

The Hope GenZers Can Give the Church

In just a few decades, Christians may make up less than half of the U.S. population. By 2070, Pew Research predicts the number people in America who call themselves “none’s” when it comes to religion will outnumber Christians.

Much of this is due to the growing number of young Americans leaving Christianity by age 30, or those who never affiliated with the religion at all.

David Kinnaman, president of the Barna group, has studied the faith journeys of young people for more than 20 years and authored many books on why they leave the church.

“One of the most concerning findings is that the number of people who say they’re no longer Christian has doubled in the last 10 years from 11% back in the early 2000 to 2011 to 22% in 2020,” Kinnaman told CBN News.

“It’s a very concerning trend, and at the same time we also see that 10% of young people who grow up as Christians are resilient disciples,” continued Kinnaman. “It’s too few. One in 10 is too small and yet they are extremely, sort of committed to their faith, and there’s actually a lot of bright spots despite some of the darkness and some of the challenges that their peers face.”

Kinnaman sees a correlation between life in the screen age and this decline in believers.

“In the screen age there’s all these reasons why people sort of go down a rabbit hole learning about why faith might not work and clearly there is also a lot of challenges that I think within the Christian community sometimes the Christian community doesn’t represent what Jesus intended,” explained

Kinnaman.

Kinnaman thinks this is why more Christians need to actually live out their faith.

“One of the things we’re seeing about millennials and Gen Z is that they don’t want to just understand that Christianity is true, they also need to understand that it is a good faith, that it actually matters in the world, that it can be for better friendships, better community engagement, serving the poor, generosity, lives of impact, community transformation,” explained Kinnaman.

The latest Barna study, called the Open Generation, reveals a majority of Gen Z sees Jesus in a positive light.

“Most teenagers around the world believe that Jesus existed, they believe He’s a good person, they actually hold Him to a very high standard and believe a lot of really positive attributes about Jesus,” Kinnaman said.

But he feels Christians need to introduce Gen Z to a God who speaks to them and can positively transform their lives.

“Young people don’t want to just hear sermons, they actually want to be able to be taught to learn how to believe and why Jesus’ life, death, Resurrection actually matters in the world today, in their lives, that Jesus is actually speaking in a real and personal way, and we have to help young people learn to listen to that voice of God in their lives and respond to it well,” said Kinnaman.

✖ While the trends of millennials and Gen Z leaving the church may seem like bad news, Kinnaman suggests there could be a positive side.

“We are very Christianized nation, not a very Christ following one,” explained Kinnaman. “I think it’s actually good news when the Christianized part, when the people who say ‘I’m a

Christian' but there's no evidence of Christian faith in their life, I think that's actually good news when the false sense of Christianity begins to fade to the background."

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