

Don't Buy Into the Hype About Millennials—They Crave the Gospel

It's 7:30 on a Saturday night. Bev sits down at her computer to begin a routine that she will repeat several times this week. Within minutes, the first dialog box appears. The young woman's name is Nancy, and she needs help. At just 18 years old, her body bears the scars of her compulsion to self-harm. She sees no hope for her life. In fact, she has gathered enough pills to end it all, never imagining that this will be the day that she finds a brand new life in Christ through her online interaction with a kind stranger.

It's no secret that the church's role in American society is changing. Scroll through the average Facebook feed, and you will see a parade of links to blog posts, articles, and surveys spelling out disaster for the church in America. Even fewer people self-identify as Christian than when we last took the survey, the headlines proclaim. Millennials are leaving the church in record numbers, the "open letters" bemoan. The last remnants of traditional Christian morality in the broader culture have been kicked to the curb. In this climate, it would seem that even the gentlest attempts to speak biblical truth would be met with a resounding, "No, thank you."

If that were really the case, Bev would have a lot more spare time. Instead, she spends hours each week chatting with young people (usually ages 15-25), offering a listening ear and speaking biblical truth into their situations. Bev is a volunteer coach for Groundwire, a gospel outreach ministry specifically targeting the unique needs of millennials. Through the Jesus Cares Initiative, Groundwire pursues millennials where they are and through the media they already consume. Picture a teenager or young adult watching CW, MTV or

Comedy Central or listening to a popular radio station when a Jesus Cares ad interrupts her regularly scheduled programming and speaks directly to the needs of her heart. Maybe she has never even considered attending a church, but she does want to talk to someone about her struggles. The opportunity for a conversation with someone who cares draws her and to the website.

Hundreds of volunteers from around the world form a team that offers coaching 24 hours a day. The around-the-clock conversation is what really sets apart. Since 2006, Groundwire coaches have interacted with broken and searching youth on thousands of live chats. The young people are drawn to the honest dialogue about spiritual issues, often receiving Christ as their Savior as a result of the coaches' ministry. It's a strategy that works—so well, in fact, that Groundwire is prayerfully recruiting more volunteer coaches to handle the flood of young seekers who respond to the invitation at the end of each advertising spot.

Groundwire founder Sean Dunn sees our broken culture as a catalyst that God is using to draw young people to Himself. "Teenagers and young adults do not have the stability of healthy families, strong spiritual lives, and distinct purpose that used to be more common. They are struggling to find themselves, find purpose, and find hope. To quote Scripture, this generation "fainted and were scattered, like sheep without a shepherd." When Jesus recognized these conditions as recorded in Matthew 9:35-38, he came to a conclusion. "The harvest truly is plentiful."

What does it take to become a volunteer coach? Most importantly, Groundwire is looking for believers who are committed to the Great Commission and love people. Coaches must be over eighteen and willing to submit to a background check and go through the necessary training. The key qualifications are compassion, a teachable spirit, good listening skills, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading,

patience, resilience and authenticity. Current Jesus Cares volunteer coaches range in age from 19 to 81.

Bev signed up as a volunteer coach five years ago after hearing Sean Dunn on a radio interview. She was particularly drawn to his vision of a ministry that extended beyond the four walls of the church. "I knew immediately that coaching online would be a perfect fit for me, and it is," she says. "I'm not a public speaker, an author, a talented singer or musician, but I knew I could do this. Five years later, it continues to be one of the most exciting ministries I have ever been involved with."

In those five years, Bev has seen God transform lives around the world. There was Nancy in the UK who flushed her suicide plan (168 pills) down the toilet mid-chat and prayed to receive Christ, and the young unmarried mother of a newborn whose shame and despair was covered by God's grace and forgiveness. Adam, a teenager from the U.S., signed on to chat with someone about his worries for his parents and their constant fighting. His conversation with Bev was the first step in bringing his entire family to Christ. Several "chatters" still send Bev updates about their transformed lives, months and years later.

"This is a life changing ministry that will take you deeper into God's Word and give you a greater compassion for lost and broken people. It will take you out on a limb—but that's where the fruit is," Bev says.

Michelle, a volunteer coach from Arizona, agrees. "I have had to become a more serious student of the Word, so that I could give sound, correct and true encouragement from the Bible. I used to carry the burdens of the chatters and wanted to "fix" everything in one chat. The Lord taught me more about the power of prayer, and how things can really change in the spirit realm by praying with the chatters. It doesn't need to be a perfectly eloquent prayer each time but a prayer calling

out to God on behalf of the chatter—right where they are in their pain. I also share the importance of reading the Word, praying, and finding Christian fellowship in a good, Bible-teaching church.”

Some of the most common issues mentioned during chats include self-image, loneliness, fear of failure, family dysfunction, sexual immorality, addiction, and the difficulty of transitioning into adulthood. After a prospective coach completes an application and returns it to the Director of Ministry, the majority of training is done online and consists of learning how to deal with the different types of conversations that might take place. There are a series of written responses that take place in email format and then an online mock chat as well.

“My heart is so full after chatting with a person who really wants to seek His face and to know the truth,” Michelle says. “It is life changing and gratifying knowing that you are making a difference in someone’s life eternally. It doesn’t get better than that!”

Take heart, Christian. God is still drawing people—especially young people—to himself. The fields are ripe for harvest, but the laborers are few. To take your place in the Jesus Cares initiative, visit .