

The background of the slide is a landscape photograph. The sky is a deep teal color, filled with wispy white clouds. A bright yellow sun is visible on the horizon, partially obscured by clouds, creating a warm glow. The horizon line is dark, with silhouettes of trees and rolling hills. The foreground is a grassy field with some small bushes.

Thought Leadership for Servant Leaders

Mary Tindall Communications

First, a quick intro!



- Thought leadership consultant and ghostwriter
- Small business owner
- Trained journalist
- Former PR agency exec
- Wife and homeschooling mom of four

What we're covering today



- What is thought leadership?
- Why does it matter for servant leaders?
- Laying a foundation
- Practical tips and next steps

What is thought leadership?

Thought leaders are the **informed opinion leaders** and the **go-to people in their field of expertise**.

They are **trusted sources** who move and inspire people with **innovative ideas**, **turn ideas into reality**, and know and show how to **replicate their success**.

Source: Denise Brosseau

In a missions context...



- **Thought leaders play a critical role in missions.**
- **They change the world through their ideas, expertise and wisdom.**
- **They cast a vision and inspire others to join them.**
- **They spark global movements.**



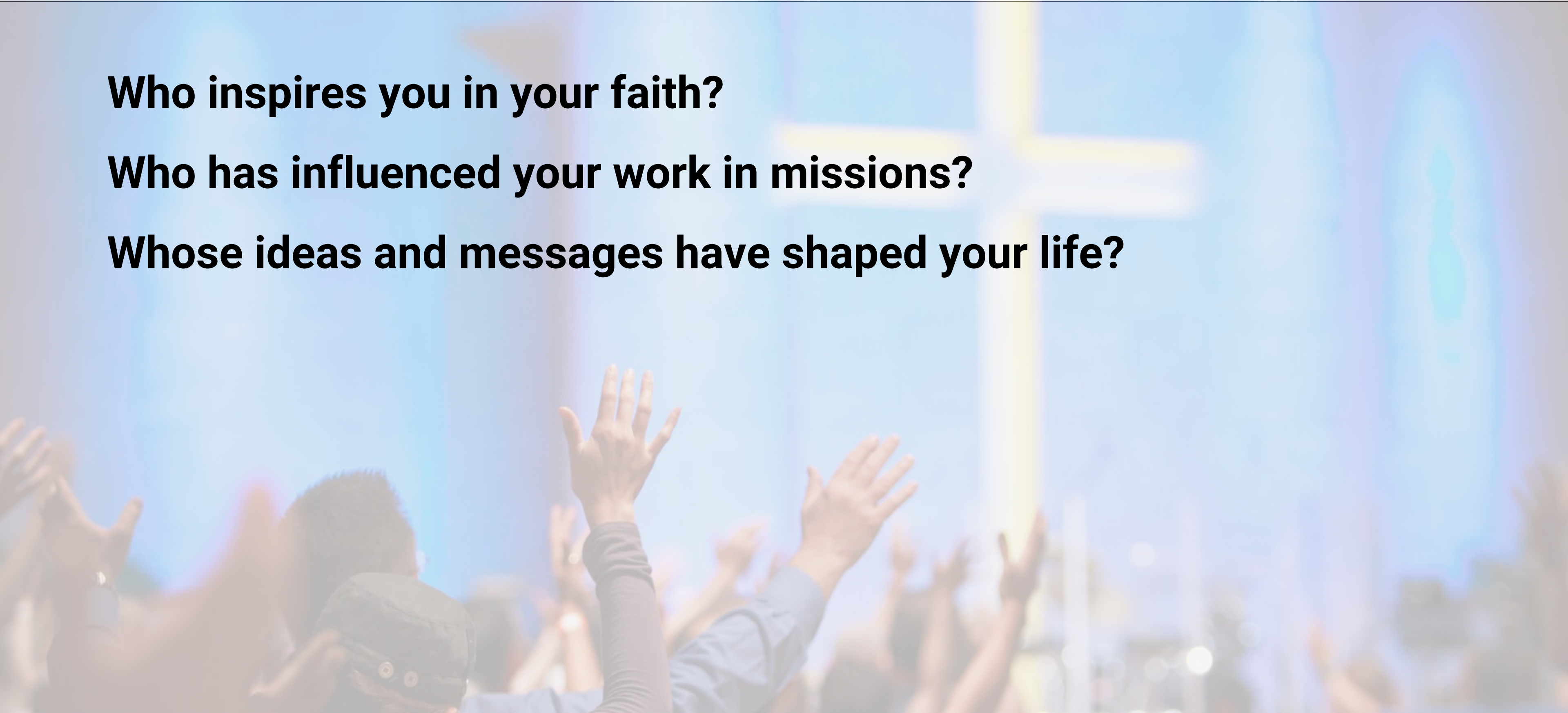
Your turn...



Who inspires you in your faith?

Who has influenced your work in missions?

Whose ideas and messages have shaped your life?



Servant leadership



But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20:25-28 ESV

Characteristics of servant leaders



- **Wisdom**
- **Humility**
- **Generosity**
- **Willingness to speak truth**
- **Ability to connect with people where they are**

All of these are ingredients for thought leadership!



My encouragement to you today



**Thought leadership is
a set of skills you can grow.**

**Building a thought leadership
practice looks different for
servant leaders.**

**Our focus is furthering the
kingdom vs. building a brand.**



Laying a foundation...



**All truth is God's truth.
(St. Augustine)**

Laying a foundation...



Thought leadership is about communicating timeless truth, using fresh ideas, insights and perspectives...

...so we can share the Gospel, invite others into the Great Commission, and spread best practices in missions.

Questions to ask



What has God laid on our hearts?

What's working well in our organization?

What do others need to know?

What misconceptions can we correct?

What's changing in the world?

What does the future look like?

Finding the big idea



Listen to the slow hunch

Gather data

Talk with others

Connect the dots in disparate areas

**Name, explain, pattern-make,
recommend and predict**

Credit: Steven Johnson, Sheila Goldgrab





Helping Generation Z Flourish and be Catalysts for God’s Mission



RENÉ + SARAH BREUEL

When we thoughtfully engage younger generations in a whole story gospel, we can accept them where they are while also helping them grow into who God created them to be. At the same time, recognizing the strengths they bring into Christian community and missions prepares us to respond to where God is next leading his people.

When we moved from Brazil to Italy twelve years ago, the newer generations were very much in our hearts. We planted a church in Rome, called *Hopera*, next to Europe’s largest university, with 150,000 students, and served students under the umbrella of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). And by God’s grace, we’ve been delighted to see many embrace Christ, grow in their faith, and develop a heart for God’s redemptive mission. Gen Z is full of potential, despite (and because of) the unique challenges it faces.

ROOTED IN JESUS, SUPPORTED BY COMMUNITY
Because Gen Z grew up with social media, they’ve seen firsthand how young people can mobilize to turn grassroots causes into global movements. However, as digital natives, they often have less embodied relationships. They were born into an environment of constant connectivity and pressure to impress others. While Gen Z desires to connect to something bigger, they often ask, “Who am I compared to my peers?”

By sharing the gospel, we can shift that question to: Who does God say we are? Christianity offers grace, acceptance and hope through a true story that gives us purpose. Deep rootedness in Jesus grounds us amid the pressure of comparison. Knowing

who we are as God’s sons and daughters anchors our identity and gives us the real answers we long for.
Christianity also gives Gen Z a deeper sense of community and the chance to be part of embodied relationships, across generations, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Indeed, this is a beautiful mirror of incarnation, a theology that is unique to Christianity. Instead of a God shouting at humanity from the outside of his creation, we see a God who came to Earth and became man.
The notion of Jesus taking a body is significant for a generation that grew up online. He became flesh, had real relationships, and marked his covenant with bread and wine. The life of Jesus illustrates the importance of personhood, presence, real relationships, and authentic connections—tangible fruits experienced in daily life.

TELLING A WHOLE STORY GOSPEL
Yet before young people can enter a relationship with God, many are wrestling with the question: Is Christianity moral? With this generation, our apologetics have shifted from analyzing truth claims to grappling with what the Bible says about sexuality and gender. These difficult conversations pose the biggest challenge to Gen Z’s embracing the gospel.

In approaching these conversations, we

should focus on the larger story in God’s creation—seeing gender and sexuality through the lens of his intention and purpose. Deep within our hearts, it is a matter of trust. *Can I trust this God? What is his character? Is this someone that I want to have a relationship with?*
We must also show the Christian sexual ethic being lived out in community, particularly in communities that give equal space to those who are single and married. The church must honor people who live out singleness well throughout their lives, or who are flourishing equally in biblical marriages. And the church must show younger generations that both married and single believers are treasured, have a voice, and are not stigmatized.
Jesus lived by embodying true love, not merely expressing theological arguments. He dined with sinners. Prostitutes and tax collectors were attracted to him. Yet he never compromised in his beliefs. We should emulate his character in our ministry to and alongside Gen Z.
Two key parts of the gospel to share with this generation are its bookends: the doctrines of creation and new creation. We must tell a *whole story* gospel that goes beyond sin and redemption in Christ. Going back to creation gives us a sense of purpose, which ripples into our work and culture, and ultimately our redemption



Rome, Italy – René and Sarah Breuel baptize a young person who is part of Hopera Church.

into the new creation. While these doctrines have received less emphasis in evangelical preaching, they are crucial for young people today.

MOBILIZING GEN Z FOR MISSIONS
The theme of a new creation also impacts young people’s desire to be involved in God’s global mission. We believe that a root cause of the so-called “Great Resignation” within the modern workforce is that people are asking deeper questions: *What difference is my job making? What is the purpose I’m longing for?* In this generation, these questions are coming to the surface. On top of this, Gen Z may be less motivated than other generations by lucrative, high-powered careers. Instead, they’re often interested in jobs that are flexible, suit their passions and support their quality of life. They’re saying, “I want my life to count.”

Missions is the best way of inviting them to make their life count—to participate in God’s kingdom and play a unique role in the grand story he is writing in this world. That may be working full time in cross-cultural missions or being an ambassador of Christ in their workplace. Gen Z is deeply driven by purpose and the chance to be part of something bigger.
Yet we feel a difficult tension. This generation longs for purpose—but growing up

in digital spaces has created expectations for immediate gratification. Yet the deeper meaning that Gen Z longs for is something that you pour yourself into. In missions, our work takes perseverance, suffering, and God’s grace. Making a lasting difference takes time and God’s involvement.

Here, the pursuit of purpose becomes a pathway to discipleship. If you’re seeking purpose, you’re truly looking for rootedness. Only the depth of Scripture can impart the rootedness of God’s character. A generation accustomed to consuming content online must become self-feeders in the Word. We want young people to not only hear from pastors or worship leaders, but have fresh, authentic encounters and history with God in their personal lives. It’s critical that they learn to have that time with Jesus, interacting directly with Scripture. We can only build stamina and perseverance in our faith by hearing for ourselves what God is speaking to our hearts.

Given this, we must broaden the focus of discipleship, from theological knowledge and understanding to spiritual formation. Many young believers come from broken families, while others bring their own baggage, just as we all do. We need to invest in developing emotional maturity and establishing strong relationships, which requires us to move beyond Bible

knowledge into relational discipleship.

THE GIFT OF LONGEVITY
In the same vein of discipleship, we must convey the importance of longevity in missions. Short-term missions are valuable in igniting and mobilizing people. But to have a bigger influence, we must stay in a place for years, potentially decades. We need to help people see not only the personal formation they’ll get from a missions experiences, but also the impact of what they’re giving others.

Longevity is a gift that people from the global South can give. For us to serve cross-culturally, we must overcome greater barriers, including fundraising challenges, since we come from less prosperous countries. For us, missions has to be very intentional, because we must persevere to overcome many obstacles. This means we send highly committed people who give themselves to missions for a long time.

When we decided to serve in Italy, we wanted to develop long-term roots. At the time, our first-born son was two months old. We gave him the name Pietro, which is Peter in Italian. This was our statement that Italy is the place we were giving ourselves to until God says otherwise. We named our second son Mateo (Matthew in Italian). Giving our boys an Italian iden-

PHOTO COURTESY OF RENÉ BREUEL

GOD IS RAISING UP THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Alongside the emergence of Gen Z, we must also recognize that missions is no longer “from the West to the rest.” God is raising up people across Latin America including Brazil, in Kenya, China, Korea, and many more nations. Today, we see a global sending church. When a young American or Canadian goes out as a missionary, they will not only encounter missionaries from Europe; they will also work alongside missionaries from South America, Africa, Asia, and from the Pacific Islands. North American agencies need to equip and train young people for this.

In addition, many diaspora communities from the Global South live in Europe and North America. We need to help them become resources for the body of Christ in the countries where they live, rather than being siloed into communities that only speak their language. As part of this focus, we could teach courses on mission-

Sharing the big idea



Storytelling

Share a moment you experienced

Paint a picture

Simple, concrete, memorable

Use humor when appropriate

Learning from Jesus



Vivid metaphors

The parable of the sower

Amplification

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Speak the language of your audience

Clarity over cleverness

Learning from Jesus



Be bold

Provoke discussion

Speak truth with kindness

Balance wisdom and compassion

Give freely.

Be generous with your ideas

The big idea



Bringing Open Hearts to Engage Generation Z

Generational theory helps us understand generations as distinct cultures. This demystifies how we can effectively engage Gen Z in the gospel and mission.



As people who've answered God's call to missions, we embrace tools that help us relate to our colleagues, partners, and those we're reaching with the gospel. Generational theory can help us do exactly that. By understanding each generation's common traits, beliefs, and values, we can build stronger relationships and better discern God's calling on our lives. As Gen Z grows into adulthood, this is an ideal moment to reflect on how God wants us to minister to those coming after us – and how to invite them into missions.

GENERATIONAL THEORY

I first heard about generational theory while I was working in campus ministry. At the time, I was also doing a Doctor of Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary, and my dissertation was on postmodern leadership development. During this time, the cultural limelight was shifting from Gen X to Millennials. As an Xer, I had already lived through the shift from Boomer to Xer. I was fascinated by both shifts and how they reflected the philosophical shift from modernism to postmodernism.

the dynamics between age-based cohorts.

Strauss and Howe outlined a revolving four-generation cycle in American history, later extending their findings to Western Europe. My travels abroad and other observations suggest that these generational shifts have also occurred in other parts of the world, although I haven't researched it extensively. Those with an immigrant or refugee background may also experience these generational shifts differently, but the themes are more similar than disparate.

Strauss and Howe identified each generation's characteristics in areas such as parenting style, religious openness, and views of gender. They developed an archetype for each generation and noted that each group tends to offer unique endowments. These endowments can translate into callings, as people lean into areas they're good at.

Building on Strauss and Howe's work – which examines each generation's characteristics, callings, and endowments – led me to ask if there were spiritual implications. In this way, we attempted to iden-

answers to the other questions. Therefore, we need a different approach for inviting each generation into God's community:

Prophets: When Boomers had the cultural limelight in the '60s and '70s, the critique of Christianity was around creation and evolution – in other words, was Christianity a myth, a superstition, or a crutch? With that in mind, appealing to Boomers is about the search for truth, using apologetics or other convincing arguments. (Think of authors like C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, or Lee Strobel.) Boomers need to understand that Christianity is true – and therefore, they should change their lives around it.

Nomads: The way to reach Gen X isn't through argument. Their mantra is: "Your truth is your truth. My truth is my truth." They ask a different question: What is real? During Gen X's cultural heyday, televangelists were falling from grace. The critique during the '80s and '90s was that Christians don't walk their talk. If you aren't being real, Gen Xers don't want to hear about your truth. To reach them, you must be vulnerable and

beyond the benefits you get when you die.

Instead, we elicit spiritual curiosity about how the kingdom of God has come near, and how that impacts our everyday lives. After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, we took hundreds of students to volunteer in the city for successive years during their spring break. Half of them didn't follow Jesus. We studied the scriptures and connected them to our mission. Many people gave their lives to Jesus as they served in this community.

Artists: As Gen Z reaches young adulthood, we're trying to figure out their message. However, we know that transcendence, wonder, and ideals are important to them. In their world, good design is the norm, and a good aesthetic has its own credibility.

Gen Z's critique against Christian faith now – as it was in the 1920s and into the '30s – is that Christianity is *not beautiful*. Their communities are ugly, intolerant, and bigoted. Providing a picture of another world beyond the material one – a sense of beauty and wonder, amazement –

speaks loudly to Gen Z. They highly value sacramental spaces that are imbued with mystery and wonder. And a beautiful community is just and inclusive.

INVITING GEN Z INTO GOD'S MISSION

For Millennials, the invitation to God's mission was enough: "Hey, we're reaching out to impoverished communities in Bangkok. Join us and you can change the world." They'd respond, "Yes, I can! Give me a camcorder. I'll make a film." Or, "I'm gonna drill wells and make a difference."

For a lot of mission agencies, that was a high point.

Inviting Gen Z to mission is very different. A vision for the mission isn't enough. They are more risk-averse and less trusting. They want to know more before jumping in. Gen Z wonders: "What's your plan? What are my benefits? If I do this for 10 years, where will I be afterward? How does this help my career?"

These concerns show up in a strong unease about commitment. If previous generations had FOMO (the fear of missing out), Gen Z has, quoting Mark Sayers,

... if you don't answer each generation's first question, they won't hear your answers to the other questions.

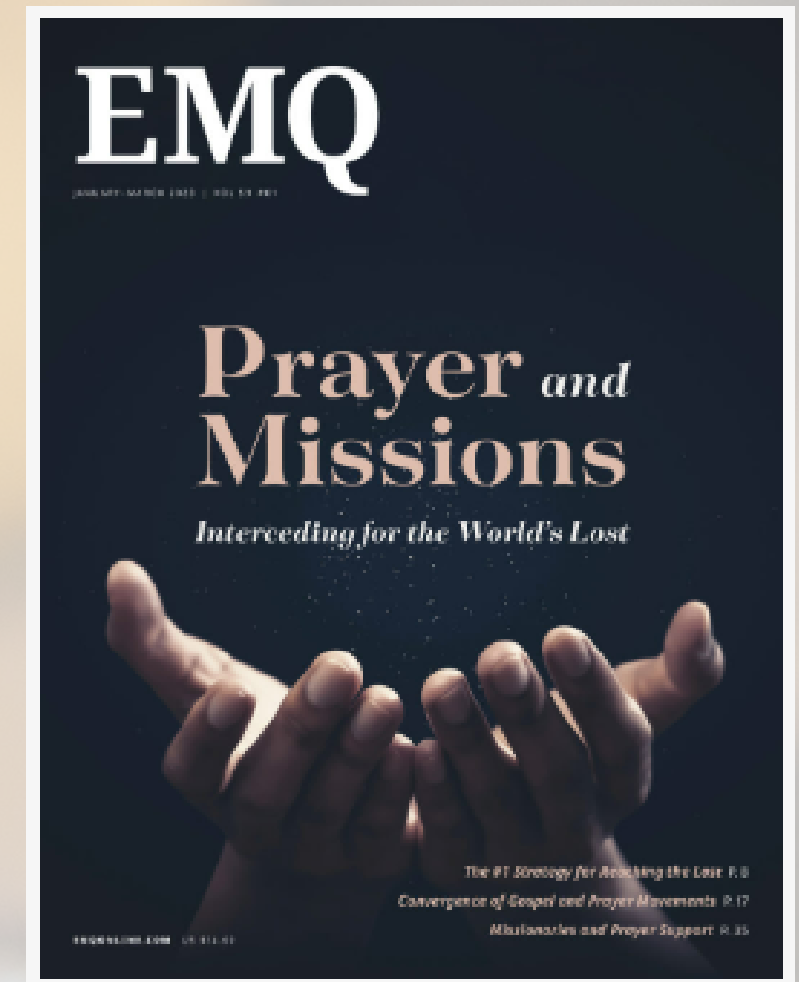
Table 1.1 – Spiritual Questions by Generation

Spiritual Questions by Generation

ARCHETYPE	CALLING	ENDOWMENTS	SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS
Prophet (Baby Boomers)	Preachers, writers, radicals, publishers, teachers	Vision, values, religion	What is true?
Nomad (Gen X)	Entrepreneurs, brigands, industrialists, generals, salesmen	Liberty, survival, honor	What is real?
Hero (Millennials)	Statesmen, scientists, economists, diplomats, builders	Community, technology, influence	What is good?
Artist (Gen Z; also known as iGens)	Artists, lawyers, therapists, legislators, statisticians	Pluralism, expertise, due process	What is beautiful?

Where to share thought leadership

- Blog posts
- Guest articles
- Books
- Social media
- Email newsletter
- Annual reports/studies/surveys
- YouTube/podcast channels
- Media outreach
- Speaking engagements



Plant the seeds

- Have a vision
- Results take time and may be hard to measure
- Test and refine as you go
- Listen to feedback



Discussion time!

- Any questions?
- How can thought leadership help your team?
- What ideas do you have?

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