



GEN Z INSIGHTS: A COLLECTION OF BIBLE STUDIES



ifesworld.org/gen-z

INTRODUCTION

Recent cultural shifts and the arrival of what is popularly called “Gen Z” has prompted us to reexamine our understanding of and approach to student ministry among this new generation. This collection of Bible studies is designed to inspire and inform a fresh look at how we can help today’s students thrive as disciples and witnesses, and how we engage with and support younger staff.

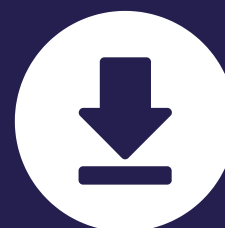
With carefully chosen scriptures, helpful commentary, practical questions, and heart-felt prayers, the studies can be used by an individual or for team study and discussion.

The collection explores four significant shifts that have shaped Gen Z and accompanies a new IFES report titled Gen Z Insights for Global Student Ministry. Both pieces were authored by Peter Dray, who has worked with UCCF, the IFES movement in the UK, for more than 20 years.

GOING DEEPER

[Explore more resources on the IFES Gen Z Insights webpage including:](#)

- *The new report, Gen Z Insights for Global Student Ministry*
- *Details of the Gen Z Insights podcast mini-series (or search for it on your preferred podcast platform)*
- *Other helpful materials from across the IFES fellowship*



WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 1. WISDOM IN A DIGITAL WORLD page 4**
Serving Gen Z, the Digitally Immersed Generation
- 2. THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH page 9**
Serving Gen Z, the Culturally Exposed Generation
- 3. TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY page 14**
Serving Gen Z, a Generation Concerned for
Mental Wellbeing
- 4. NOBLE-MINDED SEEKERS page 19**
Serving Gen Z, the Spiritually Open Generation

1 WISDOM IN A DIGITAL WORLD:

Serving Gen Z, the Digitally Immersed Generation

We serve at a time when digital technology has fundamentally altered how people are experiencing and interacting with the world. Generation Z stands apart from previous generations in its relationship with technology. Digital connectivity is the water this generation swims in – most having never known a time without quick and easy internet access.

Such digital immersion has profoundly shaped Gen Z and provided opportunities that previous generations could never have imagined. Gen Z students operate with unparalleled access to information, skills, and relationships.

Yet this constant connectivity is often accompanied by a sense of heaviness. Many Gen Zers report feeling ‘always on’ – they experience elevated levels of digital fatigue yet simultaneously feel unable to disconnect for more than a few hours.

- *What positive opportunities have digital connectivity created for students in your context? How have you seen technology enable learning, relationships, or ministry?*
- *In what ways are digital tools enhancing (rather than hindering) spiritual formation for Generation Z in this context?*

Generational Skepticism

In some contexts, Gen Z's much greater access to information is leading them to a generational scepticism. They are inclined to disbelieve what they have been taught by older generations – including, sometimes, the Christian faith.

If this is true in your context, you might ask: how might we help students grow in true biblical discernment online – testing everything, but holding fast to what is good?

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the “Teacher” offers wisdom that presciently speaks to these digital realities. Writing from a position of expectational access to knowledge, pleasure, and achievement, the Teacher reflects on what ultimately brings meaning in a world of endless pursuit.



READ
ECCLESIASTES 1:16-18

The Teacher establishes his credentials: he “increased in wisdom more than anyone” and “experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” But his conclusion is sobering. With increased knowledge comes increased sorrow.

British Kenyan commentator Michael Eaton distills the Teacher’s experience in these verses like this: “The more you understand, the more you ache.” Learning leads to despair if we do not look beyond the wisdom of this world to ultimate meaning.

- *How might an experience of endless searching, scrolling, and watching feel like ‘chasing after the wind’?*
- *How is the Teacher’s experience similar to Gen Z’s experience of constant access to information? In what ways can more knowledge lead to more grief?*
- *How have you seen this tension between knowledge and meaning play out in your own digital habits or in the students you work with?*

With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the
more knowledge, the more grief.

ECCLESIASTES 1:18



READ ECCLESIASTES 2:9-11

The Teacher moves from intellectual pursuits to experiential ones. He denies himself nothing. Yet, despite achieving greatness and experiencing every pleasure, he concludes it's all "meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

- *What parallels do you see between the Teacher's pursuits and online experiences today?*
- *How might these verses challenge the world of constant entertainment, novelty, and stimulation that many Gen Z students inhabit?*
- *According to these verses, why didn't the Teacher's accomplishments and pleasures ultimately satisfy him? What might we learn?*

Wearisome Questioning

Verse 12 develops a persistent theme in Ecclesiastes. The more questions the Teacher asks, the closer he gets to the unknowable. This makes him weary. As theologian Barry G. Webb says, "**Grappling with unanswerable questions brings exhaustion. Beyond this it is not safe to go.**"

Asking questions isn't wrong; far from it. Study is good and there's plenty that's good about Gen Z's curiosity and access to information. But Christians must also recognize the limits of what we can know – and be satisfied that sometimes trusting God is better than knowing all the answers.

**READ****ECCLESIASTES 12:12-14**

After exploring various paths to meaning, the Teacher concludes with a warning against endless study, pointing to fear of God and of keeping God's commandments as being "the duty of all mankind."

- *How might the Teacher's warning (verse 12) speak to today's digital fatigue and information overload?*
- *What does it mean to "fear God and keep his commandments" in our digital age?*
- *How does the Teacher's final word about judgment relate to the apparently consequence-free nature of what happens online?*
- *How might this simple conclusion offer freedom to students feeling overwhelmed by digital complexity?*
- *As you reflect on the teaching of Ecclesiastes, what practical wisdom might you offer members of Gen Z who feel digitally fatigued?*

Of making many books there is no end, and
much study wearies the body.

ECCLESIASTES 12:12



A PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wisdom found in your Word that speaks to every generation.

Give us insight to apply the ancient wisdom of Ecclesiastes to our contemporary challenges.

May we model healthy digital practices as we embrace technology's benefits for kingdom purposes.

Teach us - and the students we serve - to find our ultimate meaning not in endless information or digital connection, but in fearing you and walking in your ways.

May your truth provide an anchor in the constant flux of the digital world.

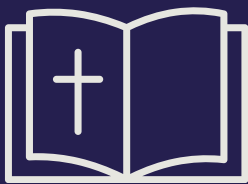
AMEN.

2 THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH: Serving Gen Z, the Culturally Exposed Generation

University campuses worldwide are increasingly diverse, with students crossing borders for education like never before. Those studying in their own nations have also grown up with an unprecedented level of global connectivity. Today's Gen Z students are asking questions shaped by an exposure to diverse worldviews – questions that previous generations may not have encountered.

In the book of Acts, we see God orchestrating movements of people across cultural and geographic boundaries to build his kingdom in new and unexpected ways. The church in Antioch stands as a powerful biblical model of cross-cultural ministry. Birthed through displacement, it ultimately became one of the most significant sending churches in Christian history.

As we explore Acts 11 and 13, consider how the Antioch church's story might inform and inspire your ministry among Generation Z students today. How might God be using the increasing diversity among Gen Z as an opportunity for fresh expressions of the gospel?



READ

ACTS 11:19-21

The church in Antioch was planted by a group of immigrants from Cyprus and Cyrene (modern day Libya). These believers would have been part of the city-shaking revival in Jerusalem. And now they were on the move again.

Stephen's loyalty to Jesus to the point of death had sparked a wave of persecution. The remaining believers now ran for their lives.



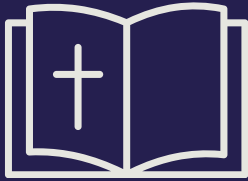
- *The Antioch church was born from persecution and displacement. How do you think this traumatic beginning might have influenced the church's approach to community and gospel ministry from the start?*
- *Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene took the unprecedented step of preaching to Greeks (verse 20). In what ways might their experience as displaced people have prepared them to cross this cultural boundary?*

Reflecting on how these unnamed followers of Jesus are used by God to lead many Greeks to Christ, Zimbabwean theologian Anderson Moyo writes, **"Acts 11... points to the fact that God can use anyone who is available and willing to take a risk with God's assignment."**

- *What evidence do you see in the text that God was affirming their cross-cultural outreach? How does this reveal God's heart for the diverse city of Antioch?*
- *In your own context, how does Moyo's statement challenge or encourage you in your approach to serving today's diverse student body?*

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch.

ACTS 11:19

**READ**

ACTS 11:22-24

The church in Jerusalem hears about what's happening in Antioch. They send Barnabas to investigate. His arrival prompts “a great number of people” to come to the Lord Jesus in a fresh spurt of growth.

Barnabas: Bridge Builder and Encourager

Barnabas was a great choice to represent the Jerusalem church. He represented apostolic authority while also being open to new expressions of faith. His nickname, “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36), reflects a gift for nurturing spiritual growth in others.

With his Cypriot Jewish background, he could navigate Greek culture and Jewish traditions. His personal connections to Cyprus probably helped him build trust with the church planters in Antioch.

- *Barnabas is sometimes called the patron saint of IFES staff! If this is so, what specific qualities might we cultivate as we serve increasingly diverse student communities?*
- *Verse 23 describes three things Barnabas did upon arriving in Antioch. What were they, and what do they reveal about effective ministry in a diverse environment?*
- *Consider what we know about Barnabas. How had God been forming him for the tensions and new questions he would encounter in Antioch?*

**READ**

ACTS 13:1-3

Around three years later, the church's leadership evolved to reflect Antioch's own diversity.

- *If you had been a member of this church, what aspects might have been most precious to you? What challenges might you have found the hardest?*
- *The first intentional missionary journey emerges from the church in Antioch. What relationship do you see between the church's multicultural identity and the global vision Jesus gives them?*
- *Luke intentionally highlights the ethnic and cultural diversity of the church's leadership team. What theological significance do you think this might have?*

The church in Antioch shows us how the gospel can thrive at the crossroads of cultural change. Cultural adaptability breeds missionary vision. The church that initially reached across boundaries to share the gospel locally becomes a church Jesus uses to send proclaimers across the world.

Acts invites us to consider that the diversity among Gen Z on today's campuses isn't just a challenge to navigate, but could be God's design for a fresh expression of Christ's kingdom in our generation.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

ACTS 13:2



A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the example of your church in Antioch – diverse, adaptable, and mission-minded.

Give us eyes to see your grace at work in the changing faces of our campuses.

Help us, like Barnabas, to recognize and encourage your work in unexpected places and people.

Make us willing to cross boundaries with the gospel and shape our fellowships into communities that reflect the beautiful diversity of your kingdom.

Use us – and the Gen Z students we serve – to advance your mission in our generation.

AMEN.

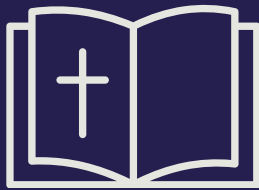
3 TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY: Serving Gen Z, a Generation Concerned for Mental Wellbeing

Attitudes towards wellbeing and quality of life are rapidly evolving in many countries. Gen Z especially holds a markedly different outlook – for three principal reasons:

- 1) As health conditions have improved, members of Gen Z have grown up with the expectation of long life. In turn, health messaging in many countries has moved from simply elongating life to making changes for healthy living.
- 2) Gen Z individuals experienced the COVID-19 pandemic during a critical stage of their development. With many personally experiencing profound anxiety and loneliness, Gen Z's response is to place a high premium upon wellbeing in all its forms – including mental health.
- 3) The pandemic disproportionately interrupted the lives of Gen Zers – it affected their education, friendships, spiritual development, romance, and entry into the workforce. Today, many Gen Zers still feel years behind where they hoped to be. As a generation, they have a distinctive way of relating to institutional reliability, personal risk, and long term planning.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul offers a metaphor that speaks to these experiences: treasure in jars of clay. Writing from his own experience of suffering and limit, Paul recognises human fragility but also the extraordinary power of God to work through it.

Paul's words provide us with a framework for understanding, ministering to, and working alongside today's students and younger staff members as they search for life in its fullness.

**READ**

2 CORINTHIANS
4:7-12

In verses 8 and 9, Paul describes feeling “afflicted,” perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “struck down” - yet not destroyed. Knowing the risen Christ helps Paul face almost overwhelming pressure.

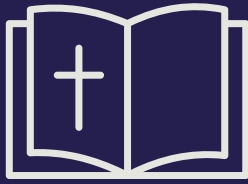
- *How might Paul's language resonate with or challenge Gen Z students or young staff who feel very aware of their fragility?*
- *According to these verses, in what ways should Christians expect to feel fragile? In what ways should Christians expect to feel resilient?*
- *How does Paul's outlook challenge you personally?*

The tension between vulnerability and strength lies at the heart of Paul's thinking. Reflecting on this dynamic, Peruvian theologian Samuel Escobar wrote, **"The clay jar keeps breaking so that the treasure may be seen. Our vulnerability becomes the stage on which God's power is displayed."**

- *Tell a story of when you have seen God's power displayed through human vulnerability – in your own life or someone else's.*
- *How do you think hearing stories like these might encourage Gen Z students and staff in your context?*

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

**READ****2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-15**

Despite his sense of fragility, Paul maintains an outward-looking mindset. In verse 13, Paul explains that personal suffering does not disqualify him from speaking for Christ – in fact, quite the opposite.

Many members of Gen Z are deeply aware of the fragility of their minds, bodies, and plans.

- *We tend to think that our weakness will hinder the advance of the gospel. How do these verses challenge this view?*
- *In what ways do you think Paul's confident statement in verse 14 is especially good news for today's students and young adults?*

**READ****2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18**

Paul contrasts present affliction and future glory – between what is seen and what is unseen. Knowing Christ allows Paul to reframe his sufferings in an eternal perspective.



- *Earlier in 2 Corinthians, Paul described being “utterly burdened beyond our strength” (1:8). Now he calls his afflictions “light and momentary.” What might this teach us about balancing honest acknowledgment of our suffering with hope?*
- *How might verses 16-18 speak to members of Gen Z who feel their lives have been made harder by the pandemic?*

Some Gen Z individuals are so concerned for their health that they are afraid to make certain sacrifices. They are worried that additional effort could over-burden their fragile minds or bodies.

- *To what extent do you recognise this phenomenon in your context?*
- *What principles do you see in this passage for building resilience and a sacrificial mindset in student leaders without minimising their legitimate concerns?*

Paul concludes by calling us to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- *How might adopting this focus attractively mark students out on university campuses in your context?*

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16

A woman with long, wavy hair is shown in profile, looking upwards towards a bright sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, with the sun low on the horizon. The woman's face is partially in shadow, and her hair is illuminated by the warm light of the setting sun.

A PRAYER

*Lord Jesus,
Thank you for the profound truth that
we carry your treasure in fragile jars
of clay.*

*Give us wisdom to understand the
unique experiences of today's
students – their vulnerability, their
resilience, and their search for
meaning amid disruption.*

*Help us affirm the reality of human
limitation and the extraordinary
power of your resurrection life.*

*Guide us in navigating the tension
between sacrificial service and
faithful stewardship of the bodies
and minds you've given us.*

*May we see our present challenges
in the light of eternal glory, and may
your grace extend to more and more
students through our faithful witness.*

AMEN.



4 NOBLE-MINDED SEEKERS: Serving Gen Z, the Spiritually Open Generation

Access to diverse perspectives and information is altering how people around the world form and hold beliefs. Members of Generation Z are especially willing to question, reconsider, and change their minds, even about deeply held convictions.

This openness stems partly from their connectivity. Through social media, online forums, and digital platforms, Gen Z individuals regularly encounter new worldviews, life experiences, and belief systems. They may also have a weaker sense of local community.

All this tends to make them more sceptical of their inherited beliefs and more open to considering other options. This flexibility is creating opportunities for gospel witness. Gen Z students who might not traditionally have engaged with the gospel are being intrigued by what they're seeing – especially when they encounter attractive Christian community.

Yet this same openness presents challenges: those raised as Christians are also more likely to question their beliefs.

- *What examples have you seen of Gen Zers' willingness to change their minds – both positively and negatively – in your context?*
- *How have you seen Gen Zers' global connectivity and exposure to diverse perspectives shape the questions they ask about faith?*

In Acts 17, Luke introduces us to groups in two cities. They make dramatically different responses to Paul's preaching about Jesus. Their responses can help us understand how to engage constructively with Gen Z's questioning spirit.

**READ**

ACTS 17:1-9

Paul arrives in Thessalonica and begins teaching about Jesus in the synagogue. There is a swift and decisive response – but not in the way that Paul had hoped.

- *How do different groups respond to Paul's message (verses 4-5)? What does this tell us about how new ideas can be received?*
- *Paul's opponents accuse him of "turning the world upside down" (verse 6). What does this suggest about the perceived threat of his message?*

The Thessalonians reveal one way that people can respond to challenging new ideas: quick rejection and aiming to silence the messenger. They never truly investigate Paul's claims.

- *Have you seen similar patterns of quick dismissal without investigation?*
- *What factors contribute to this kind of response today, even among a generation known for questioning?*

These men who caused trouble all over the world
have now come here!

ACTS 17:6

Communities of Discovery

The Bereans investigated Paul's claims as a community. This wasn't just convenient; it was crucial. Whether we find ideas believable depends on three factors: evidence, personal experience, and community. While we often assume evidence is most important, research shows that community – the people whose judgment we trust – most powerfully shapes what we find believable.

For Gen Z, these communities are increasingly online: digital rather than local, chosen rather than inherited. This creates both opportunities and challenges for gospel witness. The Berean model offers a better way: communities committed to seeking truth together, where questions are welcomed and investigation happens together.



READ

ACTS 17:10-12

The Bereans don't just listen politely or accept everything uncritically. They test Paul's claims. Their eagerness to hear is matched by their willingness to examine what they're hearing.

- *Exactly what makes the Bereans 'more noble-minded' than the Thessalonians?*
- *Which aspect – eagerness to explore or careful examination – is weakest among students in your context? How might you encourage what is lacking?*
- *The Bereans don't test Paul's claims individually; they do it together. How do you think this changed their experience of exploration? What are the implications?*



The contrast between the Thessalonians and the Bereans is striking.

- *What do their responses show us about the importance of how we approach new ideas – especially claims about Jesus?*
- *What could it look like to create opportunities for curious non-Christian students to explore the claims of Jesus in community, Berean-style?*

American theologian Tim Keller reflects on the Bereans' approach: **"The Bereans were commended not for their scepticism, but for their noble-minded pursuit of truth. They show us that the opposite of doubt is not certainty, but rather faithful investigation."**

- *How might Keller's distinction help you better serve doubting or questioning students from Christian backgrounds?*
- *How could adopting more of a 'Berean' emphasis change the culture of your ministry or movement – both in how you handle questions and how you encourage students to channel their curiosity?*
- *Thinking specifically about the year ahead, what's one concrete step you could take to create a more 'Berean' environment in your context?*

They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

ACTS 17:11

A photograph of a group of young people, likely students, gathered in a large, white, tent-like structure. The scene is dimly lit with a cool blue and purple color cast. In the foreground, a young man with glasses and a headband is kneeling on the ground, his hands clasped in prayer. Behind him, several other young people are standing, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The background shows the interior of the tent with some structural elements visible.

A PRAYER

*Heavenly Father,
thank you for the example
of the noble-minded Bereans
who show us that eager hearts
and careful minds can work
together in seeking truth.*

*Give us wisdom as we serve
Generation Z students who
question everything. Help us
welcome their questions as
opportunities rather than
threats.*

*Make us faithful like Paul -
persistent in proclaiming Jesus
while respecting people's need
to investigate.*

*Create Berean hearts among
our students - eager to hear
about your Son and diligent to
examine your Word.*

*May their willingness to change
their minds lead them not into
endless uncertainty, but into
confident knowledge of Jesus.*

*Use their questioning spirits to
draw them closer to you.*

AMEN.



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