

## Reaching out to Young Adults

*by Sarah Reinwald*

Today's young adults-- ages 18 to 34-- have statistically proven their relational, professional and spiritual differences from those of their parents in their younger years. Although Baby Boomers laid the groundwork for the present social circumstance- exemplified during the Vietnam War years and since-- the behaviors of this present young adult aged group are now considered standard rather than rebellious.

Young adults today live in a world where truth is relative. They have had far less spiritual upbringing and nurturing than the generations of recent centuries. This is a high-risk group: 25% currently identify with no faith at all. 46% of this demographic have no spiritual preference- whether raised in a religion or not. An emphasis on parenthood and tradition is dying to the enhancement of education and professional success.

This age group struggles with more alcoholism, anxiety and depression, and promiscuity than before-- including sexually transmitted diseases and addiction to pornography. There is an obvious need for fulfillment: an obvious need for God. But in a generation where spiritual awareness is dwindling and truth is relative, how can we get their attention? What can we do or say to gain their respect and a listening ear?

### Tips:

**Get their attention.** Society offers too many entertainment options; and, in turn, we have short attention spans. If you don't prove your conversation or outreach event is more important than the alternatives, it will be short-lived. Do what they like to do. Discuss what they want to discuss. Be passionate! Have fun. Any topic they could possibly address can be tied back to the Bible.

**Use historical fact.** Where education is greatly emphasized, so is historical fact and rationale. Use historical proof that Christ existed and was who He said He was. Show that you too are educated; not only do you stand in faith-- you have made an educated decision to be a follower of Christ.

**Listen to their spiritual views.** A common belief among young adults is that we want to talk to them about our religious beliefs but don't want to hear about theirs. Your views will be respected further when you have respected theirs.

**Admit your faults.** Don't act like you have it all together: you don't. Be relatable. Communicate your faults and point to your continuous need for Christ. If you are self-righteous, you will be tuned out from the start.

**Don't proclaim to know everything.** Because of potential crime as well as the simple desire to acquire better business skills, the young-adult generation has been taught to read people. If you don't know something, don't wing it. Ask to check on it or ask another trustworthy source to join the conversation. If young adults think you are winging it, they will disregard it quickly.

**Communicate *complete* forgiveness.** There are many alternatives to Christ: drugs and alcohol, money, sex...the list goes on. But nothing fills the God-shaped hole except God. At some point, sin brings disparity. Communicate that no matter *what* we have done, God completely wipes the slate clean! He forgives us, so we can start over every day.

## Resources:

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**The Internet** is the communication of choice for this age group. It provides anonymity to its users. Instant messaging, interactive websites/chat rooms and blogging sites are all popular forms of communication. The web sites below allow young adults to freely open up about spiritual topics.

- [Re-YourLife.com](http://Re-YourLife.com): an online community where young adults [re-reflect](#) on the realities of everyday life and the human experience. They are challenged to [re-think](#) life and seek something of greater value: to [re-think](#) who Jesus is, what He taught, and what He did.
- [Relevantmagazine.com](http://Relevantmagazine.com) (or have them pick up the tangible magazine): a magazine that comes from “twenty-something Christians who want to break stereotypes, challenge status-quo and enact change through the media by seeking God, living life and striving to impact the world around us.” Trendy and edgy in graphics and content, it talks about what is going on around us -- in the media, in our relationships, etc. -- in relation to God.
- [Goodnewsline.com](http://Goodnewsline.com): a Christian media broadcasting website with up-to-date and entertaining video sermons, testimonies and services. Most of its sermons and music are from young, cutting-edge pastors and Christian artists. This site can assist you as you search for knowledge and tools to further reach out to this age group. Direct them to specific sermons and/or artists that will reach them in their present situation.

## Practice:

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**Meet them where they are.** Young adults are ultimate and revolutionary consumers. Where they spend their money indicates what is essential to their present age:

- The Apple Store: cutting-edge digital technology
- Starbucks: a home away from home to study and socialize
- REI: adventure, extreme sports, outdoor activities, youth!

How can you incorporate their interests into your outreach to engage their attention?

On the St. Louis University Campus, a 117-year-old Lutheran church, Christ in the City, has been renovated into a coffeehouse. This coffeehouse attraction is a place where college students can spend time with friends, do homework between classes, or just relax. It's a place people want to go. The most interesting part: it's a worship venue. “The Crave” is a modern worship service for those who are seeking to connect with God in an authentic, non-traditional way. It will attract college students for the coffee and hopefully keep them for the worship.

This same idea goes for outdoor recreation. Coordinate a rock-climbing and rappelling day. Start a softball team. Have the members of your outreach invite their friends. Think outside the box and dive into their world. PLAN AND PREPARE.

**Build relationships.** Don't count on happenstance. First-time conversations rarely lead to the Sinner's Prayer with young adults. Be intentional. Pursue a meaningful friendship. Trust is the key to spiritual discussion.

I was taught, "Keep your friends close, keep your enemies closer. And, everyone is an enemy to begin with." In other words, assume everyone is trying to cheat you; only then will you be protected. This generation has been taught to sniff out a situation before making a move. They don't take what you say literally from the start. They question everything.

On a related note, don't assume respect. This must be gained over time. See the above tips to help you on this journey. When you say you will do something, keep your word. Because of high divorce rates and single-parent homes, this generation is accustomed to disappointment. Rarely do people say what they mean. If you follow through, you will stand out above the rest.

## Conclusion:

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Although belief in God and identification with religion among young adults is far lower than the national average, 36% say that they would like more opportunities to be active in a faith community. Speaking from personal experience and conversation with other young adults, young adults steer clear from church and God for several reasons: religion has been shoved down their throat; a Christian they know has caused them pain; they fear that becoming a Christian means becoming part of a mindless herd; or, they will have to forsake any fun they experience in life as it is – in other words, boring and non-descript.

## Questions to Consider:

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Look for these signs when in conversation with young adults:

Has religion been shoved down their throat?

Communicate the difference between this living, powerful God who exists today and mere "religion." A one-on-one relationship with God is different than ancient traditions. It is a relationship with God, not the person who shoved religion down their throat. And, after all, this is about *their* soul and *their* eternity.

Do they reject Christ or the idea of Christianity?

Look for the reason they perceive Christianity negatively. Perhaps a Christian hurt them. Separate the difference between Christ, who loves them unconditionally, from the hurtful person-- who is a sinner, just like everyone else.

Do they fear being a Christian means being a member of a mindless herd?

God has made us all unique. He hasn't made one person to be like anyone else. This also means that their relationship with God will be different from anyone else's. Becoming a follower of Christ doesn't mean losing your unique personality or style.

Do they think they will have to forsake fun to be a follower of Christ?

God wants us to live life abundantly. That means having fun, not somberly drudging through life just waiting for death!

**Author Bio:**

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