

3 Ways to Equip the Millennial You Lead to Guard Their Heart

Social media. How do you explain the impact it has on all of us, even those who don't use it frequently?

Millennials and Gen Z leaders are on it, and they are influenced more than they realize. Now, social distancing, isolation, quarantine and lockdown are subjects of conversation on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. As the magnitude of the global catastrophe takes its toll, it seems natural to take to the internet to share information, air anxieties and pass time while in quarantine.

The COVID-19 crisis presents Christian leaders with a chance to show up-and-coming leaders that they can develop their internal strength during this time. What an opportunity for all! While we can't change what's happening globally, we need to help our young leaders see a vision for how we can come through this crisis even stronger than we were before.

Scripture gives us sound advice on how to deal with the avalanche of fake news *and* factual reports that we receive from around the globe 24/7. "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov. 4:23, NIV).

How might you energize and equip the Millennial you lead and coach to "guard their heart" during this unprecedented time? Here are some ideas to share with the emerging leaders in your sphere of influence:

1. **Guard your heart with hope.** Hope is an activating force that enables leaders, even when faced with overwhelming obstacles, to envision a promising future and to set and pursue goals. No, I'm not talking about a rose-tinted-

glasses brand of hope and optimism. “Don’t worry, be happy” doesn’t cut it right now. It’s too shallow, too disconnected from the reality of the challenges we’re facing, especially when we’ve lost our job, or we have loved ones who are sick.

People who are truly hopeful are grounded in God’s truth. Acutely aware of the difficult issues at hand, they deliberately choose to stay positive, expecting good outcomes even when facing tough circumstances. I call it “hopeful realism”!

So, if hope is a feeling, then hopeful realism is a powerful leadership strategy. What might happen if we start spreading messages of hopeful realism instead of the gloom of 24/7 news and social media?

In one of the Millennial small groups I’m coaching, they listed these as hopeful realism outcomes. Consider discussing them with your emerging leaders:

- Generates positive action.
- Builds the determination and energy to pursue goals and dreams.
- Strives toward productive relationships to create collaboration with the team.
- Strengthens coping strategies to tackle unforeseen challenges with confidence.
- Increases peace and reduces stress.

2. Guard your heart with gratitude. Gratefulness turns on the light switch, shedding light on all possible solutions. It’s independent from our circumstances, oftentimes in spite of our circumstances. There’s a new level of influence and spiritual growth that is linked to a new level of thankfulness. Is that why James says,

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2)?

I view the obstacles we’re facing as gifts that are building our capacity to positively impact our communities and our world. What might happen if we exercised gratefulness in the midst of these challenges?

When I coach up-and-coming leaders on cultivating gratefulness, I use my “3-5-10” strategy:

–3: Carry a small gratitude journal and commit to jotting down three things that you are grateful for throughout the day.

–5: Record five positive actions that you notice others doing throughout the day to instill hope and optimism in this difficult time.

–10: Identify 10 things that happened (or didn’t happen) that you are grateful for before going to bed, instead of catching up on more bad news. The result? More restful sleep.

That which seems like it will break us will instead build us up when we guard our hearts with gratitude. What could destroy us will deliver us and make us stronger.

3. Guard your heart with truth. It takes intentional energy to focus on God’s truth. Social media allows fake news and bad news to spread as quickly as the virus itself. What is the effect of these messages? They create fear and anxiety, and that’s no way to guard your heart.

In my leadership coaching work with Millennials, they’ve come up with creative ideas to curb the anxiety they’ve been feeling:

–Focus on the names of God that give you strength. One up-and-coming leader said he focuses on Jehovah Shalom. Did you know that Shalom means much more than “peace”? It means safety, rest, flourishing, well-being, wholeness and completeness. We

need Jehovah Shalom during this crisis, don't we?

–Surround yourself with optimistic people who energize you. Limit time spent with pessimistic, draining people. You say you are social distancing, but are you still allowing those negative influences?

–Take control of what you watch and read. Think on that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable and anything that is excellent or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8). Our mind is powerful, so we need to fill it with good thoughts!

Dwelling on the truth of Scripture is vital during these times. Confidence, creativity and conviction flow from meditating on God's truth and character.

Everything You Do

Social media is a powerful resource to spread helpful information and to encourage one another. But, as we know, it is also being abused by many to spread fear and anxiety. Be intentional in highlighting the emotional traps of social media to your emerging leaders. Remind them to be diligent in guarding their hearts with hope, gratitude and truth during the season of uncertainty.

With God on their side, there is no match for their mental strength and external resources. Hopeful realism will stabilize them in the midst of unprecedented, uncontrollable adversity. By guarding their hearts and focusing on what the truth is about who God is, they *will* move forward with realistic hope. Remind them that everything they do flows from their heart, and that gratitude, hope and truth will prevail!
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