



Commitment #2: Empathize with Today's Young People

"Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation."

From the Fuller Youth Institute:

... churches that [effectively reach young people] dive into the deep waters of teenagers' and young adults' lives. Both in young people's descriptions of their churches and in our observation during site visits, *empathizing with today's young people* bubbled to the surface as a core commitment of growing young.

By *empathy*, we don't mean patronizing young people. Nor do we mean a superficial or false sympathy. We certainly don't mean judgmentalism, even if it's cloaked in helpful suggestions (e.g. "Instead of playing video games all day, have you thought about looking online for a job?").

When we talk about empathy, we mean *feeling with* young people. As defined by Stanford University's "D" (Design) School, empathizing is, "the work you do to understand people ... It is your effort to understand the way they do things and why, their physical and emotional needs, how they think about the world, and what is meaningful to them." In other words, it's sitting on the curb of a person's life, celebrating their dreams and grieving over their despair.



More from FYI:

Based on [our research], as well as our theological reflection, we believe that at the core of what it means to be human lie three ultimate questions. If we are going to empathize with today's young people, we have to explore these questions. They are often what keep today's teenagers and emerging adults awake at night.

Who am I? A question about *identity*, meaning a person's conception and expression of who they are. This question holds up the mirror and scrutinizes *me*.

Where do I fit? A question of *belonging*, or a person's quantity and quality of life-giving relationships. This question looks around the room, eager to explore *us*.

What difference do I make? A question about *purpose*, or a person's commitment to and ability to engage in meaningful activities that impact others. This question peers out the window and wonders about *our world*.

These questions are not corralled by any one generation; they roam the canyons that separate the generations today. In those moments when the gap seems to be growing between those under and those over 30, these common questions enable us to transcend the particular year in which any of us was born and empathize with others in our midst.

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