



Roanoke, Virginia

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“To What Will I Compare This Generation”

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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¹⁶*“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

¹⁷*‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’*

¹⁸*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”*

²⁵*At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

²⁸*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*



Last week, during the youth mission trip with Appalachia Service Project in Kentucky, I showed my age...several times.

But one time in particular stuck with me.

We were leaving our cabins to go to the Family Life Center where we had all of our meals, and I did something that made all 4 youth, and the 2 young adult chaperones, on the trip stop right where they were... this thing was so outdated that one of them said, “Ben, please tell me you didn’t just do that.”

You want to know what I did? I dabbled. (DAB)¹

Yep. But just so everyone is clear, that move is not cool anymore. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Don’t make the same mistake. I learned the hard way.

From one generation to the next, fads come and go, society and culture changes, and what was cool or in or hip or dope or far-out to one generation, can be super sus or cringe to the next.

Not only do social and cultural fads change and influence our lived experience, but the historical location of generations can shed light on how we all see ourselves, and how we interact with other generations and with the world. Each generation having lived in a particular time, within a particular national and global setting, has unique characteristics.

So, let’s look at the generations as we know them...²

“The Silent Generation”—those born between 1928 and 1945. These are the children of the Great Depression and World War II. The formative years of this generation saw the devastating economic downturn of the 1930s; they experienced the enduring trauma of war, and then a tireless

¹ The Dab was a popular gesture around the early to mid-2010’s that involves lifting one straight out to the side and bending the other arm at the elbow and leaning into the bent elbow with your head.

² Much of the generational descriptions were taken from FamilySearch blog (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/>) as well as resource guides from the Library of Congress for consumer research and marketing (<https://guides.loc.gov/consumer-research/market-segments/generations>)



rebuilding of a post-war nation. This generation is characterized as thrifty, loyal, respectful, and determined. The “silent” label refers to their image as conformists and their civic-mindedness.

“The Baby Boomers”—those born between 1946 and 1964. The name was given to this generation due to the baby boom that followed the war. This generation played a major role in the civil rights movement, including advocacy for women’s rights. They experienced the first tech revolution, with the advent of personal computers and the internet. This generation is characterized as relationship-centered, goal-centric, self-assured, and resourceful. Many in this generation fought in the wars; while others served in the anti-war movement of the time. They witnessed transformative social movements and technological advancements.

“Generation X”—those born between 1965 and 1980. The “X” in their name was used because they refused to be defined. The formative years of this generation included space exploration, great tension between the US and the Soviet Union, and the development of the modern computer. They are sometimes referred to as the middle child of generations. This generation is characterized as independent, flexible, critical thinkers, and self-reliant. They are the latchkey kids. This generation experienced economic recessions and witnessed the effects of globalization. So, the need for adaptability was seen in the economic, social, and cultural landscapes.

“Millennials”—those born between 1981 and 1995. Millennials grew up when technological advancements revolutionized the world we live in, witnessing the rise of social media and the accessibility of information. They faced the challenges of the 2008 economic recession, grappling with high unemployment rates and financial insecurity. They brought heightened attention to environmental issues. This generation is characterized as curious, willing to accept change and be changed, team-oriented, and they value feedback.

“Generation Z” (GenZ)—those born between 1996 and 2009. Gen Z grew up not knowing a world before the internet or smart phones. Gen Z exists in a hyper-connected world, which has greatly impacted them. The Covid-19 pandemic is the defining moment for this generation. Gen Z is more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation. They can be characterized as digital natives, highly educated, entrepreneurial, and aware. They pursue connection, just in different ways than before. They seek knowledge and wisdom, just in different ways than before.



Gen Z is using their digital fluency to connect, organize, and amplify their voices for things that matter to them.

“Generation Alpha”—those born from 2010 to today. We don’t know much about, sorry. At least not yet.

Much like the unique characteristics of each generation, John the Baptist and Jesus too had unique characteristics. They actually could not be more different: John, the bug-eating wilderness prophet, who wears odd clothing on purpose, and Jesus, who is frequently found dining at a table, sharing a good meal, who can be persuaded to keep the good wine flowing at a wedding reception. John, who addresses his hearers as a “brood of vipers,” and Jesus, who opens his Sermon on the Mount with blessings. Such differences have turned John’s once-booming “voice in the wilderness” into a questioning heart from the darkness of Herod’s prison.³

Even with these differences, John and Jesus share in the rejection they received. John came “neither eating nor drinking” yet the generation did not care for him, his style, or his demand for repentance. So, the generation played a dance tune on the flute, hoping to loosen him up a bit. Then, Jesus came and was ready to dance! Each gathering was a cause of celebration, eat, drink, and be merry for as long as everyone is invited it’s a party! The generation didn’t approve of Jesus’ guestlist, however, and called him a “glutton” and a “drunkard.”⁴

There is something to be said about the generational differences that make us play dance tunes on the flute one moment, hoping to change generational behavior, and then wail the next moment, hoping other generations will join in our mourning.

“To what will I compare this generation?” Jesus asked this of his generation. We too can ask this of our generation.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

The Silent Generation is like a steady lighthouse, guiding us through the storms of life, being a beacon of hope to the country and the world.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

³ Lance Pape, “Homiletical Perspective” essay on this passage in *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 3*, 213.

⁴ *Ibid*, 214.



Baby Boomers are like a roaring river, carving new paths in their wake, carving away at the barriers of social and cultural constructs.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

Gen X is like chameleons, seamlessly adapting to the shifting landscapes of technology, economy, and family ideals.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

Millennials are like chain-links of compassion and curiosity, inviting all to hold tightly together for a more inclusive world.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

Gen Z is like a phoenix rising from the ashes, embodying courage, inclusivity, and connectivity.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

Last week in Kentucky, I witnessed members of Gen Z, and members of all generations, doing great and amazing things. I witnessed a fun-loving group from diverse backgrounds come together to sing and dance and work. I witnessed kids from Virginia, North Carolina, Minnesota, and Connecticut join in the work of caring for the least, the lost, and the lonely of Bell County. I saw young people who have a zest for life and a zeal for compassion and empathy. I saw young members of this church, and others, embrace new things, new challenges, grabbing a drill or saw, seeking to learn and grow.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

Gen Z is like fearless adventurers, stepping into uncharted territory, challenging norms that confine them. This generation dares to ask tough questions, refusing to accept the world as it is. This generation rises up against the walls of prejudice, ignorance, and inequality with a spirit that is not intimidated. Just like Greta Thunberg, a Swedish environmental activist who boldly raises her voice for climate justice, who challenged world leaders to take immediate action.⁵ This generation turns pain into power as they pursue a world where all people can be who they are and are accepted just as they are. Just like Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani educational activist who fearlessly speaks out for girls everywhere, who was shot by a masked gunman because she spoke out publicly on behalf

⁵ <https://www.amraandelma.com/gen-z-activist-influencers/>



of girls and their right to learn.⁶ Gen Z embodies a childlike courageous exploration and the authenticity to be true to themselves.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

They are like a mosaic of love, where every piece is unique and valuable, contributing to the beauty of the whole. This generation embraces diversity, in all its forms, tearing down walls of discrimination and prejudice. They extend their hand to the “least of these,” the marginalized and forgotten. They speak out for the different, the new, those misunderstood by the world. Just like Taylor Cassidy, a young TikTok creator who uses her platform to shine a spotlight on black history, history that is not taught, not mentioned, not celebrated.⁷ Just like Madeline Stuart, a supermodel with down syndrome and autism, who speaks out for disability rights and acceptance.⁸ Just as Jesus called the least the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, so too does Gen Z.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

They are like seekers of truth in a world of noise and confusion. This generation, set to be the most educated generation, has the knowledge and discernment to sift through the information age with wisdom beyond their years. They understand the difficulties of life and are not afraid to talk about them. Just like Emma Chamberlain, a social media influencer, who has been open about her battle with depression and her battles with mental illness through her podcast.⁹ Just like Sameer Jha, who started the Empathy Alliance to support students who are bullied because of their LGBTQI+ identities in hopes to make schools a safer place for all.¹⁰ Like Emma Gonzalez and the numerous other young people who rallied against gun violence and pushed for gun control and gun reform following school shootings.¹¹ These truths, the truth of the power of love, compassion, and the pursuit for justice, these truths have been hidden from the wise and the intelligent and have been revealed to infants, the young and the vulnerable of Gen Z, for such was God’s gracious will.

“To what will I compare this generation?”

⁶ Malala’s Story page on her foundation’s website: <https://malala.org/malalas-story?sc=header>

⁷ Featured digital publication by *Variety*, Feb 26m 2021: “Taylor Cassidy, Rising TikTok Star Focused on Black History, Looks to Build a Full-Time Digital Creator Career” written by Todd Spangler

⁸ Read more of Madeline’s story on her website <https://www.madelinestuartmodel.com/>

⁹ <https://www.amraandelma.com/gen-z-activist-influencers/>

¹⁰ <https://tylerclementi.org/meet-tcfyouthambassador-sameer-jha/>

¹¹ <https://nationaltoday.com/birthday/emma-gonzalez/>



Yet with all of these joyful pursuits in hopes for a better tomorrow, this is a generation weary and heavy-burdened.

They are carrying the weight of anxiety and uncertainty. They are weary from the pressures of academic performance, career prospects, and the rapid pace of technological change. They are burdened with the weight of social expectations, the fear of rejection, and the struggle for acceptance. And this generation is carrying the weight of global issues such as climate change, inequality, and political unrest.

Beloved, children of each and every generation, you do not have to carry the burdens of the world in which you grew up all by yourself, the burdens of a world left to you by generations before you.

No matter what generation you belong, Jesus is inviting you to come, all of you, and find rest from the weariness and burdens of life.

Come: whoever you are, wherever you are, however you are, whenever you are. *Come.*

All: not just one generation, but all, those with questions, weary hearts, and heavy burdens. *Come. All.*

Rest: rest from the storms, from the stress, for the anxieties and uncertainties of life. Rest knowing you are loved, you are worthy, and you are accepted just the way you are. Rest finding joy in the dancing, and rest finding meaning in the mourning. *Come. All. Rest.*

May we, from generation to generation, join in the weightless wonder of faith, as we work, rest, and dance together.

Amen.

