



Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity

Challenges and Opportunities

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Who is Generation Z?

What is Spiritual Maturity?

How can we help?



Who is Generation Z?



Birth Years

1995 – 2010 (Seemiller & Grace)

1995 – 2012 (Twenge)

1999 – 2015 (Barna)

Currently 6 – 26 years old

“Sweet spot” = older half



Jean M. Twenge, PhD
author of *Generation Me*

iGen



Why Today's
Super-Connected
Kids Are Growing Up
Less Rebellious, More
Tolerant, Less Happy—
and Completely
Unprepared for
Adulthood*

*and What That Means for the Rest of Us



Generational Traits

Traits of Generation Z

1. “I’ve never had a job or a driver’s license, but I’m planning to start my own business.”
2. “I’m worried about money, but I still want to make a difference.”
3. “I’d rather lose a finger than give up my phone, but I spend too much time on screens.”
4. “I have a hard time coping.”
5. “Let’s keep everybody safe.”
6. “Of course you can be you, because I’ve got to be me.”
7. “I like church and God, but I wonder if they will work for me.”

I. I've never had a job or a driver's license, but I'm planning to start my own business.

pace and paths to adulthood

As teenagers, less likely to ... (Twenge, 19-20)

Go out without their parents

Ever go on dates

Get a driver's license or drive a car

Have a job

Have sex, try alcohol, or binge drink

Many want to start a business someday

I in 10 have already (Weise, 129)



2. I'm worried about money but I still want to make a difference.

(Weise, 127; Seemiller & Grace, 2016, 99-102)

education & achievement

Value Financial Security

Achievement Oriented

43% said professional/educational achievement is central to their sense of identity (Barna, 41)

More realistic about work (Twenge, ch 7)



2. I'm worried about money but I still want to make a difference.

education & achievement

Value helping people and making a difference

2/3 want their careers to have positive impact on world
(Seemiller & Grace, 2016, 2017)

Want to make an impact sooner, not later

“Can I count the hours I spend each week running my non-profit organization toward the community service hours required for this class?” (Seemiller, 2017)



3. I'd rather lose a finger than give up my phone, but I spend too much time on screens.

Screens & social media

As of 2019

5 - 6 hours per day on smart phone

1 - 2 hours per day on other entertainment screens

(Barna, 2021)

Where is this time coming from? (Twenge, 2017, ch 2)

Sleep

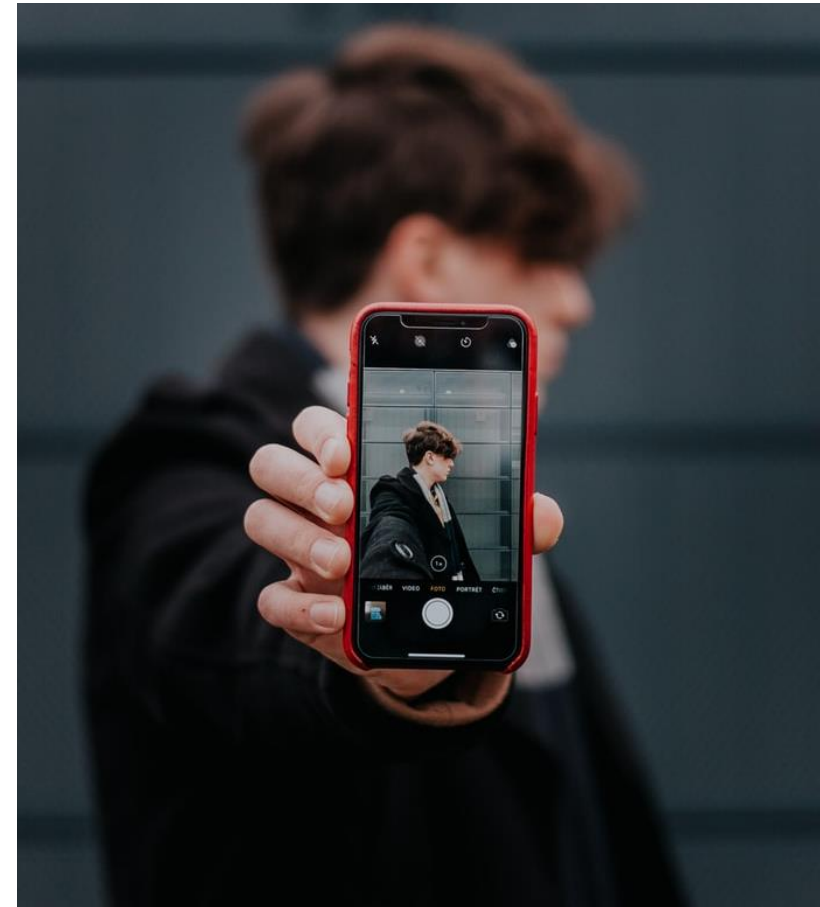
Face to face interaction

What do they think of their generation's screen time?

(Barna, 2021)

60% too much

25% just right



4. I have a hard time coping. (Twenge, ch 4)

stress & mental health

Decreasing

Happiness and life satisfaction

Increasing

Stress & Anxiety

Loneliness

Depression



Stress & Trauma (Barna 2021)

31% feel “always” or “usually”

“judged by older generations”

“pressured by my parents’ expectations”

25% “always” or “usually” feel

“pressure to be successful”

“a need to be perfect”

82% have experienced at least 1 trauma

35% Death of loved one

30% suicidal thoughts

25% betrayal by loved one or other trusted person

1 in 4 18-24 year olds considered suicide due to pandemic.



Anxious vs. Empowered

Always or usually feel ... (Barna, 2021)

Anxious (26%)

- afraid to fail
- anxious about important decisions
- uncertain about the future

Empowered (25%)

- able to accomplish my goals
- satisfied with my life choices
- **someone believes in me**
- prepared for everyday life
- optimistic about the future
- deeply cared for by those around me

Screens, Social Media & Mental Health

Inflection point: 2011-2012

- Majority of teens own smart phones for first time
- Negative trends in adolescent mental health intensify (Twenge 2017)

Psychological well being decreases with increasing screen time (Twenge & Campbell, 2019)

Optimal: no more than 1 - 2 hours per activity, per day.

To reduce risks from social media use, increase time spent on:

sports, religious activities, face to face interactions, work, homework, or print media (Twenge, 2017)



5. Let's keep everybody safe. (Twenge, ch 6)

physical and emotional risk

More risk averse than Millennials were as teenagers

“risk,” “harm” “danger” “safety” “damage” and “trauma” all apply as much to emotions as to bodies:

“Safety has to do with avoiding danger. There is physical danger and emotional danger. Traumatic experiences can affect your mind and cause emotional suffering which can feel just as negative as physical suffering.”

Gen Z interview subject quoted in Twenge, 2017, p. 157)



But don't call them “fragile” or “coddled.”

“The trend is toward greater understanding for people's feelings and people's health. That looks like coddling because when my parents were kids lots of people were oppressed. It was really dangerous to be gay. People didn't recognize PTSD as a medical condition that people needed to be treated for, and we believe that people with anxiety need to be understood and not just called thin skinned.”

college student quoted in Twenge, 2017, p. 163



6. Of course you can be you

diversity and Identity

More likely to experience racially diverse schools, sports teams, conversations, etc ...

Expect racial diversity and equality.

Would like to talk about race, but cautious

- 69% would love opportunity to have open, respectful, judgment-free conversation about bias. (Twenge, 2017, ch 9)

Similar levels of racial prejudice as Millennials



...because I've got to be me.

diversity and identity

“I’m proud for those people [same sex marriage] – they fought through everything. It’s letting everyone be themselves, and everyone can be happy.” -- Emily, regular church attendee (Twenge, 2017)

“expressive individualism” and the “identity revolution”

Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*

Christian Smith & Amy Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass their Religion on to the Next Generation*.

Bergler, “Reframing Family Ministry in Light of How Christian Parents Really Think”



7. I like church and God, but I wonder if they will work for me.

Experiences with Christianity

Rise of the “nones”

The “squishy center” is shrinking (White, 2017)

Engaged vs. Churched Christian Teenagers



Engaged vs. Churched Christian Teenagers

(Barna, 2018, p. 112)

Engaged (9% of Gen Z)

1. Have attended church within past 6 months
2. Strongly agree with each:
 - The Bible is the inspired word of God and contains truth about the world.
 - I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in my life today.
 - I engage with my church in more ways than just attending services.
 - I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death.

Churched (33% of Gen Z)

1. Identify as Christian
2. Have attended church within past six months
3. Do not have the other traits of engaged Christians



Domains in which Engaged Christian Teenagers differ from Churched

- Importance of faith
- Confident Orthodoxy
- Moral opinions
- Views of the Church

Bergler, "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity" *CEJ*, 2020.



Views of Church

- The church is a place to find answers to live a meaningful life (95% of engaged vs. 77% of churched)
- I feel like I can be myself at church (94% vs. 71%)
- The church is relevant for my life (90% vs. 79%)
- The people of the church are tolerant of those with different beliefs (64% vs. 63%)
- The church seems to reject much of what science tells us about the world (37% vs. 53%)
- The church is overprotective of teenagers (28% vs. 41%)
- The people at church are hypocritical (21% vs. 42%)
- The church is not a safe place to express doubts (12% vs. 32%)

(Barna, 2018, p. 61)



Gen Z and the Gospel

“Jesus died for your sins so you can go to heaven when you die.”



Gen Z, faith and suffering

Freshmen Spiritual Autobiographies 2001-2021



What is Spiritual Maturity?

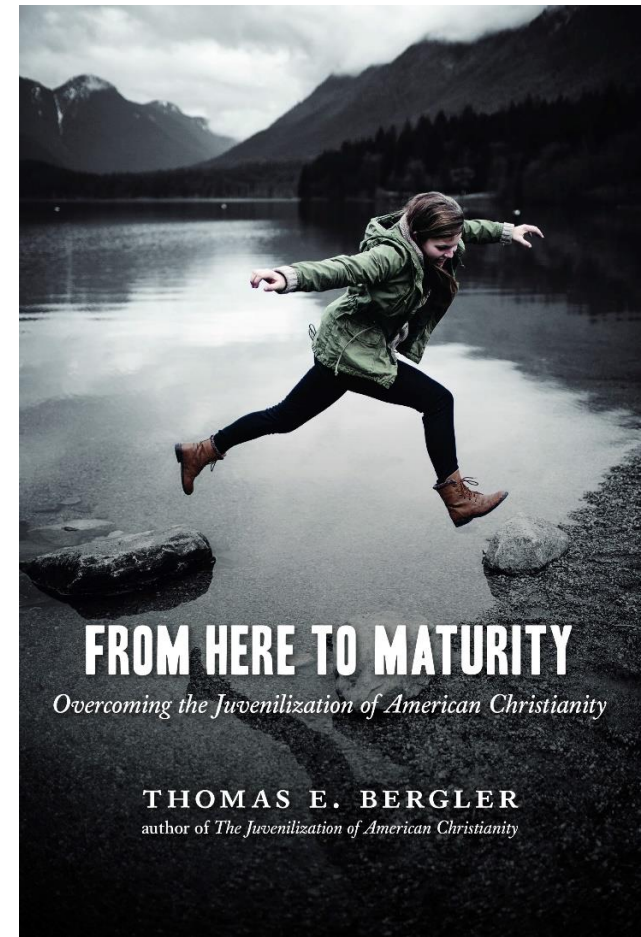


Spiritually Mature Disciples

(Heb 5:11-6:2; Phil 3:7-16; Ephesians 4; 2 Cor 2-3; Col 1:28-29; Mt 28:16-20)

- **Take up cross daily** (Christ-centered spirituality of suffering and comfort)
- **Know** basics of the faith (Gospel; Christian way of life)
- **Discern:** apply basics competently in everyday life
- **Put off** sins, **put on** positive opposites
- **Help others grow** in community
- **Partner** with Jesus and his church in mission

Bergler, "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity" *CEJ*, 2020



Spiritual Maturity and Emotional Maturity

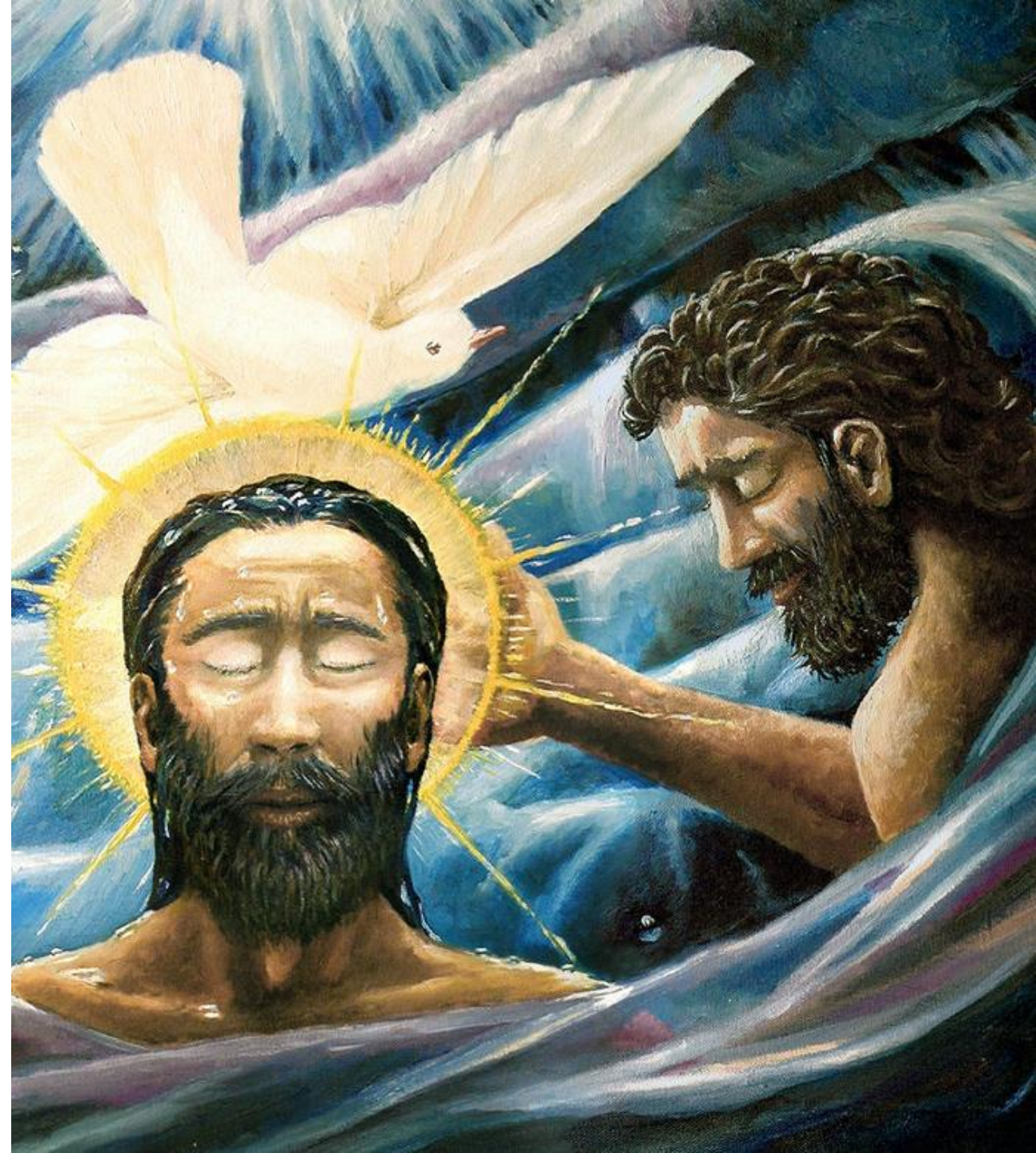


What can we do to help?



The Holy Spirit

**Personal
Dynamic
Creative**



The Holy Spirit: Personal

The indwelling of the Father and the Son in us is the Holy Spirit, who is their personalized self-giving to us. The Spirit is the originating love of the Father and the responding love of the Son given to us in personal form. The Spirit of the Father and the Son comes to us to enable our reception of and our response to what God has done in Christ.

Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift*



The Holy Spirit: Dynamic

The fullness of the Spirit, both for him [Jesus] and for us, is no immediate possession of a static completeness, but a continuing dynamic self-giving by the Spirit to the person he is filling, which is relevant to where that person is and what he has to do and be. What Paul in Ephesians 5:18 urges upon us, was first of all true of Jesus: he went on being filled with the Spirit.

Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift*



The Holy Spirit: Creative

. . . think of the Spirit much more personally and creatively as an artist whose one subject is the Son, and who is concerned to paint countless portraits of that subject on countless human canvasses using the paints and brushes provided by countless human cultures and historical situations.

No one portrayal can ever capture such a subject completely. But in them all **Jesus is the model; the Spirit is the artist** who is totally dedicated to do justice to that model and who has such unity of being with the model that he knows him through and through. **Christian churches and people**, sharing the concerns, the language, the questions, the achievements and sufferings of the lands and times in which they live, **are the raw materials** he uses to fashion ever new portraits of Jesus. They will all show him in his basic self-identity and continuity, but they will all make explicit something that was implicit from the first but that now the divine artist highlights and offers to our faith and love with new clarity and emphasis.

Smail, 77-78



The Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ

(Romans 8; 2 Corinthians 3-4; Colossians 3; Ephesians 4)

1. Direct consequence and evidence of Gospel
2. Both individual and corporate
3. Both ongoing and future
4. Helps us in our weakness & sin
5. Enables us to experience the love of the Father
6. Prays for us from within us
7. Creates *koinonia*
8. Inspires hope

Bergler, "The Holy Spirit, the Image of God and Generation Z"



The Holy Spirit works through ...

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NRSV)

You yourselves are our letter, written on our [your] hearts, to be known and read by all, and you show that you are a letter of **Christ**, prepared by **us**, written not with ink but with the **Spirit** of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

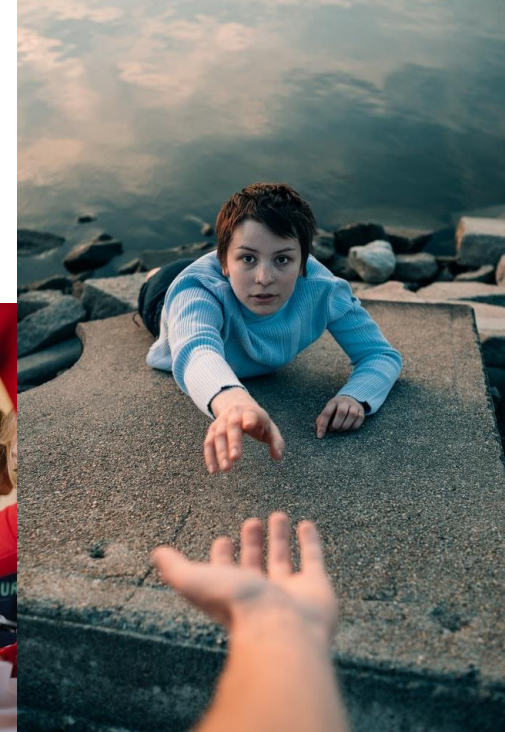
2 Corinthians 3:2-3

- God's Word/ Gospel
- Prayer and worship
- Sacraments
- Suffering
- Relationships in the body of Christ



What kinds of relationships?

- Face to face
- Deeply caring & valuing
- Truthing
- Stable & present during suffering
- Intergenerational/ mature & immature together
- Emotional & relational skill development
- Practices & rule of life
- Everyday faith conversations
- Leaders first, then church-wide investment



Resources

Barna, *Gen Z: Caring for Young Souls and Cultivating Resilience*.

Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*.

Jim Wilder, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard and the Church that Transforms*; "Life Model"

Angela Williams Gorrell, *Always On: Practicing Faith in a New Media Landscape*.

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