

**This Missional Moment:
Evangelizing and Discipling the Next Generation**

Things I've learned ...

I want to talk to us about a cultural moment we find ourselves in ..

As a church planter and pastor who's on the ground ...

Evangelizing and discipling the next gen, especially gen Z ..

Globally, Gen Z is the largest generation in history — **2 billion people**, constituting 26% of the total world population.

My theology would lead me to believe that is a sovereign, missional moment.

Acts 17:26-27

"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and **he marked out their appointed times in history** and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

Did you hear that?

God marks out the appointed times of every generation. He determines how large they are, where they land, and when they show up in history and the reason

He does it explicitly missionally. He does it *so that they would seek him*.

Which means the Gen Z in your city, the ones in your neighborhood, on your campus, in your church ..

God placed them there. Not randomly. Not incidentally, but purposefully.

The assumption of this text is this:

God has already positioned people in your city to be found in Christ. They are not too far gone. They are not too hard to reach.

He is not far from any one of them ..

Before Paul , Jesus said it this way:

The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few.

So here's the tension.

If God has sovereignly placed the largest generation in human history on the earth .. and positioned them in our cities to seek him .. why is the church in the West largely losing them?

... the data suggest good news and bad news:

According to Barna's most comprehensive church study in 25 years —

Good news:

Gen Z now leads every other generation in church attendance frequency.

Not Boomers. Not Gen X. Gen Z.

Barna's CEO is calling it a "generational reversal."

The young people who are showing up are showing up with more hunger than any generation in recent memory” one analyst said.

Bad news:

Pew Research reports that Gen Z is the least religiously affiliated generation in American history.

One reason for this is their parents ... Gen Z is also the generation least likely to have grown up in church, attended Sunday school, or prayed over a meal with their family.

What does that mean?

We have both a resurgence and retreat.

Some Gen Z are showing up with more hunger than we've seen in decades.

Meanwhile, a growing majority are completely unchurched and unaffiliated.

So how do we labor well at this moment?

I want to look at Paul.

Not just the Mars Hill sermon — we know that text and there's been extensive teaching on that

. I want to zoom out and look at his overall missionary strategy

What can we learn, because objective truth ..

He was the most effective missionary in human history.

What can we learn from Paul's overall missionary strategy for reaching a generation like Gen Z?

Because if we're going to reach the next generation, here's the case I want to make:

We need to shift from thinking only like pastors to thinking like missionaries.

We're not just pastors in our cities, we are missionaries in our city.

And if anyone had reason to say, "This culture is too far gone," it was Paul.

.. show of hands ...

Has anyone been shipwrecked?

Beaten, whipped? Imprisoned?

He faced obstacles far greater than most of us will ever encounter ... yet he saw entire cities turned upside down by the gospel.

So the question for us becomes:

What was his missionary mindset, and how do we embody that as we labor among Gen Z?

1. Paul went to the largest city in the region and planted churches there.

Philippi — Acts 16:12 *"From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia."* Luke specifically notes it's the *leading city*. That's not accidental.

Thessalonica — Acts 17:1 *"When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue."* He passed through smaller towns to get to the regional hub.

Corinth — Acts 18:1 *"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth."* Corinth was the commercial capital of Greece — the most strategically connected city in the region.

Ephesus — Acts 19:1 *"Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus."* Capital of the province of Asia. Everything flowed through it.

Rome — Romans 15:23-24 *"But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain."* Rome was the next hub. Spain after that. Paul was always thinking regionally through cities.

He went to hub cities.

Why because that's where the people are.

If the gospel is going to spread, He had to meet them where they are.

Am I telling us that we need to leave our city to go to another no?

But I am saying if we are oing to reach gen Z, we need to show up where they are ...

And you know where they are ...

On their phones.

9 hours on screens

4-5 hours a day on social media

They have their own hubs,

Here's my thought:

If we are going to get serious about reaching the next generation, we have to get serious about social media

There was a point in our church where every 8 out of 10 people came through social media.

Here's how I think about it personally:

Social Media Strategy 1: Counter-Catechesis (discipleship)

Only 4% of Gen Z has a biblical worldview. But they are being catechized — daily, aggressively, relentlessly.

TikTok is discipling them.

Therapy culture is discipling them.

The "do you" gospel is discipling them.

Every hour they spend on their phones, their worldview is being shaped by what they see.

So through our church & through my personal account, I want to help shape their thinking.

Social Media Strategy 2: Beauty (evangelism)

Make beautiful content.

I know someone's going to say — that's shallow. And I get it. I've heard it. But here's what I'd say back:"

When Samuel showed up to anoint the next king of Israel, he saw Eliab — tall, impressive, looked the part — and thought, *that's the guy*. And God said to him:

"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." — 1 Samuel 16:7

Now here's what's interesting about that verse.

God isn't making a critique of aesthetics.

He's making a critique of *priority*

He's not saying appearance doesn't matter. He's saying don't let it be the only thing. God looks at the heart, man looks at the outward appearance.

I'm not trying to reach God, I'm trying to reach man.

I don't think the point is that there is something inherently wrong with being attracted to that which is beautiful.

Pete Nicholas, writing from the Gospel in Life community, makes a point that is directly relevant here.

In a post-truth generation ... where truth claims are received as power plays ... leading with propositional argument alone won't open doors.

But beauty will.

Creativity and beauty matters to God.

One of the first ways God reveals himself to us is as Creator.

.. but it also matters to those created i his image.

If we are going to reach a generation that lives on a visual, aesthetic medium — beauty isn't shallow. Beauty is a missionary strategy.

What Jesus said to his disciples then, he says to us.

2. Paul preached the gospel contextualized not compromised.

Paul never changed the truth. But he did adjust how he applied the truth.

To Jews he started with Moses. To Greeks he started with their own poets. At the Areopagus he found an altar to an unknown god and said — *"what you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you."*

Same gospel. Different entry point. Contextualized — not compromised.

Jesus and His gospel is still the best that we have to offer.

The gospel of Jesus is still the most attractive and compelling reality we have to offer the next generation.

The reason the gospel is still the answer is because ultimately sin is still the problem.

I know that sounds simple. But I think we need to say it out loud — because there's a temptation to look at Gen Z and think we're dealing with something entirely new ..

New pronouns. New sexuality. New identity frameworks. New everything.

Read your Old Testament.

The generation that crossed the Red Sea built a golden calf forty days later ... Exodus 32.

The generation that saw Joshua conquer the promised land turned to Baal before Joshua was even in the ground Judges 2.

The generation after that worship Asherah— 1 Kings 14.

Different idols. Same problem

They aren't worshipping Jesus. In every generation, our sin manifest itself in breaking the first commandment.

Putting something in the place of God in our hearts.

For Gen Z — the idol is self.

Self-fulfillment. Self-actualization. Self-expression.

The "do you" gospel. It tells young people — the problem isn't your sin. The problem is that you're being held back. Just be yourself. Free yourself.

Express yourself.

And here's the only problem with that gospel ... it's not working.

We know it and they know it.

We know it. And honestly — they know it too.

The most self-expressed generation in history is the most anxious. The most connected generation in history is the loneliest. The generation with more freedom to define themselves than any before them — is the most confused about who they are.

The wells are empty. And a generation is thirsty.

Which is exactly why the gospel is still the most attractive and compelling reality we have to offer. Not because we've packaged it well. Because it's the only thing that actually answers what they're actually looking for.

Here's the thread I want to pull through everything:

The life they truly desire is not achieved — it's received.

It doesn't flow from them. It flows from God. And that changes everything.

So in our preaching and in our leading — here's what we show them ... in the gospel they get a ..

Sub points:

- A Better Identity — Received, Not Achieved

Identity is the one moral absolute left in our culture. "You gotta be yourself. Do you."

The problem is — telling someone to be themselves when they don't actually know who they are doesn't produce the life they want.

Any identity constructed from the inside out — without reference to God — is unstable. It shifts with your feelings, your relationships, your circumstances. It can't hold the weight of a life.

But in Christ — you receive an identity. You don't build it. You don't earn it. You don't perform your way into it. It's given.

Keller was asked — if you were starting over, what would you emphasize? He said identity. How the gospel gives us a secure identity.

I tell people all the time — do you really like that major you declared, or do you like the status it gives you? Do you really like that job, or the status? Here's the good news — there is no status on earth that compares to what you have in Christ.

Not achieved. Received.

Jesus is the only one who can fulfill the deepest desires of the human heart.

- A Better Community — Belonging Without Performing

Keller said — "To be fully known and truly loved is a lot like being loved by God. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our

self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us."

3. Paul moved in the power of the Holy Spirit

Here's something we can't skip over when we talk about Paul's missionary strategy.

He didn't just have a good methodology. He had the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:11 — "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul."

And before Paul ever went anywhere — before the first missionary journey, before Athens, before Ephesus, before any of it — Jesus made a promise to his disciples:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." — Acts 1:8

Notice the sequence.

Power first. Then witness.

Not — go witness and hope it works out. Power first. Then witness.

Here's my point, I think we need to primarily focus on how we can compete with culture, but be a counter culture centered on power and presence of God.

I'm not anti cool lights

I'm not anti giveaways

I'm not anti slick campaigns

What can't they get from the culture?

The presence of God, prayer for their problems , a prophetic word, laying on of hands. The gifts of the Spirit , healthy relationships. Family , belonging.

Ultimately the only way to ..