



The Culture, Beliefs
and Motivations Shaping the
Next Generation



A Barna Report Produced in
Partnership with Impact 360 Institute

Copyright © 2018 by Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-945269-14-1

All information contained in this document is copyrighted by Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute and shall remain the property of Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute. U.S. and international copyright laws protect the contents of this document in their entirety. Any reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission, publication, translation, display, hosting or sale of all or any portion of the contents of this document is strictly prohibited without written permission of an authorized representative of Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute.

The information contained in this report is true and accurate to the best knowledge of the copyright holder. It is provided without warranty of any kind: express, implied or otherwise. In no event shall Barna Group or Impact 360 Institute, or their respective officers or employees, be liable for any special, incidental, indirect or consequential damages of any kind, or any damages whatsoever resulting from the use of this information, whether or not users have been advised of the possibility of damage, or on any theory of liability, arising out of or in connection with the use of this information.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation* copyright ©1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

Contents

Preface <i>by Jonathan Morrow</i>	5
Introduction <i>by David Kinnaman</i>	9
1. The World According to Gen Z	15
Q&A <i>with Donna Freitas</i>	21
Q&A <i>with Irene Cho</i>	31
2. Who I Am & What Matters Most	41
Q&A <i>with John A. Murray</i>	44
3. Faith, Truth & Church	63
Q&A <i>with Fikre Prince</i>	68
4. Making Gen Z Disciples	81
Q&A <i>with Joivan Jimenez and Troy Earnest</i>	91
Q&A <i>with Jonathan Morrow</i>	99
Hope for Their (and Our) Future	103
Appendix	
A. Notes	109
B. Methodology	111
Acknowledgements	115
About the Project Partners	117

PSALM 78:4-7 *NLT*

We will not hide these truths from our children;
we will tell the next generation

about the glorious deeds of the Lord,
about his power and his mighty wonders.

For he issued his laws to Jacob;
he gave his instructions to Israel.

He commanded our ancestors
to teach them to their children,

so the next generation might know them—
even the children not yet born—
and they in turn will teach their own children.

So each generation should set its hope anew on God,
not forgetting his glorious miracles
and obeying his commands.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

By David Kinnaman, President of Barna Group

We live in a complex, accelerated culture.

For a few years now, the Barna team and I have been calling our surrounding culture “digital Babylon,” to highlight both the outsized impact of always-connected technology and notable similarities between Judean exiles in Babylon in the sixth century BCE and people of faith today. Not too long ago, North America felt to many (especially white) Christians like Jerusalem to the ancient Judeans: culturally homogeneous, religiously comfortable. But as cultural change has accelerated over the past three decades, many have begun to feel like exiles from their home country. Like the Hebrew exiles, many feel they are living in a place very different from the land of their “tribe.”

J e r u s a l e m

Faith at the center

Monoreligious

Slower-paced

Homogeneity

Central control

Simpler life

Idol: false piety

B a b y l o n

Faith at the margins

Pluralistic

Accelerated, frenetic

Diversity

Open-source

Bitter / sweet tension

Idol: fitting in / not missing out

When Daniel, Ezekiel and other Hebrew elites were taken forcibly to Babylon, their view of the world was utterly changed. In order to remain faithful to their calling as the people of God, they had to adjust to a new reality. They had to reimagine what it meant to practice Judaism in a world where the Temple—the epicenter of their religious practice—no longer existed. They had to rethink their own story, to reexamine their understanding of their place in the world and in God’s intentions for creation. In response to a worldview-shifting calamity, prophets arose to equip God’s people to live in a new world.

Is it possible that many churches are preparing young Christians to face a world that no longer exists? Are we making disciples for Jerusalem when we need to be making disciples for Babylon?

Barna and our research partner, Impact 360 Institute, wanted to begin to understand the next American generation on the cusp of adulthood: Gen Z. Generational analysis is an area of Barna expertise (some might call it an obsession), and our team has suspected for some time that the generation after Millennials would bring different values and assumptions to the cultural table—and this expansive research project was our first chance to test that hypothesis.

Our theory was correct: Gen Z teens are not just mini-Millennials.

Born between 1999 and 2015, Gen Z—as we’re calling them for now—is between 69 and 70 million children and teens, the largest American generation yet. For our first in-depth research with this population, researchers focused on youth ages 13 to 18, U.S. adults 19 and older (for comparison), and committed Christian parents and youth pastors for insights on how they are discipling Gen Z. (For a complete research methodology, see Appendix B.)

Our goal for the research and for the report you’re holding is a first look at Generation Z, including their:

- ▶ **Identity:** how they define themselves, what makes them who they are
- ▶ **Worldview:** their spiritual and moral beliefs, their understanding of what life is about
- ▶ **Motivations:** their life goals and priorities, what they think is important
- ▶ **Views on faith and church:** what they think about Christianity and Christian communities

In these pages, we share our findings and offer insights from our researchers, as well as from outside contributors whose expertise shine different angles of light on the “spiritual blank slate” that is Gen Z. We believe Christ’s followers have something essential to offer this diverse, fluid, empathetic, anxious generation growing up in digital Babylon: hope.

Let’s get to know them together.

