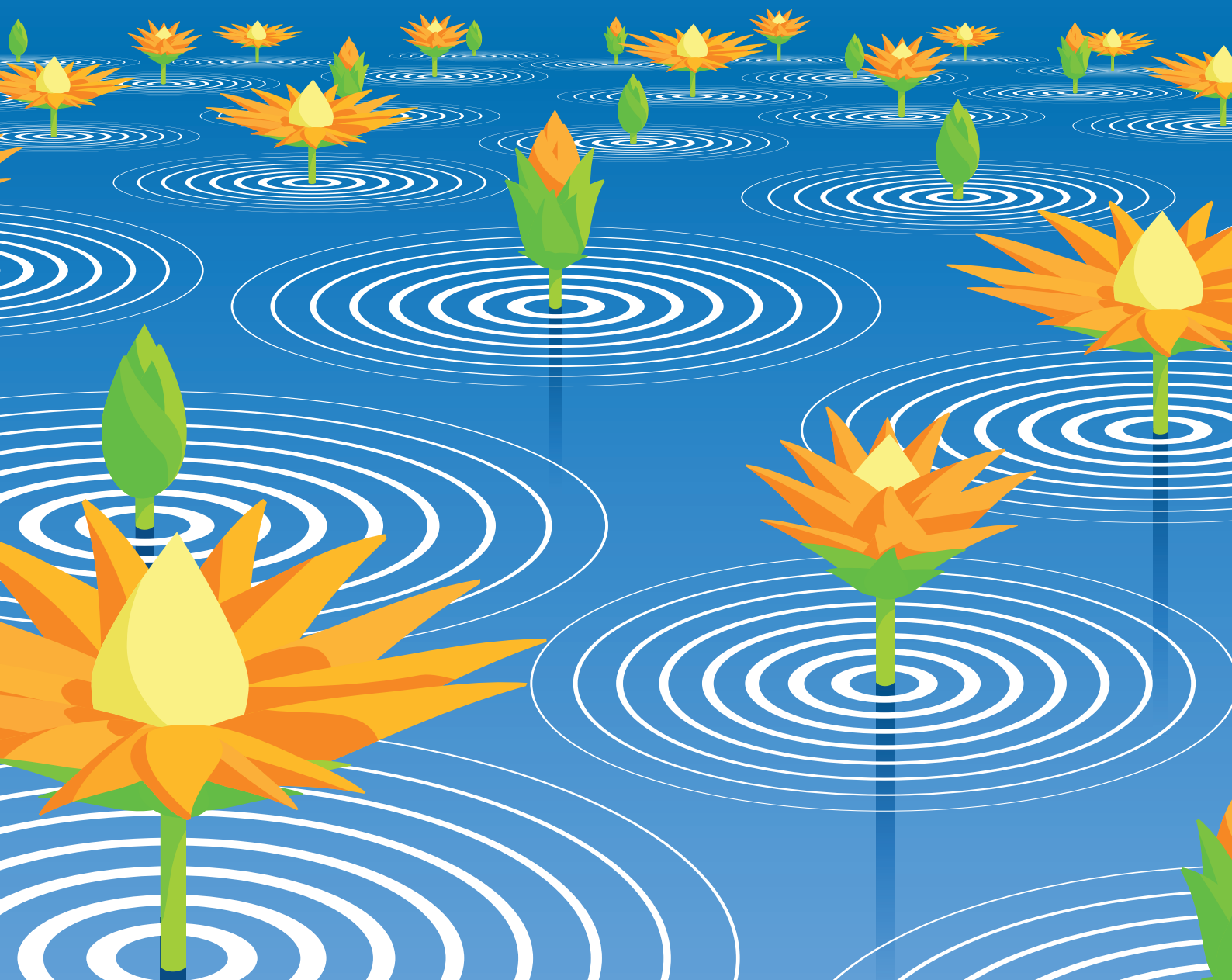


# SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT WITH AN EMERGING GENERATION

THEORIES AND THEMES EMERGING FROM THE  
WORLDWIDE SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT CONSULTATION IN MALAYSIA

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## 1.0 THE WWSE

The Worldwide Scripture Engagement Consultation (WWSE) was held in Melaka, Malaysia from October 4-9, 2009. It was an initiative of the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) and included five separate tracks covering Scripture engagement with young people and children, in churches, with marginalised peoples and with peoples of other faiths. The fifth track was shaped into a think tank and featured 20 Christian leaders from nine countries. The purpose of the think tank was to discuss Scripture engagement in developed (Western) nations where Bible availability is high but Bible use relatively low.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

For over two hundred years, Bible mission has been dominated by three core functions; translation, publication and distribution. The act of getting Bibles into hands was seen as the completion of Bible mission.

In recent years however, the discovery of what is now being called the Bible Engagement Crisis has abruptly illuminated a missing final link in this process. Despite the fact that only 3% of the world's population do not have a complete Bible in the language they understand best<sup>1</sup>, we seem to be standing on the precipice of a Western church in Bible crisis as fewer and fewer Christians pick up the Bible and read it.

If, as suggested at WWSE, Bible translation is in maturity and Scripture engagement is in its infancy<sup>2</sup>, the emphasis now must shift to helping people engage with the Bible in meaningful and life-transforming ways without neglecting translation as central to the wider process. In an environment where church attendance is declining and the Bible is perceived as being irrelevant, how do we begin to shape the journey of the Bible from the hand to the heart?

<sup>1</sup> Wycliffe Bible Translators website: <http://www.lastlanguagescampaign.org/LLC/llcmain.aspx> accessed October 28, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The first of seven final statements made by the 'listeners' group whose role was to hear common themes coming out of discussions from all five tracks at WWSE.

This paper discusses theories and themes emerging from the four day think tank. It focuses on, as explained further in the next section, Scripture engagement with the Emerging Generation.

## 3.0 ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

There is little in the way of in-depth research into Bible use in developed nations. However, this is changing as more and more Bible agencies and the wider church realises that the Bible Engagement Crisis is a real problem and much more widespread than first thought. In recent years, significant Bible use research has been undertaken in the USA<sup>3</sup>, UK<sup>4 5</sup> and New Zealand<sup>6</sup>, with smaller studies and Bible use questions embedded in wider church surveys in other countries. At least one major global study into the behavioural characteristics of youth also includes some Bible use related questions<sup>7</sup>.

Because of the lack of research over time, it cannot be said for certain if the Bible engagement crisis has

<sup>3</sup> **Fan the Flame**, 2005. A research project undertaken through a partnership between Scripture Union and American Bible Society. The initiative involved market research to gain insight into target populations for a national Bible awareness campaign.

<sup>4</sup> **Taking the Pulse: Is the Bible Alive and Well in the Church Today?** 2007. Again, a partnership between Scripture Union and British and Foreign Bible Society investigated Christians' attitudes toward the Bible. In total 1,700 church leaders and 1,900 "people in the pews" were surveyed using a combination of online and paper-based self-completion questionnaires as well as focussed group qualitative research.

<sup>5</sup> **National Biblical Literacy Survey**, 2009. This comprehensive research set out to investigate levels of Biblical literacy in Britain. It was conducted in nine locations in England and Wales and had more than 900 respondents who were interviewed candidly in previously chosen locations.

<sup>6</sup> **Bible Engagement in New Zealand: Survey of Attitudes and Behaviours**, 2008 and 2009. Bible Society New Zealand undertook two nationwide surveys in 2008 and repeated the first 2008 survey again in 2009. The first survey in both years (identical questions) was a random sample of the population with the second 2008 survey effectively a re-polling of respondents that declared themselves Christian in the first survey. The second survey then probed deeper into Bible use, barriers to Bible engagement and views of the Bible.

<sup>7</sup> **The Attitudes and Behaviours of Youth**, ongoing. One Hope is partnering with Metadigm Group to undertake quantitative research providing insights into the daily lives and cultural beliefs of children and youth from many countries around the world.

resulted from a gradual decline in Bible use or that it is a more recent phenomenon. New Zealand's 2008 Bible use statistics can only be compared to a 1986 study<sup>8</sup>, which does indicate a decline over that period (see table one).

*Table 1: Comparison of general population Bible use in New Zealand from 1986 to 2008.*

	1986	2008	Decline
Bible Ownership	85%	68%	20%
Daily Bible Readership	11%	5%	55%

Although we cannot conclusively say if low rates of Bible use have been the result of a steady or rapid decline, what is clear is that researchers are now asking the right questions. Traditionally, measures of spiritual growth have been the numbers attending church or church activities, or the number of people committing to faith in Jesus Christ at an evangelism event. Such studies are outcome deficient and tell us nothing about the nature of the ongoing relationship Christians have with God.

Hawkins and Parkinson, in their 2007 research into the spiritual health of Willow Creek church, suggest that church and church activity attendance alone, while important in the early stages of faith development become less so as Christians progress to a more Christ-focused life. They explain: "So if the church isn't the driving force behind the later stages of spiritual growth, what is? That's where the second external element<sup>9</sup> of spiritual growth comes into play: personal spiritual practices. These include prayer, journaling, solitude, studying Scripture – things that individuals do on their own to grow in their relationship with Christ."<sup>10</sup>

So in researching Bible use, we are beginning to ask questions that give us a better insight into the spiritual health of church communities, even whole denominations and entire nations.

<sup>8</sup> **New Zealanders, Bible Ownership and Bible Reading**, 1986. A survey by Ralph Bradley of 1,500 New Zealanders randomly selected throughout the country.

<sup>9</sup> Hawkins and Parkinson suggest that church involvement has an initial strong central role in the early development of the Christian faith, but its importance becomes secondary as people progress to a more 'Christ-focused' life.

<sup>10</sup> From **Reveal, Where Are You?** 2007 Willow Creek Association, page 43.

What then, does research tell us about Bible use?

Although early studies vary greatly in size, frequency and make up, we can make the following generalised statements about Bible use in Western countries:

- Bible use among Christians is low
- The younger the person, the less likely they are to use the Bible
- Bible ownership among the general population is declining
- Biblical literacy, even among Christians, is very low
- The Bible's influence on the lives of Christians is low
- The view of the Bible among the general population in more secularised countries is one of:
  - Irrelevance
  - Promoting socially and culturally unacceptable behaviours such as violence and slavery
  - A complicated and inaccessible book
  - A rule book

So whether or not the Bible engagement crisis is a new concern for the church, it is certainly pertinent to Bible mission in developed nations. To understand it fully and track developments, greater synthesis of available research is needed along with a more collaborative and cohesive approach to researching and understanding this crisis across cultures.

## 4.0 GLOBAL CRISIS?

Although there is no explicit evidence, it is suspected that the Bible Engagement Crisis is not solely a phenomenon in developed English speaking nations.

Data emerging from the One Hope / Metadigm Group global study entitled *Attitude's and Behaviours of Youth* suggest children and young people exhibit many of the same behavioural characteristics regardless of which country they live in. The common characteristics indicate

an emerging generation of people strikingly different in the way they think and act to generations before them. Although it is natural to expect generational differences in behaviour and thinking with all generations, the difference between children and young people living in the 21st century and their elders is far more profound than the generational differences of those immediately before them. Marc Prensky describes it like this:

“Today’s students have not just changed incrementally from those of the past, nor simply changed their slang, clothes, body adornments, or styles, as has happened between generations previously. A really big discontinuity has taken place. One might even call it a “singularity” – an event which changes things so fundamentally that there is absolutely no going back.”<sup>11</sup>

One of the most difficult aspects of discussing the Bible Engagement Crisis comes when one attempts to define the new generation of people for whom this crisis is most pertinent and evident. There is much debate surrounding the social revolution taking place in Western societies. Various labels, some widely used for this new generation include:

- Mosaics<sup>12</sup>
- Digital Generation<sup>13</sup>
- N Generation (for Net)<sup>14</sup>
- Digital Natives<sup>15</sup>
- Emerging Generation
- Post-modern generation

Most commonly, this generation are tagged with the post-modern label.

11 <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> accessed December 14, 2009

12 Barna Research Group; <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible> accessed October 30

13 Reverend Mark Brown; [http://brownblog.info/wp-content/plugins/wp-downloadMonitor/user\\_uploads/The\\_Digital\\_Revolution\\_and\\_the\\_Church.pdf](http://brownblog.info/wp-content/plugins/wp-downloadMonitor/user_uploads/The_Digital_Revolution_and_the_Church.pdf) accessed October 30, 2009

14 <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> accessed December 14, 2009

15 <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> accessed December 14, 2009

Broadly speaking, while this age group have a declared interest in spirituality, there are behavioural characteristics that might naturally lead them away from considering engaging with the Bible and the church as an important aspect of life. These characteristics are attributed by many as the state or condition of being post-modern.

It may also be that although some people are predominantly post-modern, no one can be totally post-modern in their thinking and behaviour. Likewise, the same would apply to those exhibiting predominantly modern thinking and behaviour



who also exhibit some characteristics akin to post-moderns. David Benson suggests people are not born with ‘post-modern eyes’, rather they are socialised into such a worldview.<sup>16</sup>

For the purpose of this discussion, I have labeled children and young people living in the twenty first century as the Emerging Generation. This is based on an assumption that a majority of this group exhibit predominantly post-modern characteristics that are clearly distinct from previous (including baby boomer and ‘buster’<sup>17</sup>) generations.

## 5.0 PASSING DOWN THE BATON

Research shows that the Bible Engagement Crisis among Christians exists across all age demographics. However, as described in section 3.0, the magnitude of the crisis is directly related to age, with younger generations more likely to have low rates of Bible use and biblical literacy.

For decades, the answer to the problem of Bible use was

16 From **What’s the Bible got to do with Me?** David Benson, page 7. Published for the WWSE Consultation.

17 Barna Research Group; <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible> accessed October 30

seen in product development. If the perceived problem was 'youth aren't reading the Bible' then the perceived solution was 'publish a youth Bible'. The evaluation of this process of course was in sales success.

However, with thousands of themed Bibles and thousands of translations available to a large portion of the world's population, why are we still facing a Bible engagement crisis? The failure of the product development solution lay not in the product itself, but more in the 'state of being' of the people the product is trying to reach. 'Dressing up' the product (the Bible) went no further to making inroads into the crisis than standing on a hilltop bellowing the need for people to spend time with God reading the Bible. Both are ineffective, not because of what they are, but because they don't recognise the needs and wants of the people they're trying to reach.

The same could be said about the way the church and agencies have promoted approaches on *how* to read the Bible. On April 1st, 1879 the Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM – now known as Scripture Union) began distributing small membership cards containing a system of daily Bible reading to children.<sup>18</sup> The 'method' of engaging with Scripture became known as the Scripture Union Method<sup>19</sup>, and has been the philosophy behind most Bible engagement resources to date including reading plans, daily commentaries and Bible products. The beauty of the 'method' was that it was simple enough for even children to understand and memorise:

1. **Pray** – ask God to help you understand the Bible passage
2. **Read** – the passages slowly, perhaps even twice
3. **Reflect** – ask questions of the Scripture including 'What does it say about God?'
4. **Apply** – think about how what you've read applies to your life
5. **Pray** - for God's help in applying what you've learnt

18 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scripture\\_Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scripture_Union) accessed November 10, 2009 and <http://www.su.org.za/downloads/magazine/SU360-Dec07.pdf> accessed November 10, 2009.

19 <http://site.e100challenge.biz/downloads/reading-method.pdf> accessed November 10, 2009.

This method worked well for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many baby boomers would still use this or a similar style of approach when coming to the Scriptures. But, despite its simplicity, and support provided from an endless range of Bible products - this approach of producing resources and encouraging people to read the Bible using the tried and true method is proving to be not as relevant with the Emerging Generation.

Essentially, this is a *modernist* approach to solving a *post-modern* problem.

I will discuss reasons for this later.

If this is the case, then the Christian church-going baby boomers, for all their love of the Bible and their desire to see young people engaged with God through it, have no baton to pass on unless the approach changes. The tools that worked for them simply don't work for the Emerging Generation.

## 6.0 HOW THEN DOES THE EMERGING GENERATION ENGAGE?

So if the traditional model of Scripture engagement no longer works, what does? How could the Emerging Generation engage with the Bible?

In order to develop approaches to helping the Emerging Generation engage with God, we need to understand what motivates and energises them. Numerous global studies into youth culture and post-modernity reveal common characteristics of this generation. Table two outlines some of these.

Table Two: The Contrast in Tendencies of the Modern and the Post-modern Person<sup>20</sup>

Modernity	Post-modernity
Truth is absolute.	Truth is relative, socially constructed and based on assumptions.
Knowledge is knowable – we can work all things out through science and academia.	Knowledge and truth is subjective with opinion valued highly.
Monotheism	Pluralism (all religions are valid and equal)
Emphasises logic and reason.	Emphasises story, experience and personal discovery.
Economic progress leads to prosperity – the environment is used for profit.	Economic development hasn't solved the world's problems. Concern for environmental deprivation, poverty and justice.
Respect for authority and institutions.	Suspicion and rejection of authority and institutions.
Traditional family unit upheld.	Definition of family changes - alternative family units, move away from traditional marriage model, including same sex unions and single parent families.
Hierarchy, order, centralized control.	Subverted order, loss of centralized control, fragmentation.
Mass culture, mass consumption, mass marketing.	Segmented culture; niche products and marketing, smaller group identities.
The quest to master knowledge and attempts to embrace a totality – the encyclopaedia.	Navigation through information overload, information management; fragmented, partial knowledge; just-in-time knowledge - The Internet.
Broadcast media, centralized one-to-many communications. Paradigms: broadcast networks and TV.	Decentralised information dissemination that is digital, interactive, user shared and user motivated.
The book as sufficient bearer of the word. The library as complete and total system for printed knowledge.	Hypermedia as transcendence of the physical limits of print media. The Internet as infinitely expandable, center-less, inter-connected information system.

So what does this all mean for Bible engagement? If we look into the characteristics exhibited by this group, we can say that in order for them to engage with the Bible, some or all of the following criteria need to be met

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from a range of sources including <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/pomo.html> accessed November 10, 2009.

in our approaches to Bible engagement:

- **Interactive online and offline community** – a chance to contribute, critique and build understanding through discussion and collaboration.
- **Non-prescriptive approach** – let them discover truth and meaning in Scripture rather than imparting the answer up front.
- **Authentic models and relationships** – evidence in those around them of transformation through the Bible needs to be clear.
- **Respect for personal stories and experiences** – the chance to share where they're at and how they feel.
- **Intergenerational connections** – drawing on the experience and stories of other generations.
- **Creativity** – creative experiences that involve the whole person.

These criteria should shape our approaches to Bible engagement with this audience. Not all strategies need to accommodate every element above and neither should any strategy be weighed against how it might perform against them. Rather, these criteria should represent the starting point for the strategy.

Simply window dressing existing or modern products or resources will be fruitless and may even create an adverse reaction to the Bible in the user. Completely new strategies need to be devised, new products, new resources, that all take into account the elements outlined above.

So where should we focus our energies? From discussions in Malaysia, two key strategic themes are emerging that will change the way Bible engagement resources are developed and distributed.

## 1. Establishing Relevance Through Listening First

For a generation of people living in a developed world suspicious of the church and its perceived lack of genuineness and authenticity, establishing the Bible's relevance is an important pre-cursor to engagement of any kind taking place.

David Benson suggests that establishing relevance, plausibility and the credibility of the Bible must sit alongside any strategies aimed at reaching non-Christian young people – whom he calls 'adolescent outsiders'. He says "...such strategies [post-modern approaches to engaging teens with the Bible] may be ineffective with many teens unless they are bolstered by complimentary approaches that address the presuppositions, questions and objections of adolescent outsiders. After all, our heart can't embrace what our mind rejects as false."<sup>21</sup> The message here is that teens have a general suspicion of the Bible, its origins, its mystery and its relevance to their life, which need to be overcome before the process of engagement can begin.

For Emerging Generation Christians however, establishing relevance may need to focus more on *why* they should engage with the Bible, rather than the historical credibility of the Bible itself. In Bible Society New Zealand's research, just over half of all Christians described the Bible as the 'written word of God'.<sup>22</sup> This troubling statistic raises a clear question: if half of all Christians genuinely believe the Bible is the written word of God, why are they not reading it?

There is clear confusion among Christians about why they should read the Bible. For many, who have lived a Christian life without much engagement with the Bible, there is no perceived need to engage with it. Why should a Christian begin engaging with the Bible half way through their Christian journey, especially if their church has never promoted such a discipline? What possible value could it have?

<sup>21</sup> From **What's the Bible got to do with Me?** David Benson, page 7. Published for the WWSE Consultation.

<sup>22</sup> **Bible Engagement in New Zealand: Survey of Attitudes and Behaviours**, 2008 and 2009.

It is clear that the Bible has been somewhat devalued within the church. One of the conclusions of the think tank in Malaysia is that the church cannot be absolved of any blame for the current Bible Engagement Crisis. Perhaps the way the Bible has been used in the church has changed as a result of the impact the Emerging Generation is having on the DNA of many congregations. Recognising they inhabit a changing world, Pastors are trying to appeal to their pew-fillers by dressing up the modern approach to church and delivering a Bible message through the introduction of drama, video and more contemporary styles of music. But in the process, the way the Bible is used has changed. It's now often approached by pastors as if it were a pick 'n' mix candy bar where single verses are extracted and presented, sometimes out of context, as the basis of an entire message. The results? A population of Christians that believe the way to engage with the Bible is to self-select one or two uplifting verses to encourage them through their day, week or even year. Moreover, we get a Christian population not understanding the Bible narrative and how the whole text fits together.

So the challenge is to communicate to Emerging Generation Christians the relevance of the Bible in their faith and the foundational role the Bible plays in the life of Christ's church. Such a proposition is easily done when looking through modern eyes – you just tell them. But we've established that for the Emerging Generation, the effectiveness of this approach is questionable.

Establishing relevance through the *listen first* approach is most likely the place to begin.

*Listening first* is the most revolutionary aspect that must shape all Bible engagement practices with the Emerging Generation. This was the *key* message emerging from the think tank in Malaysia.

This is a radical departure from current practices where people are encouraged to open the Bible first, and then determine life application – as with the Scripture Union Method for example. With the Emerging Generation, their story and the story of the culture around them is the place where we must begin this process. The Biblical narrative is then introduced in order to allow God to speak into their story.

The premise here is to establish the Bible's relevance in today's world, and to the person we're attempting to engage with it. If there is evidence people in the Bible experienced the same emotions and feelings a young Emerging Generation person does, the document's perceived relevance is enhanced. If, for the person engaging, the Bible cannot speak into the situation, event, life stage or cultural issue, then for the person engaging, it may be proven irrelevant and engagement with it will be that much more difficult.

There are some obvious potential pitfalls with the *listen first* approach. First, it requires those opening the Bible to have an excellent knowledge of the Bible, or an excellent tool to help them draw biblical parallels to the story of the person they're working with. Considering the ever decreasing rates of biblical literacy among Christians, this is obviously a major concern.

Secondly, this approach essentially can be self-centred.

Focus begins with the self and the Bible could quite conceivably be seen by the person as a source to turn to for immediate problem solving alone. The greater premise that the Bible exists for all humanity to reveal God's nature and to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven for all people of the world could be relegated. This is to argue that the full power of the Bible is not realised where it is constrained to being a self-help book.

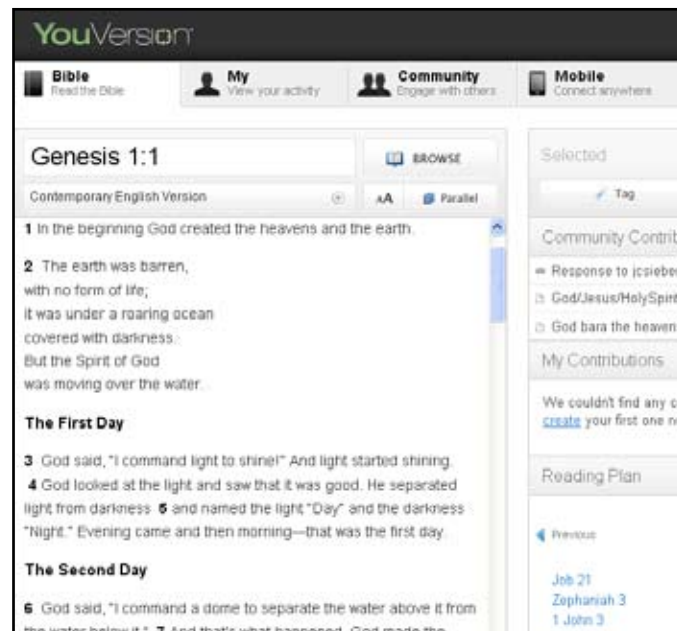


But these concerns may be arising because we're still looking at this through *modernist* eyes. The key is in how this concept is put into practice.

## 2. Technology

It is clear that technology, in particular the Internet, will play a vital role in future Bible engagement strategies with the Emerging Generation. Already many are experimenting with using the Internet to engage people

in the Bible. Examples include The Bible page on Facebook<sup>23</sup> (now with 1.2 million fans<sup>24</sup>), YouVersion<sup>25</sup> (LifeChurch TV), Share Your Story Now<sup>26</sup> (American Bible Society), WordLive<sup>27</sup> (Scripture Union) and many more.



YouVersion

The Internet now consists of more than 50 billion web pages<sup>28</sup> with more information created on the Internet each year than all previous years combined.<sup>29</sup> Now with the popularisation of the smartphone (mobile devices that can access the Internet, receive and send calls and messages and are fully multi-media capable), people can finally remain connected to the world and each other 24 hours a day almost wherever they go. Some reports estimate smartphones such as the Apple iPhone will make up 38% of all mobile phones by 2013.<sup>30</sup> Within ten years they will most likely be the standard mobile device owned by billions of people worldwide.<sup>31</sup>

23 <http://www.facebook.com/#!/TheBible>

24 As of December 11, 2009.

25 <http://www.youversion.com/>

26 <http://shareyourstorynow.org/>

27 <http://www.wordlive.org.uk>

28 <http://www.worldwidewebsize.com/> accessed December 11, 2009

29 <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/6079.html> accessed December 11, 2009.

30 <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/FortyOne-Percent-of-Consumers-bw-15488799.html?.v=1> accessed December 11, 2009.

31 Martha Lagace suggests that 3 billion people (nearly half the world's population) owned a mobile phone in November of 2008 (<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/6079.html> accessed December 11, 2009).

The Emerging Generation are the first to grow up in a digital world dominated by this technology. Marc Prensky says, "Today's students... represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Today's average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives." Prensky describes this group as Digital Natives – those who have only known a world with such technology. Those that were not born into a digital world but have become fascinated by and adopted this technology into their lives he calls Digital Immigrants.<sup>32</sup>

This generation are defined by the kinds of devices they own and use. For many, the feeling of not being connected is unbearable and uncomfortable. There is no doubt the emergence of virtual social interaction on the Internet is beginning to play an increasingly important role in wider society.

But how do we embrace this technology to engage an Emerging Generation of Digital Natives with the Bible?



Clearly, any virtual strategy must be built around the core principles outlined earlier in this section. The key question is this; do current offerings

such as WordLive, Share Your Story and YouVersion fit these criteria or are they simply a virtual edition of a modernist approach in a digital world?

One criticism of the Christian church is that, generally speaking, it has been very slow to adapt to the rise of the Internet. This is also true of Christian agencies attempting to encourage the Emerging Generation

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> accessed December 14, 2009

into the Scriptures. Clearly, the digital revolution will shape Scripture engagement strategies with the Emerging Generation and the church and Bible agencies need to be not just adapting to new technology and Internet developments, but leading through observing online trends and behaviour and translating them into useable, transferable (between cultures), and engaging approaches. This is a huge challenge for the church and Christian agencies.

Listening to Digital Natives is the first step in this process.<sup>33</sup>

## 7.0 THE COMPLEXITY OF ENGAGEMENT

As we begin to think about engaging the Emerging Generation in the Bible in new ways, we must turn to the basic question that needs to guide the outcomes we expect from engagement strategies, resources and approaches. This is the question of 'What is effective Bible engagement?'

For some, the term 'effective' clouds this question, as it is perceived as a corporate term. 'Effective' is seen as something that should be measured quantitatively and often in the short term. In terms of effective Bible engagement, if results and outcomes are the measure of success, then those results must be transformation. Has the person's behaviour changed? Has their thinking changed? Most importantly, are they outworking their faith as they are called to by God through the Bible?

It could be said that for a long time, reading the Bible has focused on cognitive engagement. Emphasis has been on learning, memorizing, increasing knowledge, gaining understanding and interpreting meaning. But these things are not the ultimate outcome of effective Bible engagement. Effective Bible engagement should result in an active faith outworking itself in bringing in the

<sup>33</sup> Mark Brown in his paper **The Bible in the Digital Space** says, "So sit with young people, these digital natives and find out about this digital space. Join Facebook and Twitter, start reading blogs, and attend a service at the Anglican Cathedral in Second Life; be prepared to learn."

Kingdom of God in the world around us.

But does all Bible engagement always result in positive transformation? Not necessarily. Bible engagement can lead to a negative reaction; a turning away from the Bible. In this instance, the person still actively engaged with the Bible, they simply had a negative reaction to it.

So, if we qualify what effective Bible engagement is, the answer is engagement that leads to positive transformation. But this is just the end of a process. That process must start somewhere, and that somewhere by definition is not really effective Bible engagement.

To help us build better engagement strategies, resources and approaches with the Emerging Generation, we need understand the different levels of engagement that lead to transformation.

If we imagine a continuum along which a person moves towards transformation through effective engagement, it must start with *exposure* to the Bible. This is the key step in the whole process; getting someone interested enough in the book to want to pick it up and look at it, or at least listen to someone speaking about it. For adolescent outsiders, this stage must involve establishing the Bible's relevance and credibility.

Following exposure, the next stage in the continuum is Bible *use*. The act of reading and thinking about the Bible cognitively and reflexively is the intermediate step between exposure and effective engagement. Perhaps, as discussed earlier, the church and Bible agencies have been promoting Bible engagement only to this point, falling short of realising the ultimate outcomes of engagement.

Finally, as discussed, we have *effective* engagement. The results of which must be transformational in terms of thinking and behaviour.

The goal therefore is to graduate along the spectrum. Some resources and approaches might focus entirely on encouraging the first step; exposure. For many, especially those interacting with the Emerging Generation, this is the hardest step, especially when the

general societal perception of the Bible is negative (as outlined in section 3.0).

## 8.0 A THIRTY YEAR JOURNEY

I recognise that some of the ideas and approaches to engaging the Emerging Generation with Scripture outlined in this paper and discussed at the WWSE consultation represent in essence what may already be happening on the fringe of the mainstream church. And often the work of those on the fringe eventually makes its way into the mainstream. This is the case here. It is time for the mainstream church to recognise and accept the Bible Engagement Crisis and begin to adopt new approaches to engaging the Emerging Generation with the Bible.

Like the so-called Green agenda, the process of bringing the Bible into full focus for the church could be a 30 year journey. With environmentalism as a social movement beginning to gain momentum in the 1970s - followed by the rise of Green politics in the 1980s - what began essentially as a collection of grassroots movements is now front of mind for consumers.

If this is a 30 year journey, then where should we start? For some agencies, including the British and Foreign Bible Society, this process has already begun with a strategic advocacy campaign aimed at changing the perception of the Bible in the public space. This campaign includes, for example, a deliberate effort to influence journalists in the way they portray the Bible in the media. The thinking behind this approach is to help the Church regain confidence in its own text and help wider culture rediscover the value of the Bible. In doing so, Christians might be more likely to want to read the Bible if it is perceived to be a valuable resource for life and the wider non-believing public might turn to the Bible for help in times of need - Bible exposure.

The difficulty in such a campaign is the cost and measuring its impact and success. And with limited resources, it is doubtful many agencies could sustain even a small public advocacy campaign over time.

If public advocacy then presents a long-term financial constraint, perhaps agencies should turn their attention to resourcing existing grassroots movements focused on engaging the Emerging Generation with the Bible.

So where do these grassroots movements begin? As explained above, they already have begun. The role now of Christian agencies must be to resource them – to stoke the fire and ensure they spread. As an agency in itself cannot begin a grassroots movement, they must identify ministries achieving success in engaging the Emerging Generation with the Bible and through research determine how best to enhance, develop and encourage them. This may involve sharing theories, such as those outlined in this paper, and allowing practitioners to put these into practice. Over the course of time, it should become clear what works and what doesn't and how best to facilitate and magnify the success.

The implied hope here is that an Emerging Generation of Bible engagers will pass on the baton to their children, thus perpetuating the movement.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION - PARADIGM SHIFT

What is being advocated here is a complete paradigm shift in our approach to engaging the Emerging Generation with Scripture. This paradigm shift is away from the existing product driven strategies of the past and even away from 'window dressing' products and resources built inherently for modern audiences. A new pair of glasses must be put on to view solving the Bible engagement crisis through a completely new lens.

Agencies and the wider church need to understand the Emerging Generation before they build strategies to help them engage with the Bible. These strategies should include building both online and offline communities to enable discussion and sharing, enabling people to share their stories and experiences *before* introducing the Biblical narrative and allowing people to discover truth and meaning in the scriptures rather than simply imparting the 'answer' upfront. Listening to the culture is

a crucial step in the process.

In doing all this, agencies and the church also need to embrace technology, particularly the Internet and learn how to facilitate meaningful and life-changing Bible engagement experiences in the digital space.

The next step for agencies in beginning the 30 year journey is to identify grassroots movements successfully engaging the Emerging Generation with the Bible and help them grow.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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