

You May Be Surprised By What Millennials Really Want Out of Church

My son, Jess Rainer, and I recently spoke in Texas on the topic of the millennials, America's largest generation of nearly 79 million persons. Because we coauthored a book titled *The Millennials*, we have had the opportunity to speak on the subject on many occasions.

We reminded this audience in Dallas of the birthdates of this generation, 1980 to 2000, and then proceeded to share our research. We had commissioned LifeWay Research to survey 1,200 of the older millennials; the researchers did an outstanding job. We have thus been able to share incredible amounts of data and insights from these young adults.

The Question About Worship Style

As in most of our speaking settings, we allow a portion of our presentation to be a time of questions and answers. And inevitably someone will ask us about the worship style preferences of the millennials.

Typically the context of the question emanates from a background of nearly three decades of "worship wars." In other words, on what "side" are the millennials? Traditional? Contemporary? Or somewhere on the nebulous spectrum of blended styles?

And though Jess and I did not originally ask those questions in our research, we have sufficient anecdotal evidence to respond. And our response is usually received with some surprise. The direct answer is "none of the above."

The 3 Things That Matter Most

You see, most millennials don't think in the old "worship war" paradigm. In that regard, style of worship is not their primary focus. Instead, they seek worship services and music that have three major elements:

1. They desire the music to have *rich content*. They desire to sing those songs that reflect deep biblical and theological truths. It is no accident that the hymnody of Keith and Kristyn Getty has taken the millennials by storm. Their music reflects those deep and rich theological truths.

2. They desire *authenticity* in a worship service. They can sense when congregants and worship leaders are going through the motions. And they will reject such perfunctory attitudes altogether.

3. They want a *quality* worship service. But that quality is a reflection of the authenticity noted above and adequate preparation of the worship leaders both spiritually and in time of preparation. In that sense, quality worship services are possible for churches of all sizes.

The Churches They Are Attending

Millennial Christians, and a good number of seekers among their generation, are gravitating toward churches where the teaching and preaching is given a high priority. They are attracted to churches whose focus is not only on the members, but also on the community and the world. Inwardly focused congregations will not see many millennials in their churches.

And you will hear millennials speak less and less about worship style. Their focus is on theologically rich music, authenticity and quality that reflects adequate preparation in time and prayer.

But they will walk away from congregations that are still fighting about style of music, hymnals or screen projections, or choirs or praise teams. Those are not essential issues to

millennials, and they don't desire to waste their time hearing Christians fight about such matters.

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