

# MILLENNIALS: OUR MANDATE AND THEIR MYSTIQUE

{A Five-Part Series by Gwen Diaz}



## 3. FINDING THE RIGHT STADIUM

The dimensions of an Olympic relay baton are very specific. It must be 28-30 centimeters long; 12-13 centimeters in circumference; and weigh at least 50 grams. Any variations result in disqualification.

In the last two articles, we talked about the fact that we are in a spiritual relay race. God has handed us a baton to pass on to the next generation, and the dimensions of the baton are every bit as precise as those for an Olympic baton. They are given to us in the Bible and include the following facts:

- God is holy and we are not.
- Our sinfulness separates us from God's holy presence.
- But God loves us so much that He sent Jesus, His only son, to die on the cross and take the spiritual consequences of our sins. He was separated from his Father so that we don't have to spend eternity apart from Him.
- When we accept the fact that Jesus died for our sins on the cross then rose again, we become God's children and part of His forever family.

We've discussed how difficult it seems to be to pass this incredible baton on to the next generation – to the young adults we call Millennials. They don't seem at all interested in receiving it. As we look ahead, we can't find anyone wearing running shoes, anxiously waiting in our lane, and reaching back to accept the message we are trying to hand off. As a matter of fact, most Millennials are nowhere in sight! They have left the stadium we are in to build a more modern one of their own – and most of us didn't even notice.

We must come to grips with the fact that it may be time for us to run this race on a different track – taking God's required baton with us.

Paul did this often. In Acts 17 he showed up in Athens and engaged this new culture in *their* marketplace and at *their* places of learning. He used *their* own unique passions and interests and viewpoints as a springboard to present the truths of the Gospel. Paul met them where *they* were and then led them to the cross. He always chose to minister to others in the context of their lives. In I Corinthians 9:20-23, he explained that he was willing to do anything short of sin to share the message of Jesus. Contextualization is vital if we are going to reach Millennials. It has nothing to do with changing scriptural truths to fit their culture. It has everything to do with going into their culture and reaching out in places and ways they can understand.



Recently Ed and I have re-focused our ministry on young adults – primarily those who fit into the Millennial generation. As a result we have become much more engaged in their culture. We spend a lot of our time observing and listening and learning. Slowly we are beginning to understand a few of the things that make them unique and discover some of the ways we can best minister in their context.

1. For starters, nothing in their lives seems to fit into the tidy boxes we like to provide – e.g., they function in fuzzy time frames. Although some ministry has to be tied to the hands on a clock, we can't take it personally if they arrive late or leave early. We should be happy when they show up and pray that God will use the time they are there.
2. Cell phones are a vital part of their anatomy. So, if they attend church, they *will* use them during the service – for looking up Bible verses; for snapping photos of interesting ministry slides; for saving memorable quotes; and, yes, for checking their twitter and Facebook posts. (Don't judge. This isn't much different from when you used to doodle.)
3. Planning and vision meetings are generally useless. Getting together at Starbucks next Tuesday (unless something else comes up) is about as far ahead as they are willing to schedule.
4. Millennials aren't interested in programs (which is good given #3). They are far more attracted to relationships. They find meaning in the context of community, and are searching for a deep, authentic, community rather than a fabulous agenda. Although they love having fun together, they want to move beyond watching football games to answering important questions of life.
5. If they plan a service it will have very little structure, and sermon organization is not high on their priority list. They prefer heart-felt authenticity to well-researched data. They can always Google the data later if they want it.
6. Although they don't seem to have much time or respect for their elders, they are actually longing to be mentored by someone who truly lives out their faith. They are looking for authentic (there's that word again) role models who honestly share their struggles.
7. They love stories – genuine, quality stories – especially about humanity! And if we can produce a vision filled with hope from that story, we've got a winner.
8. They want to know that we care about the poor, the homeless, and the needy more than we do about church structure and events. They want us to help them make a difference in the world.
9. They want to be part of a movement that is bigger than they are, and they love to watch "their" movement develop and grow on social media. So creating an appealing presence on Facebook and twitter is key to involving them in ministry and philanthropy.
10. They want their church to be a place where everyone feels welcomed and comfortable.

Yes, it is possible (and vital) to pass the baton on to the next generation. But the race is best run in the context of their culture – in a stadium where they are comfortable.