

MILLENNIALS: OUR MANDATE AND THEIR MYSTIQUE

{A Five-Part Series by Gwen Diaz}



2. MISSING OUR TEAMMATES

In the last section we discussed the mandate that God has given us to pass His truths on to the next generation. We determined that Millennials, the generation we are responsible to impact and who are currently between the ages of 19 and 36, are very difficult to reach spiritually. We discovered that they comprise the largest living generation in the United States. Couple this with the fact that those who grew up in churches are exiting at an alarming rate, and we find ourselves in the midst of a dilemma. We are standing on an antiquated track, holding a golden baton and desperately searching for the next teammate to hand it off to.

We cannot drop this baton. We have an obligation to figure out how to pass the message of Jesus Christ on to the Millennial generation so they can in turn pass it on to the next generation. But how can we do this?

First, I suggest that we take a closer look at who Millennials really are, what they are most interested in, and why they seem to be so hard to reach.

Millennials grew up differently than any generation before them. For starters, they were plugged into the Internet from the day they were born. Because of this, they are much more technologically proficient and far more connected to the world around them than their parents.

But despite their global awareness, the focus of their upbringing and education has been on them as individuals. From their earliest days they have been taught that they are special. Special programs were designed for each of their special needs and special rewards given for each of their special (and sometimes not-so-special) accomplishments. Highly involved parents stressed the importance of self-esteem, indulging their children with every opportunity they could afford.

Because of their superior understanding of technology, their extremely high level of education, and their coddled upbringing, Millennials often come across as overly confident – sometimes even cocky. Yet, because they are so accustomed to receiving praise, they seek (and seem to actually need) constant approval. If they find themselves in a position that does not affirm them on a regular basis, they are likely to seek another arrangement.

This, and the fact that they are easily bored with repetitive situations, makes them less than ideal employees. They are known to be frequent job-hoppers and therefore somewhat risky to hire. They can quickly transform a company and take it to new heights with their technological skills but are not likely to remain once the programs they initiated and the devices they introduced are running smoothly.

The fabulous education they received came with a great price – and therefore great debt. That, and the fact that they are picky about their employment (refusing to accept jobs that don't fulfill or excite them), has resulted in the reality that a full one third of all Millennials move back home after college to save on expenses.



Much of their education was an experiment in integrated learning. Their curriculum was not always packed neatly into distinct spaces for different subjects. English, math, geography, history, art, music, etc. could all be learned together in the context of a Conestoga wagon traveling along the Oregon Trail. Perhaps this academic amalgamation contributes to the fact that Millennials don't seem to like well-defined boxes. Nothing is black and white. There is very little discussion of right and wrong. Everything is based on what feels right to them.

This blurring of boundaries has become a trademark of their lifestyle. Often the things they do seem contradictory and confusing:

- They fight for women's rights and healthy lifestyles; while much of their music degrades women and exalts drugs.
- They idolize people like Kim Kardashian; and mock others like Tim Tebow.
- They are not willing to work for things they want if the task does not interest them; yet they don't seem to appreciate much of what they are given.
- They are great team players (since much of their learning involved group projects); yet they yearn for personal recognition and accolades.
- One of their core values is authenticity; yet the social image they portray is usually anything but!
- They are completely invested in their community of friends; but only a marginal amount of their communications take place face to face. (It is interesting to note that they prefer to watch TV in real time – seldom recording on DVR's – so they can tweet back and forth with their friends as the events actually unfold.)
- Because of their digital connectivity, they expect immediate responses to their requests; yet their personal lives are not time-based at all. They live their lives according to their own schedules.

So how can we best pass our precious baton on to a generation that seems to be running a completely different race in a completely different stadium? First, we must be willing to enter their new state-of-the-art arena without allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by its technology and innovation. We must surrender some of our need for organization and orderliness. And we must pray that God will give us the wisdom to distinguish His truth from our own preferences. Ministering to Millennials may seem confusing and will definitely be chaotic, but it is our responsibility – actually, our *mandate*, from God.

We will look further into some of the ministry methods and opportunities available to us in the next section.