

Young Christians Can Smell a Fake a Mile Away

I spent this past weekend with a group of younger guys from the Washington, D.C. area. Most of them were in their mid- to late 20s and early 30s—the age of my own kids. All but two of them were single. And even though I am twice their age they loved being with me. I've been texting several of them since our three-day retreat.

There is no generation gap between us. We genuinely enjoyed being together—whether we were worshipping the Lord, building a bonfire, sharing meals or staying up late and talking about their biggest struggles.

I shared from the Bible in several teaching sessions, but after the messages I asked each young man to get in the “hot seat” so we could pray for him. Some of the guys were filled with the Holy Spirit. Others broke free from bad habits. Others worked up the courage to begin considering marriage.

People today often complain that the younger generation is leaving the church. I can't deny statistics. But everywhere I go I find passionate young adults who want to grow spiritually. All the men I spent time with last weekend are leaders at Overflow City Church, a congregation that was planted last year in the D.C. suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland. More than 90% of the church's members are either university students or young professionals.

I've learned so much from being around young Christians like the ones I met at Overflow. I've learned that younger believers want more of God, but they are savvy enough to smell counterfeits. If you want to draw more 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. Sometimes it is the youth who are more open to Pentecost. Don't avoid it!
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 can see through goofy mannerisms and hyper-religious terminology. If you want to introduce youth to the power of the Holy Spirit, talk in a normal voice and be yourself. You don't have to be a cool hipster to attract a younger audience. Just get out of the way and let God move.
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 and act normal.
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. Open your life. 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 10 years

now. Last year I gave the pulpit to a 23-year-old guy I've mentored, and he brought a heartfelt message about evangelism. One reason today's youth haven't 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 share a pizza afterward.

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 a human being. I believe that's what youth today are waiting for. {eoa}