



Empowering People to Change the World

Hope for the Next Generation

Joey Follett

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- My name is Joey Follett – Youth Pastor here at The Road
- I am really excited to be here and thankful to Pastor Steve for the opportunity to speak again on Sunday morning.
- I am here this morning to advocate for the next generation.
- I am here this morning to talk to you about Generation Z which is today's young people and youth.
- I am passionate about this generation, and I am excited to share some important truths and encouragement with you.
- While it is true that many young people and youth today are walking away from the faith and rejecting the church – it is also true that many youth today are hungry and many are on fire for Jesus Christ and the Gospel.
- So, we are going to dive into that today and discuss the current state of this generation of youth and what the church can do to support them.
- The first passage we will be in today is Hebrews 5 and 6. If you would like you can turn in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews.
- As I have already stated – I am passionate for youth! And I always have been.
 - Even in high school I volunteered at a Christian summer camp and hung out with kids.
 - Ever since high school – so for the past twelve years I have worked with youth in a variety of different settings.
 - While I was in college, I coached wrestling at my old middle school and high school.
 - Then I began student teaching 8th grade history in my senior year of college and continued to coach wrestling.

- After graduating college, I spent 4 years as an 8th grade history teacher and continued to coach wrestling and other sports at the high school and middle school level.
- My wife Alleigh and I also volunteered with a youth ministry early in our marriage.
- And now I get to work with youth in my role as the Youth Pastor here at the Road.
- Over those years let me say-boy do I have stories – just one quick one.
- Let me start by saying this:
 - I love our current generation of youth or Generation Z.
 - I am not here to complain about them.
 - Every generation likes to complain about the generation behind them. I am not here to do that today.
 - Gen Z refers to those born between 1997 – 2012.
 - So, anyone today between the ages of 12-27.
 - There are 69 million Gen Zers in the U.S. today.
- I also want to start by saying that today's message is for everyone.
 - If you are in Gen Z – I want to encourage and empower you today.
 - If you are a parent of a teenager or you have one in your life, then I want to equip you and help you support that loved one.
 - If you don't currently have a teenager or young person in your life, then I want to inspire you to change that.
 - Because here is the truth – if the church isn't actively investing in youth and young adults then we are in trouble.
 - Because the world and the enemy are after them. And let me tell you as someone who is around youth almost every day, they are under attack.

- It should be a top priority of believers everywhere to pray for this generation, to support this generation, to invest in them and pour into them. And we are going to talk about how today.
- But first let's take a look at who we are talking about.
- This generation faces a unique environment unlike that of any generation before them.
 - Things change – culture, society, technology...
 - A new set of challenges!

Generation Z – The Social Generation

- This is the social generation – for a few reasons.
 - Youth are growing up with incredibly easy access to the internet.
 - Many youths in Gen Z also have cell phones in their pockets.
 - Ninety-eight percent of them have a smart phone.
 - Which means they have easy access to unlimited information.
 - It is both a good and a bad thing.
 - Easily learn things! Easily look things up.
 - Curious and hungry for truth.
 - Also access to pornography and other explicit content.
 - To YouTube instead of TV which again is accessible with their phones.
 - Access to social media.
 - And on these phones they have many different types of social media with Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat being the most popular.
 - Fifty-four percent of Gen Z spend four hours or more daily on social media.

- The average usage of social media for Gen Z is one hour and forty minutes a day.
 - While there are positives to technology and social media, there are also a lot of negatives. Young people with unlimited access to a smart phone is damaging.
 - We need to encourage and teach healthy tech boundaries.
 - We don't even know yet what this much technology and screen time is doing to young developing brains.
- Comparison/Identity
 - Like generations before, youth today are trying to fit in. To find their identity and find their place. To find their group or social circle and to figure out who they are.
 - They compare themselves to their peers. This has been true of teens for years.
 - The difference today is that they are not just comparing themselves to their peers but also to what they see online.
 - Problem with this is that what is online is fake, semi-real, or altered. It is not achievable, an impossible standard, not real life.
 - This isn't new info for teens, they know this but it doesn't change the effect that it has on them.
 - They know the content is fake which is why they are hungry for truth. Guess what church . . . we have the truth, isn't that exciting??
- They are also known as the social generation because they also have easy access to each other in ways previous generations have not seen.
 - Teens can easily text, call or video call their friends.
 - They can also sext their friends and peers. Which this generation has also seen an uptick of.

Generation Z – The Lonely Generation

- Even though this is the *social* generation. It is also the lonely generation.
 - Many teens today feel lonely.
 - Isolation is a huge problem amongst young people today.
 - They feel lost and are trying to find their identity and their place.
 - Looking to find their identity in things.
 - What they are good at.
 - Who they hang out with.
 - What they struggle with.
 - What their gender is.
 - Who they feel attracted to.
 - Identity is important to a teenager and an area many need help and guidance.
- Loneliness has led to struggles with mental health.
 - Gen Z is more aware of mental health than any generation before it.
 - And unfortunately, this generation deals with mental health issues more than any generation before it.
 - We know that at least one out of every five teens deal with a diagnosable mental health disorder.
 - Some studies have it at one out of every three and I have also seen the figure as high as 50% of teens.
 - Of all the mental health issues, anxiety is certainly the highest and the one I talk to students about the most.
 - I love walking students through some of the powerful scriptures regarding anxiety. Like Philippians 4 and 1 Peter 5 (Pastor Steve covered last week).

- Teens today are also very socially aware.
 - They are aware of social and cultural problems and injustice and want to make a positive difference in the world.

- Teens today are also realistic and cautious.
 - Yes, they are still teenagers and with that comes irrational decisions but Gen Z is more cautious and realistic than generations before.
 - - Wait to get drivers licenses.
 - Not as likely to party recklessly.
 - Willing to learn from mistakes made by generations before.
 - Access to so much info that they overthink everything and are overly cautious.
 - One of their top concerns is the cost of living.
 - And they are also concerned about AI replacing future jobs.

- Let's also consider data that is out there showing young people leaving the faith when they get to high school and college.

- Studies from organizations like Barna, Pinetops, Tenx10, Pew and others have shown that young people are leaving the church at an alarming rate. Gen Z is not immune to this trend.
 - We are seeing Gen Z identify as other world religions or none at all or will just call themselves spiritual.
 - Shout-out to Lexy from the opening testimony video this morning. She is one of my youth leaders and she shared her powerful testimony at Tribe this past spring.
 - But young people today are drawn to the things that Lexy was drawn to. Her story is not uncommon today.
 - But her story also demonstrates that Jesus is powerful and can turn any life around – amen?

- Research also shows us from a recent Barna study that most Americans are not opposed to Jesus. Their issues lie more-so with Christians and the Church.
 - I think the reason for that amongst Gen Z is this issue with what is fake.
 - And to many young people today, what takes place in the church and the behavior of Christians appears to be fake or not authentic.
 - But ultimately this data is good. The fact the people (as a whole) are not closed off to Jesus is a good thing!
 - People are open to Jesus.
 - This is also encouraging because half the battle has been won here. People are open to Jesus.
- But statistically we can see that there is a problem and young people are choosing to walk away from the faith.
- So what can be done? What can we the church do to support this generation of youth and young people?
- I've got four things for you this morning to answer that question. And no this is not an all-encompassing list but here are the practical things we the church can do to support Gen Z and what Gen Z can do to support each other.

Four ways the Church can support Gen Z

- First let's look at Hebrews chapter 5.
 - Hebrews 5:12-6:3.
- What is the context?
 - We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews.
 - But we know it was written to a group of believers.
 - And this passage in particular was written to warn against apostasy.

- Which is the act of leaving the faith.
 - The author is also warning against backsliding and stagnancy in one's faith.
- The first thing we can do to support Gen Z.

1) Be a source of solid food.

- This one actually works on a couple of different levels.
 - Literally – teenagers can eat. And they love to be fed.
 - A major part of my job as a youth pastor is snacks.
 - Providing food for kids goes a long way.
 - But that is not what the author of Hebrews is talking about.
 - The author seems to be a little frustrated that the believers he is writing to are not progressing in their faith.
 - He is saying that at this point they should be teachers! Should be teaching others about Jesus and they aren't.
 - They should be eating solid food but instead they are still drinking milk!
- This passage is a great reminder that our Christian faith and walk with Jesus should be one that progresses.
- We should always be learning and growing and developing our faith and walk with Jesus.
 - We should be in the word daily.
 - Spending time with Jesus daily.
 - Consuming the word.
 - Growing – increasing our faith.
- Notice I am saying we.

- Every piece of advice that I have for Gen Z this morning is for us too. And if we aren't modeling this stuff to the next generation then we are failing.
- We should be a source of solid food for youth today.
 - Are we helping them grow in their faith.
 - Are we challenging them spiritually?
 - Are we helping them progress?
 - As a wrestling coach – during the season we start with the fundamentals and build from there. But we don't stay there. Every day we are progressing, getting better, showing new technique to become better wrestlers every day.
 - Something I started asking the kids at the end of practice. Did you get better at wrestling today?
 - We can ask ourselves and those we are discipling and walking with a similar question:
 - Did you get closer to Jesus today?
 - Did you increase your faith today?
 - Did you learn something about your Heavenly Father today?
- Are we available to hear them and are we trying to understand what they are dealing with?
 - You don't have to understand or relate to what they are dealing with. You don't have to relate, in fact, don't try to relate or hit them with a personal story.
 - The environment they are growing up in is different than their parents' environment and they know that.
 - Just listen! Be there for them. Pray for them!
 - Show genuine compassion and empathy.

- Ask the Lord for help.
- They can tell if you don't have compassion.
- Are we being a source of truth?
 - The enemy is feeding this generation lie after lie after lie.
 - Are there any lies from the enemy that we are believing?
 - What are we buying into?
 - Are we believing the truths that we want our students to believe?
 - Be a source of God-given truth to Gen Z.
 - How?
 - That leads us to the second way.

2) Young people need community.

- The enemy wants us to be isolated.
- This generation is lonely and that's exactly how Satan wants it.
 - He does his best work when we are alone.
- God did not intend for us to do things alone.
- And He wants our young people to be surrounded by good community.
- College Bible Study
 - 1 Timothy 1:4

“Nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

 - Solid food.
 - Teaching each other.
 - As the Hebrews passage states we are supposed to be teachers!

- Jesus said in the great commission “go and make disciples.”
 - Disciple means pupil.
 - So, if you are making pupils that means you are teaching!
 - Guess what young people? You can teach! Start a Bible study. Grow with each other, learn together!
- Young people need community.
 - If you are a young person in the room today, I want to personally invite you to:
 - Flagship (Middle School)
 - Tribe (High School)
 - Revive (Young Adults)
 - Or serve!

3) Remind young people of who they are (identity).

- The Bible is full of stories of young people doing amazing things.
- While the stories are all different . . .
 - David and Goliath
 - Daniel with the lions
 - Mary the mother of Jesus
 - Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt
 - List goes on . . .
- There is a common theme in each one of those stories that made every one of them possible.
 - Identity.
- I want to talk about Daniel for a minute but keep a finger in Hebrews. You can flip back in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 1.

- Context of Daniel chapter 1
 - Babylon – Powerful empire at the time.
 - Attacked Jerusalem and captured the Israelites.
 - Including four men.
 - Daniel
 - Hananiah
 - Mishael
 - Azariah
 - Who were in the Tribe of Judah.
 - These four including others were selected as impressive young men to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's Palace.
 - Because these men were brought into service to the King they were treated like Babylonians.
 - Three-year training program.
 - They ate the same food and drank the same drinks that the King did.
 - Considered a great honor.
- Things we should know about Babylon.
- A giant powerful empire.
- Trying to take land and people – take over the world.
- Babylon was an extremely pagan culture that was very anti-God. Meaning anti the true God.
- This would have been a culture shock for Daniel.
 - Who were used to following the covenant of the Old Testament.

- Living a certain way, eating a certain way—following God’s laws.
- As soon as these men enter King Nebuchadnezzar’s Palace things start changing.
 - First thing to change was their names.
 - Daniel (God is my judge) – Belteshazzar (Bel’s prince).
- Then the food changes.
 - Asked to eat and drink a certain way.
 - Contrary to what the Lord has asked them to do.
- Education
 - Part of this 3-year training period would be a lot of education.
- The goal is to fully bring these guys into the Babylonian culture and make them good Babylonians so they can serve the King.
- Daniel was in the thick of it but he never forgot who he was.
- What Daniel didn’t do.
 - We don’t have any record or indication that Daniel did anything about the name change.
 - Not a whole lot he could do perhaps, but we don’t have any record of him throwing a fit about it.
 - If someone named me Belteshazzar, I would probably throw a fit.
- So, what did he do?
 - Verse 8 says he would not defile himself with the King’s food.
 - Daniel refused to eat the King’s food and actually requested to eat a vegetarian diet instead and his request was granted because the Lord blessed him. He was in better shape than those eating the King’s food.

- Daniel demonstrated extreme courage, boldness and faith as a young man in a foreign country. He was able to do this because he knew who he was.
- Because Daniel was courageous, bold and faithful he was blessed by God and used powerfully by God to influence the most powerful man in the world!
- If you keep reading Daniel (I encourage you to do so) you will see that Daniel interacts with the King a whole lot and eventually the King praises God!
 - Isn't that crazy!!
 - Five minutes ago, Daniel is chilling in Jerusalem and now he is telling the King of Babylon about God!
- Anyway, I love this example of Daniel because his identity was grounded in his Creator.
- To go back to the name thing:
 - Daniel knew who he was!
 - That's why he didn't care about his name being changed.
 - It didn't matter. He knew who he was in God!
- Same is true for each one of us and every young person in Gen Z.
- Your identity is a child of God.
- If someone calls you anything different, it doesn't matter
- They don't define who you are God does.
 - Nobody on this earth has any power to tell you who you are – including yourself.
 - **The only person who can define you is the one who created you.**
 - He created you the way you are for a reason.
 - He has purpose.

- He loves you and loves the way he created you.
- He doesn't make mistakes.
- Satan wants to define who you are and give you a false identity.
- Countless examples of things which define us that shouldn't:
 - Gender
 - Who we feel attracted to
 - Gifts or talents
 - Struggles – anxiety, depression
 - Satan wants those things to be your identity.
- Look what happened as a result.
 - If young people in Gen Z understand who they are then they will find freedom. They will find peace and they will find purpose. They are so desperately craving those things.
 - And who knows what amazing things they will accomplish, just like the examples from the Bible.
 - Let's remind young people who they are.
- For the fourth way we are going back to Hebrews 6.
- Hebrews 6:19

4) Share the hope of Jesus with Gen Z.

- Hope is a powerful thing.
- The world doesn't have it.
 - They might think that they do.
 - But their hope is in things that don't last.
- Our hope is in something that the world can't touch.
 - Our hope is in something eternal.

- Because our hope is in Jesus Christ.
- And as the author of Hebrews said, “our hope is an anchor for our soul.”
- There is hope for Generation Z.
- Maybe you have a loved one from this generation who has walked away. There is hope.
 - Pray for them. Pray every day. Come get prayer at the end of worship.
- Let’s not lose hope for this generation.
- Let’s pray.