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GREG'S BLOG

Digital Worship May Create America's Next Spiritual Awakening

by [Greg Laurie](#) on Apr 14, 2020

Like everywhere else across America, the church I pastor in Southern California, Harvest Christian Fellowship, had to go exclusively to online services four weeks ago. Scrambling to respond to the abrupt change in circumstance, we were pleasantly surprised when on the first Sunday of quarantine we realized our online attendance exceeded 250,000.



But then it just continued to grow. Last week, we had over a million people tune in for church. These are people literally from all around the world, from every age and background, who are missing church. So, to the best of our ability, we are bringing church to them. What's more, hundreds of thousands of them are people whom marketers would refer to as the "target demographic" between the ages of 18 and 34. Since the shutdown started, our millennial viewership is up 235 percent.

What exactly is going on here?

For decades, the church has been trying, seemingly in vain, to reach America's youngest generations—millennials and Generation Z—with the gospel. All the while, we've seen headline after headline and poll after poll reminding us that church attendance has been falling, and rapidly. The fastest-growing religion in America is now the "nones," those individuals who aren't necessarily atheists. Maybe they're loosely spiritual, but they profess faith in no specific religion or tradition.

Enter a global pandemic. Could it be that simply by responding as best and as quickly as we could to something no one saw coming, we've unwittingly stumbled into part of God's answer to a generational riddle?

A millennial friend of mine wrote:

"As a millennial I understand in a way a Gen X or a Boomer doesn't (and probably a little less than a Gen Z) what it means to be digitally native. Doesn't it make sense, then, that God

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world before cellphones. Perhaps this is why some psychologists refer to millennials as “Generation Panic.” They have been so inundated by a world of unrealistic comparisons and “excessive expectations” online that they are afflicted by “a harsh inner critic and an obsessive need to achieve.”

Meanwhile, many have a form of in-person social anxiety. They’ve been interacting on social media and message boards like Reddit, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram for so long that while they’re extremely fluent in those digital settings, they are much less comfortable with in-person interactions. Some psychologists are now prescribing screen detoxes and screen-free zones to help our young people cope with the anxieties of life and relationships.

This is obviously problematic, taken on the whole, but God will use any opening He can get.

Again, my millennial friend told me:

“Just sitting alone in my living room, watching Sunday service with no one watching me, with no pressure to behave or perform, I had an encounter with God that was truly powerful.”

In a perfect world, they would all be part of a great congregation with a loving pastor, accompanied by a spiritually supportive community. But we don’t live in a perfect world. We live in a world of rampant anxiety and a global pandemic.

But here is the most surprising thing to me about this new, burgeoning online congregation. At the end of my message, I extended an opportunity for people to pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into their lives. At last count, over 31,000 have responded. That’s in four weeks.

You’ve heard of “life imitating art.” Well, this is virtual reality becoming actual reality.

Maybe it’s a new piece to an ever-evolving puzzle: how to say something old to a new audience. Just as Paul wrote letters, as Gutenberg used the printing press and as Billy Graham used film and television, the church is called to engage the un-churched and under-churched, using whatever useful tools we have at our disposal. The new wave of video technology allows a preacher like me to bring the gospel into your living room in a way that is more personal and intimate than ever before. It’s also a medium millions of young people are very comfortable with.

Don’t misunderstand me. Nothing takes the place of the local church and gathering and worshipping in person. I am also alarmed by some of the overreach on the part of some

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congregation in person again, hopefully in the very near future. But in the meantime, while we are all still sheltering in place, we are seeing something take place that looks an awful lot to me like a spiritual awakening.

Let's hope and pray that it continues. America is long overdue.

Learn more about Pastor Greg: [Bio](#)

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