

Canton, NC Transform – GenFree Presentation  
September 2024  
Mellisa Pressley Director of GenFree

Psalm 78:4-7  
1 Corinthians 9:19-23

## What makes reaching Young Generations Unique?

\*\*Statistics provided by 2018 and 2021 Barna Studies

- Largest demographic group (32% of the global population)
  - Born between 1999-2015 - called Gen Z
- Have always been wired...digital natives
- Skilled researchers and fact-checkers
- Visual Multitaskers
- Impatient – attention span is 7-8 sec
- Racially diverse and multiracial
  - 2 in 5 teens interact with people who are different from them *(compared to just 1 in 4 of Boomers)*
- Independent
- Aware of a troubled planet
- Justice-minded
- Average time on screens: 9-10 hours per day
  - Teens are missing their 2-3 times of REM Sleep, so brain function suffers
  - Self-inflicting identity disorders
- Real Safety is a myth
  - Most Gen Z do not remember the years before 9/11. They do not recall ever having lived in a country at peace
- Their parents are double minded
  - They are both “helicopter or lawnmower” parents in some areas and negligent at the same time in different areas
  - Half say parents are their primary role model, but only 1/3 say that family is core to their identity

### Gen Z - Identity and Goals of 13-18 year olds

Achievement means success: 43% state their identity is in their professional/educational achievement

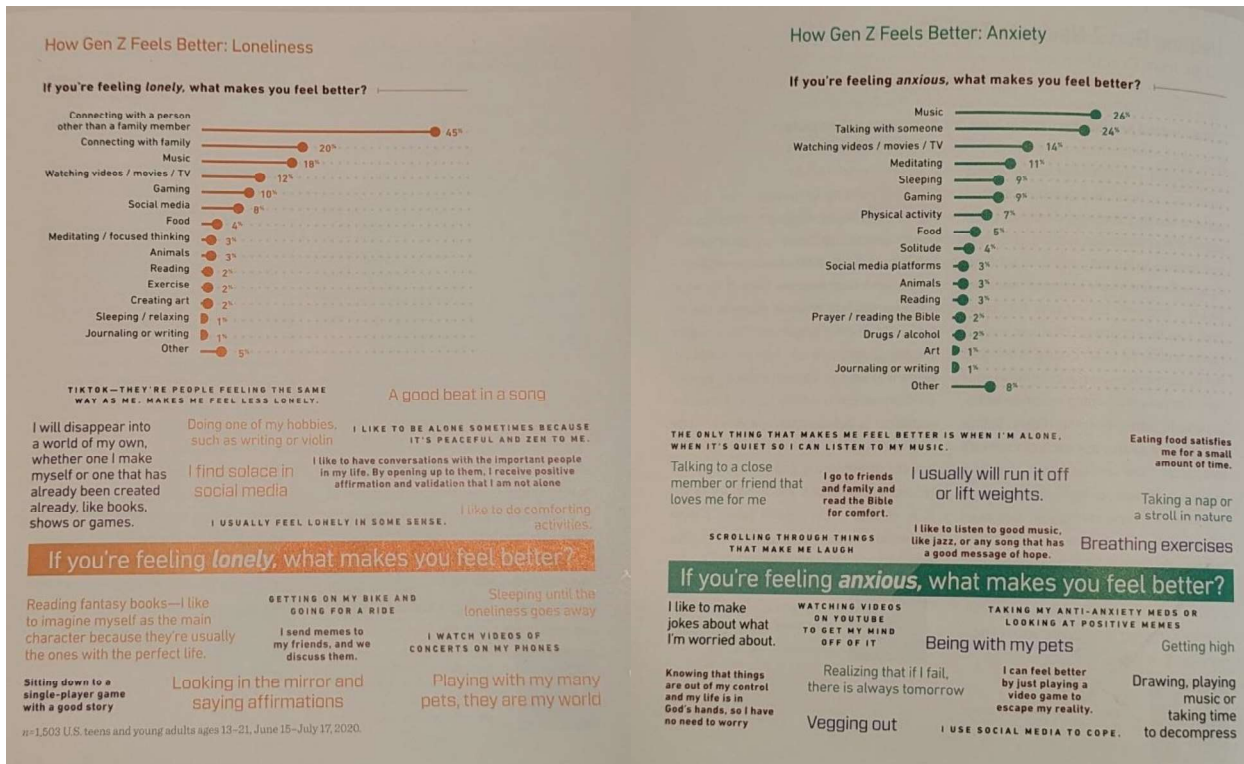
- 66% want to finish their education, start a career and become financially independent by age 30, while only 1 in five wants to be married by then (20%)

Doing is Primary: 42% state their identity is in their hobbies and pastimes

- 31% feel these hobbies will help them find who they really are

## Gen Z Emotional Climate

- Lonely
- Overwhelmed
- Anxious
- Want Transparency
- Cautious & Pragmatic (58% are worried about the future)
- Teens are 10-15X more impulsive now then 10 years ago



## Gen Z Morals

- Only 1/3 of teens believe lying is wrong
- Are more accepting of sexual fluidity
  - 1/3 of teens say gender is how a person feels inside, not their birth sex
  - 1 in 8 describe their sexual orientation as something other than heterosexual (12%)
  - 7 out of 10 believe it's acceptable to be born one gender and like feel another (69%)
- Have seen porn
  - 64% of young people ages 13-24 actively seek out porn weekly or more often
- Only 21% believe sex before marriage is wrong
- Only 29% believe abortion is wrong

## Gen Z Faith

Post-Christian BUT are open to faith

- Skepticism toward authority
- Doubt rather than trust
- Knowledge without wisdom
- Distorted view of reality
- Attempts at spiritual formation without foundation
- Preferential view of truth

Most young people abandon their faith while they are still at home with their parents. 79% of these young people say they walked away from Christianity during their adolescent and teen years. *Many reported that they left the faith between the ages of 10 and 17.*

Only 4% of Gen Z has a biblical worldview. *(Only 12% of today's youth pastors have a biblical worldview)*

Teens 13-18 years old are twice as likely as adults to say they are atheist (13% vs. 6%)

## What is the purpose of GenFree?

*GenFree exists to equip and encourage young generations and those who work with them to desire a true knowledge of God through a relationship with Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:17-18).*

We will do this by teaching them to:

- understand and believe the truth of their identity in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-20)
- turn from deception and live in Truth (1 John 1:6-10)
- mobilize others to live a transformed life, free in Christ (Matt. 5:14-16)

## Who and How does GenFree serve?

### PASTORS & MINISTERS

- Building a process of youth ministry
- Leading young people to faith
- Enabling Bible study
- Facilitating conversations
- Sharing testimonials and stories

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Counselors
- After-school clubs
- Community centers
- Adult mentors
- Collegiate outreach and support groups
- Crisis care and intervention teams

### FAMILIES

- Navigating social media
- Relating to and understanding your young person
- Modeling security, acceptance, and significance in loving your child
- Building autonomy and resilience into your young person

### GEN Z (being developed in the future)

- *Peer testimonies*
- *Music Share*
- *Peer Leadership Training*

## Resources

Website: [GENFREE.FICM.ORG](http://GENFREE.FICM.ORG)

Digital Course for new Believers: *First Steps*

Books: *Stomping Out the Darkness*, *Bondage Breaker Youth Edition*, *Steps to Freedom in Christ for Teens Booklet*, *Unstuck*

## Connecting with Young People

### L.U.V.E.

#### Listen

- We surrender control of a conversation when we choose to listen
- We give God the control to unfold the conversation

#### Understand

- Are we seeking to really understand where their beliefs are coming from
- What has shaped their ideas
- Reflective listening – asking questions that are clarifying, not entrapping person

#### Validate

- Endorse their value and their identity in Christ

#### Empathize

- Capacity to understand a person's inner world and connect with them emotionally
  - Not sympathy or compassion, it is far deeper

### ATTUNEMENT

"I **see** you"

"I **hear** you"

"I **understand** how hard this must be for you"

"I am honored to **walk alongside** you in this journey"

## Why ASKING GOOD questions is essential for a generational connection

❖ Questions are **personal**

*lecture has limits ... it's impersonal...one person speaking to many ... ALSO, the learners are passive... typically falling into mentally agreeing "yes, yes, yes" to every statement made by the teacher.*

*Questions—good ones—are tailored to individuals ... meeting their needs*

❖ Questions **provoke thought**

*questions are active ... even if a person doesn't talk ... this is the beauty, everyone has the opportunity to be engaged*

❖ Questions **create community**

*conversation connects deeper than spectating an event ... FANS of a particular team have a lot in common—but nothing personal... two fans can talk for hours without really connecting, because nothing intimate is shared ... questions change this*

*A good discussion isn't just a shared experience, people reveal their thoughts...*

❖ Questions **draw out wisdom**

*people learn when other people speak ... seeing different perspectives is an essential aspect of life in God's kingdom ... as, God is doing different things in different people...*

❖ Questions **reveal character**.... or maturity ....

*a person's answer reveals where he or she is "at" on a particular issue ... good questions will lead to answers that allow you to see, firsthand, a person's spiritual condition*

❖ Questions **spark more questions**

*creating a culture of questions isn't easy ... but asking questions will lead to more questions...*

*Discipleship is about transformation, not the transfer of information ... if we want our students to own their faith, then they need to think about it—in their own terms—there is no ownership without personal processing...*

❖ Questions **lead to undiscovered places**

*you can't FULLY control a good conversation... and that's good...wonderful...amazing...awesome ... you should have an objective, a destination in mind, but the journey to get there will be wild*

❖ Questions **express humility**

*Our students already put us up on a pedestal ... great leaders lead like Jesus, and this means leading in humility ... we don't know everything, and asking questions—even ones we don't know the answer—demonstrates humility to our students...*

## Tips for Asking better questions

- **Accept the reality that your answers are not nearly as powerful as your questions.** Hard truth ... this is a difference between average and great leaders ... Think of your life: how often did you learn from another person's answers?
- **Pray for discernment for each young person.** "God, what's next for BOBBY?" .... personally pray, by name ... spend time in reflection to hear God's voice ... you don't need to "play god" and control their lives... but you do need to seek God for a vision of what questions they need to hear...
- **Define the objective or goal for your discussion.** If you don't have the end in mind, you aren't caring enough ... we have goals for the things we value ...
- **Be ready to learn.** Romans 1:12 ... "mutually encouraged by our faith" Ask every question as if it were your OWN question... False questions are evil ... a false question is when you don't care about the answer because you already know it all ... this is fake, a false projection of an over inflated ego ... if you only ask questions you know the answer to, then you are either asking weak questions or you don't know the limits of your understanding.
- **Be understandable, stay away from Christian culture jargon.** Jargon is for experts; it leads to condensed conversation that is efficient. It's great that medical Doctors have their own "language" they need it ... in discipleship, we need to speak plainly... This doesn't mean avoiding difficult or complex truth...
- **Be able to ask the same question in different ways.** People understand things differently ... what is clear to you is unclear to someone else ... people think differently and respond to different words ... Especially the important questions ... and especially when a question is answered in silence ... In your opinion, why is it difficult to forgive others? What are some hurdles you've faced? When is it hard to let go of a grudge?
- **Be ok with awkward silence.** Silence is powerful ... it gives people time to think ... it's also a cue that someone ought to be talking
- **Create confusion: push things to extremes, teaching opposing truths.** You can't learn without confusion ... you need to know you are missing something before you add it to your life... Most of us think we are right—99.99% of the time ... Forgiveness extreme ... so you say we are supposed to forgive everyone, all the time ... what if a person is getting picked on at school ... and it's getting bad ... do we just forgive and let it happen? Opposing truths ... e.g. free will vs. God's sovereignty ... Nearly every comment/answer a young person gives can be pushed to an extreme ...
- **Make eye contact.** This is a basic human skill ...
- **Affirm responses...even "incorrect" ones.** "It's tough to share, great job."
- **Be slow—like glacier slow—to correct answers.** I almost never correct ... it shames them ... shuts down sharing ...
- **Keep it practical, abstract ideas are interesting for only a few.** Jesus taught us to go and teach people to obey. Connect the abstract with the concrete, "theology" with "real life. Ultimately, we are about spiritual growth ... life change ... according to Jesus, going "deep" only means one thing: obedience

- **Encourage students to ask their own questions.** I always start, “who has questions? What is confusing? Is there anything that doesn’t make sense?”
- **Challenge easy answers—test their conviction and ownership, especially don’t settle for superficial answers.** Don’t assume kids are getting it ... if they aren’t personalizing it in their own words ... struggling to find words ... passionate
- **Don’t answer your own questions...never in the beginning and rarely at the end.** You don’t need to answer every question. Give them something to think about ... I’ve had kids come back from college say, “I remember ... you didn’t always answer the questions ... it was frustrating ... but it got me to think...”
- **Speak less than a third of the time.** Don’t talk.
- **Be both focused and flexible.** Keep the goal of your discussion in mind but be flexible if God goes in a different direction.
- **Admit your confusion.** I can’t read three verses without having a question ... admit this to your students... they already put you up on a pedestal ... take yourself down.
- **Avoid closed questions (one-word answers).** There are a few expectations: when the group will be polarized, or if a simple question sets up a more complex question.
- **Be passionate.** If you aren’t, get recharged.

## TAKING ACTION

What would you add to this list? What else does it take to ask really good questions? Review the tips above, circle two that you are already doing well with. Put a star next to 2 that you will work on next. Read John 4 to study the questions Jesus asked.