

Why I Don't Bash the Younger Generation

I'm encouraged about the future of the church after meeting these upcoming leaders.

Every generation has unique qualities. I'm officially a Boomer—although I think people who grew up in the 1970s with disco, Watergate and *Soul Train* deserve our own niche. Next we have Gen X, the celebrated “MTV generation,” those who were shaped by the advent of personal computers. They are followed by Millennials (those born after 1992), who were perhaps most affected by 9/11.

And next we have the iGeneration, today's emerging teens whose lives have been forever altered by smartphones. The typical teenager sends and receives 3,146 text messages per month. They are texting, tweeting, posting and downloading their way into a new era of 24/7 media consumption.

I hear so much negative talk among Christians today about the habits and values of the emerging generation. We are often led to believe that kids today are more apathetic, more immoral and less spiritual than previous generations. But statistics actually show the opposite. Fewer teens today are sexually active than in the 1990s, teen pregnancy and teen abortion rates are down, and the National Institute of Drug Abuse says alcohol abuse among teens is declining—as is cocaine use.

My personal interaction with several passionate younger Christians has caused me to step back and reassess. I'm actually more encouraged about the future of the church than ever because of my encounters with these upcoming leaders.

✕ **Paul Muzichuk** is only 27, but he just returned from planting his first church in the Philippines. A Russian immigrant to the U.S., he and his wife led a team of six youth from his

church in Jacksonville, Fla., to a remote place called Hambugan Island. They were the first Westerners to ever preach there. They distributed Cebuano Bibles, staged concerts, ministered to children and led inmates to Christ in prisons. I'm planning to do some missionary trips with Paul—not so I can teach him what I know but so we can learn from each other.

Abbie Short, 24, is one of the spunkiest female evangelists I've met in a long time. Raised in a charismatic church in Norris City, Ill., she loves the mission field and has given her life to helping the poor. I met her in July in India, where she was serving in an orphanage in Kakinada. Last week she was in a motorcycle accident in Thailand, and she's recovering from some serious injuries. After her accident, her friends back home raised more than \$6,000 to buy a vehicle that Abby had wanted to purchase for the orphanage in India. It's called "Abbie's Van."

Jacob Owens recently ministered with me at a conference near Naples, Fla. I met him earlier this year when I was teaching at the Global School of Supernatural Ministry. He's only 23, but his spiritual maturity is impressive and his love for the Holy Spirit's anointing is contagious. When I prayed and prophesied over people, Jacob came behind me and prophesied some more. He even sang spontaneous prophetic songs.

A.J. Hall is a 28-year-old pastor I have taken with me on a mission trip. But today he is investing his life in younger leaders who are ministering on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville. Two of them, 21-year-old **Peter Boemler** and 22-year-old **Brandon Roberts**, boldly preached the gospel open-air last week, right in the middle of Turlington Plaza where students congregate during classes. I call these guys "sons of thunder" because of their courage to speak about Jesus to their peers.

Derrick Brown is just 22, and he actually looks younger. This baby-faced guy from north Georgia is already making

plans to plant a church in Chattanooga, Tenn., when he graduates from Emmanuel College in a couple of years. A creative musician who writes his own hip-hop songs, Derrick often volunteers to reach drug addicts at the Safehouse ministry in Atlanta. He told me recently: "There's something about 'being' the church, instead of 'going' to church, that sparks a fire in my heart."

That same fire burns in many people Derrick's age.

It's a fact that many GenXers and Millennials have left the church and are struggling with their faith. And it's certainly true that Satan has his sights on the iGeneration. Kids today are threatened like never before by the effects of divorce, pornography, relativism and our culture's increasing hostility to biblical values.

But we can't allow hopelessness to cripple our efforts to reach them. God is already working to harness their amazing potential. Young people like Paul, Abbie, Jacob, A.J., Peter, Brandon and Derrick are somewhere near you. I hope you will affirm them, bless them and cheer them on.

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