

EQUIP THE NEXT GENERATION WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY AS BORN AGAIN TEND TO HAVE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD

Young people know less about the Bible than previous generations. While the problem of Biblical illiteracy has been discussed for decades, our latest surveys point to a growing problem—not only outside the church, but inside it as well.

As a result, the work of perpetuating the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3, ESV) among our children and grandchildren and credibly proclaiming the Gospel to a lost and confused world is made much more challenging. Instead of resembling the Bereans, who in Acts 17:10-12 searched the Scriptures as their measure of truth, too many modern believers seem to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

Probe Ministries has been studying this issue for more than a decade. A previous survey, the 2010 Culturally Captive Christians Survey, was limited

to born-again Americans ages 18 to 40. A 2020 survey of more than 3,100 Americans, ages 18 to 55, allowed us to make meaningful comparisons with the 2010 results, as well as compare them to many other surveys (General Social Survey, Barna, Lifeway, etc.).

THE UNAFFILIATED

The most dramatic change has been the percentage of young people who are unaffiliated with any religion (often referred to as “the nones” because they select atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular on a survey). In the last decade, the unaffiliated have almost



by **Kerby Anderson**

tripled, from 13% to 35% of the population. As we might expect, they know the least about the Bible, theology and the Biblical worldview.

Christian leaders aware of this concerning trend have sometimes predicted that these unaffiliated young people will eventually come back to church once they marry and have children. We refer to this as the Field of Dreams Myth—“If you build it, they will come.” We have built over 350,000 churches, but there isn’t much evidence these young people are

coming back.

A significant number of these young adults were rarely or never in church when they were young, so they aren't "coming back" to a church they never attended. Our surveys demonstrate that not only are they not coming back, but a significant percentage who were in church are leaving. We have also found that many of these young people aren't hostile to the Bible and church—they just don't see the Bible, Jesus and the church as relevant to their lives.

If we are to reach these younger generations, we will have to go to them and not assume they will come to us. Outreaches, from small-group neighborhood Bible studies to open-air crusades to media ministries (online content, radio, podcasts, TV) will be important in reaching them. And it will be important for pastors and Christian leaders to show them how the Bible and a saving relationship with Jesus Christ provides meaning and significance to them.

INSIDE THE CHURCH

Unfortunately, we have found that young people inside the church who would identify as born again also show high levels of Biblical illiteracy. They spend many more hours in front of screens each week exposed to unbiblical ideas than they do in church. In our surveys, young people are identified as born again if they say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and that commitment is still important to them today, and also that they believe they are going to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and received Jesus Christ as Savior.

We have found in our surveys that born-again young people (born 1980-2010) don't always have a Biblical worldview. On questions concerning a basic worldview (God, the Bible, Jesus and salvation) we found that those who are older (40-55) are more likely to give Biblically orthodox

answers than those who are younger (18-39). Once you add questions about absolute moral truth or belief in the person of Satan, the percentages drop significantly in the younger group.

One statement that best illustrates Biblical illiteracy is this: "Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus are all valid ways to God." Nearly two-thirds of young people who fell in the category of born-again Christians (60% to 65%, depending on the age group) agreed.

This is hardly the only survey that documents the rising number of young, self-identified Christians who accept pluralism. Pastors and Christian leaders must address this issue and teach what Jesus says in John 14:6—"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (NIV).

Another example can be found in a survey question concerning tolerance of other religious beliefs. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of born-again Christians ages 18 to 39 agreed with

4:12 reminds us that Jesus is the source of salvation: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (ESV).

These false views about salvation and tolerance also explain why there is a diminished interest in evangelism. A significant percentage of young people said they did not witness to others because they believed that other religious beliefs lead to Heaven. We have also found that many did not even know that Jesus commanded His followers to "make disciples" and had never heard about the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Pastors and Christian leaders must consistently teach the basics of the Christian life. We must not assume that everyone in the congregation or Bible study believes what we believe. In surveys we have provided for some churches, pastors have been surprised to find out how many in their congregation do not hold to Biblical truths.

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this statement: "It is important to let people know that I affirm as true their religious beliefs and practices." This younger generation has an incorrect view of tolerance. We call this the Princess Bride Myth: "You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means."

They use the word *tolerance* but have redefined it to mean *affirmation*. We should be civil and gracious to non-Christians, but that does not mean we should affirm their false beliefs about salvation. We should speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Acts

These surveys should encourage all of us to diligently teach God's Word (Deuteronomy 6:7) and make sure we have equipped (2 Timothy 3:17) the next generation with Biblical truth (2 Timothy 2:15). ■ ©2022 J. KERBY ANDERSON

Kerby Anderson is president of Probe Ministries International in Plano, Texas, and host of the syndicated daily "Point of View" radio and streaming broadcast. Details about the latest survey can be found at Probe.org.

The Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. The Scripture quotation marked NIV is taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version.