

GEN Z PERSONAS

FAITH TIPS

FOR EVERY TYPE OF TEEN



Ministry is not one-size-fits all and this is especially true of next gen ministry. There's a lot of research out there on Gen Z, but OneHope's Global Youth Culture research showed how truly diverse this generation is. We can see a diversity among this generation that goes far beyond generations of the past. They are more ethnically diverse, more ideologically diverse, and more willing to be fluid in their beliefs and identity.

As we seek to minister to today's teens, we must understand not just generational hallmarks, but the distinct characteristics of individuals and groups within Gen Z. We must be willing to understand them deeply, meet them where they are, and engage them in thoughtful dialogue and authentic relationships. Let's look at each Gen Z persona we discovered through our research and some practical tips on how to minister to each one.



HURT NONE

The “hurt nones” were raised in or around Christianity, but they didn’t like all that they saw there and didn’t feel accepted. Many of them have clashed with Christians over the topics of gender identity or sexual orientation and some have been deeply and personally hurt by how this was handled.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **Loving Christians in their lives.** These teens have been hurt in the past by those claiming to represent Christ. They’ve been burned before, and they don’t ever want to experience that again. They need loving Christians in their lives to journey with them, listen patiently, empathize, and help wisely discern the roots of their hurt. For those who are offended, how can we help them heal and see that the Body of Christ is a loving and welcoming place for them?
- **An eternal perspective.** The concept of heaven and hell is not new to these teens. They’ve heard what the Bible says about sin and its eternal consequences and they’re honestly tired of hearing about it. Nothing bothers a hurt none more than what they see as a judgey Christian. It’s going to require a new approach to help them understand the seriousness of sin without shutting down the conversation before it even begins. How can we communicate that a life submitted to Christ is deeper, richer, and more fulfilling than a life without Him?
- **A transformed experience of religion.** Hurt nones tend to focus on the external requirements of religion and see it as controlling and manipulative. They need help experiencing faith not as a set of rules, but as a life-giving relationship with the Creator of the universe. Heads up: they will also be the first to sniff out any inauthenticity in our faith walks or within our churches.
- **A welcoming church community.** These teens are not at a church now, but don’t mistake their absence for hostility. Some would be willing to check it out based on the strength of a personal relationship. But that church community needs to be willing to help own their hurt, answer their hard questions, and journey with them personally and sincerely.
- **Redemptive conversations around identity.** Most of the nones we talked to identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. This is one of the primary barriers standing between them and Christ and an area where some teens have experienced deeply personal hurt from Christians close to them. They’re not really looking to give faith a chance when that faith conflicts with how they see their identity. It’s going to be tough, but we have to prayerfully engage in these conversations in a redemptive way rooted in authentic and strong personal relationships.





APATHETIC NONE

Following in the footsteps of their non-religious parents and secular culture, the “apathetic nones” don’t believe in God or feel the need for faith in their life. But they also don’t care what you believe in, so long as you don’t force your beliefs on others.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **Vibrant faith examples.** These teens can respect that faith might work for you, they just think it isn’t for them. We can start with our own example of living in step with Scripture and showing how it saturates and transforms every part of our lives.
- **Authentic peer relationships.** Apathetic nones probably won’t actively push away people of faith, so this can be a great opportunity. Encourage Christian teens to seek them out as friends and engage them in authentic relationship that might someday penetrate their spiritual apathy.
- **A push to question.** Apathetic nones are disconnected from spiritual realities and lack a sense of urgency to ask and answer life’s big questions. How can we help them see that eternity is not just an intellectual exercise but something they need to care about for their lives today?
- **An opportunity for God to work.** These teens are open to personal experiences, but they don’t really expect to have a spiritual encounter. We can encourage them to invite God in and put His Word to the test in their lives.
- **A bridge to the church.** Apathetic nones largely see church as a social club for Christians. They’re not against it, they just don’t think it is for them. How can we create a bridge to our ministries through authentic personal relationships and create a curiosity about exploring a faith community.





PASSIVE NOMINAL

Many Christian teens have faith in their lives, but are not actively working to make it their own. They're "nominal Christians". These teens are in Christian families and may even be regular church attenders. But without those external encouragements, they are in danger of falling away and some are already emotionally checked out.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **A personal faith.** For these Christian teens, faith is peripheral instead of personal. They go through the motions, but it hasn't really come to life for them. How can we help them embrace a life-giving relationship with Christ that soaks into every part of who they are?
- **Committed Christian friends.** The great opportunity for passive nominals is that they are within arm's reach. They haven't walked out on their faith or church community...yet. But they are in danger of slowly fading from view. Committed Christian friends and mentors can very often make the difference. Simply being in the presence of wholehearted disciples of Jesus can make them hungry for more. How can we intentionally invite them into our lives and encourage their Christian peers to do the same?
- **The right focus.** Passive nominals understand that Christians are characterized by certain beliefs and behaviors, but they tend to stop there and miss the bigger picture. They see the checklist, but not how those things overflow from a heart authentically transformed by the Gospel. How can we help them refocus on the epic purpose of being a true Christ follower and the calling that is on our lives because of that?
- **Biblical knowledge and engagement.** Passive nominals have grown up hearing Scripture, but they don't actually know it for themselves. They see the Bible more as God's rules than God's Word. How can we help them grow a love for Scripture and allow it to speak into their daily lives?
- **Conviction of truth.** These teens are not rooted deeply in God's truth, and this leaves them vulnerable. They have accepted the world's sophisticated arguments about subjective truth and adopted culture's posture of tolerance. They need to understand why truth matters and that not all roads will ultimately lead to life.





PROGRESSIVE NOMINAL

Some Christian teens have shallow roots, but not because they have been apathetic about their faith. Progressive nominals have actually thought a lot about what Christianity means. But they have considered it alongside the messaging of culture and in the end a secular gospel has won their hearts.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **A faith that thinks and feels.** These teens have seen examples of faith in action that they haven't found admirable. They are very often friends and allies of Hurt Nones and they take exception to Christians who are anti-gay and churches who are judgemental. How can we encourage their empathy alongside a growing understanding of God's standards?
- **Biblical voices and role models.** Culture has cornered the market when it comes to influencers. Progressive nominals likely have plenty of voices they are listening to that winsomely sell a secular gospel. But where are the voices that engage culture with the message of the true Gospel? They need relatable role models who show how the Bible speaks today and can help them reclaim their true faith foundation.
- **An understanding of God's justice.** These teens have a beautiful heart for justice. They rightly oppose faith that is hypocritical and hurtful. But they counterbalance by emphasizing only Jesus' love and acceptance. They need to understand that the Bible is more than the Golden Rule and that the truest justice is found in Christ laying down His life for us.
- **A heart for God's truth.** These teens are looking for a faith that goes beyond intellectual positions and is big enough to encompass the pain and complexity they experience in the world around them. But they fail to see God's Word as holding these answers. How can we help them see that Scripture is a trustworthy guide for today's questions and issues?
- **Welcoming spaces for conversation.** Progressive nominals need space to process and live out their deep values for love and justice within the boundaries of God's truth. Some may be critical of the Body of Christ, but many are still church attenders and they are actively wrestling with these concepts. How can we dive with them into the conflicts they feel and welcome their questions and struggles in the safety of authentic relationship?





PROGRESSIVE COMMITTED

Some Christian teens have all the hallmarks of being committed to their faith. They are attending church, reading their Bible, and actively seeking to grow spiritually. But there is a fracture in their worldview when it comes to the topics of LGBTQ+ specifically. This hairline crack in their theology can widen into a large and surprising gap in lifestyle. So you might turn around and find an active, serving believer in your youth group ready to come out as queer and bring their girlfriend to church.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **A conviction of created identity.** These teens love Jesus and want to serve Him, but they also want the personal freedom to choose their gender or sexual orientation. They have absorbed culture's message that identity is your right to choose. Interestingly, they sincerely want to make this work with their faith and might not even see the conflict. These teens need to see the beauty in their created identity and the love, wisdom, and absolute claim of God to form us and guide us within His boundaries.
- **Submission to Scripture's authority.** Progressive Committeds are reading their Bibles and believe it is God's Word for believers to follow. But they have selectively honed in on the Gospel's mercy apart from its truth. They don't want to lay down their right to choose for themselves the demands God should make on their life. As a result, they compromise Scripture's authority and choose interpretations of the Bible that fit their personal values on identity. It's a tricky balance to get right and it ultimately lacks integrity. How can we help them develop a conviction of Scripture's authority over all areas of their life, including identity?
- **A true vision of Christ.** These teens love Christ and have accepted His sacrifice for their lives, but they are missing out on some of the depth and power of the Gospel. Christ died so that we could have an abundant life within the boundaries of God's beautiful design—not so that we could choose to live in sin. How can we help them reclaim a true vision of Christ and what His death on the cross means for how we live today?
- **A church that wrestles.** Progressive Committeds love the Body of Christ and you will find them at church and inside your ministry. But their viewpoints may stretch and push your church to refine its approach to the LGBTQ+ conversation. We need to understand the deeper things at the root of these issues and have open conversations about them. We need thoughtful dialogue about what shapes us and the difference between feelings, desires, and identity. In addition, we need to look to Scripture and what it tells us about the deceptive nature of our hearts and the sin that resides in us all. Teens need churches who don't run from the wrestle and pastors who both lead in love and hold to truth in this area.

A life that aligns. These teens are living in a battle. They're caught between what God says and what feels natural and right to them. They want to have it all. When pushed, it is easy for them to look around and accuse the Christian community of having unfair standards. "We all have sin in our lives" is a favorite line of the Progressive Committed along with the argument that no sin is greater than another. It will take courage, maturity, and mentoring for them to see that they are being called by a God who has an absolute claim on their lives. In addition, they need to see us as leaders living out God's absolute claim on our own lives.





ALL-IN COMMITTED

If you're in need of encouragement, just look at the lives of the All-In Committed Christians. They are proof that it is possible, at a young age, to have a faith that is full of both grace and truth in a world of overwhelming ambiguity and cultural pressure. Though many of these teens have dealt with hardship or difficulties, they have discovered the truth of Scripture and made it their guide. Their lives are deeply rooted in God's truth and reflect the freedom and joy that Christ alone can bring.

WHAT THEY NEED:

- **Ongoing discipleship.** Committed Christians are a joy to journey with. They have a deep resonating confidence in the Gospel that is so refreshing and counter-cultural. But remember, they weren't born this way. They've developed into mature believers with the help of parents, mentors, their church community, and the power of Scripture. They will always need these things in their lives to continue growing as disciples of Christ.
- **Confidence to engage truth.** These teens know that the foundation you stand on matters. They keenly feel the difficulty of sharing God's truth and values with peers who refuse to acknowledge that objective truth even exists. They need help finding ways and words to do this. How can we help them cut to the core issue and engage their generation confidently and lovingly around the topic of truth?
- **Scriptural equipping.** Committed Christians know what they believe and they are not swayed by culture's messaging. But it is sometimes difficult for them to engage their generation in the face of strong and practiced cultural arguments. They need to be equipped with biblical and practical approaches for today's difficult topics, from why truth exists to what the Bible says about created identity.
- **Space to serve.** These teens have tremendous gifts and will continue to grow as they serve and lead others. It is critical to find space in our ministries for these developing leaders. What opportunities can we entrust them with and how can we support them in stepping into these roles?
- **Affirm, encourage, and commission.** Committed Christians are more than ready to support, influence, and lead their generation. They have the gift of faith and have invested deeply in making it their own. They also have a desire to share that faith. One of the most valuable things we can do is call them into this and affirm their readiness to minister to their generation. Who has God placed in front of you to encourage and release to be a disciple maker of others?



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