



REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Relationships Matter

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My team and I have done a deep dive into research on Gen Z and Generation Alpha to help Kids and Student Ministry leaders better understand how we can best reach them with the gospel. **The research is sobering.**

Data shows that with each new generation, from the Silent Generation, through Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials, the number of people who identify as Christian has declined steadily, and the number of kids who walk away from the church and their faith increases. This research, and a strategic response, is unpacked in our brand-new ministry strategy book, *Flip the Script, Disrupting Tradition for the Sake of the Next Generation*.

If we continue to do what we have always done, we stand to lose even more of Gens Z and Alpha. For me, that is not an acceptable option. We must never compromise the teaching of sound doctrine and biblical fidelity, but we need to contextualize how we communicate with kids so they are able to hear what the Bible says.

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Today's kids see the world through a very different lens than most adult leaders. We need to know what they are thinking so we can more effectively point them to Jesus.

So, what are kids thinking? Our research has revealed 10 sobering realities that kids and student leaders need to be aware of:

- ◆ The idea that Jesus is the only way seems intolerant in a politically correct culture.
- ◆ The biblical teaching about binary gender is considered bigoted and intolerant.
- ◆ They talk about themselves as a "brand."
- ◆ They refer to "your truth" and "my truth" rather than "The truth."
- ◆ They make decisions by "following their heart" or an inner power.
- ◆ They celebrate others regardless of behavior.
- ◆ They struggle in situations where they are asked to give up their own preferences or rights in exchange for the good of the group.
- ◆ They disagree with the idea that humans are sinful by nature.
- ◆ They elevate self-actualization and personal happiness as the central purpose of life.
- ◆ They believe that their identity is something that they need to discover or determine themselves, not something given to them by God.

So, what can we do? Here are three practical responses:

1 Engage them in relationships.

Discipleship always happens in relationships. Today's kids do not trust institutions or denominations or authority figures on stages, but they will listen to leaders that they know are invested in them and care about them. Every child in your church needs a consistent adult leader who looks for them every week; a leader who knows their name and their needs and their situation. As the adage says, they don't care what we know until they know that we care. It's true.

2 Create an emotionally safe atmosphere.

Kids need to feel emotionally secure before they can hear what's being said. We need to take active measures to help them feel seen, and known, and valued, and safe so that their eyes, ears, hearts and minds can be open to hear, understand, believe and receive the good news of the gospel.

Teach them who God says they ARE.

We will not win this generation by filling their heads with Bible trivia, wowing them with Christian entertainment, or through moralistic behavioral guidelines. Kids need to know that following Jesus isn't about what they know, or what they do (or don't do); being a Christian is about finding a new identity, their TRUE IDENTITY, in Christ.

We need to acknowledge that this generation sees the world differently and understand how the lens of the secular worldview they live in every day affects their ability to understand the things they hear at church. In order to win this generation of kids to Jesus, we must engage them in new ways that allow them to hear and understand the truth of God's Word amidst the noise of a secular culture that is loud in their ears.

For more insight, strategy and encouragement, look for **Flip the Script**, by Chuck Peters, Jana Magruder, and Stephanie Salvatore.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuck Peters is Director of Lifeway Kids. Before his role at Lifeway, Chuck had a prolific career in television and video production. He is a 3-time Emmy Award Winning producer, director, writer and on-screen talent. A graduate of Columbia Bible College, Chuck, and his wife, Cris, have served in Student and Children's Ministry for many years.