

Larry Tomczak: Overcoming Huge Obstacles to Reach Young People for Jesus

“Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Prov. 20:5).

In my 50 years of ministry, I’ve read countless articles giving advice from church growth experts and Christian leaders on how to reach young people for Christ. My quest for insights began during the Jesus Movement when I had the daunting challenge of addressing approximately 2,000 youth in a weekly gathering in Washington, D.C.

Recently I read results from a Barna research study revealing that 50% of pastors in America struggle with their ministry to young people. This has always been a difficult area for shepherds of the flock, but with the upheaval of the COVID-19 crisis and related issues, it has intensified.

5 Added Challenges in 2020

1. Ever-increasing distraction, temptation and dependency on computers. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock discuss this in depth in their book, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. They share how young people en masse are being adversely affected by nearly nonstop screen time. Also educators and administrators are having to deal with students viewing pornographic imagery shared in classrooms and during online learning at home.

2. Social distancing and sequestering increasing fear, anxiety, loneliness and other issues contributing to suicide. Barna reported 19% of young people feel lonely all the time, and 25% feel that way at least part of each day. Being kept back from usual social interaction in school and

extracurricular activities is having adverse effects.

3. Lack of emotional support and spiritual nurturing from diminished participation in a local church community.

Streaming and skipping online church services has its negative effect. Barna research revealed the dropout rate for 18- to 25-year-olds now is at 64%. Fifty-nine percent of the young guys and girls surveyed felt “church was not relevant” and 48% expressed, “I find God elsewhere.”

4. Ongoing racial tensions as politicians and Black Lives Matter activists and anarchists stoke division and disruption in cities.

Many young people looking for a cause resonate with the call to be “social justice warriors” making a difference by contributing to a new “progressive” America. Naive and ill-informed on Marxism and the toll it has taken on millions of lives over the past hundred years, they are easily seduced into a socialist utopia propagated by pied piper politicians and pop culture propagandists.