

Kinnaman challenges churches to engage young spiritual exiles

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CORPUS CHRISTI—The life of a 20-something isn't what it used to be.

Young adult lifestyles today differ starkly from 50 years ago, researcher and author David Kinnaman told the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting.



David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, challenged Texas Baptists to engage 20-something spiritual exiles.
(PHOTO/Eric Guel/BGCT Newsroom)

Kinnaman, president of the [Barna Group](#), cited the late "launch" of young adults into the world of independent living. Fifty years ago, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men lived apart from their parents, completed their education and were self-supporting married parents with children by age 30. Today, only 46 percent of women and 31 percent of men fit that description.

Kinnaman also pointed to the increase in percentage of births to unwed mothers. In 1960, the number remained around 5 percent, but today 41 percent of children born do not have biological parents who are married to each other.

Added to these personal factors, the rapid change of technology also provides young people with a different reality. In 1960, people had the choice of a radio and three television stations; today, the number of media outlets seems unlimited, and youth can never seem to get enough.

"The typical teenager today uses more than 10 hours of media per day," Kinnaman stated. "How is it that our churches are going to disciple in that kind of world where we have maybe 40 minutes a week?"

Looking to Scripture as a guide for engaging the current generation, he said, "Friends, I believe that the best metaphor for the complexity of our digital culture is being exiles in Babylon."

The difference for churches today, Kinnaman suggested, is the difference between discipling in Jerusalem—the homogeneous society of 1960—and discipling in Babylon and a culture where anything goes.

With this paradigm in mind, the Old Testament prophet Daniel provides an example for a young generation of exiles raised in Babylon and its culture while retaining the essence of their faith. Because of the faithfulness of young exiles like Daniel, God used them to teach the community how to be faithful.

Kinnaman insisted churches must reach out in three ways to stay engaged with the young exiles and disciple them. First, they must be in genuine relationship with other believers, especially older believers. Second, they need to cultivate a clear sense of calling. Third, they need to have a clear sense that God continues to speak to his people through his word.

Keep the picture of Daniel in mind, Kinnaman urged, and seek ways to keep the younger generation engaged with the gospel, even if that engagement looks different than it did in the past.

"We need exiles to help us navigate the changing culture," Kinnaman stated. "They are going to challenge us, they are going to ask tough questions, they may not always agree with us, but we have to be willing to be present when they are asking us these tough things."