

# An Essay on Evangelizing Jewish Millennials

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## Introduction

Google *millennials* and you will find a plethora of results. Among them are some rather humorous op-ed articles or survey results regarding their characteristics. They read something like, "Millennials are the worst!" Many of the results refer to this age group in the workplace, some to their habits on social media, and still others about their community involvement. But almost all state numerous negative traits. We are called egotistical, narcissist, hypersensitive, entitled, and arrogant and we are a uniquely western subset of society based mostly in the United States, Canada and some of the British Isles.

If you are offended by some of these characterizations, chances are you are a millennial because after all millennials like to be offended. But I find many of these to be true, not in my case of course, but for much of this age group and Jewish millennials are not much different. However, we are also, technologically savvy, socially connected, internally motivated, and outside-of-the-box thinkers which make us a dynamic and influential generation.

My name is Ryan Karp and I serve as the Chicago Branch Director of Chosen People Ministries and the National Director of Young Adult Engagement and Outreach. Over the past seven plus years, I have worked in New York City, Washington DC and Chicago mostly doing outreach to young adults as a young adult. This presents unique challenges and advantages but I consider myself an old soul, more of a Gen X guy meaning I am able to observe my peers in an effort to figure them out so that we can be more effective in evangelism. This is a daunting task because my age group is a multi-faceted, emotional, enigma wrapped in a riddle.

However, after working with young professionals in NYC, Christian college students from all over, undergrads and graduate students in the DC area, I have noticed that there are similarities when it comes to reaching millennials that can help us be strategic about the largest generation since the Baby Boomers<sup>1</sup>. I have also noticed a few differences between Jewish millennials and Christian millennials at the undergraduate level which can help us to influence and create unique evangelistic models. I have had successes and failures, both of which help me to move forward in the worthy task of presenting Yeshua and his salvation to Jewish millennials.

Please know that this will not be a discourse on retaining the millennials who are departing your congregations and churches. That is a different topic, however I believe that successful outreach will stem that departure and will actually help to bring others in. When the

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<sup>1</sup> Baby boomers (ages 51-69) in 2014 in the United States was estimated at 75.4 million. Generation X (ages 35-50) is estimated to be 64.6 million in 2028 in the United States. Millennials (ages 18-35) is estimated to be 75.3 million in 2015 in the United States. Fry, Richard. "This Year, Millennials Will Overtake Baby Boomers." Pew Research Center. (January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers/>

Lord moves and millennials see vitality, they will want to be a part of it, both believer and non-believer alike.

My desire for the ideas I am about to present and for the panel is that they will induce discussion and debate, but more than anything else, ideas and action. I am a big fan of ideas and experimentation especially when the one coming up with the ideas is willing to see them through even if they fail. I also hope to win the hearts of the more mature audience believing that their attention can and would make an astounding difference. I will share about millennials, the importance of reaching them, successes and failures, obstacles, and finally a few thoughts and suggestions.

I hope that while I paint the picture of a privileged and challenging generation, your heart and mind will be opened to realize that we cannot and should not force them to conform to any specific way of living out a faith in Yeshua but should strive to engage them where they are with the truth that only the gospel demonstrates. This should move us out of our comfort zone a little. I want to encourage those of you who may not have as much experience with this age group to develop expectations that are more in synch with the culture of the day and not try and impose the culture of previous generations on to our youth.

### **What Are Jewish Millennials?**

From the back of the room, we could see him getting frustrated and it turns out it was for a good reason. At an internal Chosen People Ministries Symposium about Jewish identity in Messianic faith, the topic of reaching Jewish millennials arose. After 20 minutes of thoughtful, passionate banter, Vladimir Pikmin, director our branch, Beit Sar Shalom in Germany, raised his hand and said, "What are you all talking about? We don't have such things in Germany or in the former Soviet Union with differences like this." At first I dismissed his comments but in the end, he was right. The Millennial generation and the research done on it is a mostly North American thing and more specifically, the United States, Canada and some of Europe.

So who are the Jewish millennials and what are some of their characteristics? There are an abundance of definitions and names for this age group so I will briefly describe some. They are called Millennials, Gen Y, or Gen Me. Some say that they were born between the mid-70's and the early 2000's while others make it more narrow and say 1980, 81 or 82 to 1997 or 2000. And one such researcher and writer that this writer appreciates, Tim Elmore, further divides the group calling the greater group, Gen I while calling a subset of the group born after 1990, Gen iY because their upbringing was even more distinct because they never knew a time without being connected to the internet<sup>2</sup>. This has tremendous value but for now we will stick with the whole group born from 1981-1997<sup>3</sup> which means at the time of this writing millennials are between the ages of 18 and 34.

So are these young Jews much different than those in their 40's, 50's and 60's? On one hand, no; self-centeredness is pervasive in all generations. The need to feel loved or respected is still there, and the idea that you are right about whatever your mind thinks up is still present.

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<sup>2</sup> Elmore, Tim. *Generation iY: Our Last Chance To Save Their Future*. Atlanta. Poet Gardener Publishing. (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Fry, Richard.

On the other hand, yes, because all of the things listed above look different depending on the age group you examine. Regarding millennials in general, they<sup>4</sup>:

- Expect technology to simply work, to be pretty easy, and to be almost free
- Adore and cannot live without mobile tech
- Are social either online or IRL (Millennial acronym for, "In Real Life.")
- View themselves as equals to their parents and older people
- Collaborate to get things like work or a cause accomplished
- Are looking for adventures or stories
- Are principled when it comes to the companies and communities with which they interact, more specifically; they are concerned with what the group stands for

While the above seems to paint millennials in a generous light there is another side, they:

- Are self-centered philanthropists
  - They buy Toms shoes because it helps needy people but also because they get a pair of trendy shoes and they feel good about it
- Are moody and addicted to, "drama"
  - By having a bone to pick or being easily offended or quick to anger, they have a purpose to propel them forward and to feel important
- Are smitten with the idea of tolerance
  - This tolerance is only for progressive values and therefore not true tolerance
- Are pluralistic in their beliefs regarding right and wrong
- Expect the world to cater to them without earning it

Tensions also arise between generations in the workplace as described by Rabbi Ben Greenberg:

"The differences between millennials and older generations are also prevalent in the work place. Whereas baby boomers and older Gen X'ers view work as primarily a location (where you are situated), millennials primarily view work as an activity (what you are doing not where you are). Tensions can arise between baby boomer management and supervisors and millennial employees when the former thinks the latter is not working and the latter does not understand why their boss doesn't understand that they are working."<sup>5</sup>

Jewish millennials fit most of these traits as well as a few more<sup>6</sup>, they:

- Are likely to intermarry
- Only went to synagogue for family events if that
- Likely have Christmas trees in their house or soon will
- Often stem from intermarried couples

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<sup>4</sup> Solomon, Micah. "2015 Is The Year Of The Millennial Customer: 5 Key Traits These 80 Million Consumers Share". <http://www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way/>

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Greenberg, Ben. "Jewish Millennials Creating Community Together". [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-ben-greenberg/jewish-millennials-creati\\_b\\_4369293.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-ben-greenberg/jewish-millennials-creati_b_4369293.html)

<sup>6</sup> "A Portrait of Jewish Americans". Pew Research Center. 2013. <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

- May or may not have celebrated Jewish holidays like Passover
- Are 40% of the time unaffiliated religiously

These characteristics should help to educate all age groups who desire to see young Jewish people receive Yeshua on how to become relevant in their spheres of influence.

### **Why Is Reaching This Generation Important?**

The workforce and the future are in their hands, simply said. In 2015, millennials will or have overtaken baby boomers numerically in the US workforce<sup>7</sup>. They will hold influence simply because of their numbers but also because their ideologies are becoming more prevalent. Millennial trendsetters like Mark Zuckerberg, YouTube stars, and celebrities influence their peers in everything from philanthropy to philosophy, religion to geo-politics. This is a significantly different generation than we have ever seen in Jewish evangelism. This is the first to more likely than not, intermarry<sup>8</sup>. They create personal spiritualities of their own making, mixing deities, unseen forces, eastern thinking and other religions. They are from a larger percentage of intermarried couples with confused identities<sup>9</sup>. They are the first generation where they create their own kingdom or become small gods, online. They are the first generation in which hard work is not a given<sup>10</sup>.

Perhaps reaching this generation for Yeshua says more about us, Jewish evangelists and those attempting the same, than about them. If we don't reach this generation, we will surely struggle with evangelism to future generations because of our inability to relate the message of the kingdom to a generation with different ideas. There are many ways we could fail. Perhaps it will be because we are too stuck in traditional ways of evangelism and living out a life of faith. Perhaps it will be because we have moved too far from the non-believing Jewish world and we are now out of touch. Perhaps it will be because many of us are more concerned with internal issues and don't have time to engage them. Or it could be a mixture of the above and more.

But those are not an option because if we don't reach them, the future of messianic communities is uncertain. If we don't reach them, reaching their kids will be even harder. If we don't reach them the ruler of this world is winning. If we don't reach them, more of the people whom we love will go to an eternity without their creator. However, with God's help, creativity, and fresh ideas we will find ways to engage 18-34 with their messiah.

### **Challenges to Reaching Jewish Millennials**

Jewish millennials are often indistinguishable from their peers. They don't wear a chai or a Star of David. They don't all go to Hillel. They don't all take off for the High Holidays. We who

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Fry, Richard.

<sup>8</sup> "A Portrait of Jewish Americans". Pew Research Center.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Millennials tend to seem entitled to other generations. They are more likely to not adhere to normal business hours than other generations.

desire to reach them have to wrestle with challenges like this as well as some old challenges that affect each generation of Jewish people. The following are a few.

### **Inability to Identify Jewish Millennials**

In addition to the reasons in the paragraph above, young Jewish people don't all identify if they are Jewish or not because they don't believe in traditional Judaism, or because they never had to think about it, or because only one parent is Jewish. Their appearance could be stereotypical or could resemble that of Northern Europeans or people of Middle Eastern descent, or Israeli.

### **Starting Points**

Where do you start with a typical Jewish millennial? The problem with that question is that there is no *typical* Jewish millennial. Some believe in God, some do not. Some have spirituality, some do not. Some have thought about issues, some haven't. If a young Jewish person doesn't even believe in God, where do you start? It is almost as if, you treat them like you would any Gentile with whom you wanted to share. You cannot simply assume that a Jewish person believes what traditional Judaism teaches and you simply show them Isaiah 53. It doesn't work that way very often with young Jews. And more often than not, they don't want to talk or debate because they simply don't care, which leads to the next area.

### **Religious Ambiguity or Atheism And Its Various Pseudonyms**

Along with the growing influence of pluralism in the world, Jewish millennials believe that there cannot possibly be a right or wrong when it comes to religion so they believe that Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, yogis, and unnamed forms of spirituality have valid ways of approaching life. Tolerance has become a woefully, mis-defined term for the acceptance of everybody as long as you are pluralistic and you don't wish to hold to a perceived, "antiquated," set of values. True tolerance embraces the uniqueness of groups or individuals and allows for the difference of opinion. Today's popular tolerance seems to embrace differences unless the difference espouses absolute truths like the Bible does. This is not tolerance.

The millennial's approach to spirituality is similar to their approach to art (discussed later in this essay). Their spirituality conforms to the way they want to do it and it is the, "enlightened," thing to do.

As we say, "Ask two Jews and you will have three opinions." So is the case with spirituality or lack thereof. On campuses you will find an inordinate percentage of the people involved in *Freethinker* or atheist groups are Jewish. At the University of Maryland, the group was 25-35% Jewish. While some were what I call, "lazy atheists," without good reasons, others were militant atheists.

Simply attempting to present a Biblical worldview to a group of people who have made up their minds with conflicting beliefs is a difficult endeavor.

### **Christianity's Reputation**

This is one of those remaining issues from generations past. Even though the above issues pervade the generation, often there is still a hint of the untouchable or taboo that is believing in Yeshua. I put it this way, while it used to be explicitly said in previous generations

that, “Jesus is the Christian God,” or, “He’s not for us,” it now subtly communicated by the families of Jewish millennials sort of the way you become a follower of your father’s favorite sport team. It is simply understood by the things you do and the comments that are made.

While some Jewish millennials are typical Jews that, “know,” that Yeshua is a no-no like their parents did, many others know He is not for them but don’t know why.

Still others have bad tastes of Christianity because in modernity, and historically, what they consider as Christianity offends their sensibilities regardless of whether their considerations are accurate. Whether it is the crusades, the greedy televangelists, insensitive Christian friends, the shadow of the Holocaust<sup>11</sup>, or the idea that Yeshua is the only way, these Jewish kids still instinctively bristle as the prospect of making Yeshua their Messiah.

Christian practices and language may also continue to cause hesitation. Christian songs, the word, “Christ,” the trinity, Christmas, Easter, etc. are still objectionable or off-limits to some young Jews.

I realize that the above idea may seem to contradict other concepts that I have mentioned but they are not and they are both true to a degree

Aside from the Bible, the second best witness for Yeshua are those people who proclaim to follow Him. Unfortunately the worst witness for Yeshua are also the people who proclaim to follow Him.

## **Successes**

While this generation remains challenging there nevertheless have been successes in reaching some. They happen in little pockets and communities. But none of the successes I will list have occurred in a large-scale way, a comparison my boss, Dr. Mitch Glaser classifies as *wholesale vs. retail*. I am not saying that large-scale or wholesale outreach to Jewish millennials cannot be done. I hope we are all trying to be creative cultivating these methods. However, the successes I have seen are small, local, and sincere or the way Dr. Glaser calls it, *retail*. They are based on relationship, time, one-on-one or two-on-one conversations, small community groups and heavily involve evangelism done by their peers (although this last one is not always the case). While I realize that anecdotes are never the rule, I still stand firm from my experiences. You may have seen otherwise but I challenge you to examine a larger swath of the age group than those who surround you to get a more rounded perspective. Here are a few examples.

### **Intermarriage and Interfaith Relationships**

On numerous occasions my wife, colleagues, friends, rabbis and pastors have been able to engage young married couples or young couples thinking about marriage in spiritual matters. One such couple met in Israel and were dating for a long time moving toward marriage. He, an unsaved-but-thought-he-was pastor’s kid, was dating her, a liberal, women’s college attending, Jewish woman, but he knew that faith would be an issue. After agreeing to meet with them, a

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<sup>11</sup> As communicated to millennials by their parents and grandparents.

congregational leader led her to the Lord and caused jealousy within him eventually leading him to the Lord.

On another occasion, a Christian woman dating a Jewish man engages with Messianics to figure out the whole, “faith thing,” and it causes an open-minded young Jewish man to search the scripture.

Within young family environments like parks for children, child-birthing classes, schools, daycares, etc, you routinely meet people who are intermarried and it is easy to engage them especially if you are intermarried yourself or you can relate to their situation. Sometimes the intermarriage presents an issue but often it does not for them because they embrace the traditions they want from both cultures except the deep faith aspects. Regardless of that fact, the people to whom my wife and I gravitate are those intermarried couples because of shared culture and because of our desire to share with them. There hasn't been a single time that we have not been able to share the gospel with these couples after a friendship has grown.

### **Community Events Involving Millennial Peers**

With the help of a few others, I launched Metro Moses in New York City in 2008. The goals were to sharpen fellow believers Biblically and to invite Jewish peers to the events. We had weekly Bible discussions and monthly events ranging from the holiday celebrations like Passover, Hanukkah, and Purim at the pub, to rooftop Havdalah, New York Pizza taste tests, etc. Some of these events were more traditionally Jewish while others were vaguely Jewish except for the number of Jewish attendees. While we were figuring out how to make this idea work, there were successes and failures but in the end dozens of Jewish people came through our influence and were able hear about the gospel in a culturally relevant way probably because it was with their peers, it was non-threatening, and because it was familiar enough to them as a Jewish thing but wasn't like their parents' synagogue. Metro Moses continues to this day with the same goals.

In addition to Metro Moses, Jews for Jesus hosted a Shabbat dinner every week in Brooklyn. There were three strengths in this. They had committed believers attending who wanted to bring their Jewish peers, ie, “Bringers.” They had a beautiful house to hold it in. And three, they had wise and experienced guidance from Jhan and Melissa Moskowitz who nurtured the group and stepped in when needed but let the group share with its peers. Again with this there were lows, like when it became more of a place for believers because some of the bringers left the city. However, dozens of Jewish people came through that house and heard about Yeshua because they were attracted by their friends and stayed because they had the feeling of parental oversight without the actual parents, which was comforting to them. That Shabbat continues now in Manhattan.

Even the non-Messianic Jewish communities do these types of events. In NYC, Purim is a huge party night for millennial Jews because of the amount of clubs that hose masquerade balls for them. Even if they are not heavy into their Jewish heritage, that is a fun night to be Jewish. The JCC in Manhattan hosts an all night event on Shavuot with lectures, dancing, panels, movies, cooking, and of course cheesecake. Synagogues in Washington DC and Chicago host events with movies, novelists, comedians, musicians, poets, lectures and more. The common thread is that there is something, “Jewishy,” enough to host them at the synagogue and to attract young Jews but not religious enough to scare away those who don't

really want the Jewish faith. These attract many millennial Jews but they are not your 1950's and 60's brand of Judaism, they are what I call, "Jewish flavored but still nuanced."

### **Interfaith Activities**

Before you recoil at the term *interfaith*, let me explain what I don't mean. I don't mean large events with big name speakers of different faiths explaining their views on things and I don't mean cooperation between Intervarsity and Hillel (although that would be great on campus). What I mean is sort of a mix between the first two examples where believers lead a study, or Shabbat dinner, or seder or movie night in smaller groups numbering no more than 15-20 and then lead discussion as interfaith dialogs. Believers guide the respectful discussion and the attendees/participants know they are going to hear different views. The leaders make it obvious to offer a clear presentation of the gospel. A good example of this is what Jon Lash has been doing at the University of Florida. After having a supportive church behind him and committed believing students, Jewish and Gentile, he began an interfaith Shabbat dinner in his home and it is billed as such. Many inter-dating couples attend as well as single Jews and Gentiles. They are there to find out more, for a home-cooked meal away from the cafeteria, and for the sincerity among the attendees and hosts. One of the keys to this working is having dedicated students to bring the others. This cannot be understated! This has spawned another Shabbat meal on the other side of campus as well as Interfaith Bible studies where people can come to learn.

### **Christians**

The biggest and probably most effective way of reaching Jewish millennials is through Christian millennials. The above ideas are good but they take a lot of work to plan and maintain. And, even though I have described millennials as self-centered and this is true among Christians also, there are those who still think about outreach. Most of the opportunities I get to share with a Jewish millennial or to help someone else to do the same, do not come from me making the first contact but rather through that Jewish millennial's friend, spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, roommate, or someone else's evangelistic contact. And almost always, that person is a Christian.

One story involved a Christian man going to a kosher pizzeria specifically to learn more Hebrew and to share with the young Jewish man behind the counter. It worked! Also, I have received several emails from students and campus group leaders regarding their fellow Jewish students. After speaking with several groups like Navigators or Cru, students and student leaders become aware of the need to share with Jewish students on campus especially when the campus has a 20% Jewish population and they ask for more help or about specific contacts they already have. Partnering with a Christian group can be challenging for various reasons but it can pay off also because they can invite their Jewish friends.

There are numerous ways to engage Christians but it is worth it because there are numerically more of them than missionaries to the Jewish people. To get them mobilized is to really reach right into the Jewish student population and workplaces. This, in my opinion is the most promising way of reaching Jewish young people. In other words, let us work together to create materials to train Christians in Jewish evangelism and develop partnerships to achieve our common goal.



## **Creativity/Art**

I am not an, “artsy,” person and my wife makes fun of me for it but I see the value of beauty for outreach. In a quest for meaning in this world, expression is a big way that millennials chase it. Art, music, experience, etc. mean a lot to millennials. Why do you think you touch and try everything in the Apple Store or why photo editing software on smartphones is so popular or why everyone and their mother has a blog or vlog now? Creativity, expression, art are all integral to the millennial experience and they want everyone to know how much they enjoy expressing themselves and participating in the art scene.

One example is an interactive art exhibit called *Cavanah* that Suzanne Rojas from Cru did at Columbia University and Sara Lawrence College. Within a pop-up structure, art curated to produce certain thoughts and emotions on the human condition and God line the inside of an organized path. The viewer ends up in a room with user-created art where people can express their thoughts. Organizers are also present at the end to talk with the viewer about their walk-through, their art, and their thoughts. Another example are art gallery events. Again the curators line the walls and floors with art based on certain themes or from artists with similar backgrounds. This is seen as an event and attracts young people because of their appreciation for art or because it is social outing of the night. For this, it is imperative that the within the crowd are people intent on talking with the attendees about art and to begin conversations that can lead to more.

Art is seen as an almost untouchable good. In my opinion, far more things and actions, for lack of better words, are considered art than should be. However, as this world embraces freedom of expression, art morphs into the outlet of the millennial who desires to self-express and for those seeking meaning and beauty. The approach to art among millennials today is not dissimilar to the reactionary era of Romanticism in the 18th century, which prized intuition, moments of bliss, and personal touch more than traditional artistic norms of the time. While not always the case, leading poets in the era of romanticism often came from privileged or secure upbringings and sought beauty and meaning but were often unhappy or considered themselves dissatisfied intellectuals. In other words they were looking for something as are the millennials.

## **Time/Friendship**

This may seem like a given but it is absolutely a necessity. While some people still respond to altar-calls, most Jewish people do not and they don't accept Yeshua after one presentation of the gospel. It takes time, effort and sincerity. Young Jews will see you as a salesman if you can only talk about faith. In addition to your words, your life indicates whether or not the faith you espouse is worth it. Whether through a missionary or a Christian friend, multiple meetings and hangouts are required to effectively share Yeshua and this is true for all ages but especially with millennials. When I meet with a young Jewish person, I make a point to delicately direct the conversation but also to make sure that every time I see them, I am not pressuring them with Yeshua unless I discern that is where the conversation should go. But the funny thing is, if I invite them to lunch or to a party not intending to speak about the Bible, they will often bring it up.

## **Bringers**

As was described in the above example of the Shabbat by Jews For Jesus or Metro Moses, success for such events relies on individuals who live the vision for evangelism and who are extroverted enough to meet and bring new people to evangelistic efforts. When there were bringers present there were a steady stream of Jewish non-believers. But as soon as those bringers moved away, it became apparent that they were doing the bulk of the networking because the newcomers dried up. This is not an indictment on the non-bringers, although we should always encourage people to be outgoing with their witness. Rather, this is an exhortation of bringers and plea to develop and nurture them.

## **The Bible**

“The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved is the power of God.”<sup>12</sup> This is so very true in our day and age. As our society moves further and further away from God’s standards, the truth spoken in scripture is either confusing or not applicable to those who have planted themselves in the ideologies of the world. The world says truth is intolerant, people are inherently good, homosexual unions are good and normal, and abortion is loving of the mother. The world turns God’s standards on their heads. However “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart,”<sup>13</sup> and, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Messiah.”<sup>14</sup> More than anything else, if you can get anybody at any age to engage with the word of God, there is a better chance of them understanding God, their own nature, the world around them, and Yeshua. After a young Jewish man came to faith, he began posting to facebook Biblical quotes of Yeshua without citing them except by typing, “A saying from my rabbi . . .,” followed by the quote. This garnered tremendous attention and *likes* for each comment by his mostly secular Jewish friends. To them the words in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount were simple but revolutionary. This allowed him to engage his friends in the Word.

In another scenario, I began showing a Jewish friend Messianic prophecies in the Bible. After showing him Isaiah 53, he told me that it did not sound like Yeshua. After he came to faith, he told me that it indeed sounded like Yeshua and he did not know how to process the passage except to not admit that to me at the time. It was the Bible telling about Yeshua and not me.

The Bible can be daunting because of its size and language to non-believer and believer alike. But making the Bible palatable without compromise by offering these spiritual babes a little at a time can begin their journey to the kingdom!

## **Misplaced Evangelistic Effort**

What is it like to see the person on the street, clothed in a shirt that indicates they have an agenda and wanting to hand you something? They begin to make eye contact with you. My peers’ normal reaction is to avert your eyes, move further on the sidewalk, or ignore the

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew 4:12.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 10:17.

person. And what is it like to be invited to a Messianic congregation when you're not really sure what that means or what to expect? And what is it like when you are invited to church where the service is totally foreign and the word *Christ* is spoken twenty or more times? Before you think I am bashing these places or efforts, let it be said that I am not. Try to imagine yourself as a non-believing Jewish millennial in these situations. What I am trying to do is to demonstrate that the use of these as the main efforts to reach already insecure Jewish millennials may not be the wisest use of resources, time and money.

### **Street Outreach**

Let me say from the beginning that I am not high on street outreach as a regular effort. While it may be obvious that street outreach is a low-return effort in general, I do believe it has its place and I realize that there are success stories. I think everyone should try it to know what rejection feels like and what joy feels like when you get a great conversation, to struggle with how to speak with people with wildly different outlooks on life, and to have to respond in a matter of a few seconds. This helps to round out our walk and if you can do ministry on the streets, I think you can do ministry in most places on the planet.

However it must be said that a lot of time, money, and paper is spent on very few good contacts and even fewer on good Jewish contacts, and still even fewer on Jewish millennials who normally try to avoid street peddlers. You can raise the percentage of Jewish people you will see by going to more Jewish areas or campuses but you still will not know who is Jewish unless there is an identifying marker like attire or jewelry. And what about the areas where people live further apart, reducing the density of Jewish people and pedestrians, that still have many Jewish people like the suburbs of major cities?

In my mind, there only two places you could make a case for street work as an effort for Jewish evangelism: 1) on college campuses with high Jewish populations or percentages. However, a purveyor of gospel literature will quickly wear out their welcome, run out of new people to see, or struggle to get on to many campuses in the first place. And 2) In Israel, however this paper refers specifically to North America.

### **Messianic Congregation Or Church As Gospel Messenger**

A question arose from a group of Christian students after a brief lecture I gave, "If we meet a Jewish person, how should we get them to a Messianic congregation or church?"

I responded, "Don't do that!" They seemed confused so I continued, "Many believers think that their goal when meeting a non-believer is to get them into a local body so that they can hear the gospel, but to me that is counter-intuitive. Who knows them, you or the impersonal congregation? Who can discern where they are spiritually, you or a formal church? Wait until you have had some good spiritual conversations with them and even invited them to hang out with you and a few like-minded believing friends until you discern if a body of worship is where they should continue on their spiritual path. It may be that they would be turned off and that you should continue individually with them for a while." This confused the group but made perfect sense to me. Christians do church, that is what they do. It is normal to them and in the south it is even normal to non-Christian Gentiles. But to Jewish people, church is not normal. Trying to set up a weekly worship or Bible meeting or inviting them to church or services for is strange

because most Jewish millennials don't even go to a synagogue so a weekly spiritual meeting or service about, "Jesus," might be alienating.

In my estimation, from visiting and speaking in several hundred churches, the normal church is not equipped to do evangelism in its services. They can normally only do one of two things in the service, evangelistic messages or teaching messages and this is assuming that it is a healthy church which is unfortunately not a given. And in my experience they usually focus on the teaching messages. There are a few exceptions. But these are usually very large churches with name recognition who have large budgets with very gifted pastors. But even then, a Jewish millennial is probably going to balk at the oddities with which they are not familiar.

In regards to Messianic congregations, please understand that I believe in Messianic congregations and I grew up in what I would call a gem of a congregation; however I would venture to say that most Messianic entities are, similarly to churches, not in a place to evangelize young Jews. It is a misnomer that simply because a Messianic congregation's service somewhat resembles a traditional synagogue service, that a Jewish person would feel comfortable and respond to a sermon. Think about it; "Jesus," is involved and other things can easily confuse the Jewish seeker. In addition, Jewish millennials often want to see that there is participation from their peers but unfortunately most congregations don't have more than a handful of millennials.

Yes, there are exceptions. But the evangelistic concept of getting people to the building where worship services are held so that the sermon that day will speak to them should be rethought. Use the God-given meeting and your wisdom to discern their spiritual state and to decide when you might want to introduce them to worship services.

### **Living An Authentic Jewish Life**

Lastly, a popular mode of thought among some over the last few years has been to lead, "authentic Jewish lives." This concept is quite different in North America than it is in Israel. The idea in North America is presented as helping with both Jewish identity and evangelism. The concept is that if we lead lives that are thoroughly familiar to a Jewish person, the Jewish person will engage with us and want to find out about Yeshua. Jewish identity is not a negative thing but using it as the sole tool of evangelism is not as successful and it would be accompanied by an outward vocal witness. Of course, there are a few examples when this has worked but it mostly doesn't.

First, you cannot assume that a Jewish millennial cares that much if you live an authentically Jewish life when they are married to a Gentile and have a Christmas tree in the house.

Second, who is to say what an authentic Jewish life really looks like? Someone may have a Jewish mother, not work on Shabbat, get married under a chuppah, and Bar Mitzvah their son yet their Jewish neighbor still says they are not Jewish because they believe in Yeshua<sup>15</sup>. And in Israel, the idea would look very different.

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<sup>15</sup> "Believing in Jesus, however, is enough to place one beyond the pale: 60% of U.S. Jews say a person cannot be Jewish if he or she believes Jesus was the messiah." "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." Pg. 14. Pew Research Center. (October 1, 2013).

Regardless of the heritage of the person with whom you are sharing, people learn more when you tell them why you are different<sup>16</sup>.

### Caution

We often like to construct programs because we are more familiar with them, or we work in the context of churches and congregations. But sometimes we do it because we are nervous to speak with someone we don't know in a casual way. Or we do it because people want to use what they like to do as outreach regardless of its efficacy. These are not necessarily bad but we should think hard about these because in reality it takes much less effort and time to simply share the gospel with a person at the bank or in a cafeteria or to invite them to dinner than it does to put communities, events, and the like together. If you really want to do evangelism it might be worth doing time-cost-benefit analyses to see if what you want to do is worth it. I realize that it is hard to evaluate an idea in such pragmatic way when God is in the picture which is why this is merely a thought.

### Scriptural Reflection

One of the most common mistakes that I see people make in outreach in general, but especially to Jewish millennials, is failing to present the, "author and perfecter of our faith."<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, **not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God**, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Messiah, who is the image of God. **For we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Yeshua as Lord**, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Yeshua's sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (emphasis added)

In this passage Paul asserts two things that I believe speak to the subject at hand. When speaking about the Messiah with people of any age, the topics can easily shift from the Word and the Messiah to other things of interest or semi-related. We must be wary of when these occasions arise because they can derail us from our goal, presenting Yeshua and the Word concerning Him.

### Sanctity Of The Word Of God

It is cool, proper, accepted, appropriate and enlightened to be embracing of the world's pluralism to millennials. We can be tempted when talking with people to dilute the truth that God's words can bring especially when the popular opinion scoffs at the

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2.

standards of the Bible. We start to think, “Do they really have to believe this or that?” when they seem to hinder the person’s progress to Yeshua.

Sometimes it may seem easier to bend the Bible to get it to say what we want. Sometimes we actually draw attention away from the Bible to instead, present programs, mixers, worship styles, and more as the path to Yeshua. But according to the writers of the Bible, there is no substitute for Yeshua, His words and the words about Him.

Evaluate the world around you and the issues that face millennials today and contemplate ways to engage the non-believer Biblically because chances are, they will be surprised at what God has to say. Try to stop thinking like a long-time believer and instead like a young skeptic to brainstorm what might interest them. A few favorites of mine are the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes for Yeshua’s words of compassion, and presenting Yeshua as a rabbi in a lecture format.

We may use programs, friendship, and community to attract people but in the end, they must engage with the Word.

### **Preaching Messiah Instead of Ourselves**

When first experimenting with college ministry, I was advised to start a group on campus. When I was asked, “Well how will you introduce them to Messianic Judaism?” or something similar, I realized that we were of different mindsets. I could discern through their statements and goals that they thought that I should present an established style of worship. This would make more sense if there were large numbers of Messianics on campus but that is not the case anywhere in North America. In addition, if I presented a version of Messianic Judaism, that is how I would be known on campus, possibly making myself and the group unattractive to those who did not want to engage in something overtly religious or in that format. So I resolved to make Yeshua the priority in my presentation to students which allowed me to be multi-faceted in my actions on campus. Sometimes the presentation was very Jewish in the terminology and sometimes it wasn’t. It simply depended on the person.

We must consider how we present ourselves and what or whom we present. First and foremost, we are presenting Yeshua who lights people’s’ paths, not just Jews’ but everybody’s, regardless of how they decide to worship after coming to saving faith.

### **Conclusion**

I have great hope that we can reach the next generations of Jewish people with the Messiah. Right now time is running out for the older millennials because as they get older it is less and less likely that they will accept Yeshua. But I have hope because Yeshua has done and will do amazing things. The Jesus movement occurred mostly in this age group, and good things are happening among younger Israelis so why not Jewish millennials?

Jewish millennials are a challenging age group but they are imperative to our work and we care for their spiritual well-being. They are different from their parents and grandparents in many ways. And we may have been caught off-guard in terms of

engaging them, partly because they morph rapidly and belong to a culture that prides itself on uniqueness but also because we need to learn how to venture into new arenas to pursue them. They are smart, value-driven, and know how to make things happen. Embrace them and their culture and opportunities to share Yeshua will open.

I would like to outline a few considerations followed by some suggestions.

#### Considerations:

1. Do you view and treat millennials like every other age group? Examine the difference you notice in your own family's age groups in the way they approach the world. This will help to inform you regarding Jewish millennials.
2. Are you of the opinion, "I'm not conforming to them. They simply have to adjust to me." Contemplate them as a cross-cultural challenge God is setting before you.
3. If you are a congregational leader or pastor, are you only willing to do millennial ministry if they come to your place of worship? Think of it more like a local mission trip where you are contributing to the kingdom.
4. Do you think that the best way to evangelize a Jewish person is by getting them to a church or a messianic congregation? Try and engage them where they are and see if you get somewhere.
5. Are you nervous about one-on-one evangelism? Challenge yourself to improve where you are weak and raise up others who excel where you are weak.

#### Suggestions:

1. Find creative ways to engage with the word of God.
2. Present Yeshua first and foremost instead of a worship style.
3. Embrace the frustrations that millennials bring and view them as opportunities.
4. Work to find supportive students on campus and work through them.
5. Embrace the term, "interfaith."
6. Raise people who can reach millennials better than you and be open to new ideas.
7. Takes chances, one of them might work.
8. Evangelize outside of your building; use friendship and community to achieve this.
9. Partner with Christians and churches.
10. Be creative with arts and community.
11. Embrace mixed marriages relationships.
12. Consider that older Jewish stereotypes may not apply to Jewish millennials
13. Pray!

There is no foolproof way for reaching Jewish millennials just like other groups and ages. And while we cannot necessarily forecast the future trends of young Jewish people, we need to have our corporate finger on the pulse of this perplexing, yet exciting generation and not rest on our assumptions of what Jewish people are like. If we fail to lead Jewish millennials to Yeshua, it may say more about our willingness to adapt to their unique needs than their willingness to accept Him. The worst thing we can do is simply not try. If we don't reach them, the fate of Messianic Judaism and its Jewish

constituency is at stake and we stand an even lesser chance at reaching those after the millennials. But, if we reach them, new communities will begin, older ones will see new life, creativity in ministry will flourish and it will be easier to reach other Jewish people.

My brothers and sisters, are you up to taking on this worthy and needy task? When we work together, influence is exponentially increased and when we endeavor to dream of new ideas, they can serve as a spark for ideas in other places. While this paper focused on our efforts and how we can improve, I acknowledge that the Lord is present and I pray for his movement and guidance in reaching our younger Jewish brothers and sisters and I know he will!