

*The 21<sup>st</sup>*  
**CENTURY  
EXODUS**



# THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EXODUS

“Youth Ministry today (as we know it) may help build a faith that works well while students are IN youth group but it doesn’t create a sustainable faith for when students leave...” – Mark Oestreicher, The Youth Cartel



**60%**

of students walked away from their faith between high school and the end of college last year

More than half of American Christians are concerned with modern youth ministry, viewing it as **too shallow** and entertainment-focused, resulting in an inability to train mature believers.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, not all of this perception is unfounded.

1 <https://www.barna.com/research/the-priorities-challenges-and-trends-in-youth-ministry/>

2 <https://www.charismanews.com/us/41465-youth-groups-driving-christian-teens-to-abandon-faith>



This new reality for our youth should both break and challenge our hearts once we start to ask why. What if our young people are leaving because they are struggling to truly engage with God in the first place? **What if they never fully understood Him or the Church?** What if we forgot to ask, or worse, what if we didn't notice when they left?

We can no longer **sit idle** as this issue continues to expand.

We need to identify and commit to addressing the reasons GenZ is leaving the Church and seek to mend their questions with God's eternal Truth.

Scripture commands us to continually invest in spiritually preserving, sharpening and inspiring the next generation (Psalm 78:6-7). Our young people hold a whole host of questions, passions and fears. Now is not the time to avoid them, it is the time to embrace them.

A CHANGING

# LANDSCAPE

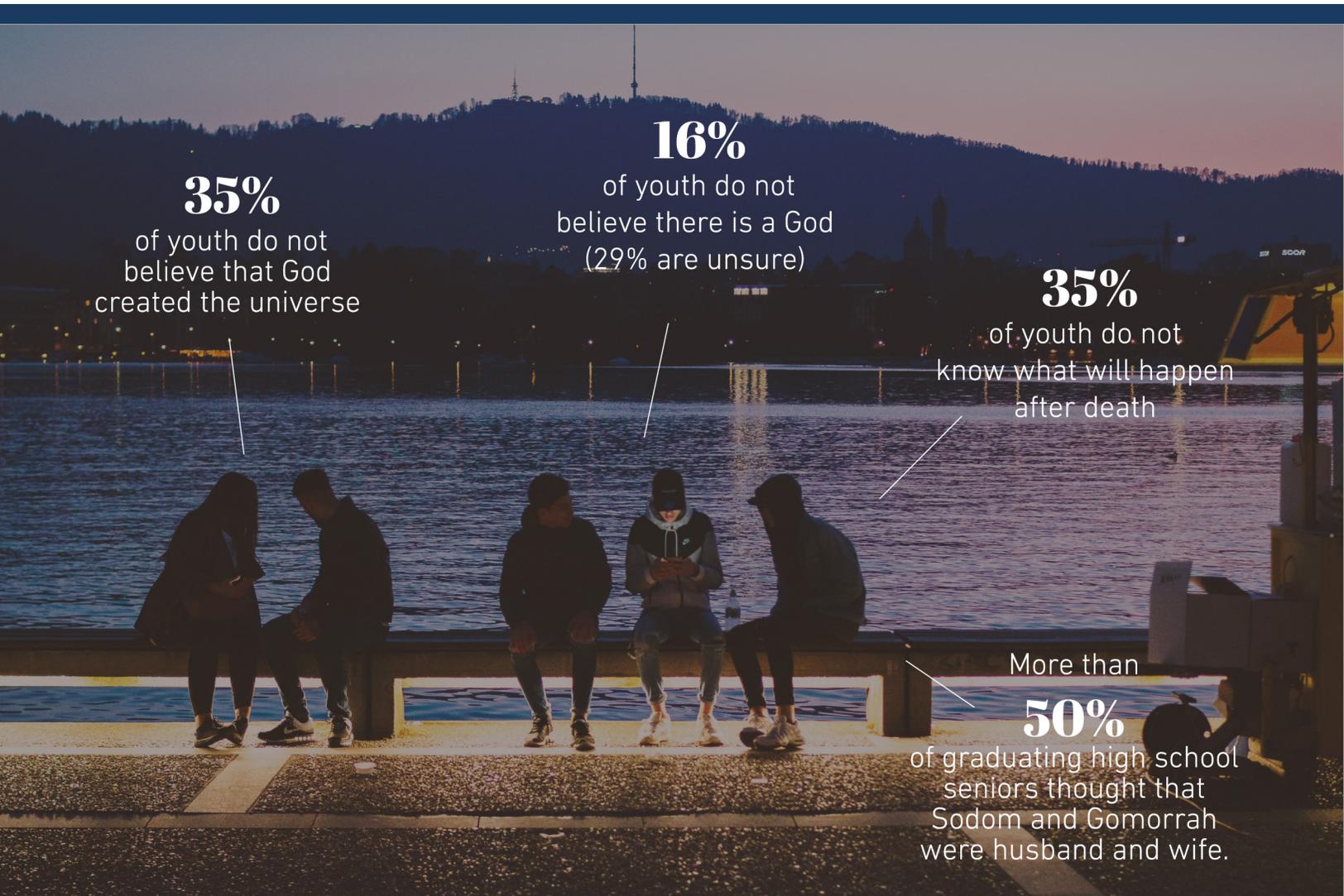
To begin to understand the problem we're facing, we have to take a good long look at the Gen Z unique context. For instance, young people, through technology, are growing to anticipate total freedom as they've grown up with unlimited access to digitally explore the world.

Many churches haven't figured out how to embrace this expansive, adventure-seeking Millennial mindset. Instead the Church is steadfastly marching on in its solidly rooted traditions, offering featureless programs instead of epic, life-altering experiences - moralistic content instead of invitations to **experience** larger-than-life God moments.

Because the church has **struggled to adapt** with an ever evolving culture,



Biblical engagement and literacy have quickly declined. In our post-modern, post-Christian society, the Bible is considered highly irrelevant. From our churches, schools, and our own homes, we are failing to share the Bible's immutable principles and well-loved stories with children. This has resulted in a tremendous amount of moral and biblical confusion. For both adult leaders and children alike, Scripture's influence on our



**35%**  
of youth do not believe that God created the universe

**16%**  
of youth do not believe there is a God  
(29% are unsure)

**35%**  
of youth do not know what will happen after death

More than  
**50%**  
of graduating high school seniors thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

daily life is dwindling. **Nearly two-thirds (57%) of those ages 18-28 read their Bibles less than three times a year, if at all.**<sup>4</sup> Biblical literacy and understanding has never been lower. And why is Biblical literacy at an all-time low? In my mind, the answer is simple. *You can't know what you don't experience.*

The church is in a position to revolutionize what it means to **experience God.**



And no, I don't mean heightening the amount of entertainment we offer students. I'm talking about truly offering young people the chance to engage at their level with the powerful, life-altering, eternal Truth of God in new and exciting ways.

While the landscape has changed, the destination has not. **It's time to adjust our trajectory and ensure the next generation doesn't end up wandering off the map.**

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4 <https://religionnews.com/2013/04/04/poll-americans-love-the-bible-but-dont-read-it-much/>



A NEW

# APPROACH

Gen Z operates within an expansive world, full of access and abundance. They need a faith that is equally as expansive. They desire depth and wonder. I firmly believe, and

research clearly shows that now—more than ever—we need to return to a **“thick” Gospel.**

One where accepting Christ is the first step in a larger process of working out our salvation (Phil. 2:12). In order to effectively reach a Gen Z audience with this thick Gospel, it’s going to take two things: **discovery and relationship.**



## DISCOVERY

Our traditional method for scripture engagement consisted of “learn” then “do.” However, with ubiquitous access to information and 24/7 connectivity, **learning and doing have become inseparable.** In this new world, Gen Z is beckoned not to simply memorize, but instead to wonder and discover. They **want to participate in their learning!** Creating a culture of biblical engagement begins with guiding learners through a discovery process.

Individual discovery leads to personal learning; personal learning leads to concepts that continue to resonate long-term.

## RELATIONSHIP

More than just involvement with their learning, Gen Z needs intimate connection on several levels. To achieve this, foundationally, we must emphasize a **relationship with Christ** as opposed to adherence to a set of rules. God must be revealed as more than a series of lines that must not be crossed - rather He is an approachable lover, a Father, and the only One capable of truly knowing us as we are.



In an age **hyper-focused on connectivity**, the person of Jesus offers the intimacy and presence this generation so deeply craves.

Additionally, Gen Z needs relationships within their faith communities. And not just friendships, but mentorship. Research shows us that the most important factor by far in the lives of teens who develop lasting faith is a **parent** who is willing to walk with them through their faith journey.

Faith also endures largely in young people who are surrounded by an **intergenerational faith community**. Young people need the generations surrounding them to step forward and live life with them. It's a part God's design (Psa. 78:6), and it is just as needed now as it was 2000 years ago.



## A LASTING RESULT

There's one final element we believe is crucial to understanding and cultivating spiritual vibrancy in young people long-term - assessment. For a long time we have avoided assessment within the church because it seems too rigid or objective.

But our avoidance of assessment has left us with little to no reliable understanding of the state of our youth. If the only thing you can measure as a church is attendance, something is missing.



**The main goal of assessment** is to evaluate whether or not students are moving forward. That can't be done once or twice a year...not at the rate our world is changing. Building micro assessments into your programming allows you to constantly tweak, update, and upgrade your methods.

Most importantly these assessments show how your audience is (or isn't) engaging with your content. Regularly examining these "snapshots" will provide you with informed analysis about their level of engagement and movement toward growth.

While the metric will be as different and unique as your ministry, as long as there IS something being measured, you'll know whether your outputs are supporting your outcomes.



In order to engage this generation with the Gospel message, it is time to embrace a philosophy of youth ministry that connects with today's audience. Learn more about Feed, a collection of resources designed to equip youth leaders in sharing biblical principles with students in a relevant way. **Visit: [feed.bible](https://feed.bible)**