

# MILLENNIALS: OUR MANDATE AND THEIR MYSTIQUE

{A Five-Part Series by Gwen Diaz}



## I. PASSING THE BATON

When Ed and I attended the University of Pennsylvania, we loved to sneak away from our studies to watch the Penn Relays from the antiquated bleachers of Franklin Field. Although the competition included all aspects of track and field, the relay races were always our favorite.

It didn't take long to figure out that speed was not the sole determining factor in the outcome of these events. It was absolutely vital for each runner to pass the baton in such a way that his teammate could grasp it securely. If this exchange did not take place smoothly, there was no chance of winning the race. We saw more than one baton bounce off the track and land in a different lane.

God makes it abundantly clear that it is the responsibility of each generation to pass His truths on to the next generation. This mandate is clearly given in Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 6:5-9 and reiterated several times in the Psalms. (You can find it in Psalm 78:4-7 and particularly in Psalm 71:17-18, the scripture from which Ed and I derive our ministry logo.) It's as if each of us is competing in a relay race, and it is our role to pass the baton to the younger runners who will then take the lead as they prepare to pass what they have learned on to the next generation.

It is obvious that God is not only concerned with how well we run our own leg of this spiritual race. He is just as concerned with how carefully and efficiently we place the baton in the hands of the young runners who will continue the race when our lap is finished – the ones whose responsibility it is to pass it on to the next generation.

Recently this vital skill seems to have become extremely difficult to accomplish – perhaps more so than at any other time in modern history. Ed and I have felt ourselves stretched to our limits as we have extended our arms out further and further, waiting for a hand to reach back and grasp the baton, only to discover that no one is there. No one is waiting to receive the prized baton we are desperately trying to pass on!

We began to wonder if the problem is ours – have we grown too old and out of touch to continue running in this race?

Or does the problem lie with the younger generation – the ones we have dubbed 'Millennials?' Are they completely uninterested in the truths God offers?

We know that the baton has not changed. It has been the same since the day God gave it to Adam and Eve to pass on to their kids and grandkids.

After doing a lot of study about Millennials, I have come to the conclusion that the problem is not theirs. Nor does it have to do with the fact that we are no longer capable of competing. It has to do with the fact that we keep showing up at the wrong site. The race is no longer being run on our home track. Newer stadiums have been erected, and if we want to be part of the relay team, we have to show up where competition is actually taking place.



### ***What I have discovered about Millennials:***

A 'Millennial' is generally identified as a young adult born sometime after 1980 and coming of age in the new millennium. The Pew Research Center places most of them somewhere between the ages of 19 and 36 in 2016. (Some demographers refer to them as 'Generation Y' and assign slightly different years as group parameters.)

Millennials are the first generation not to ever experience life without the internet, and they possess a huge variety of digital devices by which to access it. They carry a complete research library in their back pocket, create their own movie theater experiences while lying in bed, and access a complete shopping mall from a tiny device they hold in the palm of their hand.

So, is it any wonder that Millennials prefer to run the race on their own home turf? No longer are they shackled by location or tradition in their social or educational lives, so they balk at the restrictions that a typical church or study group might require. Studies by research experts like Barna Group and LifeWay Research have been reporting a Millennial mass exodus from traditional churches for years. And most of those who have departed are making no plans to return!

Millennials have already surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest living generation in the United States. According to Pew Research Center, as of April 2016, an estimated 69.2 million Millennials were voting age citizens. We must come up with a way to reach them. It is our duty to think outside of the current box, beyond the old stadiums with their outdated structures and systems that we have relied on for centuries, if we are serious about fulfilling God's mandate to continue the passing of His truths from one generation to another.

I do not believe that the most destructive force confronting our children and grandchildren comes from terrorists, or storms, or earthquakes, or illness. These can demolish and devastate their physical lives and livelihoods. But a far greater threat, one that has the potential to destroy their souls, is looming. It is inherent in our failure to communicate God's truths to the next generation. We cannot let this happen. We must work diligently to find a way to pass them on. We cannot drop the baton!

In the next four sections we will look more closely at this Millennial generation. We will attempt to explain the mystique that makes them so difficult to minister to and propose some new approaches to create ministry opportunities.