

Today's Youth Want More of the Spirit

Spiritual trend watchers have come up with terms like “nones” and “dones” to describe young people in the United States. “Nones” are those who don’t categorize themselves as anything when asked about their religion, while “dones” are those who have quit church. The prevailing assumption is that today’s youth are disillusioned with organized religion, spiritually apathetic and morally loose.

I refuse to believe these trends are irreversible. From what I’ve observed, there’s a surprising level of spiritual hunger among younger Christians—yet many churches aren’t prepared to respond to it.

This past week I spoke at a series of chapels at Emmanuel College, a small Christian school in north Georgia. At every service the students gathered around the altar during worship, and they lingered long after the services ended to ask for personal prayer. When I taught about the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Friday night, dozens came to the front to ask for a supernatural filling.

I’ve preached at Emmanuel before, but I’ve never seen this level of spiritual intensity there. I’ve noticed similar hunger among young people in other settings recently. My hunch is that the water level is rising and that we are going to see a wave of the Spirit hit the younger generation—similar to what happened in the 1970s when the Jesus Movement rescued so many college students and hippie dropouts from drug addiction and rebellion.

Younger Christians want more of God, but they are savvy enough to smell counterfeits. If you want to lead youth and young adults into a deeper experience with the Holy Spirit, consider

these guidelines:

1. Don't water it down. Some churches are so afraid of a youth service going overboard that they keep the emergency brake on at all times and never risk letting the Holy Spirit take over. Today's young people don't want to play it safe. Invite them to the deep end of God's river and trust Him to work in their lives. Explain what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is, tell your own testimony and then invite them to pray. God just might pour out a fresh Pentecost that transforms your entire church!

2. Don't put on a show. Nothing turns off kids faster than a celebrity minister who is trying to impress people with his fake preacher voice and look-at-me attitude. Today's youth see can see through our goofy mannerisms and religious terminology. If you want to introduce youth to the power of the Holy Spirit, talk in a normal voice and be yourself.

3. Demonstrate the real power. It's not enough to talk about prophecy, healing or the word of knowledge. Let people see the gifts of the Holy Spirit in action. When youth see the power of God demonstrated, they are ruined forever. They want it! And when you pray for people, don't wave your coat, push people to the floor or manipulate people to make them think you are God's man or woman of faith. Be humble, act normal and don't turn off people with your phony antics.

4. Invite questions and offer answers. In many churches the preacher delivers a sermon and then disappears behind the stage. He lectures; the people nod. Those days are over. Today's generation wants to interact. They want to have lunch or coffee with you. Don't be afraid of questions, and be willing to admit mistakes. They will respect you more if you take off your mask and invite a two-way conversation.

5. Empower them to lead. I've been doing a series of leadership events for young men and women for five years. This

year I'm handing the microphone to some of the 20-somethings who have been working with me since 2010—and they are going to preach in many of the sessions. One reason today's youth have not experienced the Holy Spirit's power is that we've never given them the car keys and let them drive.

6. Pour on the love. Youth today want relationships, and if you don't make yourself available as a mentor and friend they won't be as willing to test the deep waters of the Spirit with you. Don't be mechanical. If you pray with them, cry with them and hug them they will also let you confront them. And don't make everything about the intense Holy Ghost meeting; sometimes the most genuine spiritual moment of the night will be when you are sharing a pizza afterwards.

Perhaps one reason we've lost touch with the younger generation is that we didn't invite them to experience the raw power of God. Maybe we should ditch some of our scripted programs, strobe lights and fog machines and allow the Spirit to create a real wow factor that is not manufactured by us. I believe that's what youth today are waiting for.

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