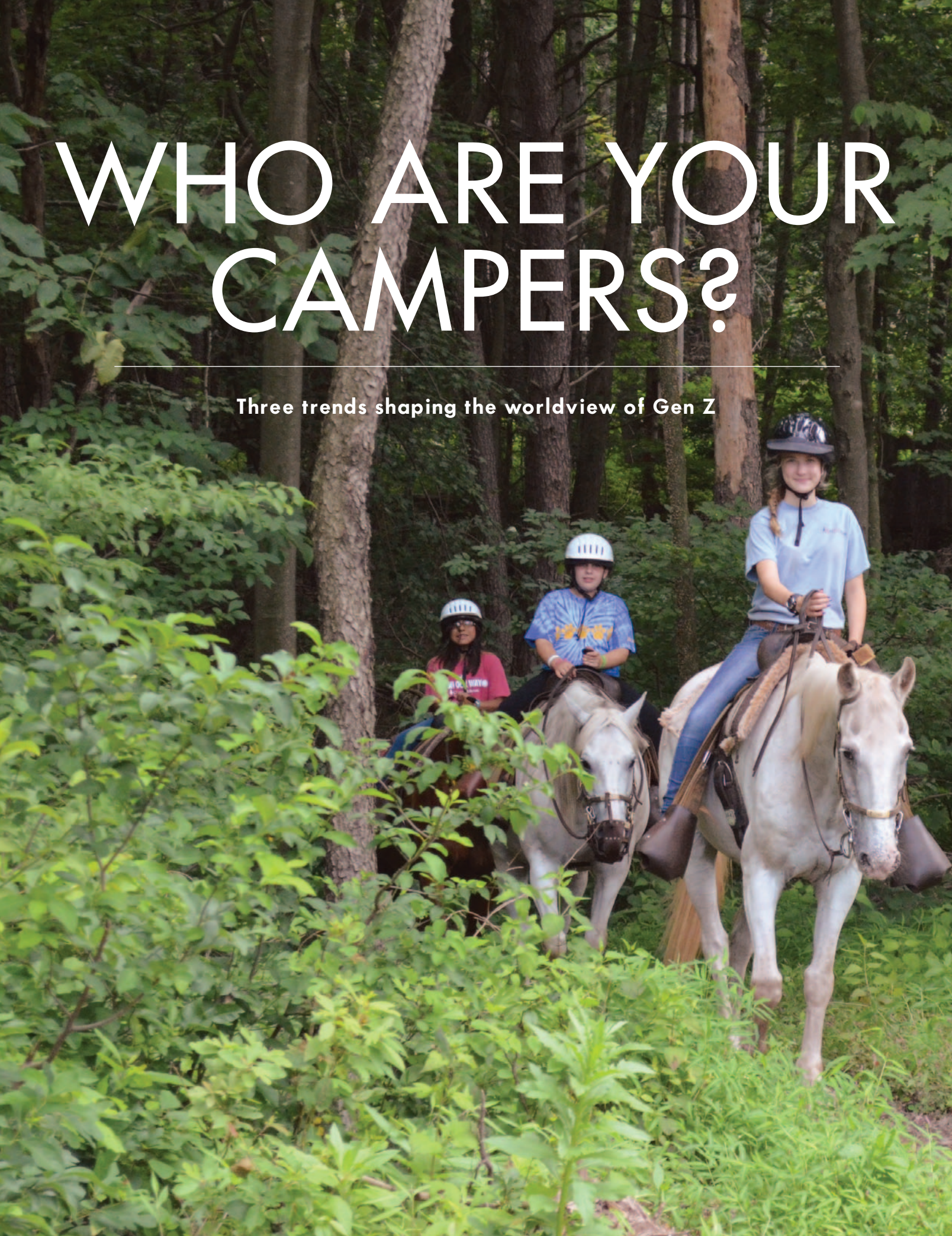


WHO ARE YOUR CAMPERS?

Three trends shaping the worldview of Gen Z



During their childhood and early adult years, each generation collectively experiences a handful of events or cultural trends that serve to shape their generational ethos. For Boomers, it was (among other things) post-WWII prosperity and the rise of the consumer economy, the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. ►



Photo courtesy of Tejas

One of the defining influences on Gen Z is that they have come of age in a world saturated by digital technology and mediated by mobile devices. Many admit to having experienced “nomophobia,” a feeling of anxiety any time they are separated from their mobile phone.

Gen X was formed in part by the *Challenger* disaster, the end of the Cold War, no-fault divorce and the personal computer. The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terrorism loom large for millennials, but perhaps not as large as the internet, video gaming and mobile technology, globalization, diversity and the consumer mindset of their Boomer parents.

The oldest members of Gen Z are now on the cusp of adulthood. Here are three trends that are working together to form their shared, population-level worldview, based on recent scholarly research and new Barna data.

Barna Group is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture, with a particular focus on the Christian church. In its 30-year history, Barna has conducted more than 1 million interviews in the course of hundreds of studies, and has become a go-to source for organizations that want to better understand a complex and changing world from a faith perspective.



David Kinnaman is the author of the bestselling books Good Faith, You Lost Me and unChristian. He is president of Barna Group, a leading research and communications company that works with churches, nonprofits and businesses ranging from film studios to financial services. He and his wife live in California with their three children.



1. They Are Screenagers

One of the defining influences on Gen Z is that they have come of age in a world saturated by digital technology and mediated by mobile devices. Many admit to having experienced “nomophobia,” a feeling of anxiety any time they are separated from their mobile phone. They can’t remember a time before the internet; the ubiquitous presence of digital technology has changed the way young people process and interact with information. The changes are so pervasive that one nickname for Gen Z is “screenagers.”

Half strongly agree that “happiness is my ultimate goal in life” (51 percent), compared to 44 percent of all adults. Yet ironically, research shows that more time with screen activities is consistently linked to less happiness. Despite the promise of connection, social

media exacerbates loneliness and dislocation and appears to increase rates of depression. Agreement with negative statements about social media increases in each successive generation, and is strongest among Gen Z. (And women in each generation are more likely than men to report these feelings.)

Agree with
“happiness is my
ultimate goal in life”

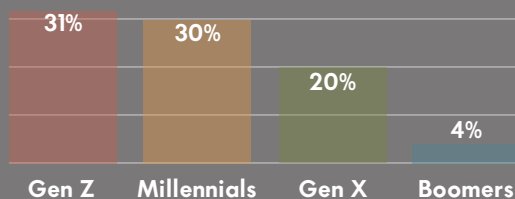
Gen Z

51%

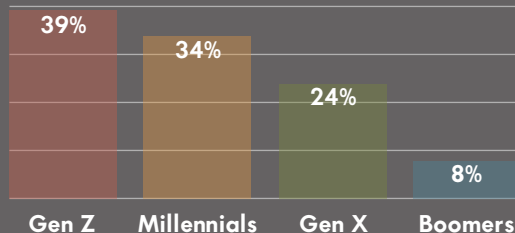
Adults

44%

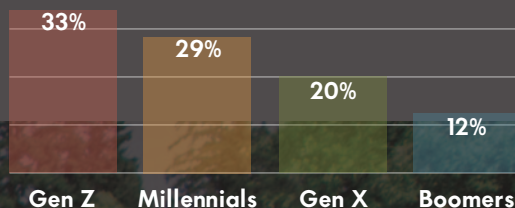
“Looking at other people’s posts often makes me feel bad about the way I look.”



“Looking at other people’s posts often makes me feel bad about the lack of excitement in my own life.”



“I have experienced bullying on social media.”



U.S. teens ages 13–18, n=1,490, Nov. 4–16, 2016.
U.S. adults 19 and older, n=1,517, Nov. 4–16, 2016.

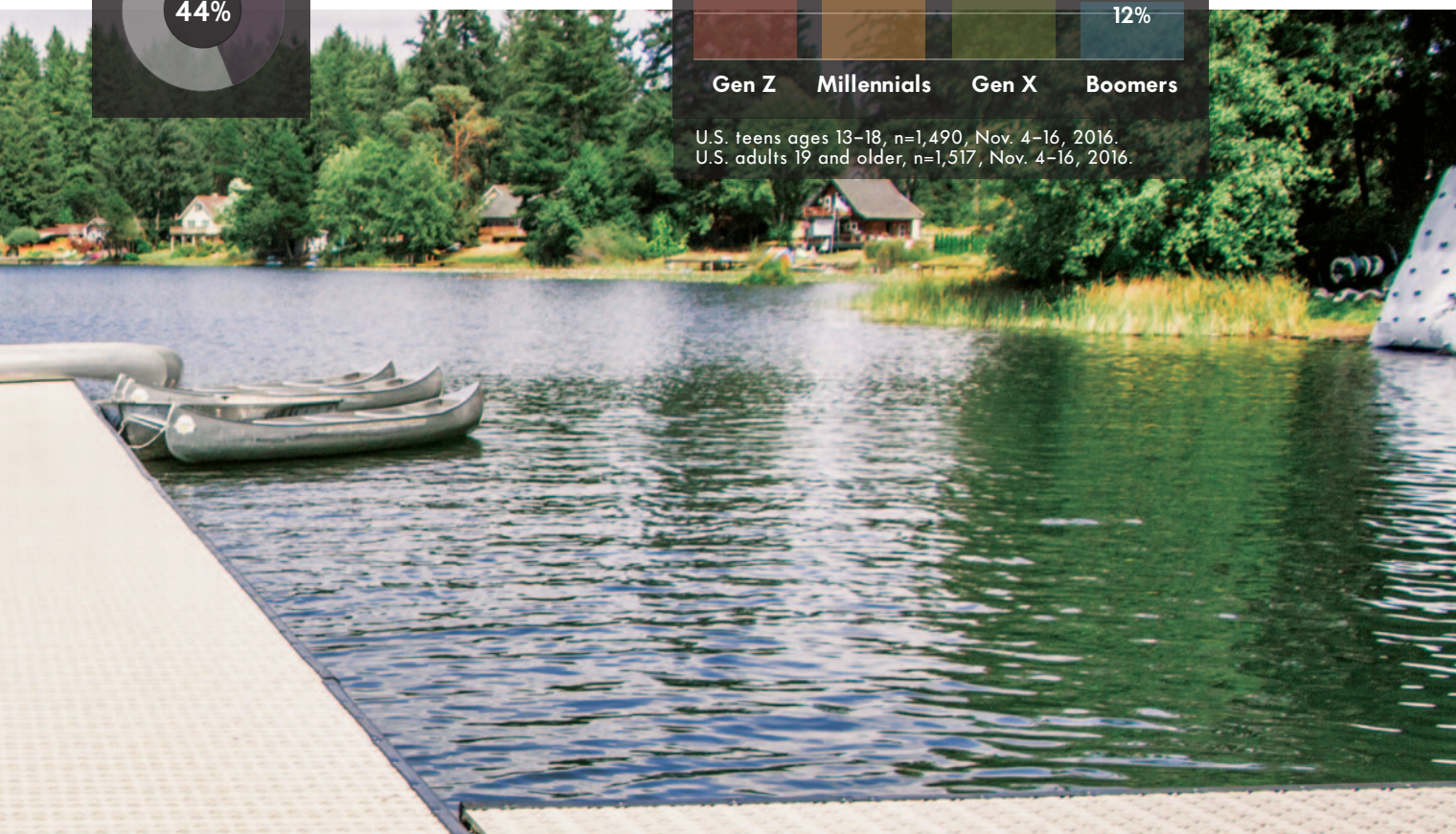
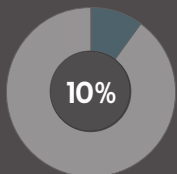


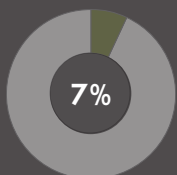
Photo courtesy of CRISTA Camps

Percentage whose beliefs qualify them for a biblical worldview

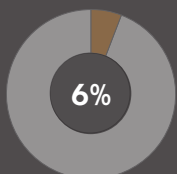
Boomers



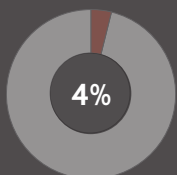
Gen X



Millennials



Gen Z



2. Their Worldview is Post-Christian

It is not breaking news that the influence of Christianity in the United States is waning. Historical Barna data show that rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer and Bible-reading have been dropping for decades. Consequently, the role of religion in public life has also diminished, and the church no longer holds the cultural authority it wielded in times past. These are unique days for the church in America as it learns what it means to flourish in a post-Christian era.

Using a classification of faith that is based on widely accepted, orthodox Christian beliefs, Barna developed a profile of people with a “biblical worldview.”¹ The percentage of people whose beliefs qualify them for a biblical worldview declines in each successively younger generation: 10 percent of Boomers, 7 percent of Gen X and 6 percent of millennials have a biblical worldview, compared to only 4 percent of Gen Z.

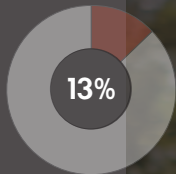
Americans’ beliefs are becoming more post-Christian, and concurrently, religious identity is changing. Within the self-identified Christian population, the percentage that qualifies as evangelical according to Barna’s

definition, which is based on nine points of theological and personal belief, has remained stable over the past two decades. However, those whom Barna classifies as “born again” (who say they have faith in Jesus and believe salvation comes through faith alone) have dwindled, especially in the last six years. During the same period, the percentage of those with no religious affiliation has risen, mostly thanks to the growing number of Americans under 50 who say they are “none of the above.”

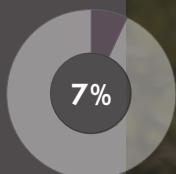
In Gen Z we see more of the same trends, except for one glaring difference: The percentage of teens that identifies as atheist is *double* that of U.S. adults (13 percent vs. 7 percent).

Identifies as atheist

Gen Z



U.S. Adults



Adapted from the Barna report *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, copyright 2018. Produced in partnership with Impact 360 Institute. Used with permission.

1 For a complete list of beliefs included in the biblical worldview profile, see Appendix B in the full Barna report.

3. They Are Anxious

Gen Z's social awareness began to dawn right around the Great Recession of 2008. Teens have never personally experienced a time when the norm was a steady job with a livable wage and a reliable social safety net. After seeing their (mainly Gen X) parents struggle in the workforce, only to earn financial stress, many young people express a strong sense of responsibility and entrepreneurial drive, likely to feel more in control of their future.

Financial expectations are only one of the cultural norms that have drastically shifted over the last several decades. Most in Gen Z do not remember the years before 9/11. They do not recall ever having lived in a country at peace. "As a group raised in constant war, contemporary youth may view the world with the belief that the world is 'unsafe,' yet at the same time, they may have greater global awareness as a result."² Between the financial crisis, perpetual war and frequent mass school shootings they are apt to be distrustful of the future.

Complementing, or perhaps exacerbating, their controlling streak are shifting cultural expectations about sexuality and gender identity. Not only are they collectively supportive of those who identify as LGBTQ, but they are also more likely than adults to personally express some level of sexual fluidity or non-binary identity.³ As far as Gen Z is concerned, when it comes to gender expression and sexual orientation, there is no norm — and that can be deeply unsettling. If even your own body cannot reliably represent you to the world, is *anything* trustworthy?

Under these influences, how can Gen Z become disciples in a post-Christian culture?

Gen Z disciple-making must actively engage a two-way dynamic: faith in light of culture and culture in light of faith. How we follow Christ is inevitably shaped by the culture in which we find ourselves. But it is at least equally true that the surrounding culture is transformed as *we* are transformed in Christ.

How can mentors equip Gen Z not just with information *about* faith, but also with critical thinking and experiences that deepen faith? Parents and educators, especially, are positioned to *proactively* guide growing teens to think well about living for Christ in a post-Christian culture.

Jonathan Morrow, author, professor and director of cultural engagement at Impact 360 Institute, has developed a framework called the "Three Rs of Worldview Transformation." He posits, "In order to build a strong and lasting faith, students need reasons, relationships and rhythms." Morrow explains that those are things adults in the lives of teenagers can directly influence. (See the sidebar for more on Morrow's Three Rs.)

■ ■ ■

The pace of cultural change may feel overwhelming, but don't be discouraged. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church — and that promise is for God's people in Generation Z, too. ■

What Adults Can Do in the Faith Lives of Gen Z

The Three Rs of Worldview Transformation

■ by Jonathan Morrow

As I have worked with Christian teenagers over the past 15 years, I have developed a framework that I call the "Three Rs of Worldview Transformation." In order to build a strong and lasting faith, students need reasons, relationships and rhythms. These are the things we can directly influence.

Reasons

First teenagers need reasons for faith: to know why they believe what they believe (see 1 Peter 3:15). Apologetics is not optional. They also need to be inoculated against false ideas while they are younger and in an environment where we can help them discover reasonable responses to objections to their faith. This requires safe space for them to ask questions and explore doubts. In short, teenagers need a grown-up worldview, not coloring-book Jesus. It's so fun to see teenagers' confidence grow and their faith come alive when they discover that Christianity is actually true!

Relationships

Next, teenagers need wise relationships. Gen Z increasingly feels isolated and alone, but they hunger for real relationships. There are four strategic relationships we can help them cultivate: God, parents, mentors and friends (see Proverbs 13:20). I am convinced that relationships are the most powerful shaping influence during the teenage years.

Rhythms

Last, students need rhythms to help them practice their faith. We become what we repeatedly do. Teenagers can't build a strong worldview if they never practice it. We must help students ask who they are becoming. Formation of virtue is more than just doing the right thing; it's about becoming the kind of person who loves what is good. Through rhythms and spiritual practices, we can indirectly affect our desires, loves and character (see Hebrews 5:14). In addition to the work of God's Spirit and our response to His grace, this process takes time, intentionality, honest conversation and mentors.



Jonathan Morrow has been equipping students and parents in biblical worldview, apologetics and culture for 15 years. He is the director of cultural engagement at Impact 360 Institute (Impact360.org) and an adjunct professor of apologetics at Biola University. Jonathan is also the author of several books.

2 Anthony Turner, "Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest," *Journal of Individual Psychology*, Summer 2015, Vol. 71, No. 2, pp. 103–113.

3 Jon Brooks, "A New Generation Overthrows Gender," NPR, May 2, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/05/02/526067768/a-new-generation-overthrows-gender> (accessed September 2017).

Camp provides one of the few opportunities where we can actually detox students from what Barna calls “nomophobia,” created by their screen addictions.



Photo courtesy of Tejas



Photo courtesy of T Bar M Camps

Influencing Gen Z Through Camp

A response to the Barna research

■ by Jon Bisset

After reading the latest Barna study on Gen Z, I was reminded of both the opportunity and responsibility we have as camp professionals to engage this generation with experiences designed to deepen their faith. The study reveals some very concerning trends that, if not addressed, could have dire consequences on the spiritual well-being of future generations. Here are a few observations from that study that I believe camps should consider.

Partner with the Church

While Gen Z may be coming to camp, most are not going to church, and only 4 percent have what Barna describes as a “biblical worldview.” Historically, the church has been the primary source of moral and biblical education; however, in a post-Christian era, younger generations continue to see the church as irrelevant. If the church is the “bride of Christ,” this should be concerning for all of us. Is there anything Christian camps can do to change this troubling trend? I would suggest we could do the following to support the local church:

1. **Offer a unique place, unique experiences.** Provide a meaningful place where churches can get away to both refresh their youth and engage new ones with unique, challenging experiences.
2. **Work together.** We can look for creative ways to partner with churches to collaborate on ministry in our communities. Whether it’s providing recreation for one of their youth events, or hosting a day camp on the church’s property, we can use our gifts to help reach people who would likely never darken the door of the church otherwise.
3. **Plug campers into a church.** When our campers go home, we can emphasize the importance of connecting with a local church, even providing them some specific options in their neighborhood.

Provide an Opportunity to Unplug

Camp provides one of the few opportunities where we can actually detox students from what Barna calls “nomophobia,” created by their screen addictions. While it’s probably not realistic to expect kids to completely unplug from the digital world, as camp professionals we have a unique opportunity to show them that there is real, abundant life outside the screen. How do we do this?

1. **Remove all digital devices.** You can’t break an addiction unless what’s contributing to the addiction is limited or even removed. Provide a locked box or simply ban them altogether.
2. **Talk about it.** Facilitate conversations at camp about living in a digital world that is always connected, and its effects on people.
3. **Inject positivity into their screen.** Look for ways to bring God’s truth to their screen. Consider sending a positive text from camp on a regular basis, creating an inspirational podcast or providing links to popular Bible apps.

Create a Loving and Safe Community

Growing up in an era with financial insecurity, endless wars and no semblance of cultural norms, it’s no wonder Gen Z is dealing with severe anxiety. At camp, we have a wonderful opportunity to provide a safe and loving environment where students can deal with their anxieties through well-designed experiences, and hear about the One who asks us to cast all our anxieties on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). While having conversations about the numerous social issues and cultural challenges may be stimulating, it may not be helping to reduce their anxiety and ultimately point them to Christ. At River Valley Ranch (RVR), we encourage all of our staff to “keep the main thing the main thing” when having conversations with students. This doesn’t mean we don’t discuss difficult subjects. However, we never let a secondary or controversial issue dominate the primary message of God’s love and salvation through Christ.

Focus on Results

Getting as many students as possible to our camps is great. Moving those students into a deeper relationship with Christ is better. What if we made it one of our primary initiatives at camp to educate this next generation to the timeless truths of Scripture? By using the unique platforms we have at camp to attract and engage Gen Z, we can look for ways to reverse this troubling trend of biblical atrophy among our next generation.

Jon Bisset is the president of Peter and John Ministries (PJM), and executive director of River Valley Ranch (RVR) in Manchester, Maryland. He is currently on the board of Curium Outreach Ministries, an organization dedicated to serving the poor of Nogales, Mexico. Jon and his wife, Courtney, have two children, Anna and Aidan.

