

# Book Reviews



The book reviews submitted offer a critique of some of the latest family ministry titles. If you would like to see a title reviewed in the future, please submit at least two copies of either the book or galley copy (Publisher's PDF proof is acceptable if not yet published or to galley stage).



Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011. 304 pages. \$22.99. Hardcover.

Review by Christopher Talbot, Teacher at Welch College in Gallatin, TN. Chris teaches courses in Youth and Family Ministry and Biblical studies, while also serving as the Pastor of Youth and Family at Sylvan Park Free Will Baptist Church.

The “Bridger” Generation, Generation Tech, Boomer Babies, Echo Boom, Generation Next, Generation Y, Generation XX, (10) and so on—the proposed labels are as diverse as the assorted group of people they seek to define. Nevertheless, the term “Millennial” has seemed to stick for the children of the Baby Boomer generation. Churches, denominations, and businesses alike have sought to better understand this new and complex social generation. A quick online query will reap a myriad of blog posts explaining how one might better “reach” this group. Yet, no matter how many bullet-point lists prescribed, the millennial generation still seems nebulous in their characteristics.

In seeking to do generational discipleship as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggests, one may find it beneficial to investigate generational and sociological studies. While no study seeks to pigeonhole all those born in a certain sequence of decades to rigid characteristics, a study can help to provide a general portrait of the preceding generation. Thom Rainer, and his son Jess, have sought to provide a helpful guide to understanding the Millennial generation through research and evaluation.

Thom Rainer is the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. He is the author of over twenty books, including *Simple Church* and *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*. Jess Rainer is an assistant pastor and banking professional. As is evident, the authors make up a father-son team, Thom being a member of the Baby Boomer generation, Jess being an older Millennial. Certainly, the family

connection, as well as the divide generationally, offers a helpful and refreshing perspective to this type of study.

The volume is separated into eleven different chapters with an added postscript. Chapter one introduces the reader to what is now known as the Millennial generation. Jess Rainer authors the second chapter, offering a helpful perspective from within the generation itself. Chapters three through ten seek to draw correlations from the generational study, mapping what characteristics Millennials have in common with one another. Chapter eleven then seeks to offer a way forward in ministering to this generation, specifically from an ecclesiastical perspective.

One of the difficulties of this book may be found in its intended audience. While the entire book is premised on a study facilitated by the authors (4), there seems to be a reservation in detailing the research. For example, the authors state in regard to the study, “We could belabor all these points and bore you to death...” (5) and “We risk boring you with theses numbers...” (82) or another, “Forgive us if this excursion caused you to yawn” (9). There seems to be an assumption from the perspective of the author(s) that the reader will not be interested in the finer details of the study the book is built upon.

Further, the selection of the survey sample is worthy of attention. First, the book is seeking to articulate common characteristics among the Millennial generation. However, the study only covers those born between 1980 and 1991. In their own words, “our study is on the older Millennials” (4). To be sure, when the book was published in 2011, the youngest millennial, per their demarcations, would have been eleven and in the fourth grade. Nevertheless, a study seeking to articulate common components of a generation while only surveying half of that generation, could present difficulties. Second, one should note the generational delineation. According to the Rainers, Millennials are any of those born between 1980 and 2000. While this is within the general consensus of generational studies, some have argued for an exact year of 1982, and have allotted as late as 2004 as a final year.

Additionally, there were some elements that may have benefited from a more nuanced explanation. Jess Rainer, speaking about familial emphasis states, “Family values may well become one of the main distinguishing marks of the Millennials” (33). What is difficult in respect to “family val-

ues” is the lack of definition of this term within the book. One can speculate that the Millennial emphasis on monogamous, life-long marriages (63) is an affirmation of these values. Yet, the Millennial generation largely has no difficulty with same-sex marriage. This is only further confused when the author(s) states “[Millennials] desire to see their families return to *more traditional values*” (70, emphasis added). Therefore, the terms “family” and “traditional values” become cofounded, especially in contrast to popular nomenclature.

Jess Rainer also states that (primarily ethnic) diversity is “a nonissue” (35). While diversity and race relations have improved in the past half-century, to call this area a nonissue may be a misnomer. Chapter four is dedicated to evaluating the new openness among Millennials, particularly in regard to diversity. This is often contrasted with the actions and beliefs of former generations. Thus, while great strides have been made in areas of diversity, one may argue that Millennials are not blind to this issue. Certainly, even among Millennials—especially evangelicals—racial reconciliation and matters concerning diversity are important and vital topics.

With these elements in mind, pastors and organizational leaders may find *The Millennials* to be a useful volume in engaging with this multifaceted group of individuals. While virtually no one of this generation is a quintessential Millennial, having a broad understanding of their context and influences can help one better understand their, for lack of a better term, social consciousness. While the book is brief on any prescription, knowing the lay of the land allows each individual leader to formulate his or her path forward in this new generational discipleship.

For those involved in youth and family ministry, readers should be encouraged by the Rainer’s findings. Particularly in chapter 3, “It’s a Family Affair,” the findings of the generational study are positive. While not perfect, Millennials seem to have a renewed emphasis on the importance of family. An overwhelming majority see themselves only being married once and staunchly against divorce. Further, a consistent theme found among this study was the Millennials’ respect for older generations, especially their parents. According to the authors, “There is nothing more important to the Millennials than family” (76). For this, we should be thankful.



*Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*. Edited by Chap Clark. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 2015. 224 pp. \$21.99. Paper.

Review by Charles Cook, Lead Pastor at Cookeville Free Will Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tennessee. He also serves as the editor for Randall House Academic Books, managing editor of *D6 Family Ministry Journal*, and teaches online courses for Randall University.

New collegiate ministries, national political engagement, and countless new hymns and choruses are among the many markers that define the post-World War Two American Evangelical movement. These ministries and movements serve as helpful tools for analyzing the impact and challenges faced by Christians, churches, and denominations that minister in today's context. Amidst all the sign posts of energized church life, ministry to youth continues to serve as one of the most important. With the strategic importance of youth work, it is unsurprising that numerous contemporary voices (parents, lay leaders, pastors, and parachurch) are engaged in reevaluating the goals and foundations for youth specific ministry.

Into this realm of renewed evaluation, comes the recent book (2015) *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*. With societal and personal forces demanding that those in youth ministry go deep and locate solid theological roots for the how and why of youth ministry, editor Chap Clark sets out to assist the Church in moving beyond youth groups that revolve around a few volunteers and a star youth pastor (xiii.) To provide this assistance, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century* functions as a dialogue between five authors invested in youth ministry, who also possess thoughtful perspectives for revitalizing student ministry. The five authors are Chap Clark, Greg Stier, Brian Cosby, Fernando Arzola, and Ron Hunter. Their dialogue plays out in five sections, with each author laying out his youth ministry perspective followed by responses from the other four writers. The sections conclude with the original author briefly responding to the suggestions and critiques from the interlocutors.

Section one starts with Greg Stier, who is the founder and president of Dare 2 Share Ministries. Stier's approach "The Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry," seeks to move student ministry from program based models to lifestyle models, while keeping Evangelism and Discipleship connected (4). Stier's position accentuates the need to equip students to share the faith, the important role of stories, repetitive gospel sharing during youth gatherings, investing in the most willing teens, connecting all activities to the gospel, and reliance on prayer. Adults are encouraged to share in this type of ministry through modeling, coaching, and leadership embracement.

One of *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century's* strengths is in the carefully crafted responses to proposals. This is seen in section one when Brian Crosby raises concern that Stier relies too much on narrative passages of Scripture to undergird his approach, and (unintentionally?) undermines the role of God, local churches, and parents in youth ministry. Chap Clark issues similar concerns by reminding Stier and readers that God is the one who ultimately changes the world, and leaders should show students how to follow and experience His love (25). Fernando Arzola cautions that Stier's Gospel advancing strategy seems more like a formulaic imposition instead of a call to a deeper way of life. And finally, Ron Hunter echoes the other writers by encouraging Stier to develop deeper descriptions of discipleship than just simply sharing the faith.

Following Greg Stier, Brian Crosby a former youth pastor and the current pastor of Wayside Presbyterian Church, kicks off section two. Crosby utilizes his space to outline "The Reformed View of Youth Ministry." Arguing that youth ministry too often functions from an entertainment-driven foundation, Crosby pushes for student ministry to move instead toward a faithfulness based footing (41). To facilitate faithful student ministry, Crosby advocates a traditionally Reformed, means-of-grace approach. Therefore "The Reformed View of Youth Ministry" gives primacy to Word based ministry, prayer, sacraments, service, and community (43-49).

In the response to Crosby, this reviewer resonated most with the questions of Chap Clark and Ron Hunter. Clark identifies three important concerns for Crosby's ministry approach: the lack of appreciation for developmental differences between adults and adolescents, the amount of research indicating students do not default trust adults, and the low recog-

nition in Crosby's position for how difficult it is for churches or individuals to go about enacting his suggested method. Ron Hunter, on the other hand, questions if Crosby's philosophy, that places almost all responsibility with church leadership, will not end up recreating the "hired-gun" and "superhero" youth pastor syndrome Crosby views negatively. In addition, Hunter correctly points out that Crosby's playing of faithfulness off against success is counterproductive and unclear. Success is not the antithesis of faithfulness, although some contrast the two in such a manner (65).

After section two's constructive back and forth, section three moves to Chap Clark's view titled "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry." Clark's view starts from the premise that many youth cease to exercise vibrant faith because churches fail to provide the most vita of resources, the community of faith (75). According to Clark, the mantra of long time youth worker Mike Yaconelli, "Jesus and kids; that's who we are, that's what we do," has served for decades as youth ministry's philosophical core, regardless of one's theological, denominational, or church background (77-78). From Clark's perspective, youth ministry's core foundation needs a renewed emphasis on the *corporate* identity of Jesus followers. This corporate identity, per Clark, finds biblical grounding in the New Testament's communal language. Words such as, assembly and body, and family terms such as, brother and sister, provide the narrative language for how Christians should see themselves and relate to one another. For teens to experience the communal support embodied in the New Testament, churches and youth groups must actively see that teens are adopted into the larger body. This is accomplished through strategic opportunities for worship and service. In Clark's adoption model, youth workers become bridges and guides for the fuller participation of teens in the church's corporate identity and mission.

Brian Crosby responds to Chap Clark's "Adoption View" with the pressing question, "Where's God's salvation, development, and sanctification of youth?" (97). To drive home his Godward concern, Crosby points out that Clark spends lots of space emphasizing loving one another, but the first command is to love God. Ron Hunter takes his response in a different direction, reminding readers that when students relocate for college, which many of them will do, their local church community does not move with them. It is imperative, therefore, that someone in the student's life guide

them as they seek a new community of faith. Fernando Arzola does not spend much time critiquing Clark's view, but he does expand on Clark's emphasis on community. Which is fitting, because Arzola's section, which comes next, also has a thematic center fixed on community.

Arzola terms his communally focused fourth section "The Ecclesial View of Youth Ministry." This section begins with the wrenching observation that "Protestant youth ministry has all but deleted ecclesiology from its theological radar" (113). Arzola's view, which seeks to remedy the Protestant youth ministry's core deficiency differs strikingly from the other four perspectives. Instead of providing a distinct approach to youth ministry, Arzola challenges youth ministry to appropriate ancient church practices and to understand local ministry in light of the church universal's long history. To achieve this end, churches must *intentionally* perform their work under the rubric of the church as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic," while simultaneously viewing local communities as Jesus' incarnated presence in the world where a renewed emphasis on universal church teaching and liturgy occurs (121-123).

Of all responses in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, Greg Stier's rejoinder to "The Ecclesial View of Youth Ministry" stings the strongest. Holding back no punches, Stier responds that if "the subject of ancient creeds and pre-Reformation ecclesiology" comes to dominate youth gatherings, the four participants who happen to be present should have a great time (125). In no uncertain terms, Stier reminds readers that it is outward advance and sharing of the gospel that made the early church exciting, not "developing, dissecting, and distributing creeds" (125). The starkness of Stier's response is refreshing, even if it is also somewhat overblown. Nonetheless, strong responses serve in this book as a reminder that the subject matter...matters! The other responders to Arzola are not as critical, Ron Hunter's response highlights the lack of uniformity among early church fathers as a helpful antidote to Arzola's wishful thinking on early church doctrinal unity, and several authors question the lack of practicality in putting Arzola's view into practice.

The fifth and final view, "The D6 View of Youth Ministry" grounds its presentation not in Arzola's ancient church practices, but in the scriptural commands of Deuteronomy 6. Ron Hunter, the CEO of Randall House publications and co-founder of the D6 conference, offers up a vision of



Youth ministry where parents and church workers work together intentionally to minister to students. To enact the D6 approach, Hunter lays out five focal points: Be a Transformational Leader / Build a Strategic Philosophy / Build a Team Approach Among Staff With Volunteers / Teach Students / Coach Parents to Be Coaches. One of Hunter's strengths, like several other contributors, was repeated reliance on Scripture to guide his proposal.

Despite a solid scriptural foundation, a common response to "The D6 Model" stresses its inadequacy in dealing with 21st century family breakdown. How, several responders wondered, will Hunter's emphasis on church and family partnerships deal effectively with the multidimensional reality of modern family life. In addition to those concerns, Crosby raised again in his response his consistent concern that "The D6 Model" also overly roots itself in what humans can do and not in what God does. Furthermore, Crosby's response wonders why youth ministers are viewed as heroes in the D6 view, but no mention of God as ultimate hero.

For those seeking to understand the contemporary state of Student Ministry, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century* has made a timely arrival. Likewise, for those looking to strengthen or retool ministry to students, this book provides a starting point for grasping some of the most thoughtful perspectives currently available. Readers will discover in its pages the scriptural foundations and philosophic insights that undergird youth ministries current re-envisioning. As with most multi-authored works, some sections are stronger than others, but the insightful back and forth with responders makes each section worthwhile. All these reasons and more make *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century* a book well worth investing in and learning from.