

Executive Summary
Love Well
Hope Williams, Presenter

“WWJD to Love Generation Alpha Well?”

WWJD? This phrase “What would Jesus do?” might seem outdated, depending on your generation. It may also seem modern and relevant, if perhaps the 90s feels like just the other day. How revealing that trends and methods used to share the Gospel can and should change. Imagine a church world that understands and seeks to know the coming generation well so that this generation might feel well loved.

The question is most likely not whether or not a church wants every generation to feel loved, but perhaps have we considered and closely examined whether or not we are putting the work in to be sure they do. What if we took a look at them, Generation Alpha? What if, instead of reminiscing on days gone by, hoping for values of former times, we looked up close at the modern households and took a glimpse at who *they* are? What methods or trends in our next generation spaces and lessons are loving and which ones might need to be reconsidered to determine how to best love them well?

Let’s take a look at *them*, this Generation Alpha who is coming up in the current times. Let’s take a look at *Him* the master teacher and Lord who loves everyone in any culture, yet faces them with love and truth. Finally, after looking at *them* and to *Him*, let’s take a look at *us*. Teachers, next generation ministers, parents, and pastors can greatly benefit from this closer look at these 3 key groups.

As we look at “*them*” this Generation who are 20 years old and younger, we see disjointed family units, with the nuclear family being rarer than ever before. There are also trends that arise when taking a look at the enemy’s tactics with this population. It’s clear that the attack on identity and absolute truth leads to a challenge for prior generations who are aiming to influence teens and children. More specifically, these challenges are in many ways brand new to the Church.

As Lifeway’s new publication *Flip the Script* details so well, the belief system this generation is faced with in droves through many methods is *expressive individualism*. In main stream media, cartoons, songs, and of course on social media the teens and children growing up now are subtly and often intentionally being told there is no absolute truth. They are being told identity is not solid or found in any one thing but that they may choose who they are day to day and even that if someone disagrees, they are being hurtful. The message is to live and let live, not impose values on someone else.

How do we counter this cultural belief with an unchanging Word of God? What can be done to speak the truth in love to this generation?

The tension arises though in any Believer’s mind when we consider *change*. Change makes us nervous – and rightfully so. God’s Word is alive and active, His character is not changing,

ancient truths, ever new. So how could we take a Biblical look at loving people well in different contexts? Let's take a look at *Him*.

Dive in and consider the ways that Jesus changed His method when He spoke with different people. Throughout the gospel books we see a rich life full of numerous encounters with a rich variety of people. By the grace of God, we see God incarnate interact with women, children, rich men, powerful men, and working men. We see how Jesus is able to connect with each of these subcultures with grace and tact without ever any trace of losing His message in the process. We'll observe, if we're careful, that He also never changes the truth, waters it down, or makes it easier to follow. So, we can glean from the Master that if we want to love people well, we will speak the truth in love. They might decide not to follow, but we speak the truth.

Consider Jesus with the woman at the well in John chapter 4. He was at a common place at an uncommon time. He had a difficult conversation that was real and honest. He engaged an outcast. He loved her enough to see her. He called out sin and shared the Good News. What can we glean from His example?

Consider yet again the way Jesus approaches Jairus and his family in Mark 5 or the way Jesus speaks about and to the little children in Matthew 19. Then again, later in the same chapter, we see a difference in the way Jesus approaches gently yet with unwavering truth the Rich Young Ruler.

As we look to Him for an example of how to love *them*, we could look further. Even as examples like Jesus with the Centurion in Mark 7 lead us to see the way He interacted with those unfamiliar with faith in the Creator God. While we could continually list specifics, perhaps one more that would be wise to glean from would be the way Jesus interacted with Peter, James, and John.

Pull all of these looks at *Him* together and we see that our Messiah absolutely loved each person in every context. He valued them enough to speak on their level, in a way that was engaging to them. This meant elevating to speak to those in power or authority on earth and it involved humility enough to listen and engage with those who had nothing to offer. We see that He acted in a way toward each of them that was considered loving and kind. Yet, as we watch we also see that He spoke the truth in love. Jesus was not afraid to offend. Jesus was clear and careful to present the Good News of God's plan and love with each person or group. He did not shy away though from sharing what it would cost to follow Him. The people left with a clear understanding of truth. They knew He was speaking the truth as one who loved them, but they knew He was speaking in love.

So, what about *us*? What about when we take a look at *me*?

To those in teaching and investing roles who influence this generation, we must look closely at this next generation, closely at Jesus, and take what we glean to influence the way we interact with the families we are trying to reach. This look in the mirror will be uncomfortable. To consider methods we're using now and evaluate if we're being Christlike to this coming generation means questioning if we really know our audience? Furthermore, we're asking

ourselves if we know them enough to alter the methods we use or the way we communicate without ever altering or shying away from truth. We're considering, in light of the way Jesus reached all people, what is true and unchanging versus what is it that we need to adjust in our own styles and preferences that will make the discipleship in our ministries more effective. How do we love this generation like Jesus?

It looks like being more prepared than ever before with our theology, our Word memorized, and our truth ready to be spoken clearly. It looks like teachers, parents, ministers, and investors praying fervently and often by name for their small groups, families, and individuals. It looks like modeling Jesus's example and engaging in conversations that seek to understand so that we know who is in the room. Acknowledging that kids are walking in without prior knowledge of the Word, with parents who may not support their faith, and with confusion, fear, and anxiety beyond the average adult's understanding. When we honestly step back to consider a look at ourselves, we might find that at times we've been more interested in our comfort than the Kingdom come. The Lord loves this generation well and sees them. When we take a look at *us*, we pray for this heart that seeks His glory above our comfort.

Hopefully after taking a closer look at *them* and *Him* we'll find that we are willing to be uncomfortable, willing to evaluate the 'why' behind the way we interact with parents. Yet, as we look to Him, we realize that there is no wavering from truth. So, in reality we find ourselves on a tight rope. Attract and love this generation well by acknowledging the world the kids and teens are growing up in and adjusting communication as needed, but stand firmly on the Word. Speak the truth in love, because the most loving thing we can do for this generation is to share the Gospel with them and disciple them to be men and women who follow Jesus with unwavering faith. WWJD to love Gen Alpha well? He would know them, engage them, and speak the truth to them. We are charged to do the same as we make disciples of this present generation, prayerful that they will be doing the same in the decades to come.