

# Facebook Nation

**Youth today are not interested in anything fake or pretentious.**

One of my weaknesses is a stubborn refusal to grow up. The years keep ticking by and my metabolism keeps slowing down, but I still feel 21 inside. I've talked with a lot of guys my age who feel the same way: It's almost as if we froze emotionally during our junior year in college. Perhaps it had something to do with the food in the dorm cafeteria.

I loved college. Maybe that is one reason I joined Facebook, the social networking Web site that is so popular among college students today. A few months ago I created my own page on Facebook mainly to interact with my four daughters. But since then I've been linking up with lots of students who have heard me speak at their churches.

Older and less tech-savvy people probably think Facebook is a waste of time. But the typical student spends hours filling his page with all kinds of personal information, including favorite movies and music, inspirational quotes, hobbies and goofy photos.

All this data is shared with friends who connect online and write short messages on one another's "walls"—the Facebook term for a message board. People can't see your Facebook page unless you grant them access—unlike the MySpace site.

Besides connecting me with some college-age friends and introducing me to a new vocabulary, Facebook has helped me understand how the digital generation ticks.

I've come to appreciate their authenticity and their craving for relationships. And I have come to realize that I must make adjustments in my life if I expect to relate to the emerging

Christian generation.

Here are some things I've learned about the Facebook nation:

**want fathers and mothers.** I was surprised when a group of guys from a charismatic church in Gainesville, Florida, "tagged" me on Facebook and asked me to be in their network of online friends. I am old enough to be their dad.

This showed me that today's generation gap is really not as wide as I imagined. Many young people, including those who grew up in fatherless or dysfunctional homes, crave meaningful relationships with older people who can offer mentoring, encouragement and affirmation.

**2. They despise phony spirituality.** We are way past the time when preachers can afford to be cocky and unapproachable. Those who arrive at church in limousines might as well forget about attracting the younger crowd. Youth today are not interested in anything fake or pretentious. Today's audience wants the real deal, not the swagger of the slick televangelist.

If you show genuine love and share the gospel with humility, today's young people will go to the ends of the earth with you. They want to heal the sick, stop child slavery and end the crisis in Darfur. On the other hand, if you spend all of your time talking about your latest "prosperity breakthrough" or taking offerings for your private jet, they will yawn, roll their eyes and find a better cause to support. (And they can spot a religious con artist quicker than many adults who have been in church for years!)

**3. They speak the language of culture.** Young people today

integrate music, movies and TV shows into their daily lives—whether it's a quote from Spider-Man, a line from a 50 Cent song or a scene from Grey's Anatomy. If we expect to relate to the emerging generation we must learn their language and be willing to talk with them on their level—rather than lecturing them about their entertainment choices.

For example, instead of blasting Harry Potter for being demonic, how about using J.K. Rowling's books to start a conversation about how her last novel offers obvious literary allusions to Jesus' death and resurrection? I guarantee students will line up to talk about that.

**4. They are radical for Jesus.** Many of the young Christians I meet today are more passionate about their faith than their parents. They spend their summers on the mission field, get involved in 24/7 prayer efforts and forfeit cars and careers to serve the Lord. If they are willing to give 100 percent, we should be willing to tear down the walls that divide us.

It is time for the hearts of the fathers to be turned toward the children. Today's younger generation is worth the investment.

---

J. Lee Grady is the editor of Charisma. Check out his weekly online column at [.](#)