



Online Influencers Teach Christianity to Young People

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In the News

Christian influencers are using digital platforms to guide people toward Christian faith and offer them biblical answers to difficult questions. These influencers are largely Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and members of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), and their teachings go beyond the questions that are answered in most Sunday sermons.

"I can be that in-between -- Monday to Saturday help -- to give you practical things to make you feel like you're not walking this walk alone," said Megan Ashley, 35, to *Associated Press*. She is the creator of the "In Totality" podcast.

Ashley and her fellow influencers talk about everything from anxieties to doubts, dating to contemporary culture. "What they're making accessible is a truth that transforms people," said Lecrae Moore, a Christian rapper and podcaster. "There's something that's happening existentially -- supernaturally -- that I can't explain."

"Being a Christian, sometimes I think there's a unique vantage point that I think I may be able to give that people might not have considered," said Moore to *Workfaith*. "Some people may say 'Oh man, 9/11 happened let's go to war' or some others might say, 'Let's shore up our defenses' or 'Let's do

something about our own government' and I would just jump in the middle to say, 'Let's consider prayer, how do we love people from different walks of life and different perspectives?' I just wanted to throw out a third way on social issues that were happening."

Ashley and Moore are among a group of popular influencers who describe themselves as churchgoers without denominational labels. Some have formal theological training and some do not; some grew up in church while others did not.

What unites them is an experience of spiritual transformation, one that came out of an experience of hardship or a sense of emptiness arising from a secular lifestyle. "We're like, listen, we're two mess-ups too," said Arielle Reitsma, 36, one of the co-hosts of the podcast "Girls Gone Bible," which gets more than a million listens each month. "It's OK."

Along with Angela Halili, Reitsma occupies a spot in Christian media that has wide appeal and a very specific vibe, reports *Family Theater Productions*: the "LA Girl" evangelist. The two broke out of the acting and modelling world to spread the gospel, and they say that it was a much-needed conversion. They declare that Jesus has brought them much more joy and fulfillment than hustling to make it in "the industry." Episodes of "Girls Gone Bible" begin with a prayer or Scripture reading, and then they jump into conversation.

Zachary Sheldon, a Baylor University lecturer on media, religion and culture, told *Associated Press* that these podcasters fit into a long tradition of Christian celebrities, including televangelist Billy Graham. As independents, these influencers can attract audiences more easily than established congregations. Sheldon praised them for exposing people to the faith "and challenging them to ask questions and search for something more," but he warned about the danger of "granting them too much authority on the basis of their celebrity."

To their credit, these influencers encourage church attendance and try to reach a wide variety of people, including those who have been disconnected from religion. In 2023-2024, only 41% of people ages 18-35 said they believe in God with certainty, down from 65% in 2007, according to the Pew Research Center. "People are spiritually hungry, emotionally hungry, and I think for the first time ever ... people are encountering Jesus even through online platforms, and they're realizing, this is true life and fulfillment," said Halili, 29, of "Girls Gone Bible."

Although these podcasters promote biblical principles, they admit that Christian life can be hard. God "does make everything better," said "In Totality" host Ashley, "but that doesn't always come in the way that we think it's gonna come." Her current focus is on the importance of living as a sacrifice, as she encourages people to give up certain wants and behaviors so that they can grow closer to God. From a healing encounter with God's "severity" in her own life, she knows that Christian life is not easy, but it is worth the effort.

For some listeners, online influencers provide an alternative to the overly formal pastors they encountered in childhood. "I really needed someone who was a younger Black female portraying something that wasn't super traditional," said Olivia Singleton, 24. She is involved with her current church and likes her pastor, but says these influencers are like "one of the girls ... walking out the faith with you."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[These Influencers Are Teaching Christianity Online -- and Young People Are Listening. *Associated Press*](#)

[Christian Hip-Hop Artist Lecrae Reflects on Societal Issues, His Faith, His Philanthropic Work in Atlanta. *WorkFaith*](#)

Applying the News Story

Consider the ways in which online influencers successfully teach the Christian faith to young people. Think of the approaches you take to sharing the Christian faith with others, and look for ways to improve what you are doing.

The Big Questions

1. How do you guide people toward Christian faith, if at all? When have you offered a biblical answer to a difficult question, if ever? What is the challenge and importance of doing such work?
2. Why do people need Monday to Saturday help, in addition to Sunday help? How can the church meet this need?
3. What is the value of a denominational label? What are the disadvantages? When and where have you heard the most compelling presentation of the gospel? What effect did it have on you?
4. Podcaster Megan Ashley says that she tries to "give you practical things to make you feel like you're not walking this walk alone." When have you given a friend or neighbor practical help and assured them of your companionship? What is the Christian value of such assistance?
5. How can your church do a better job of reaching people who are spiritually and emotionally hungry? What type of gospel outreach would be most effective in your community? What is the value of being the hands and feet of Jesus through acts of love and compassion?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 96:2-3

Sing to the LORD; bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. (For context, read [Psalm 96:1-13.](#))

Psalm 96 is a song of praise to the God who comes in judgment. It begins by challenging us to sing "a new song" (v. 1), acknowledging that we must always be creating new ways to share the greatness of God. The psalm invites us to "tell of his salvation from day to day" and to declare "his marvelous works among all the peoples." As people of faith, we are not to keep silent about God, but are to speak of his salvation and his marvelous works.

The psalm goes on to remind us that the Lord is great and "greatly to be praised," as well as "revered above all gods" (v. 4). While the gods of society are idols, our Lord is the creator of the heavens. The psalm concludes with a call to worship the Lord (v. 9) and to remember that God "will judge the peoples with equity" (v. 10). God "will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth" (v. 13).

Questions: How do you tell of God's salvation, in your words and your actions? Why is it important to make a distinction between the one Lord God and the many idols of the world? What does God's judgment mean to you, and how does it shape your faith, if at all?

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (No context needed.)

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, and scholars believe that it was the first of the biblical accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The first eight chapters of Mark contain an account of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, and the second eight tell of events at the end of his ministry, on the way to Jerusalem and in it, including his death and resurrection.

The word gospel means "good news," and can be defined in a number of ways. The good news can be the entire story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which is why the first four books of the New Testament are called gospels. It can be the good news that Jesus declared when he said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Or, since the story of Jesus might have been lost without the miracle of Easter morning, the good news can be understood as the announcement of the Resurrection: When three women entered the tomb, a young man in a white robe said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here" (16:6).

Questions: How do you define the gospel? What connection do you make between the gospel and the kingdom of God? Where do you see a link between the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus? What do you do, if anything, to share the gospel with others?

Acts 1:8

[Jesus said] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (For context, read [Acts 1:1-9](#).)

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke after he finished his gospel, which reported "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (1:1). The book of Acts tells the story of the first Christ-followers, with a focus on the ministry

and mission of the apostles, a group of leaders whose title means "messenger" or "one who is sent forth."

The book begins with the story of the ascension of Jesus and then tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day after Passover. Before he ascends to heaven, Jesus promises the apostles that they "will receive power when the Holy Spirit" has come upon them. He also predicts that they will be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The beginning of the book focuses on Peter and the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem/Judea, while the middle and concluding chapters tell of Paul and his missionary journeys through the Mediterranean region.

Questions: What does it mean to you to be a messenger of Jesus? How is the Holy Spirit involved in the spread of the message of Jesus? How do you understand being a witness to Jesus? When, if ever, has your church encouraged you to testify to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is God's saving power for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." (For context, read [Romans 1:1-17](#).)

The apostle Paul's letters are the oldest Christian documents in the Bible, and all probably predate the four gospels. They are arranged from longest to shortest, Romans to Philemon, and are letters written to churches and individuals addressing a variety of theological and personal issues.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul begins by saying that he was "set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1). He tells the followers of Christ in Rome -- Gentiles and those of Jewish background -- that he has "eagerness to proclaim the gospel" to them (v. 15).

As one who is "not ashamed of the gospel," Paul offers a compelling definition of the Good News: "it is God's saving power for everyone who believes." God's plan for salvation started with God's covenant ("for the Jew first") and then extended to the Gentiles ("also for the Greek"). Paul believes that people are made right with God "through faith for faith." Having grown up a Jew, Paul goes on to quote the prophet Habakkuk by saying, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Questions: How do you understand the gospel to be God's saving power? When, if ever, have you been eager to proclaim the gospel? What, if anything, makes you ashamed of the gospel? What role does faith and belief play in receiving the gospel? How important is sharing the gospel in the life of your church?

For Further Discussion

1. "To me the influence is reaching people where they are," says TWW Team Member Mary Sells: "evangelization in the times and places that change over time so we adapt to fit the need while remaining true to the Word, which never changes. How the stories came through oral tradition in one language to one group of people, then expanded to other languages, images, written words ... it's all an evolution of God reaching us. I think of all the ways God tried to form his people in the Old Testament before the radical incarnation of Jesus to come for all people ... and if on earth today he would be using the internet, having gatherings at sports bars and other places that ancestors might never have imagined." How do you evangelize, if at all? Who gets to determine what is a proper venue (or appropriate background) when the goal is to share the Good News? How can the church embrace possibilities rather than fear new ways?

2. Online Christianity has its challenges, [reports Associated Press](#). Podcaster Jackie Hill Perry said that a hyperfocus on online drama and Christianity's

more esoteric beliefs can miss the basics, such as love and Christ's sacrifice. And the deep political and cultural rifts among Christians emerge online too. Perry and her husband "have been criticized by conservatives for talking about police brutality and racial injustice, and liberals for expressing opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion." What are the basics of the Christian faith, in your opinion and experience? How can they be best proclaimed? When have you seen political and cultural rifts interrupt the sharing of the gospel? Be specific.

3. Online influencers often participate in the life of the church and encourage church attendance among their listeners. What, if anything, could be done to strengthen links between Christian podcasts and local congregations? Where do you see advantages and disadvantages to such connections? Would your congregation consider creating a podcast, and, if so, what kind of focus do you think it should have?

4. At age 22, [podcaster Bryce Crawford](#) teaches Bible chapters and posts videos of himself talking to people about Christianity at Pride parades, the Burning Man counter-culture festival and a satanic temple. The recently assassinated Charlie Kirk (of "Change My Mind" fame) spent a lot of time on college campuses, and was not shy about sharing his faith. What is the value of talking about the gospel in such settings? Where do you see examples of such outreach in scripture? What would inspire you or your congregation to take the Good News outside the walls of your church?

Responding to the News

Think of a new and creative way to talk about your Christian faith with a family member, friend or neighbor. Like today's online influencers, speak with sincerity and keep your words connected to the challenges of daily life.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have done marvelous work among all of the people of this world. Help us to learn from the Christian influencers who are sharing their faith every day, and inspire us to speak about our beliefs in ways that are authentic to our experiences and grounded in real life. In the name of Jesus, who is always good news, we pray. Amen.

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