantheon of gods reprinted by the idol of Athens.
- Then he speaks of mankind all coming from a **single ancestor** rather than each nation coming from their particular patron deity.
- He **contrasts** this concept of God **to their pagan idols**. Then tells them they are accountable to this God who will one day Judge them.

Did 3,000 people get saved? No... as a matter of fact many **mocked him...** but a few wanted to know more.

So the **presentation** was different and the **result** was different.

There was a radical difference between the men of **Jerusalem** and the men of **Athens**. The men of Jerusalem were no less lost than the men of Athens, but there were further along on the **CONVERSION SPECTRUM**. **Jerusalem was a 3-4. Athens was a 2.**

The Conversion Spectrum



They believed the reality of a god, but they had misguided revelation. They were polytheists.

TODAY two or three generation may live in a single household and experience the **radical cultural differences** that the Apostles experienced by traveling over 1,000 miles.

**A Parent may be a 7 or 8 and the child a 1
In fact, this is so common it is scary**

- **When I came to Christ** in the 1990's I was much like the **men of Jerusalem**. I believed in God, I believed the Bible was true. I simply did not fully understand the Gospel. I came across a radio program that I could understand and with a little NUDGE, I was in the Kingdom. Many of you came to Christ in a similar scenario.

I was a 4 and easily became a 5.

- Today, we design our outreach for people like me, but the truth is, not many exist.

How comfortable do you feel in a conversation with a 1, 2, or 3?

It is not uncommon to have in the same family, a Boomer Grandfather who knows and loves the Lord, serves his local church, teaches Sunday school... but a Gen Z grandson who doesn't even believe God exists and is functionally an atheist.

CONTEXT: I've often been intrigued by the obscure, enigmatic characters of the biblical text. Those whom we seem to pass over quickly as insignificant or unimportant to the story. Such is the case with a group of men we find in **1 Chronicles 12**.

TEXT: 1 Chronicles 12:32 (ESV)

³² Of Issachar, men who had **understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...**

We don't know a lot about this tribe beyond this obscure comment. Issachar himself was the 5th son of Jacob and Leah and the 9th son overall for Jacob. Issachar had 4 sons and went with his father into Egypt. His descendants formed one of the tribes of Israel and after the wanderings in the wilderness they numbered about 60,000 fighting men. When the promised lands was appointed, the men of Issachar received 16 cities and their adjoining villages. Moses referred to them as a "Strong ass situated in a beautiful land", and he meant it as a compliment.

By the time this text is penned, they number about 90,000 and they are known for their wisdom. It is even noted in the Talmud that when the SANHEDRIN was formed (that is the Jewish Supreme Court) they wanted it to be made up of men of Issachar.

It is interesting to note that they were supremely noted for their ability to understand the TIMES and to know what Israel OUGHT TO DO in light of that understanding.

IN THIS SERIES, I want to expose you to some cold, hard, realities of a generation that is about to be forever lost...

In surveys where people are asked to identify their religious affiliation the fastest growing group in America is the **NONE** category.

- 1940's - 5% marked None. That held pretty true till the mid 90's then from...
- 1990 - 2008 (18 years) the number tripled to 15%.
- 2012 - 20%
- 2015 - 23%
- Today in 2020 the NONES are the largest group marked under the category of religion - not Catholics, not baptist - the NONES.

The shocking part of this study is that the departure from traditional faith communities hasn't happened equally in the various age segments... for example it is not that boomers or busters are leaving the faith. The **departure** has occurred primarily among people who were born after the turn of the 21st century.

What is different about this generation than those that preceded it?

1. GREATER UNPREDICTABILITY

They were born into the great RECESSION in the early 2000's. Beginning in 2007 this economic era is widely considered the greatest global downturn since WW2.

There's was the first generation owned less accumulated wealth than their parents.

They were born into a world where 9/11 happens, where COVID happens.

As a result - a recent study found that **26%** of those between the ages of 18 and 39 had a favorable view of ***Socialism***, compared to only 15% over the age of 65.

It is believe that this is because they were born into world marked by economic chaos, uncertainty, volatility and complexity.

***ART IS THE VOICE OF A SINGLE HEART
THAT SPEAKS TO THE EARS OF A MULTITUDE***

So notice that in **2012** we saw movies like Hunger Gamer, Divergent, MadMax, The Purge.

Then in **2020** we see these apocalyptic scenes on our streets, grocery stores shelves empty. GUN SALES are at an all time high since data has been collected.

2. **ONLINE NATIVES**

I remember my first computer. I was told about this device called the **modem** that could dial into the library of congress and access 1000s of books. Today practically every book ever written can be accessed from my pocket.

This new generation are considered DIGITAL NATIVES. They know no other experience.

- Teens today spend approximately 9 hours a day absorbing media.
- 91% go to bed with their devices.
- Handheld devices account for 57% of online traffic - computers, laptops are becoming obsolete.

We shop online, we learn online, our currency is becoming more and more digital, Gideons International has scaled back the printing of bibles for the first time in its history.

When COVID hit, churches who had an online expression have done fairly well. Those who did not are closing their doors.

One of the strange observations of this information revolution is that communication happens two ways - MEMEs and Long for media.

So they scower social media consuming memes... then when one strikes their interest they dive deep into a 2 hour podcast. So it's not an attention issue, it's an interest issue.

3. ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

Between 2000 and 2010 the country's hispanic rate grew 4 times the national average. 49% of the births in 2006 were hispanic.

in the 1700's the most common last name in the USA was Smith. Today it is Rodriguez.

Gen. Z is the most multi-racial generation we have ever experienced as a country.

The most successful churches in America are those who have recognized this reality and have intentionally sought to build a church that accurately reflects their community.

4. HYPER AFFIRMING

In the 80's and 90's tolerance began to be talked about frequently. Generally, that meant that we would tolerate those who had different views than we do. That idea is no longer what is meant by tolerance - today it is expected that you will affirm and support any lifestyle different than your own, and if you fail to do so, you may be labeled a bigot or found guilty of hate speech.

Gender has become a fluid term for them. Marriage has lost all definition.

Now while among Adults, this sort of thing seems foreign and the sort of thing they deal with in LA or NYC... but I want to suggest to you that this is becoming more and more the norm at Fernandina Beach High.

I read recently where in Great Britain the first 3 parent family has been recognized by the government. I couldn't even conceptualize of the things that have become the norm.

Churches like ours who are conservative theologically must not only stand our ground biblically, but we must learn to make well crafted, intelligent defenses of our positions.

HOW WILL WE REACH THE NEXT GENERATION?

1. We MUST have an Online Presence as Strong as our Real World Presence

Last year Lifeway closed 170 brick and mortar stores across the country.

It has been called the RETAIL APOCALYPSE as more and more companies shift to e-commerce.

You will find that communicating with your kids or grandkids digitally will sometimes be more effective than face to face.

Social Media Platforms are much like hangouts - they each have their accepted norms.

For example - The rules of etiquette in a coffee shop is are a little different than at a nice restaurant. In the same way they are different in each Social media platform.

- **Facebook** - is mostly appealing to boomers and busters.
- **Instagram** - practically every millennial is on Instagram.
- **Snap Chat** - Has become less seedy than it was originally and now is the preferred means of direct communication for Gen Z.
- **TicToc** - is mostly humor driven, Gen Z and Millennials rule tictoc.
- **Twitter** - Donald Trump won the last presidential election on Twitter. It's a place for online news and conversation.
- **Blogs** - They are becoming a bit antiquated but still can be helpful.
- **Podcasts and Vodcasts** - are the preferred source for longford content.
- **Documentaries** - We are in the Golden Age of Documentary Filmmaking.

We have a corporate presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

By the end of the year - we are going to take our MEDIA presence to a new level. If you are interested in participating, reach out to me directly at zacherry@gmail.com

2. Emphasize the Life-giving Aspects of the Gospel

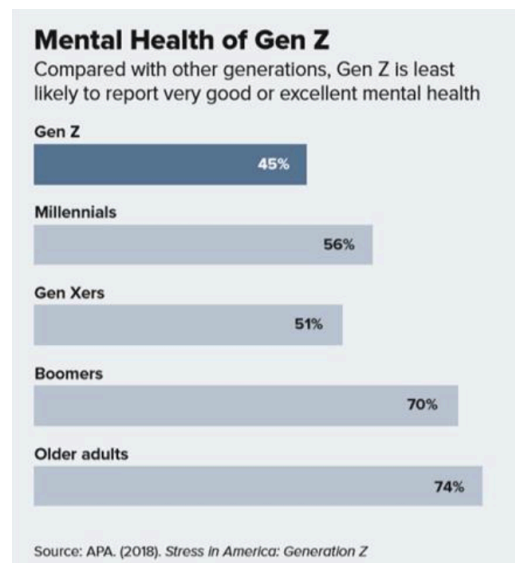
When the Gospel was presented to me as a teenager - it was presented as fire insurance. Turn OR Burn. Trust Jesus or you will burn in hell for eternity.

That made perfect sense to me - sign me up...
I don't want to be a crispy critter.

Today we are talking to a generation who has no concrete concept of God, Sin, Hell, Heaven, or Eternity.

Millennials tended to say, "I'm not religious but I am spiritual". Gen Z doesn't even claim a vague spirituality. They see themselves as purely secular.

But there are some aspects of reality that they just can't shake.



- Between 2005 and 2017, the rate of 12 to 17 year-olds who experienced a major depressive episode in the past year rose by 52 percent.
- In young people ages 18 to 25, the percentage with depression rose by 63 percent.
- The rate of 18 to 19 year olds who had suicidal thoughts, plans or attempts rose from 8.5 percent in 2008 to 12.4 percent in 2017.

3. Become Fluent in PreEvangelism

When I was a teenager - if someone said they were an Atheist, it was the God they talked about down at the Baptist Church, they didn't believe in. We at least had a starting point.

Today - very, very, few are self proclaimed Atheist.

- For something to be Amoral there has to be a standard of morality from which they separate themselves.
- For someone to be Atheistic, there must be a standard of Deity that they disbelieve in.

Generation Z - has not examined God and found the evidence lacking, they've simply never given it serious consideration.

They are more likely to believe in Aliens than a Supreme Deity.

They have wrestled far more with the concept of Aliens than they have the Concept of an all powerful Creator.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

In this series we are going to look at three questions you must be able to answer intelligently when it comes to reaching the next generation: **Is God There? Has God Spoken? Is Jesus the Only Way?**

- May we be like the men of Issachar.. who had understanding of the times, to know what we ought to do...
- May we be like Paul who became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some...
- May we be like Jesus, who left the comfort of Glory to walk in our sinful presence...

WHERE ARE YOU ON THE SPECTRUM?