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**Bible Engagement, Communication with God,
& the Mosaic Generation**

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Researcher George Barna coined the term Mosaic Generation to refer to those born between 1984 and 2002 who are “very mosaic” in nearly all areas of life. Also known as Generation Y or the Millennial Generation, people in this generation have no real dominant attribute, except that they are “comfortable with contradiction”, “post-modern” and exhibiting “non-linear” thinking (Barna, 2001). Other key characteristics of Mosaics, delineated by Kinnamen (2006) are displayed in the box to the right.

In terms of spirituality, authors have noted that Mosaics tend to be moral pragmatists, deciding questions of morality based on “whatever works”. Classic examples of this approach include statements such as “Whatever is right for you may not be right for me” or “There is no absolute truth”. While each generation has some share of moral relativists, the rate among Mosaics is much greater. For example, Kinnamen (2006) notes that three out of four Mosaics make decisions based on factors such as what feels right, what produces the most positive outcome, or what others think is right. In contrast, only one-third of elders, two-fifths of boomers, and half of busters use this relativist approach. As Kinnamen states “The generational slide toward relativistic morality — where each individual feels he can decide what is right and what is wrong — has reached Niagara Falls proportions.”

Key Characteristics of Mosaics

- ❖ Post-modern, non-linear thinking
- ❖ Moral relativism
- ❖ Comfortable with contradictory beliefs/positions
- ❖ Curious, craving new experiences
- ❖ Relationships (“the tribe”) are important for trying out ideas
- ❖ Technology
- ❖ Value process over product

At least among teens, studies suggest that expressing an allegiance to Jesus Christ does not necessarily translate into moral decisions and behavior. For example, 53% of born-again teenagers admit to cheating, viewing online pornography, experimenting with alcohol or drugs, and/or having sex in the previous three months. The rate among non-believers is only slightly higher at 59%.

Professing their allegiance to Christ and involvement with a youth group also doesn’t prevent youth from walking away from the faith when they reach young adulthood. For example, seven out of ten Protestants between the ages of 18 and 30 who attended church in high school say they quit attending by age 23 (Grossman, 2009).

These two disturbing trends are no doubt related and largely explained by the fact that few young adults today have a biblical worldview. Studies by the Barna Group (Riley, 2009) estimate that less than 1% of 18 to 23 year olds have a Biblical worldview. Those who say they are “born again Christians” are twice as likely to have such an outlook. However, two times a small minority is still a minority, with no more than about one out of five (19 percent) born again young adults espousing a biblical ideology.

Why is a biblical worldview so important? Emerging research indicates that it is one of the key elements for youth groups that help teens develop a faith that is vital and endures. In addition, having a biblical worldview reduces the likelihood of engaging in various risk behaviors (Kinnamen, 2006).

Of course, you can’t have a biblical worldview unless you actually know what the Bible says and the only way to know that is to read it. Today few people of all ages do so. Moreover, the younger you are, the less likely you are to read or listen to the Bible (Back to the Bible, 2006).

In this paper we explore critical issues related to developing a biblical worldview among the Mosaic generation. Specifically, we present data on rates of Bible engagement among American young adults, their moral behaviors, and their ideas about how they communicate with God and how He communicates with them.

Methods

Our data come from an internet-based survey with a random sample of 987 Americans between the ages of 18 and 24. Table 1 displays data on the demographic characteristics of our sample.

The 45-item survey instrument used in this study contains a mix of closed- and open-ended questions about involvement in attending religious services, prayer, and Bible reading, beliefs about how God communicates with you and how you communicate with God. It also asks about their involvement in behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking, and pornography.

Consistent with the picture of this age group painted by other researchers, we find a diverse array of religious preferences among the young adults in our sample. Figure 1 shows that a little less than half identify with a Christian religious preference. Protestant remains the most common response, although it accounts for only 28.2%. Only one out of four (25.6%) Moslems would identify him or herself as a born-again Christian.

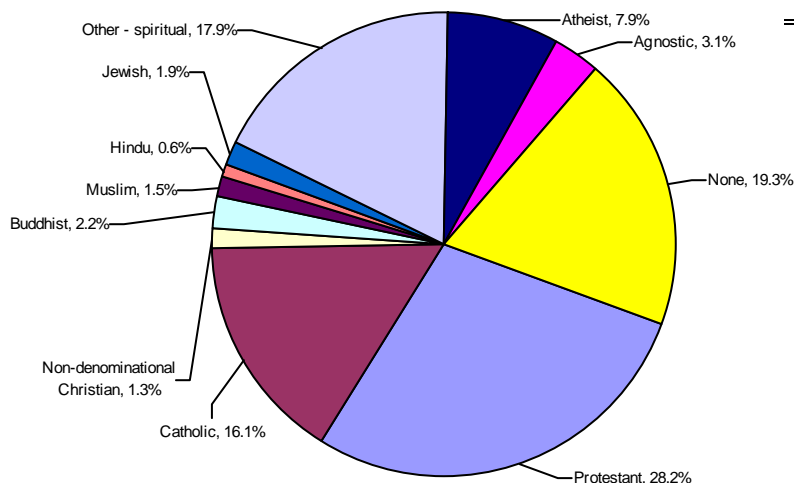
One out of five respondents stated that they have no religious preference. Almost the same percentage identified a preference outside of the categories listed. These included New Age and Wiccan as well as those who said that they are "spiritual" but not necessarily religious.

Compared to teens, young adults are much less likely to identify with the Protestant church and much more likely to state that they have no religious preference. They are also less likely to say that they are born again.

Table 1. Sample Demographics.

Characteristics	Percent
Age	
Mean	21.2 years
Median	21.0 years
Gender	
Female	55.3%
Male	44.7%
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian	68.3%
African-American	9.8%
Hispanic/Latino	8.3%
Asian	6.8%
Other	6.8%
Marital Status	
Never married	66.4%
Married	18.2%
Living w/significant other	12.6%
Divorced/separated	1.8%
Education Level	
Less than high school	9.2%
High school graduate	26.0%
Some college	45.0%
College graduate	14.6%
Other	5.1%

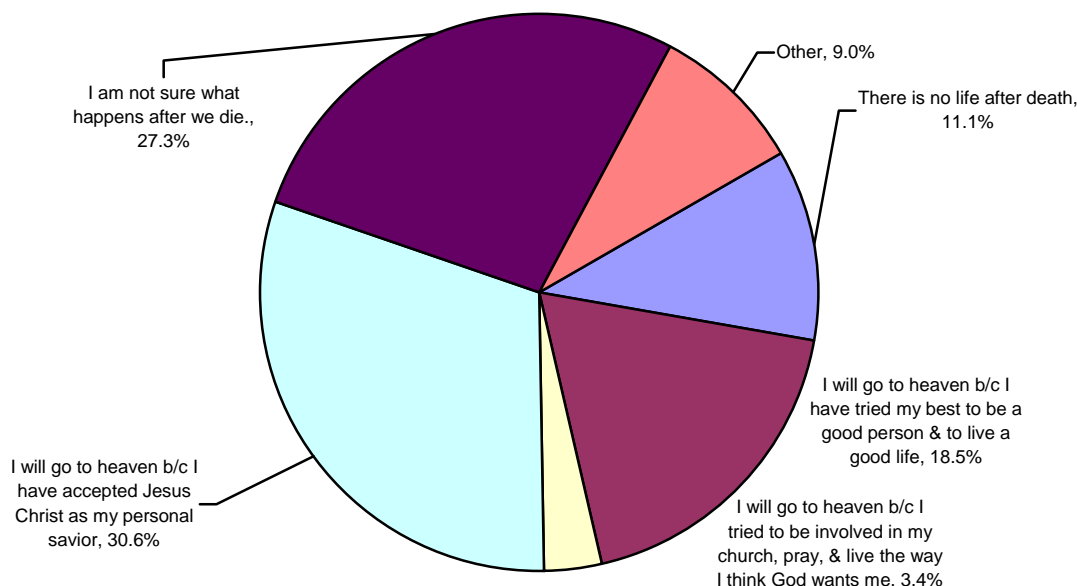
Figure 1. Religious Preference among Moslems.



Because a biblical worldview goes deeper than just one’s religious preference, we also asked survey respondents what they believe happens when you die. Three out of ten chose “I will go to heaven because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior. Sadly, the next common response – given by more than one-quarter of young adults – was “I am not sure what happens after we die.”

One out of ten gave a response other than one of our predetermined categories. Among these “other” responses, three common themes emerged. A minority of Mosaics expressed belief in reincarnation. Others indicated that God will weigh our good and bad deeds to decide where we will go or that you go to heaven if you accept Jesus AND follow God’s laws.

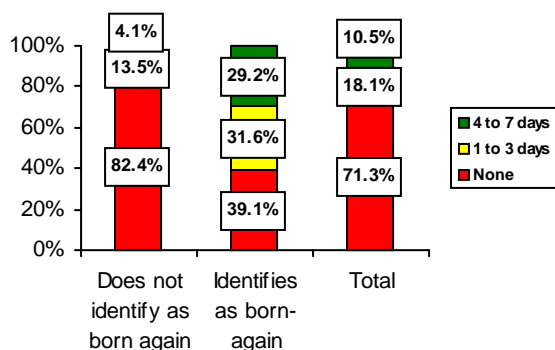
Figure 2. What Happens When We Die?



Spiritual Practices

In terms of their spiritual activities, Mosaics report little involvement in a local church. Two out of five (39.7%) say that they do not attend at all and an additional one-fifth attend only on special occasions. One-third attends church at least once a month. This rate is much lower than that observed among teens, more than half of whom go to church at least once a month. Adults over the age of 24 also attend church more frequently than Mosaics, with two out of five doing so at least once a month.

Figure 3. Days Reading or Listening to the Bible in the Past Week.



While church attendance is fairly rare, prayer is surprisingly common among Mosaics. Three-fifths say that they pray at least once on an average day.

The vast majority of young adults did not the Bible at all in the previous week. As Figure 3 illustrates, seven out of ten young adults do not read or listen to the Bible at all in a given week. Only one out of ten engages scripture most days of the week.

Not surprisingly, Bible reading is more common – although far from universal - among those who identify themselves as born again Christians. Three-fifths of born again Mosaics read or listened to the Bible on at least one of the previous seven days. However, two-fifths of this group did not engage scripture at all.

Communication with God

So far we have seen that young adults express a wide variety of religious preferences and most pray, but few read or listen to the Bible. This leads to the question of what they believe about how they communicate with God and how they think God communicates with them.

Three-fifths (61.8%) of Mosaics say that they communicate with God through prayer. The next most common response, given by 29.9%, is that they do not communicate with God at all or they do not believe in God. Other methods identified for communicating with God include through meditation, ritual, attending church, music, journaling, and how you live your life.

When asked how they believe God communicates with them, one out of four young adults said that He does not. An additional one-tenth indicated that they did not know how God communicates with them.

Only 7.6% mentioned the Bible. Some stated only the Bible or God's Word while others included the Bible in a list of several ways that God uses to communicate. For example:

Still small voice, other people, His word

Word, music, people

Through His Words in the Bible and through circumstances and also by the Holy Spirit reminding me of what I have read

He uses others to speak through me. More importantly, He speaks to me by means of His word, the Bible.

Though his Spirit, personal revelation, words of Church leaders, scripture study

Many young adults indicated that they were looking to the outside world for communication from God. Some talked about "signs" or "everyday miracles" while others referred more generally to the way things happen.

Shows me in different ways that he is watching... simple signs... in daily life.

Through various signs and paths he leads me down.

I'm not sure. Sometimes I get 'signs', things always seem to work out one way or another. I'm not sure if it's God or what, but I'd like to think I believe in 'something'.

Strange occurrences, small things that I enjoy, and friends.

It could be through stuff happening, like everything happens for a reason, but i am not 100% on that. he may not at all.

Another theme evident in Mosaics' descriptions of how God communicates with them was that this communication was personal. That is, God communicated with them through answering prayers, providing blessings, giving the person a feeling of peace, or taking care of them.

Guides me and protects my family

He allows me to wake up every day. He has blessed me with my children. He feeds me. He speaks in my heart. He gives me signs that I can only see with my eyes and heart wide open.

He gives me blessings & trials.

By providing me 'luck'.

I feel like he makes things happen to show that he's listening to me.

God communicates by answering prayers. Though he does not always answer a prayer in the way I might want it to be answered.

Dealing with Life's Temptations

Previous CBE research on people's Bible reading habits showed that "not enough time" or "too busy" was the most common reason given for not engaging scripture (Back to the Bible, 2006). In other words, the various distractions and temptations of life keep us from hearing from God on a regular basis. Similarly, research by Youth for Christ of Great Britain indicates that distractions of life are the main explanation for why so many young adults leave the church.

In order to understand the temptations young adults face, we asked them several questions, using the following definition of temptation:

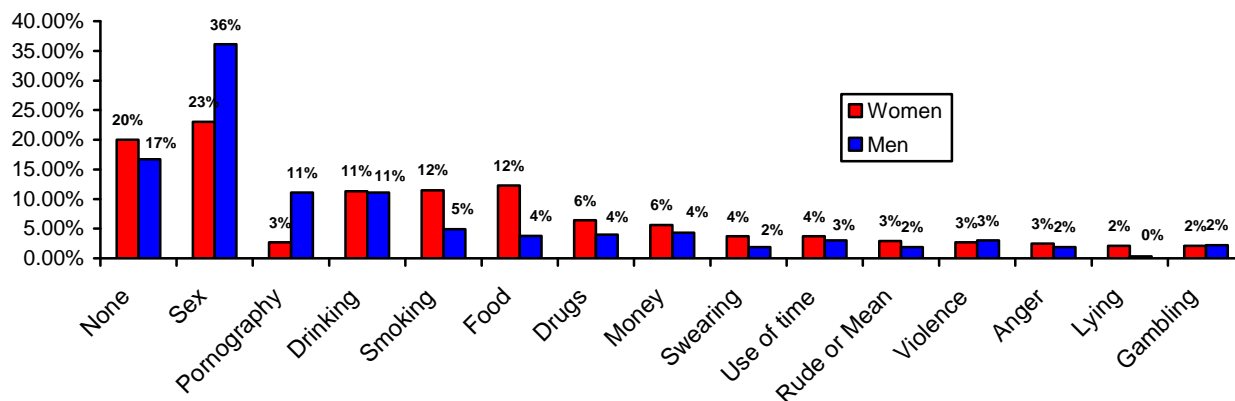
"the desire to have or do something that you know you should avoid"

Three-fifths (59.2%) of Mosaics admit that they were tempted at least once the previous day. This rate is higher than that observed among older adults and teens (Cole & Ovwigho, 2009). Typically temptations occurred only one or two times and, according to survey respondents, lasted only a few minutes.

What types of temptations do young adults face? Figure 4 illustrates the themes identified in responses to the open ended question "In the last month, what temptations were most frequent?" One-fifth stated that they had no temptations. Among both young men and women, sex outside marriage was the most common temptation. However, men were significantly more likely to name this as their most frequent temptation. Pornography was the second most common among men. Typically these two temptations were not named together, so that more than two-fifths (43.4%) of men between the ages of 18 and 24 said that sex and/or pornography was the most frequent temptation in the past month.

In terms of other temptations, responses varied widely from drinking to issues such as overeating or eating the wrong food, spending money or being greedy about money, and not using time wisely to violence and anger. Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize that respondents' perceptions of what they should "avoid" will impact what they list as a temptation. For example, if the participant does not view smoking or swearing as a problem, he or she is very unlikely to say this was a temptation, by the definition given. In fact, one-fifth of young adults who did not list drinking as a temptation say that they get drunk at least a few times a month. Similar trends are evident for the other behaviors measured (smoking, pornography, drug abuse, and sex outside marriage).

Figure 4. Most Frequent Temptations in the Past Month.

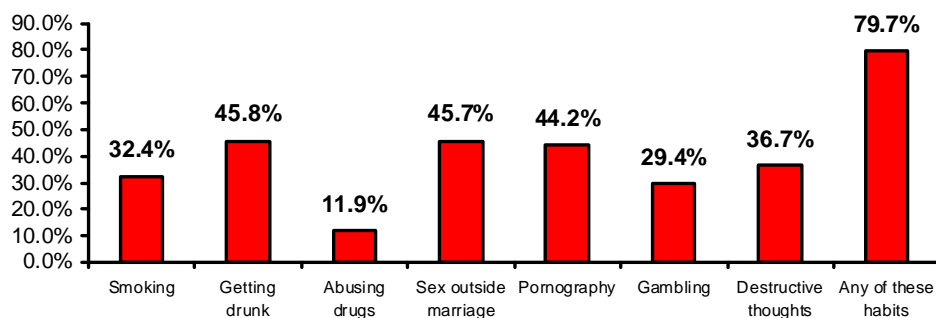


Moral Behavior, Being a Christ-Follower, & Bible Engagement

Figure 4 indicates the types of behaviors or attitudes that tempt Mosaics. It does not necessarily mean that they gave into those temptations. In this section, we explore their actual behavior, as reported in our survey, and how those behaviors relate to their identification as a Christian and their level of scripture engagement.

As shown in Figure 5, four out of five Mosaics stated that they participate in at least one of the behaviors measured, at least once every few months. Nearly half indicate that they get drunk, have sex outside marriage, or view pornography. More than one-third report having destructive thoughts towards themselves or others. Young men are significantly more likely than young women to gamble (34.7% vs 25.1%, respectively) and to use pornography (58.3% vs. 32.8%).

Figure 5. Engages in Behavior at Least Every Few Months.



Not surprisingly, moral behavior is strongly correlated with various measures of spirituality. Table 2 shows that young adults are less likely to get drunk, have sex outside marriage, view

pornography, or gamble if they identify as a born again Christian. Similarly, rates of engagement in these behaviors are lower for those who attend church at least once a month and those pray. However, even among those who profess to be a Christ follower or participate in church and prayer, a significant minority still struggle with immoral behavior. For example, one-third of Mosaiacs who claim to be born-again have sex outside marriage or view pornography at least every few months. Rates are similarly high among those who attend church at least once a month and even higher among those who pray.

The final columns of Table 2 show the relationships between moral behavior and Bible engagement. The more days a young adult spends reading or listening to the Bible, the less likely he or she is to get drunk, have sex outside marriage, view pornography, or gamble. The effect is evident with the increase from 0 days engaged in scripture to 1 to 3 days. There are also differences between those who read or listen to the Bible 1 to 3 days a week and those who do so at least 4 days a week. Moreover, young adults engaged with scripture at least 4 days a week have the lowest rates of all of the behaviors examined, except destructive thoughts.

Table 2. Moral Behavior and Spirituality.

Participates in behavior at least once every few months	Identifies as Born Again		Attends church at least once a month		Prays		Reads or Listens to the Bible		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	0 days	1 to 3 days	4 to 7 days
<i>Getting drunk</i>	51.5%***	29.2%	52.1%***	33.3%	55.4%***	38.8%	50.9%***	33.3%	18.3%
<i>Sex outside marriage</i>	50.4%***	32.0%	52.8%***	31.5%	56.4%***	37.9%	51.4%***	29.0%	17.3%
<i>Pornography</i>	49.3%***	29.2%	50.1%***	32.4%	55.6%***	35.8%	48.1%***	32.3%	25.0%
<i>Gambling</i>	32.2%***	21.3%	33.6%***	20.9%	34.5%**	25.6%	31.9%**	23.7%	15.4%
<i>Destructive thoughts</i>	37.9%	33.2%	39.6%**	30.9%	38.8%	35.1%	38.0%	31.2%	31.7%

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Clearly there are strong relationships among various measures of spirituality and moral behavior. However, it's important to realize that although measures of spirituality may be related, they are not synonymous. For example, one may attend church for a variety of reasons, beyond wanting to have a relationship with God. Similarly, people may pray simply to make their desires known, rather than to know what God would have them do in a particular situation. Identifying as a born-again Christian may indicate that the person has accepted what the Bible says regarding sin and the need for a personal Savior. However, one can confess faith in Jesus Christ and still not live according to His Word contained in the Bible. Finally, reading or listening to the Bible reflects a desire to be close to God, to hear what He says, and to live as He would have you live.

When considered together, how do these different indicators of spirituality relate to moral behavior? In order to answer this question, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses predicting the odds of a person engaging in a behavior based on their age, gender, identification as a born again Christian, church attendance, involvement in prayer, and scripture engagement. The results of these analyses, presented in Table 6, show that the most consistent predictor across different moral behaviors is how often the person reads or listens to the Bible. For example, controlling for the other factors in the models, a young adult who engages scripture four or more days a week is 68% less likely to get drunk, 71% less likely to have sex outside marriage, 57% less likely to view pornography, and 56% less likely to gamble.

Curiously, the other indicators of spirituality only relate to one or two of the behaviors considered. For example, identifying as a born again Christian significantly lowers the odds of

getting drunk, but has no statistical relationship with sex outside marriage, pornography, and gambling.

Table 6. Results of Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Moral Behaviors.

	Getting Drunk	Sex Outside Marriage	Pornography	Gambling	Destructive thoughts
<i>Age</i>	1.08*	1.01	1.00	1.11**	0.92*
<i>Female</i>	0.93	1.10	0.32***	0.57***	0.94
<i>Identifies as born again</i>	0.60**	0.83	0.71	0.84	0.98
<i>Attends church at least once a month</i>	0.91	0.80	0.81	0.77	0.67*
<i>Prays</i>	0.81	0.73*	0.69*	0.97	1.04
<i>Reads/listens to the Bible 4+ days</i>	0.32***	0.29***	0.43**	0.44*	0.97
<i>Reads/listens to the Bible 1 to 3 days</i>	0.70	0.63*	0.73	0.70	0.95
<i>-2 Log Likelihood</i>	508.31	458.56	425.18	399.73	427.27
<i>Model Chi Square</i>	73.55***	74.39***	125.64***	46.61***	13.37

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Conclusions

In this paper we have explored Mosaics' views on religious preference and communicating with God, as well as their spiritual and moral behavior. Consistent with other studies, our data reveal that young adults espouse a wide variety of religious preferences. Only three out of ten say that they will go to heaven because they have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior; sadly, almost the same proportion says that they do not know what happens when you die.

The majority of Mosaics pray. However, only a minority attends church or reads the Bible. Prayer is the most common method given for communicating with God. In terms of God communicating with them, one out of three young adults say that God doesn't communicate at all, God doesn't exist, or they do not know how God communicates. Less than one-tenth says that He communicates through the Bible.

Mosaics stand out from younger teens and older adults in several distinct ways. Compared to the other age groups, today's 18 to 24 year olds are less spiritual active. That is, they are less likely to state a Christian religious preference, less likely to pray, less likely to attend church, AND less likely to read or listen to the Bible. Perhaps not surprisingly, they are also the most likely to engage in various risky behaviors, including getting drunk, sex outside marriage, pornography, and gambling.

The good news is that Mosaics do not differ from other age groups in two important ways. First, young adults who read or listen to the Bible at least four days a week significantly lower their odds of giving into the temptations of alcohol, sex, pornography, and gambling. This effect goes beyond their identification as a born again Christian, their church attendance and prayer life. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, engaging in God's Word is something anyone can do. According to a 2001 Gallup poll, the average American home has four Bibles. For a generation that values technology, there are also many free online Bibles, scripture reading plans, and even daily scripture readings sent directly to your email or cell phone. Encouraging young adults to use these methods to hear from God on a daily basis will make a huge difference in helping them overcome the temptations they encounter that pull them away from Him.

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