

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT

# Gen Z



2020 RESEARCH REPORT

Feed



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# INTRODUCTION

Generation Z is the world’s current generation of teens and young adults. There are differing estimates as to when Millennials left off and Gen Z began, but most researchers place the birth years between 1995-2012, making the oldest Gen Zer about age 25 and the youngest about age 8. Research on this cohort of young people shows that they are not just Millennials 2.0. Each generation is shaped by unique circumstances and influences that help form their generational hallmarks.

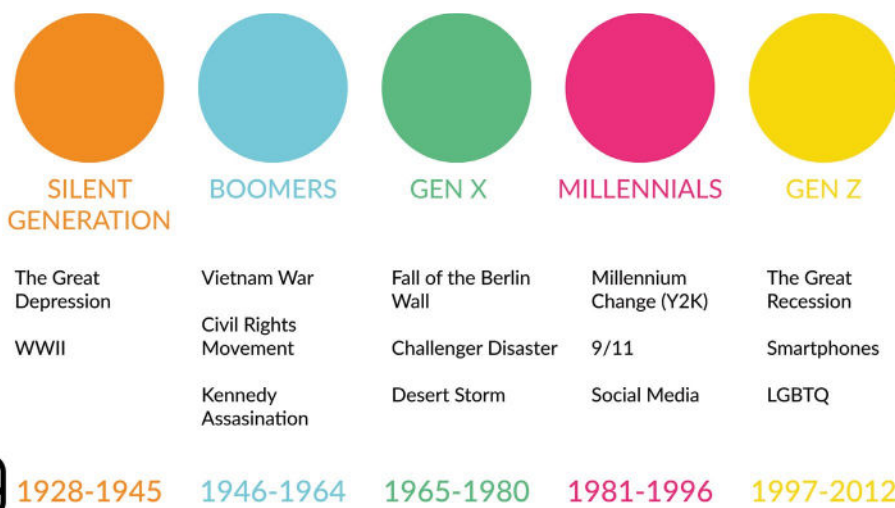
For Gen Z those influences certainly include growing up on the internet and social media and living in a world that is constantly accelerated and changed by digital platforms. Gen Z has also witnessed some of the world’s milestone events during their formative years:

- The economic recession of 2008
- The election and re-election of the first African American president of the United States
- The legalization of gay marriage
- The COVID-19 global pandemic

Research helps us examine the world these young people are growing up in and the effects they say it is having on them. In this report, we share some of OneHope’s research on today’s teens alongside other studies and statistics that help shed insight on Generation Z in the United States.

## ABOUT ONEHOPE’S RESEARCH

8,394 teens ages 13-19  
20 countries  
14 languages

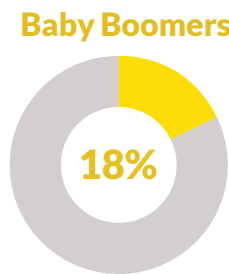
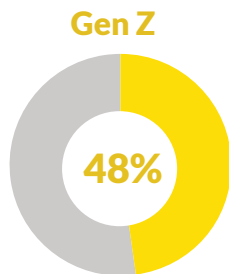


# 1: THE MOST DIVERSE GENERATION EVER



**Three in four Gen Z'ers in the United States indicate they have friends from different backgrounds, races, and beliefs.**<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising considering diversity within North America has increased with every passing generation. Today's teens are the most diverse the world has ever seen. **Almost half (48%) of Generation Z in the United States are non-caucasian, Almost half (48%) of Generation Z in the United States are non-caucasian, compared to only 18% of Baby Boomers when they were children and teens.**<sup>2</sup> Racial diversity

## NON-CAUCASIAN POPULATION



is not the only thing increasing. According to a 5-year study of people in the United States, the number of young people who identify as LGBT is steadily increasing while older generations are remaining the same.<sup>3</sup> Another study revealed that as many as 1 in 3 U.S. Gen Z'ers say they are LGBT.<sup>4</sup> "People question [their gender] because it's popular to question," said a teen in a focus group OneHope conducted in 2019. Another teen said, "It's almost worshipped. If you are transgender or struggling with this, it's cool."

According to OneHope's recent research, 27% of U.S. teens say they have felt sexually attracted to someone of the same gender within the past three months. Culture is certainly more accepting of this than it has been in the past. Public opinion on the issue of same-sex marriage has radically shifted in the last 20 years. In 2001, more than half (57%) of Americans opposed same-sex marriage, while in 2019 61% of Americans approve of it.<sup>5</sup> Gen Z has grown up watching these cultural attitudes flex, and the change is not lost on them. A study done by Barna shows that 1 in 4 Gen

Z'ers agree with the statement, "what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society," representing the highest rate of agreement of any generation.<sup>6</sup> This seems to suggest that teens have seen how standards within a nation can change, such as with same-sex marriage, and now they're believing it.

1 Beyond Millennials: The Next Generation of Learners. Pearson August 8, 2018.

2 Post-Millennial Generation On Track To Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated. Pew Research Center, November 15, 2018.

3 Share of Americans Who Identify as LGBT from 2012-2017. Statista Research Department, March 31, 2020.

4 LGBT Demographic Data Interactive. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, January 2019.

5 Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage. Pew Research Center, May 14, 2019.

6 Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.

Although Gen Z has grown up with changing cultural norms and an awareness of their unique diversity, teens don't necessarily know how to deal well with being different. Two in five Gen Z'ers admit they are easily swayed by other people's opinions, which is 17% higher than the global average.<sup>7</sup> Fifty-eight percent of U.S. teens agree that it is important not to offend other cultures or ethnicities.<sup>8</sup> But they also admit they don't know how to deal with the conflict diversity can engender. Half of teens in the U.S. say that it is difficult to dialogue with those from a different racial, ethnic, or religious background.<sup>9</sup> And many teens have simply stopped trying. OneHope's research on teens in the United States reveals that 7 in 10 rarely or never talk about religious or spiritual things with others who do not share their beliefs.

**“There is no way I feel comfortable talking to my friends about religion. It's just not something we talk about.”**

**“I don't want to hassle people.”**

- OneHope focus group participants



### IMPLICATION:

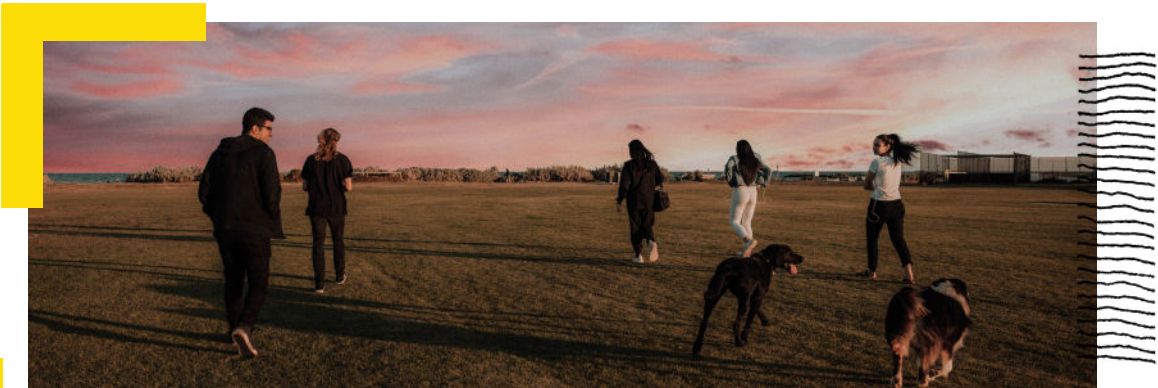
Knowing how to navigate divisive topics while gracefully sharing what you believe can be a skill that comes with maturity. Gen Z appears to demonstrate a hesitancy when it comes to conversations around race, religion, and sexual identity—topics that can come supercharged with the potential for conflict. Perhaps stemming from a fear of being offensive or discriminating, today's teens seem to see silence or avoidance of difficult topics as their best options.

Rapidly changing realities give us all the more reason to guide this generation to biblical truth and reaffirm that some principles are unchanging and worth defending. As parents, teachers, or leaders of Gen Z, how can we teach our young people to make room for diversity without either caving to conformity or choosing to disengage and remain silent?

7 The Youth of the Nations: Global Trends Among Gen Z. GlobalWebIndex, Snap Inc., June 2019.

8 We Are Gen Z Report. Sensis and Think Now, 2016.

9 Diversity, Division, Discrimination: The State of Young America. MTV/PRRI, 2018.

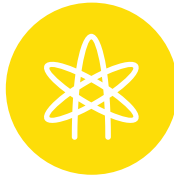


## 2: THE LEAST RELIGIOUS GENERATION EVER



Research suggests Generation Z is the least religious generation the world has ever seen. According to OneHope's research, 51% of Gen Z teens in the United States report they are Christian. This is a bit higher than the global average for Gen Z (42%) across the 20 countries OneHope surveyed. But unfortunately it continues a trend of declining faith among young people. In 2016, Barna surveyed Gen Z in the United States and found that more than half (58%) were Christian at that time.<sup>1</sup> Young people are not necessarily switching from Christianity to other belief systems. Rather, teens are more likely to say they have no faith. Those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or "none of the above" is the category that has grown the most (34% as reported by Barna in 2016, and 39% according to OneHope's 2020 research). **Additionally, Gen Z is twice as likely to identify as atheist compared to U.S. adults.**<sup>2</sup>

### Gen Z



### U.S. Adults



Gen Z is **twice as likely** to identify as **atheist** compared to U.S.

Church attendance in the United States has also been in steady decline among every generation, and Gen Z is no exception to this trend. When U.S. Millennials were teens, as many as 39% were attending church weekly according to Barna research.<sup>3</sup> OneHope has found that today just 25% of U.S. Gen Z'ers report attending religious services weekly. Nearly half (45%) of U.S. teens say they never attend church or any kind of religious service. OneHope recently partnered with Barna to study how faith can be planted and effectively cultivated among children to create lasting habits as they grow into teens and adults. **One of the most significant findings was that children who are engaging with God's Word regularly are far more likely to also be attending church regularly.** Two in three children who engage the Bible in some form at least weekly also attend church every week, compared to two in five children who are less Bible-engaged.<sup>4</sup> According to the report, Scripture engagement comes with a host of positive benefits in the lives of children, and is key to seeing faith flourish among the next generation.

**Nearly half (45%)** of U.S. teens say they **never attend church** or any kind of religious service.



1 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.  
2 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.  
3 State of the Bible. Barna Group, 2019.  
4 Guiding Children to Discover the Bible, Navigate Technology, and Follow Jesus.

Unfortunately, OneHope’s research shows that only 1 in 4 Christian Gen Z teens currently read their Bible weekly or more frequently.

Research can’t tell us all the reasons young people are walking away from the church and from a life of faith, but some reports give us a window of insight into why this might be happening. One research study examines the disaffiliation rates from a variety of sources to project that in the United States more than 35 million young people raised in Christian households will walk away from faith in Christ by the year 2050.<sup>5</sup> The report also includes a more pessimistic estimate that puts this number as high as 42 million. When youth were asked why they became less religious, nearly half (42%) said they were disinterested and just stopped attending or couldn’t think of a specific reason why. “The majority of the disaffiliated did not go through a crisis of faith or abandon the teachings of the church,” the report says. “Rather, they seemingly lost interest and drifted away.” Barna’s research seems to confirm this. Of Christian Gen Z’ers who believe church is not that important, most say “I’ve opted to find God elsewhere” (61%) or simply that “church isn’t relevant to me personally” (46%).<sup>6</sup>



**“I’ve opted to find God elsewhere.”**

**“Church isn’t relevant to me personally.”**

- Gen Z’ers who believe church is not that important



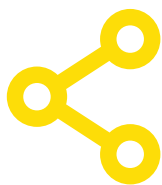
### IMPLICATION:

The good news is that, according to the research, today’s young people do not appear to be hostile or angry towards God or report having negative experiences at church. The bad news is that Gen Z isn’t really going to church, and they appear to be apathetic and disengaged. We know that spiritual disciplines work together to create a vibrant personal faith. If young people are not engaging with God’s Word for themselves or attending church regularly, how can they be transformed by the power of the Gospel? As parents, grandparents, children’s pastors, teachers, or youth leaders, we have a tremendous responsibility to disciple this generation. It is both a challenge and an

opportunity to show teens what they are missing out on and model for them what a transformative relationship with Christ looks like—both inside and outside the church.

5 The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050. Pinetops Foundation, 2018.  
6 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.

### 3: A GENERATION OF AUTHENTIC DIGITAL NATIVES



In a day and age where you can apparently be anything you want to be online, it might seem like young people would be in danger of never revealing their true selves and thoughts to anyone. However, research shows that Gen Z does not believe online spaces compromise their ability to be authentic. More than half (55%) of Gen Z'ers say their social media image is very or somewhat close to who they are in real life.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-four percent say social media helps them feel authentic rather than fake, and even more agree it makes them feel confident (69%) and included (71%).<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, both boys and girls as well as older and younger teens answered these questions similarly.



2 out of 3 Gen Z'ers in the U.S. would **rather be considered real than unique.**

When forced to choose, today's teens appear to prioritize authenticity even over individualism. One research report found that 2 out of 3 Gen Z'ers in the U.S. would rather be considered real than unique.<sup>3</sup> "My goal has always been to be a big sister to [my followers] and to be as close to them as possible," shares a well known TikTok teen in an interview with Snap, Inc. "I want to share nothing but honesty and truth with them, and what I want to do is go online and share my real story."<sup>4</sup>

**It would seem that in Gen Z's eyes, social media is not the enemy of authenticity, but instead can provide a space for it to flourish by giving teens a voice and an audience.**

One way that teens are navigating the complex digital world is by creating relatively safe spaces for themselves on platforms that provide the safety net of anonymity or impermanence. More than half (56%) of Gen Z'ers globally say they prefer to be anonymous online and seek platforms that allow them to do this such as Snapchat, where their content disappears after 24 hours. Globally, Gen Z'ers are 62% more likely than average to have a Snapchat account.<sup>5</sup> The Wall Street Journal reports that Snapchat reaches 90% of 13-24 year olds in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Even on platforms that aren't

3 Getting to Know Gen Z: How the Pivotal Generation is Different from Millennials. FutureCast, Barkley, 2017.

4 Into Z Future: Understanding Generation Z, the Next Generation of Super Creatives. JWT Intelligence, Snap Inc., 2019.

5 Gen Z: Examining the Attitudes and Digital Behaviors of Internet Users Aged 16-20. GlobalWebIndex, Q2 2017.

6 Snap Has an Age Limit. The Wall Street Journal, July 11, 2019.



designed for anonymity, teens find creative ways to operate. Instagram has witnessed the rise of fake Instagram accounts nicknamed “Finstas” where users post more personal, raw content to a select group of followers. One in three U.S. Gen Z’ers ages 13-21 have reported having a Finstagram, and the number goes up to 50% among Gen Z’ers under the age of 12.<sup>7</sup> Juggling multiple social media accounts is nothing new to Gen Z, and they do it easily. Three in four U.S. teens say they feel comfortable having multiple online personas,<sup>8</sup> and globally a Gen Z teen reports having an average of 9.4 social media accounts to their name.<sup>9</sup>

In OneHope’s own research on Gen Z, teens around the globe agreed that their churches could do a better job of engaging them on social media by posting more relevant and youth-centered content. But not all young people felt comfortable having their church or pastor in the same digital space. “If my church was on Snapchat I would feel like I’m being judged as they can see what I am doing,” said one teen from the UK focus groups.



## IMPLICATION:

It might seem like a contradiction for teens to report that social media is authentic, while at the same time seeking out anonymous platforms or creating fake accounts for themselves. But this may actually make sense as a way of navigating the extremely complex digital world where Gen Z has essentially grown up in the public eye. For good or bad, they are finding ways to cope and carve out safe spaces for self-expression. It can be a healthy thing to create inner circles that you can trust your story with. As leaders and mentors of Gen Z, how can we model what it looks like to authentically represent our faith in Christ as part of our digital identity? How can we encourage youth to do the same as they share their story with others?

- 7 Is Finstagram the Real Instagram Among Gen Z? MediaVillage, December 20, 2017.
- 8 Getting to Know Gen Z. FutureCast, Barkley, 2017.
- 9 Social: GlobalWebIndex’s Flagship Report on the Latest Trends in Social Media. GlobalWebIndex, 2020.



## 4: A GENERATION CONSTANTLY CONNECTED... AT A COST



More so than any previous generation, Gen Z has been defined by being born into and growing up in an era of digital technology. According to OneHope's latest research, teens in the United States report spending around 7.5 hours online daily. This aligns with current global research on the internet behaviors of Gen Z. Around 2 in 3 teens say they are constantly connected online. Generally, teens are accessing the internet via their smartphone, a device 98% of all Gen Z internet users own.<sup>1</sup> Smartphone separation anxiety is not an imaginary phenomenon. More than half of teens (58%) report feeling stressed being away from their phone for a few hours or less, with an additional 31% saying they can't handle being separated for 30 minutes or less.<sup>2</sup> "I'd die if I lost my phone," one teen shared in focus groups OneHope conducted in 2019. "My whole life is on it. My mom says I'm addicted to it and I should go to counseling."

This dependence on digital devices comes at a cost that research is starting to reveal. One thing that has been concretely measured is lost sleep. Teens widely admit to sleeping with their phones in their beds,<sup>3</sup> and using them when they are supposed to be asleep – a practice some call "vamping."<sup>4</sup> Recent surveys of U.S. teens revealed that those who spend 3 or more hours a day on an electronic device are 28% more likely to get less than 7 hours of sleep, and teens who use social media every day are 19% more likely.<sup>5</sup> Sleep experts say a teen who is getting less than 7 hours a night is not just sleep deprived,<sup>6</sup> but significantly sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation is one area that appears to be directly linked to teens' constant connectedness, and lack of sleep can lead to other mental and physical health issues. The American Psychological Association reports that around 1 in 4 Gen Z'ers report their mental health as fair or poor, making their rates the highest of any generation.<sup>7</sup>

**"I'd die if I lost my phone."**

**"My whole life is on it."**

- OneHope focus group participants

**1 in 4** Gen Z'ers report their mental health as fair or poor, making their rates the highest of any generation.



- 1 The Youth of the Nations. GlobalWebIndex, Snap Inc., June 2019.
- 2 The State of Gen Z 2018. The Center for Generational Kinetics, 2018.
- 3 90% Of 18-29 Year-Olds Sleep With Their Smartphones. Business Insider, November 21, 2012.
- 4 Analysis: Teens Are Sleeping Less. Why? Smartphones. PBS, October 19, 2017.
- 5 Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? The Atlantic, September 2017.
- 6 Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? The Atlantic, September 2017.
- 7 Gen Z More Likely to Report Mental Health Concerns. American Psychological Association, January 2019.

Other concerning research is showing a correlation between screen time and an increase in rates of unhappiness, depression and even suicide. Eighth-graders who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56% more likely to say they're unhappy than those who devote less time to social media.<sup>8</sup> According to OneHope's recent research, U.S. teens are spending an average of more than 13.5 hours using social media each week. Around half of them (49%) say social media sometimes or often makes them feel sad, anxious, or depressed. Other studies show that teens who are heavy social media users increase their risk of depression by 27%, and those spending 3 or more hours a day on electronic devices are 35% more likely to have suicidal thoughts, and even a suicide plan.<sup>9</sup>



The correlation between Gen Z's constant connectedness and rising mental health concerns is far from being proven definitively, yet is too significant an observation to go unnoticed. In his book "Generation Z Unfiltered," author Tim Elmore suggests that the ubiquitous presence of digital devices has removed the safe spaces previous generations had within their own homes. Bullies could be left behind at school, newspapers could be put away and negative news channels turned off. But with smartphones ever in their hands and in their beds, today's teens have no such escape. Nearly 90% of U.S. teens say they have witnessed online bullying,<sup>10</sup> and OneHope's recent research reveals that 1 in 5 U.S. teens said they have personally been bullied by someone online within the past 3 months. Sadly, almost the same number (16%) admitted they had been hurtful to someone online recently as well.



### **IMPLICATION:**

Today's teens are spending a significant amount of time online and developing a complicated relationship with the digital devices that connect them to a world on the other side of a screen. We are right to be concerned about the corresponding negative effects on their physical and mental health. But the solution is not as simple as turning off the device at dinner or putting the phone away for a day. Nor would that be the practical approach. COVID-19 showed us that our ability to interact face to face can be taken away, leaving us with technology as the only thing that connects us to our communities. Digital is here to stay and it is the world in which teens must learn to navigate with discipline and discernment. How can we as adults model for Gen Z what it looks like to have a healthy and sustainable relationship with our digital devices? How could the church help create safe spaces for teens to process what they are feeling and experiencing and come alongside to support them in their journeys?

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8 Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? The Atlantic, September 2017.

9 Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? The Atlantic, September 2017.

10 Teens and the Screen study: Exploring Online Privacy, Social Networking and Cyberbullying, McAfee, 2014.

## 5: THE GENERATION OF EARLY ENTREPRENEURS



Possessing an entrepreneurial spirit has long been touted as a hallmark of Generation Z. Research seems to confirm this character quality. OneHope has found that globally, 75% of teens say they want to start their own business or own their own company in the future. Interestingly, the entrepreneurial appetite is a little less among U.S. teens (59%). Some older Gen Z'ers are already converting on their desire to work for themselves. A report published in 2019 shows that young people in the U.S. ages 18-22 are the most likely to be freelancing of any generation. Just over half (53%) of them say they are doing freelance work, compared to 40% of Millennials and 31% of Gen Xers.<sup>1</sup> Despite being young, Gen Z appears to be finding creative ways to kickstart their careers.

This is an area where Gen Z has been held up for comparison against the previous generation. Some have commented pointedly on the “missing Millennial entrepreneurs”<sup>2</sup> and others are looking to Gen Z as the generation that will actually follow through on their aspirations. “Whereas Millennials dreamed of changing the world, [Gen Z] actually will through a much more practical approach,” says one research report.<sup>3</sup>

A closer look at the research, however, shows Gen Z may not be as distinct from Millennials in this area as we may have once believed. Sixty-two percent of Millennials in the U.S. also say they have considered starting their own business.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps influenced by the economic recession of 2008, less than 4 percent of Millennials reported being self-employed a few years later.<sup>5</sup> Although no one can say with certainty what the long-term effects will be, it is worth considering the possibility that the global pandemic of Coronavirus may be similarly disruptive to aspiring Gen Z entrepreneurs.

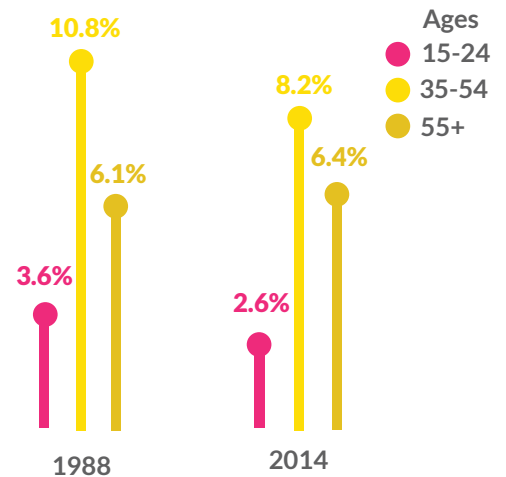
**Globally, 75% of teens say they want to start their own business** or company in the future.



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- 1 Freelancing in America: 2019. Upwork, Freelancers Union, November 15, 2019.
  - 2 The Missing Millennial Entrepreneurs. U.S. Small Business Administration, February 4th, 2016.
  - 3 Getting to Know Gen Z. FutureCast, Barkley, 2017.
  - 4 The Millennial Economy. Economic Innovation Group. Ernst & Young, September 2016.
  - 5 The Missing Millennial Entrepreneurs. U.S. Small Business Administration, February 4th, 2016.

**Self-employment rates in the U.S. have actually been trending steadily downwards since their peak among young Baby Boomers.<sup>6</sup>** Some reports are already suggesting this downward trend will continue within Generation Z as well. A study by Gallup and Operation Hope shows that over half (55%) of U.S. 5th-8th graders say they plan to start their own business, but only a quarter (27%) say the same thing once they reach grades 9-12.<sup>7</sup> This research seems to suggest that entrepreneurship is an appetite that can fade with age, as teens begin to realize their limitations and the true challenges of launching an enterprise. Though many young people might say they “want to” start a business, many fewer say they actually “plan to” showing that desire might be lost in the process of transitioning an abstract goal into plans of action.

**Decline in Self-Employment**



**IMPLICATION:**

It is probably too soon to say what footsteps Generation Z will follow in, or how they might branch off to forge their own path. Expectations certainly seem high for this digitally savvy, ambitious cohort of young people. But at the end of the day, they are still young people who want and need mentorship and guidance as they step into an uncertain future. Younger Gen Z’ers have dreams; older Gen Z’ers have skills and opportunities. As leaders we know that God supplies us with both the dreams and the means to see those dreams fulfilled. So how can the church be a place where those dreams and skills are both encouraged and empowered in practical ways? How can we provide Gen Z opportunities to exercise their God-given gifts and develop into the mature leaders of tomorrow?



<sup>6</sup> The Missing Millennial Entrepreneurs. U.S. Small Business Administration, February 4th, 2016.  
<sup>7</sup> The 2016 Gallup-HOPE Index: Quantifying the Economic Energy of America’s Youth. Gallup, Inc., Operation HOPE, 2016.

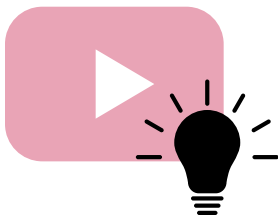
## 6: THE SELF-LEARNER GENERATION



**Recent research is putting the average attention span of today's teen at 8 seconds.**<sup>1</sup> This makes sense in an ever-accelerating digital age where teens are constantly connected and bombarded with content. YouTube reports its viewers watch one billion hours of content daily;<sup>2</sup> and other sources estimate 500 hours of video are uploaded to the platform every minute!<sup>3</sup> In this environment, teens have had to learn to be sophisticated skimmers, quickly dismissing what doesn't interest them or doesn't apply. Those preferences and habits are showing up in the way Gen Z says they like to learn and work through information even in physical classrooms. More traditional learning methods such as listening and reading are ranked very low by today's teens. In one report, only 12% of U.S. teens said they learn best by listening to a lecture, and 38% said they learn best by reading course materials.<sup>4</sup> In a report by Adobe, Gen Z'ers across four countries ranked listening and reading as 5th and 6th out of a possible 7 options for the way they learn best.<sup>5</sup>



The average attention span of today's teen **is 8 seconds.**



Three in five teens in the U.S. say **YouTube** is their number one **preferred learning method**

Instead, young people report preferences for watching media, collaborating with others, and creating for themselves. **Three in five teens in the U.S. say YouTube is their number one preferred learning method,**<sup>6</sup> with nearly half (47%) saying they spend 3 or more hours a day on the platform.<sup>7</sup> Gen Z is also a cohort of experiential learners, with 78% of Gen Z'ers globally saying they learn best by doing and creating.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Gen Z are social learners. Three in five teens across the globe say "I would rather work with others on a project than work alone."<sup>9</sup> Nearly 2 in 3 say classroom discussion is the most helpful tool in their learning. Even outside the classroom, teens prefer to be collaborators, with 80% of Gen Z'ers in the U.S. saying they prefer to study with friends and 60% specifically saying they like to study by exchanging new ideas with others.<sup>10</sup>

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- 1 Gen Z 2025: The Final Generation. Sparks and Honey, 2015.
  - 2 YouTube for Press. YouTube, accessed May 1, 2020.
  - 3 YouTube: Hours of Video Uploaded Every Minute. Statista Research Department, August 9, 2019.
  - 4 Getting to Know Gen Z: Exploring Middle and High Schoolers' Expectations for Higher Education, Barnes & Noble College, 2018.
  - 5 Gen Z in the Classroom: Creating the Future. Adobe, 2018.
  - 6 Beyond Millennials. Pearson, 2018.
  - 7 The State of Gen Z 2019-2020. The Center for Generational Kinetics, 2020.
  - 8 Gen Z in the Classroom. Adobe, 2018.
  - 9 Gen Z in the Classroom. Adobe, 2018.
  - 10 Getting to Know Gen Z. Barnes & Noble College, 2018.

Gen Z is showing the hallmarks of being a generation of self-learners who seek out answers for themselves using the tools available to them. Most teens globally (77%) say the Internet is the first place they look when they need information,<sup>11</sup> and teens in the U.S. (71%) specifically say they try to solve problems on their own using the Internet before approaching teachers for help. However, this does not eliminate their need for teachers and leaders. More than 3 in 4 U.S. teens say teachers are very important in their learning and development.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, students say teachers inspire them to be curious,<sup>13</sup> and older Gen Z teens say they make an effort to ask a teacher for advice after class.<sup>14</sup> Teachers still function as needed guides and mentors to help Gen Z make sense of the vast array of information available to them as collaborators and creators.



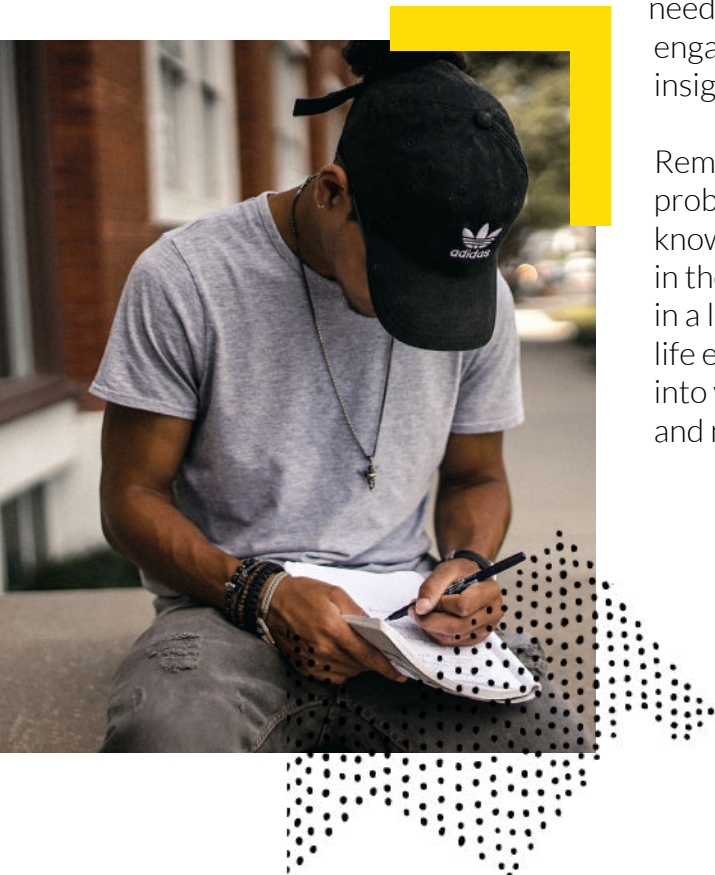
## IMPLICATION:

Learning methods are not just limited to the classroom, but have implications anywhere we intersect with young people. Knowing that today's teens are collaborative, self-guided learners—how might we need to adjust our approach to Gen Z as we bring them the most important truths they can ever hope to learn? Are we teaching this generation the Gospel in the ways they are best set up to absorb and apply it to their lives? As social learners, Gen Z especially

need a community around them to help them engage their questions and discover answers and insights.

Remember, information access is not the problem for Gen Z. Today's teens have more knowledge available to them on the smartphone in their pocket than they could ever hope to need in a lifetime. But they don't necessarily have the life experience they need to turn that knowledge into wisdom. That is why they still need leaders and mentors who will collaborate with them

alongside their peers to grapple with biblical truths for themselves. Gen Z still needs guides to help them engage their faith and learn to apply and be transformed by the Gospel.



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11 Generation Z. GlobalWebIndex, 2018.

12 Beyond Millennials. Pearson, 2018.

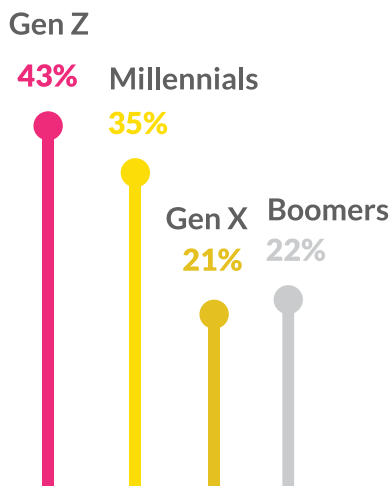
13 Gen Z in the Classroom. Adobe, 2018.

14 The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2015, Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2015.

## 7: AN AMBITIOUS GENERATION



From its earliest days, Generation Z has demonstrated that it is achievement-minded and this has not appeared to change as they grow up. Pew reports that U.S. Gen Z'ers most often post on social media about their accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> **Two in five say that professional and educational achievement is most important to their sense of self, the first generation to rank those things higher than family.**<sup>2</sup> They also expect to be recognized and rewarded for their achievements. **More than half (57%) of Gen Z'ers worldwide**



*“Professional/educational achievement is important to my sense of self.”*



More than half (57%) of Gen Z'ers worldwide **expect to be promoted** at their jobs at least once a year.

**expect to be promoted at their jobs at least once a year.**<sup>3</sup> This drive also extends into how teens are already thinking about the topic of finances. Nearly half (43%) of U.S. teens define happiness as financial success.<sup>4</sup> In responding to this survey question, teens literally selected the image of a person holding a handful of \$100 bills to represent their picture of success. More than half (58%) of U.S. teens say they are already saving money,<sup>5</sup> and would rather save money than spend it immediately.<sup>6</sup>

Is Gen Z's hunger for accomplishment and financial reward superficial, or something deeper? Looking at today's young people as compared to the previous generation helps shed insight on this question. When asked what they consider to be the mark of adulthood, U.S. Millennials most often chose “emotional maturity” (49%) versus “financial security” (25%).<sup>7</sup> With Gen Z, those stats are almost exactly reversed. Nearly half (42%) of U.S. Gen Z'ers believe financial maturity is the most accurate mark of adulthood, with a smaller percentage (23%) choosing the answer option “emotional maturity.” Gen Z's correlation between money and maturity may help explain their drive to land in high-paying careers and save money starting at a young age. A focus on stable finances may also have been prompted by growing up in a climate of financial uncertainty due to the 2008 economic recession,

1 Teens' Social Media Habits and Experiences. Pew Research Center, November 28, 2018.  
 2 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.  
 3 Meet Gen Z The Next Generation Is Here. Workforce Institute at Kronos, Future Workplace, 2019.  
 4 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.  
 5 Gen Z 2025: The Final Generation. Sparks and Honey, 2015.  
 6 What if the Next Big Disruptor isn't a What but a Who? EY, 2015.  
 7 Gen Z. Barna Group, Impact 360, 2018.



and the residual impacts Gen Z felt from that within their families and communities. For many teens, the COVID-19 global pandemic may have yet again triggered economic uncertainty within their families.

It is also possible that Gen Z ranks emotional maturity as a lower priority because they already perceive themselves as mature. Living in a digital age has given Gen Z unprecedented access to information and answers on any possible topic. More than 3 in 4 Gen Z'ers in the U.S. say that, because of social media, they know more than their parents about important issues.<sup>8</sup> Nearly half (47%) of U.S. teens believe they are already an expert on something.<sup>9</sup> Some generational observers are suggesting that Gen Z's easy access to answers may be contributing to a sense of "artificial maturity."<sup>10</sup> "Just because your mind can take it in, does not mean your emotions and will are prepared to act on [the information] in a meaningful way," writes Tim Elmore in his book about Gen Z titled "Unfiltered."<sup>11</sup>



## IMPLICATION:

Living at a time when teen YouTubers can make millions from their streaming content and any young person with a smartphone and an Instagram can seemingly turn themselves into a brand, it can be tempting to think Gen Z has more figured out than any previous generation. Today's young people are growing up empowered by technology that allows them to turn their ambitions into reality. And they appear to have both the imagination and the work ethic to do so. With the world at their fingertips, Gen Z is certainly knowledgeable, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are mature. Young people still need mentors and guides who will help them funnel their ambition in healthy directions, and learn to make sense of a world that doesn't always behave the way they expect. Parents, teachers, and leaders often feel constantly behind today's teens in their vast knowledge of ever-changing apps, pop culture, and trends. The truth is that no matter how hard we try, we will probably never get ahead of young people. But we can come alongside them to help them translate knowledge into wisdom, and information into meaning. As adults and leaders, we can also help Gen Z

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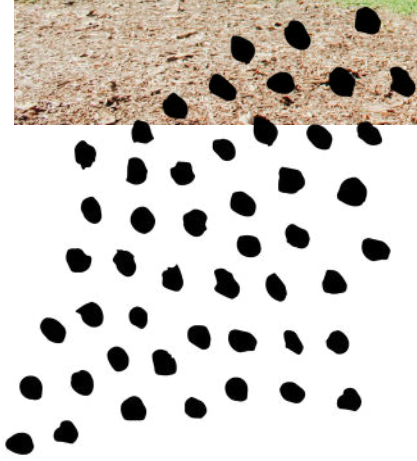
8 Undivided: 2019 Gen Z Purpose Study. Porter Novelli/Cone, 2019.

9 Gen Z 2025: The Final Generation. Sparks and Honey, 2015.

10 Generation Z Unfiltered: Facing Nine Hidden Challenges of the Most Anxious Population. Elmore, Tim, and Andrew McPeak, 2019.

11 Generation Z Unfiltered: Facing Nine Hidden Challenges of the Most Anxious Population. Elmore, Tim, and Andrew McPeak, 2019, p 63.





## WHAT'S COMING NEXT

Research is helping us understand what makes Generation Z and the world around them unique. But the picture is still far from complete. That's why OneHope has conducted research on teens around the globe to better understand Generation Z and how we can reach them with the Gospel. Our study surveyed 8,394 teens ages 13-19 across 20 countries in 14 languages. The data referenced in this report was drawn from a sample of 410 U.S. teens who responded to our survey in February-March 2020. Teens were asked questions about their attitudes and behaviors, technology use, faith, influencers, personal struggles and more.

Be the first to know when the global survey results are released: [onehope.net/research](https://onehope.net/research).

## FOR FURTHER READING

[Generation Z Unfiltered](#) by Tim Elmore

[iGen](#) by Jean Twenge

<https://generationz.com.au/> McCrindle Research



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