

Millennials, Who Are They and What Do They Want?

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Abstract

Because of the magnitude of their numbers, the millennial generation is one of the most discussed focus groups in churches today. Millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) constitute a group of over 80 million individuals that comprises the largest number of religiously unaffiliated individuals in American history. Research literature shows that Millennials are leaving churches of all cultural and stylistic types, adding to the decline in the Church. This paper will use qualitative analysis in a focused literature review. An overview of a few of the key authors and researchers who are helping to reach millennials and give churches and leaders practical components to work into their church culture is viewed through the lens of Millennial generation literature. This paper discusses the implications and applications of the findings of the research. The intentions of this study were threefold: to show the Church how to be engaging to Millennials where they are, to be welcoming in its approach to Millennials, and accepting in the Church's viewpoints of the culture of Millennials.

Keywords: Millennials, religion, churches, culture, researchers

Millennials, Who Are They and What Do They Want?

Because of their numbers, the millennial generation is one of the most discussed focus groups in churches and education. The emergence of Millennials as a group has garnered much attention. McFarland & Jimenez (2017) argue that due to the millennial generation being the largest generation since the baby boomers, many people have written books, articles, and blogs about the Millennials and how to engage them in business, education, and the church. One unique characteristic which places the millennial generation apart from previous generations is that they are less religious, increasingly unaffiliated with any religion, and attend religious worship services less than older adults (Pew Research Center, Religion & Public Life Project, 2010).

The paradigm of culture that surrounds Millennials makes them an important topic of study for the church, because the millennials are leaving church pews empty. McFarland and Jimenez (2017) opined that millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) constitute a group of over 80 million individuals who are technologically astute, ethnically diverse, and culturally and vibrantly engaged. Yet they comprise the largest number of religiously unaffiliated individuals in American history. Survey research on this population revealed 59% to 70% have stopped attending church in the United States (Kinnaman, 2011; McConnell, 2007). Ranier and Ranier (2011) suggest that this generation is less likely to care about religion or spiritual matters than previous generations. Church attendance has been decreasing with each generation. The Millennial generation illustrates that trend. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) rarely or never attend religious services. About one-fourth (24 percent) are active in church (meaning they attend at least once a week). This might suggest that a number of Millennials who attend church do so as seekers.

This paper purposes to give a synopsis of the Millennial generation, overview a few of the key authors and researchers who are helping to reach them, and give churches and leaders practical components to work into their church culture to make churches and the gospel more appealing to the Millennial generation. This then brings up the question this study seeks to answer: “Who are the Millennials and what do they want from the Church? The church must find a way to figure out who the millennials are by studying their characteristics and what Millennials want by listening to them and addressing their concerns. The question is answered when churches engage Millennials where they are, be welcoming in their approach to Millennials and, be accepting in their viewpoints of the culture of Millennials, Only after these issues are addressed will the Church reappear as a powerful source of community for Millennials.

From the analysis of my data, I will argue that only by being engaging to Millennials where they are, welcoming in its approach to Millennials, and accepting in the Church’s viewpoints of the culture of Millennials will the Church be able to answer the question of who the millennials are and what they want from the Church today. This study is not a comprehensive solution to the problem of the church or the millennial generation but a starting point to help leaders who hope to reach the Millennials. This study does not present a comprehensive solution to the problem of the church or the millennial generation but a tool to help religious leaders who hope to reach the Millennials.

Methods

Using both Christian literature and research and literature from secular organizations to discover how churches can facilitate the return of Millennials to the church, this study will primarily be a focused literature review, with an emphasis on better understanding the millennial generation. The method of research is content and qualitative analysis. Using content analysis as

one technique assists in making the researcher objective and systematic in approach as well as keeping the method replicable (Krippendorff, 1980). Using qualitative analysis assisted the researcher in drawing and verifying conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study focused on the research questions in order to answer the questions as well as draw conclusions. Through the content analysis the researcher will recognize common themes and make recommendations. The qualitative, interpretative research is mainly from primary sources. Qualitative data provides the researcher with identifiable processes, descriptions, and explanations that will assist the researcher in going beyond the obvious to critically think on the topic and revise conceptual frameworks in order to draw conclusions (2018)

Literature Review

Millennial generation literature is extensive. Howe and Straus (1991) warn that Millennials should not be confused with the Gen-X generation, also known as the "Thirteenth Generation," born from 1961-1980. This paper will examine Generation Y, also called Millennials, through the lens of the millennial generation literature. The characteristics that make them unique will be reviewed to help lead readers to the same opinions of the authors as to why the methods used by Church leadership are so vital to reach this group of people.

The research of authors and groups (e.g. The Pew Research Center (2010); Barna Group (2015); Streep (2012); Ranier & Ranier (2011); Kinnaman (2011); Sanford & Hayworth (2002); The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2015), and peer reviews are presented to suggest ideas that are critical to churches reaching the Millennials. The paper does not include every idea proposed by the supporting theorists and writers, but rather it summarized some of the ideas into some steps necessary for church leadership to transition their culture into a welcoming environment for Millennials.

Topics on Identity, Priorities, Outlook, Technology and Social Media, Work and Education, Family Values, Lifestyle, Politics, Ideology, Civic Engagement, Religious Beliefs, and Behaviors was provided in The Pew Research Center report (2010). The report was drawn from information carried out by seven projects, including: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Pew Internet and American Life Project, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Pew Hispanic Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, and Pew Social and Demographic Trends Project. The mass exodus from church pews nationwide has been studied at length in recent years by the Pew Research Center ((Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life Project, 2010) which tracks Millennials by state, religion and faith. Its research has found that no religion has been safe in these drastic membership losses, each religion is trying to find a way to bring Millennials back to the fold. The Pew Forum's study, *None's on the Rise* (2012) found that Millennials have turned away from organized religion because they view the Church as being too involved in conservative politics, and they would rather have nothing to do it. Pew Forum argues that as a result, Millennials view the Church and religion in general as being judgmental, homophobic, and too political.

The decline in denominational churches is in response to the lack of interest in church affiliation for Millennials. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2012) noted that "mainline protestant", once the most prominent denomination, has steadily declined over the past decade. Denominations have failed to provide satisfaction to this generation. This upcoming generation has already forced the church to embrace its humanity, including fallibility, but the full effects of this generation on religious communities are still to be seen. Millennials are the youngest defined generation and as such their impact on religious practices, spirituality, and the

church are still not fully developed. Changes will continue to appear as this generation matures to become policy makers, thought leaders, and, with their own children, nurture a new generation.

For this generation, many influences may be drawn upon, including: peer group, social media, popular culture as well as family upbringing. Peer groups provide a measure from which to draw personal fulfillment. Through social media, Millennials are able to have a more in-depth understanding of how they compare to their peers in terms of career, opportunities, and relationships. Streep (2012) called this comparison the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where Millennials are more likely to change their minds or their careers for fear of missing out on personal fulfillment, missing a career niche, or even being unable to find a partner. These influences, as well as others, emphasize the globalized, public forum, which is natural to this generation. No longer are localized, singular knowledge provided by the church sufficient for these individuals. Instead, Millennials draw upon a variety of factors, with religion being one of the multiple factors upon which opinions, ideals, and experiences can be filtered (2012).

The church has profoundly affected Millennials in that they still believe in the afterlife. Weber (1922) noted that one of the key promises made to religious followers is a promise in the afterlife. This still remains a core component of the church, and still is reflected in the upcoming generation of Millennials. Furthermore, a staunch belief that their religion is the correct religion is reminiscent of the semi-divine status the church has presented since its inception (Bellah, 1970). This strength in convictions is also evident in the Millennial belief of absolute right and wrong. Although interpretations may be becoming more flexible, strength of convictions stems from the character of the church to Millennials. The optimistic outlook of Millennials shows a strong belief in fate and understanding that God will provide. Although faced with hardship in

the unemployment situations, optimism remains among this generation that they will have enough money and will meet their financial goals. This optimism about the future is similar to the optimism of the church about the afterlife. Like the belief that better days lie ahead in heaven, Millennials believe that better days lie ahead beyond their unemployment. The optimism and tenacity of this belief reflects the church's optimism as well. Furthermore, values traditionally focused upon under the church paradigm remain important values for Millennials, despite their lower church participation.

Areas such as marriage, family and helping others are the top three ranked values for this generation. More so than other generations, Millennials are seeking aid in these areas outside the church, which has dethroned the church as a central part of marriage and parenthood. Similarly, helping others remains of high importance, however not necessarily under the emphasis of evangelism. Instead, helping others has evolved into simply a tenant of good citizenship and humanism. These values, which are often fostered in the church, are still relevant and important to Millennials. The fact that these values remain important emphasizes the impact churches have had and continue to have in the lives of Millennials.

Ranier and Ranier's (2011) survey of 1,200 older Millennials (born between 1980 and 1991) provides a detailed look at this generation. First, they are on track to become America's most educated generation. In 2007, the first year the twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-old age group was entirely comprised of Millennials, 30 percent had attained a college degree. Second, Millennials view marriage differently than previous generations. They are marrying later, if at all. The average age for first marriage has increased approximately five years since 1970 for both men and women. About 65 percent of young adults cohabit at least once prior to marriage, compared to just 10 percent in the 1960s. When it comes to marriage, Millennials are still

optimistic about it even though they grew up in a world where divorce was common. They were asked to respond to the following statement: “It is likely that I will marry more than one time in my life.” For those who responded, 86 percent disagreed that they will marry more than once. Apparently most Millennials plan to marry once or not at all. It is also worth noting that Millennials are marrying much later than any generation that had preceded them. Millennials also view marriage differently in part because of the political battles concerning same-sex marriage and the definition of marriage. In the survey of Millennials, they were asked to respond to this statement: “I see nothing wrong with two people of the same gender getting married.” Six in ten agree with the statement (40 percent strongly agreed, 21 percent agreed somewhat. Put simply, a significant majority of Millennials see nothing wrong with same-sex marriage. It is only logical however, that millennials will re-strengthen the family unit because they were the first generation to grow up with entirely fractured families: mothers, fathers, and grandparents in separate houses, miles apart. This “turning” toward stronger families can be viewed as an attempt to correct the mistakes of past generations. Generation X was the first generation to make divorce common in the United States and this had such a profound effect on millennials continues into their adulthood.

Ranier and Ranier (2011) were astounded at how Millennials view themselves when it comes to religion. Millennials are the least religious generation in American history and they may say that they are spiritual, but only a small fraction of them say that is important in their lives. The sad reality is that most Millennials don’t think about religion at all. Perhaps the most amazing response from the survey of Millennials was that they are hopeful. Consider their response to the simple statement: “I believe I can do something great.” About 60 percent agreed strongly with this statement, and another 36 percent agreed somewhat. That was almost every

respondent, 96 percent in total. When Millennials were asked about parental involvement, 89 percent responded that they received guidance and advice from their parents. It turns out that the Boomers are helping Millennials make decisions about work and life. While previous generations might have rejected such advice, 87 percent of Millennials view their parents as a positive source of influence. This positive view Millennials have of parents extends to the older generation as a whole. While Baby Boomers tended to be antiauthoritarian, Millennials have a very positive attitude towards those who are older. Of the Millennials interviewed, 94 percent said that they have a great respect for older generations.

The Millennial generation has been influenced by media and technology like no other generation. Social commentators made much of the influence of television on the Baby Boomers but the proliferation of Internet, smart phones, and social media has had an even greater impact on Millennials. When technology first comes on the scene, there are early adopters, then a significant majority, and finally laggards. There is one technology that Millennials always have in their hands: video games. "Video-game consoles are part of the industry that pulled in more than twenty billion dollars in revenue in 2008. If there was one form of technology that is easily identifiable with Millennials it is video games. When asked how they most frequently communicate when not actually with the other person, they rated phone first (39 percent), then texting (37 percent), and then e-mail (16 percent). At the bottom was by letter (1 percent). The survey also noticed a difference between older and younger Millennials. Put simply, the younger you are, the more likely you are to communicate by texting. Social media is also a significant part of the lifestyle of a Millennial. Although social media can be accessed in many ways, still the most pervasive is through the computer. In the Silent Generations through even the Boomer Generation, Church was a source of community. Churches may be found in the center of

neighborhoods, towns, or cities, and be idols of the idea of community. When people in previous generations thought of community, the Church was typically unified with that thought process, and typically connected to the sense of community, religion or not, being a Christian and going to Church were an unspoken (and sometimes spoken) expectation from those in the local, and even sometimes national, community. However, now, Millennials don't view the Church as being strongly connected to this sense of community that one must have to be successful. They view their online communities, their volunteer organizations, their social justice activists groups, their communities they have within their hobbies, and their religious communities as all being a part of the sense of community they describe. In a sense, across the generations, community used to be able to be clearly defined like a clear sheet of glass however, as generations began to leave and disaffiliate from communities in which affiliation was an unspoken expectation; the sense of community began to look much more like a mosaic. Millennials bring together a variety of different communities that they affiliate with, each individual community appearing as a singular broken piece of glass, and they bind them together with their identity, interests, and passions into something that makes up their definition of true community. It isn't one community now that defines community, but rather a variety of communities that decide how community will be defined (Ranier & Ranier, 2011).

Ranier and Ranier (2011) found that this generation is less likely to care about religion or spiritual matters than previous generations. When they were asked in an open-ended question what was important to them, spiritual matters were sixth on the list. Preceding them in importance were family, friends, education, career, and spouse/partner. When asked to describe themselves, two-thirds (65 percent) used the term Christian. Interestingly, nearly three in ten (28 percent) picked either atheism, agnosticism, or no preference. In other words, they have moved

completely away from certain beliefs in God. When asked if they were “born-again Christians”, using a precise definition provided by the interviewers, only 20 percent affirmed this definition of belief and experience. And when presented with seven statements about orthodox Christian belief, the researchers found that only 6 percent of Millennials could affirm them and thus could be properly defined as Evangelical. A third (34 percent) of Millennials said that no one can know what will happen when they die. But more than one-fourth (26percent) said they believe they will go to heaven when they die because they have accepted Christ as their Savior. Church attendance has been decreasing with each generation. The Millennial generation illustrates that trend. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) rarely or never attend religious services. About one-fourth (24 percent) are active in church (meaning they attend at least once a week). This might suggest that a number of Millennials who attend church do so as seekers. In other words, they are at least spiritually interested enough to visit a church even though they may not be saved. The Millennial generation presents a significant challenge for us as Christians. Additionally, there is now a burden of proof on the church to prove its continued applicability rather than on the individual church member. In other words, members are no longer shaping themselves to fit within the church community, but the church is proving its relevance and applicability in the member’s life. Whereas previously members were asked to fit the church mold, now the burden is on the church to prove it fits within the individual’s life.

Barna Group (which includes its research division, the Barna Research Group) is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. It conducts primary research, produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries. According to a Barna Group research release, nearly six in ten (59%) young people who grow up

in Christian churches end up walking away, and the unchurched segment among Millennials has increased in the last decade from 44% to 52%, mirroring a larger cultural trend away from churchgoing in America. Many faith communities and Christian organizations are struggling with how to make space for Millennials- not just appealing space in their buildings and gathering places, but also space in their institutional culture, ministry models and leadership approach. When asked what has helped their faith grow, *church* does not make even the top 10 factors.

Research from Barna Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network (2015) found that 67 percent of millennials prefer a “classic” church over a “trendy” one, and 77 percent would choose a “sanctuary” over an “auditorium.” While we have yet to warm to the word “traditional” (only 40 percent favor it over “modern”), millennials exhibit an increasing aversion to exclusive, closed-minded religious communities masquerading as the hip new places in town. For a generation bombarded with advertising and sales pitches, and for whom the charge of “inauthentic” is as cutting an insult as any, church rebranding efforts can actually backfire, especially when young people sense that there is more emphasis on marketing Jesus than actually following Him. Millennials “are not disillusioned with tradition; they are frustrated with slick or shallow expressions of religion,” argues Kinnaman (2011), president of the Barna Group who interviewed hundreds of them for Barna Group. Kinnaman (2011) divides these once church-going Millennials into three spiritual journeys, which he termed “nomads,” “prodigals” and “exiles.” These groups are derived from the most common answers given to a variety of questions about religious belief and attitudes toward Christianity, churches and faith. Their answers may help church leaders and cultural analysts better understand why some Millennials are migrating from a firm faith to a lackluster faith or no faith. The groups are:

1. Nomads

The most common spiritual journey is that of the nomads. This group is comprised of 18- to 29-year-olds with Christian backgrounds who walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians. A person in this group typically has trouble identifying with a church or a particular “brand” of Christianity, but would consider themselves, broadly, a Christian. This trend may exist because more than four-in-ten American young adults with a Christian background (43%) believe going to church and having Christian friends is optional. One-quarter of that same group say faith and religion just aren’t that important to them. Additionally, nearly one-fourth of Millennials with a Christian background (23%) say they used to be very involved in their church, but they just don’t fit in anymore. These are the people who have become the church’s nomads, young adults who see themselves as *personally* interested in God and religion, but not really in a formal or institutional expression of that faith. This is the group most likely to say they love Jesus but not the church—or that they are “spiritual but not religious.” They might appear to be wandering, but they would never claim to have lost their faith.

2. Prodigals

Prodigals, on the other hand, are those who have lost their faith. This group is made up of young adults who used to claim a personal faith, but no longer claim any Christian belief. In many of their answers in Barna Group surveys, they describe themselves as fairly certain they won’t ever return to the Christian faith. More than one-fifth of Millennials with a Christian background (21%) say Christian beliefs don’t make sense to them. Many prodigals also admit to having had a negative experience in church or with Christians (20% of 18- to 29-year-olds with a Christian background say this). Finally, 19% of young adults who have a Christian background

say their spiritual needs cannot be met by Christianity, another characteristic of prodigals. This is the group that most often gets lumped in with the “Nones,” even though they might not be totally opposed to faith and spirituality. Rather, they’ve often had some kind of experience or realization that has made it impossible to reconcile their life with the Christian faith. Often, this is either tied to some kind of intellectual change or emotional injury, leading to a long-term dismissal of the Christian faith.

3. Exiles

The final category of Millennials who struggle with the Christian faith can be termed “exiles.” This group has a tough time finding a place in a church setting, but has chosen to remain within an institutional church context. They feel “lost” somewhere between their commitments to church and their desire to stay connected with the world around them. These young adults with a Christian background struggle to connect their faith or church with their everyday lives, and yet they continue in their Christian faith despite these headwinds. More than one-fifth of Millennials with a Christian past (21%) say they remain Christian and continue to attend a church, but they find that church to be a difficult place for them to live out their faith. This group is defined by wanting to figure out how to follow Jesus in the day-to-day aspects of their lives. In fact, nearly four out of ten Millennials with a Christian background (38%) say they desire to follow Jesus in a way that connects with the world they live in. One-third of twentysomethings with a Christian background say God is more at work outside the church than inside the church, and they want to be a part of that. Notice they didn’t say they were *leaving* the church, but they desire a connection to a broader expression of faith. Exiles also search for ways to remain active participants in their surrounding culture without giving up their allegiance to Christ. Hence,

nearly one-third of American 18- to 29-year-olds with a Christian background (32%) says they want to be a Christian without separating themselves from the world around them.

Kinnaman said one of the key insights emerging from the tour was that “nomads, prodigals and exiles share something in common: being somewhere other than home. One of the characteristics of Millennial life has become the image of the traveler. They want to wander the world, both in real life and in digital ways. They want to feel untethered. There is a trend among young adults of delaying the pressures of adult life as long as possible; they want to embrace a lifestyle of risk, exploration and unscripted moments. At the same time, they want to be loyal to their peers. The generation has come to appreciate and take identity from a spiritual version of life on the road. In other words, it is a generation that is spiritually homeless.

Outside of the groups that have some type of religious affiliation, there are three subgroups within the religiously unaffiliated: Apatheists, Rejectionists, and Unattached Bellievers. Rejectionists hold the view that religion is not important to them personally, and that religion does more harm than good. Apatheists hold the view that religion is not important to them personally, but that it is more socially helpful than harmful. Of those two groups, 83% of Rejectionists and 76% of Apatheists rarely if ever attend worship services. Unattached Believers hold the view that religion is important to them personally, however that only makes up only 18% of the religiously unaffiliated, and 61% of them state that they attend worship services a few times a year. Respectively, 58% of the religiously unaffiliated are Rejectionists, and 22% are Apatheists. Ranier and Ranier (2011) found that only 3% of Rejectionists and 4% of Apatheists are looking for religion, unlike the Unattached Believers in which 22% state they are looking for a religion.

Discussion

Finally, the 127-page *Making Space for Millennials* full print report, produced in partnership with Barna Group and Cornerstone Knowledge Network presents an answer to the question of

where the Millennials are and what do they want. The report outlines Millennials as a generation and the impact their shared values, allegiances and assumptions will have on your church or organization as you make space for their ideas and influence. It recounts Millennials' perspectives on worship and community spaces and shares practitioners' views on the impact of culture, ministry, and leadership on the millennial generation:

1. Make room for meaningful relationships.

The first factor that will engage Millennials at church is as simple as it is integral: relationships. When comparing twentysomethings who remained active in their faith beyond high school and twentysomethings who dropped out of church, the Barna study uncovered a significant difference between the two. Those who stay were twice as likely to have a close personal friendship with an adult inside the church (59% of those who stayed report such a friendship versus 31% among those who are no longer active). The same pattern is evident among more intentional relationships such as mentoring—28% of Millennials who stay had an adult mentor at the church other than their pastor, compared to 11% of dropouts who say the same.

2. Teach cultural discernment.

A second important ministry outcome for today's Millennials is helping them develop discernment skills—especially in understanding and interpreting today's culture. For example, active Millennial Christians are more than twice as likely to say they “learned about how Christians can positively contribute to society” compared to those who drop out (46% versus 20%). Actives are also nearly four times more likely to say they “better understand my purpose in life through church” (45% versus 12%).

For a generation that already laments the complexity of modern life, the Church can offer valuable clarity. Millennials need help learning how to apply their hearts and minds to today's

cultural realities. In many ways, pop culture has become the driver of religion for Millennials, so helping them think and respond rightly to culture should be a priority.

3. Make reverse mentoring a priority.

A third thing Barna Group's team has learned about effective ministry to Millennials is that young people want to be taken seriously today—not for some distant future leadership position. In their eyes, institutional church life is too hierarchical. And they're not interested in earning their way to the top so much as they're want to put their gifts and skills to work for the local church in the present—not future—tense. The term “reverse mentoring” has come to describe this kind of give and take between young and established leaders. Kinnaman says, “Effective ministry to Millennials means helping these young believers discover their own mission in the world, not merely asking them to wait their turn. One way to think about this generation is that they are exiles in something like a ‘digital Babylon’—an immersive, interactive, image-rich environment in which many older believers feel foreign and lost. The truth is the Church needs the next generation's help to navigate these digital terrains.”

The research shows few churches help young people discover a sense of mission, though this too is important in cultivating a faith that lasts. Millennials who remain active in church are twice as likely as dropouts to say they served the poor through their church (33% versus 14%). They are also more likely to say they went on a trip that helped expand their thinking (29% versus 16%) and more likely to indicate they had found a cause or issue at church that motivates them (24% versus 10%).

4. Embrace the potency of vocational discipleship.

A fourth way churches can deepen their connection with Millennials is to teach a more potent theology of vocation, or calling. Millennials who have remained active are three times more

likely than dropouts to say they learned to view their gifts and passions as part of God's calling (45% versus 17%). They are four times more likely to have learned at church "how the Bible applies to my field or career interests" (29% versus 7%). A similar gap exists when it came to receiving helpful input from a pastor about education (21% versus 5%); though going so far as offering a scholarship (5% versus 2%) was not particularly widespread. "Most churches seem to leave this kind of vocation-based outcome largely at the door," comments Kinnaman, "unless these students show interest in traditional church-based ministry." But what Millennials are seeking goes beyond this. Kinnaman calls it "vocational discipleship," a way to help Millennials connect to the rich history of Christianity with their own unique work God has called them to.

5. Facilitate connection with Jesus.

Finally, more than a mere community club helping youth cross the threshold of adulthood, church communities can help Millennials generate a lasting faith by facilitating a deeper sense of intimacy with God. For example, Millennials who remain active are more likely than those who dropped out to say they believe Jesus speaks to them personally in a way that is real and relevant (68% versus 25%). Additionally, actives are much more likely to believe the Bible contains wisdom for living a meaningful life (65% versus 17%). "This means Millennials who retain a longer-lasting faith than their peers are more likely to find a sense of authority in the Word of God—both in the pages of the Bible as well as in their experience of intimacy with the God they follow," Kinnaman says. Kinnaman explains, "In part, it is a failure of not connecting Jesus and the Bible to the other outcomes identified in this research- relational, missional, vocational and cultural discernment. In other words, the version of 'Jesus in a vacuum' that is often packaged for young people doesn't last long compared to faith in Christ that is not compartmentalized but wholly integrated into all areas of life."

The lack of religious institution attendance is not due to a lack of faith, as members of the Millennial generation pray just as much as their ancestors (Pew Research, February 2010). However, Millennials are also likely to see evolution as a logical theory and support gay marriage (Pew Research, February 2010); both beliefs that have been opposed by many religious institutions. This strength in convictions is also evident in the Millennial belief of absolute right and wrong. Although interpretations may be becoming more flexible, strength of convictions stems from the character of the church to Millennials. The optimistic outlook of Millennials shows a strong belief in fate and understanding that God will provide. Although faced with hardship in the “great recession” unemployment, optimism remains among this generation that they will have enough money and/or will meet their financial goals. This optimism about the future is similar to the optimism of the church about the afterlife. Like the belief that better days lie ahead in heaven, Millennial believe that better days lie ahead beyond their unemployment. The optimism and tenacity of this belief reflects the church’s optimism as well. Furthermore, values traditionally focused upon under the church paradigm remain important values for Millennials, despite their lower church participation. Areas such as marriage, family and helping others are the top three ranked values for this generation. More so than other generations, Millennials are seeking aid in these areas outside the church, which has dethroned the church as a central part of marriage and parenthood. Similarly, helping others remains of high importance, however not necessarily under the emphasis of evangelism. Instead, helping others has evolved into simply a tenant of good citizenship and humanism. These values, which are often fostered in the church, are still relevant and important to Millennials. The fact that these values remain important emphasizes the impact churches have had and continue to have in the lives of Millennials.

Conclusion

The Church must respond in such a way that allows for change, and creates a space for Millennials to not only become involved, but to use their talents and capabilities to help the Church thrive. The Church, however, cannot reduce itself to be another institution that only tries to shape itself into what Millennials want, but rather must reevaluate itself and its own goals so that it doesn't appear as just another institutional advertisement, but rather as a cause that the Millennials can stand behind even if they disagree on some theological issues within its doctrine. By engaging Millennials where they are, the Church can prove to be authentic in their pursuits, welcoming in their approach, and accepting in their viewpoints. By embracing the precepts in this paper the Church can reappear in such a way that allows for change, and creates a place for Millennials to not only become involved, but to use their talents and capabilities to help the Church thrive. The principles in this study show the church how to be engaging to Millennials where they are, to be welcoming in its approach to Millennials, and accepting in the Church's viewpoints of the culture of Millennials.

Millennials may or may not be the next "greatest generation," but they are certainly the next largest. With about 80 million of them in the U.S., they are an important demographic for any organization to understand; churches are no exception. This upcoming generation has already forced the church to embrace its humanity, including fallibility, but the full effects of this generation on religious communities are still to be seen. Millennials are the youngest defined generation and as such their impact on religious practices, spirituality, and the church are still not fully developed. Changes will continue to appear as this generation matures.

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