

Podcast 012: The “How’s” of Reaching and Discipling Millennials and Gen Z with Abby Anderson

Learn *how* to develop relationships (through consistent commitment) that can bear the weight of truth and the hard parts of life; *how* to invite these generations into deeper development and growth; and, *how* to win people to Christ, not ourselves... and so much more in this second episode focused on Millennials and Gen Z.

Jack: Welcome to the Apprentice Approach Podcast Episode 012, where the ripples far exceed the splash... this is your host Jack McQueeney.

Many Christians struggle with making disciples; they feel busy, overwhelmed, and not qualified. We understand this struggle, which is why we’ve created a Bible-based framework so any believer can master the art of discipling.

You know, we’ve had a lot of questions about reaching Millennials – and as the largest living adult generation, they’re the greatest driving force in many areas of our society... including discipling. So, we’re excited to focus this month on Millennials, Gen Z, and **what you need to know to be a discipler who makes disciplers to the third and fourth generations!**

Today, we have the privilege of talking with Abby Anderson – who’s living The Apprentice Approach lifestyle with these generations! Abby has been a part of the Eagle Lake family here with The Navigators for many years and is currently the

Sustained Giving Supervisor. Abby was also the Crew Director at our Overnight property at Eagle Lake Camps for multiple summers, where she got to pour into the lives of Crew counselors as well as our Crew campers. She has a real heart for those that are in high school and college, and desires to walk alongside them as they learn how to pursue the Lord wholeheartedly.

We're in the second episode of this two-part series about reaching and discipling Millennials and the generation after that, Gen Z. If you haven't listened to our last episode (Episode 11), I'd highly encourage you to do that as Abby and I talked about foundational truths about both Gen Z and Millennials you need to know – showing us how we can model merging the sacred and secular, how we, as disciplemakers, get to share how the Gospel changes our relationship with God, and how the Holy Spirit transforms our identity. **But today, we're moving forward from the foundational truths to the "how's."** Abby shares some keys to *how* we can reach Millennials and Gen Z.

In this episode, we talk about *how* to develop relationships (through consistent commitment) that can bear the weight of truth and the hard parts of life; *how* to invite these generations into deeper development and growth; and, *how* to win people to Christ, not ourselves... and so much more!

It is a pleasure to have Abby with us today. Let's dive in!

Jack: Well, now that we know a little bit about Millennials and Gen Z, Abby, what are some keys to jumping in and practically discipling these young men and women?

Abby: Yeah, that's a great question. I think, you know, just to give you a little bit of background, really the two first times I was disciplined: the first time I didn't even know someone was discipling me; it was kinda secret discipleship. One of my teachers, she is a former Navigator, she asked me to

be her teacher's aid and just started asking me what I believed about Jesus, and I wasn't really walking with the Lord at that time and so through that space, she really began to cultivate some questions that I had about Jesus. And so, from her, I just learned: you can do it anywhere. **We can literally disciple anyone, anywhere, so we've gotta be able to broaden our scope of what that looks like.** And then I think the second thing is I had the privilege of being disciplined by one of my camp counselors right when I began walking with Jesus, and she just basically taught me **it wasn't optional**; I didn't know, because I was a new believer, I had no idea that there are some believers – people walking with Jesus – who do not disciple. I just thought that was what you had to do immediately, so I had just come to know the Lord; I went home (I'm sixteen at the time) and I just found an eighth-grade girl to read the Bible with. And I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew that when I was meeting with my counselor Daria, she would read the Bible with me, so I guess that's what Christians do. And so, I love that the Holy Spirit just used her in my life to propel me into this world of discipleship that has completely changed my entire life. And so, the first thing I just want to say is: **guys, it's not optional. We don't just get to decide if we feel like discipling or not, this is part of walking with Jesus.** And second, we may not feel equipped enough, we may not feel like we know what we're doing, but I love that in my ignorance the Holy Spirit showed up and gave me words to say as I disciplined this thirteen-year old girl. So, it's not optional.

Jack: How about inviting someone into that kind of relationship, what does that look like for you?

Abby: Yeah, I think it's always a little nerve-racking; no matter how old you are, you want to be liked. It doesn't change. And I really thought it would; but now I am 26, and I still want people to like me. But, I think we have to remember something innate in humans is that there's something so nice

about being wanted. And so, whenever I go to someone and say, "I want to spend time with you;" "I want to get to know you;" "I want to invest in you," I think there's no one who's offended by that. So, **we get to give people the gift of wanting to be wanted.** Um, I think the second thing, I have the privilege of discipling high schoolers and I kid you not, they're the most intimidating people I have ever met, even being 10 years older than some of them, they still intimidate me! But, I have to remind myself that if you're older, they already think you're cool, so there are many times when I'll be picking up one of my high school girls and thinking like, "Oh, does she think I'm so lame?" And I'll have to say to myself in my head, "They think you're cool because you're older, so play off of that." Um, I think we have to be okay to just be confident walking up to someone and asking if we can meet with them and begin reading the Bible with them and teaching them to walk with Jesus. I think also, the last thing that has just been so crucial in my discipleship relationships is having high expectations. **Remember that it is important to set clear expectations for them up front so that they understand what you are expecting in this relationship and what you want it to look like. Something that is so sweet about this generation is if you set high expectations, they rise to them.** And it was funny, even preparing for this podcast, I asked some of my high school girls like, "Hey what's important for people to know about discipling your generation?" And the first thing they said was: "Set high expectations, we'll rise to them."

Jack: Hmm, that's interesting. You know, Jesus called the 12 to be with him, he didn't, uh, ask for volunteers, he was very specific. You know, Abby, as you think about the generations going forward, **why is it important to have these high expectations?**

Abby: I think a lot of time our generation and Gen Z feels written off. I can't tell you how many times there has been

jokes about, “Oh Millennials!” and I think we want to show that we have something to bring to the table. And so, when you look at someone and you can say like, “I see this in you;” “I see that you can do this;” “Will you rise to this expectation?” They feel honored and valued in that. And so, one of the things, um, in leading a high school Bible Study, I tell them exactly what I’m expecting of them. If they don’t have time to be involved and be committed and show up every week, then this probably isn’t the right place... and that’s okay. **And we give them the freedom to say “no.”** But, when they commit to being in our Bible Study, to grow relationships, you can only go as deep as the shallowest person [Jack: Yeah] and so we’re really clear about what the time commitment looks like, what we are going to be doing, and then we give them the freedom to say “yes” or “no” to that.

Jack: So, this is really important for any generation.

Abby: Yep.

Jack: Well, what does that look like for these Gen Z’s, why is it especially important for them?

Abby: I think what I love about Gen Z, uh, give them the real deal. They want to know truth, they want to know what you expect. They don’t want to play around, and so if you can say, “This is what I see in you;” “this is what I think of you;” “this is what I expect of you,” they feel really honored in that. Um, even when you say hard things; I think so often we’re afraid of offending them – because this is a generation that at times can be a little touchy and can get offended pretty easily – but, what I’ve found is when you honor their dignity enough to tell them the truth, they feel respected and they trust you.

Jack: So, there’s a sense of authenticity with you as you try to communicate that truth that really does come across [Abby: Yes!]. You know that’s really good ‘cause that reminds me of a

conversation that we've had with Mark Heffentrager on ["Leading the Next \(and Now\) Generation of Disciplers"](#) and he talked about the importance of "tribe" in Millennials. Can you tell us a little more about the impact when a discipler, when someone really shows up, what does that really convey to these young men and women?

Abby: Yeah, I think **they want to be valued and important**, and so when you say, "I'm going to be present in your life;" "I'm not going to go away;" "I'm going to be consistent no matter what," what it shows them is that you're trustworthy. What I've found in almost all of my discipling relationships is that it takes about a year for me to really feel like, "Wow, they trust me." Um, and that's a long time, if we're being honest. You know, it's been interesting now walking through a couple generations of high school girls that I've disciplined, every time I start over I'm like, "Am I doing something wrong?" "Why is this weird sometimes?" "Am I bad at this now?" "Like, did I lose how to disciple people?" And yet it takes about a year for them to really, really trust you and so what that means is a year of showing up to their tennis matches, a year of showing up to their basketball games, a year of picking them up after school, a year of showing that I'm not going anywhere no matter what you do, what you say, who you are, because I love you and I'm committed to you. And, when you can show that you're going to be consistent regardless of circumstances, all the sudden the walls begin to fall and you can really begin to see who they are, and they trust you with their heart.

Jack: So, developing the weight, developing that relationship that will bear the weight of the truth that will eventually come when you guys talk about the hard things, that's good!

Abby: Yeah, definitely.

Jack: You know, you mention it being hard and awkward, and I think that's a topic that we all can really learn from, some

keys to that. What does that look like for you?

Abby: Well, I think if I would probably get on a rooftop and shout anything about discipleship, one of the first things I would say is, "Don't give up when it's weird! Don't give up when it's weird." Because **if you give up when it's weird, you'll never get to the goodness of it.** And so, I mean, I have been discipling people for ten years and, I will tell you, year after year, it's weird sometimes. What that has looked like, a lot of times when I'm building relationships with people there's a couple things that I have seen trends in. So, the first is, when you start a new discipling relationship, you're gonna start with the shallow answers; so, it's hard to feel like you're actually getting down to what they actually believe about Jesus, because a lot of times they maybe know the "right" things to say, but that's not what they *actually* believe all the time. And so, it feels like you're bumping up against this knowledge – this "head" knowledge – and not able to dig deeper into the heart knowledge. **And so, when that happens, don't give up! Keep showing up, because they will drop the walls and begin to ask you questions; they will drop the walls and let you push back on things.** Um, I think the second thing that's kind of hard about it is every person is different, and I've seen this with my girls. There are some girls if I push pretty hard, saying like, "Are you sure, like, that was the right thing to do? Are you sure that you're really trusting God with that?" They are so perfectionistic, they would be mortified and absolutely filled with shame. And so, there are girls that that would be a horrible approach to and yet, there are some other girls where I can look them in the eye and say like, "You're sinning in this way; so, what are you gonna do about it?" And, that's exactly the challenge they need, and they feel so cared for, loved, and known by – my bluntness is calling things what they are. And so, part of the first year is **just getting to know who you're ministering to, because a right step in one relationship could be a total wrong step in another,** and so

you need to know what lies Satan has been whispering over them for years – what things they struggle with – what they're so fearful of. Because, **as you can learn those things, you can be wise in not reinforcing things that are not true, but instead, speaking truth over them.**

Jack: So Abby, as you attempt to not use a "one size fits all" perspective in the midst of this, what are some of the things that you do to prepare and to listen in to the Holy Spirit to determine what it is you know one of your girls might be struggling with?

Abby: Yeah, I think um, first off, I love that you brought up the Holy Spirit, because I think that is the only way we can really have insight and wisdom to their hearts. Uh, one of the things I try to do, especially on my drive over to pick up any of my girls, I just pray like, "Lord, would you show me, you know, what's going on in their heart? What's holding them back from following you? Would you give me the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, wisdom outside of anything that man can know?" **But, I think another really important thing is, I actually try to pray that in front of them too, because I think it's important to not win people to me, but win people to Christ.** And so, building dependence on Christ, not myself, and I think it would be really easy, as the Holy Spirit gives me insight and wisdom into what they're struggling with, for them to think, "Wow! Abby's so insightful! I need to call her for everything." But really, it's the Holy Spirit who's doing that; and so, I'm intentional, like when I'm meeting with them, to pray like, "Holy Spirit would you just give me wisdom to know how I can love Carmelle, serve Carmelle, and teach Carmelle more about you." So that they know it's the Holy Spirit inside of me who's empowering me to do that, so that's one of, you know, **it's a small distinction and yet it is absolutely will change the way you disciple.** Um, I think the second thing, um, is that I, uh gosh, high schoolers are so funny because they want you know things and they don't in the

same moment. And so, if you ever sense like a hesitation before they answer a question, just call it. You know, there'll be times where I'll ask, "How was your week?" And they'll pause and then they'll be like, "Yeah, I mean it was really good." Well, that tells you right there that there's more to that answer and so I think **we have to not be afraid of what's going to come out.** I know there probably even more recently in some of my relationships, sometimes I get afraid, like what are you going to say? What if I don't have the right answer? And so, I don't press in, and yet, again, we have the Holy Spirit in us, so we need to be able to trust and press into those hesitations and say, "Hey, you sounded like you hesitated; is there more to that? Would you tell me?" Like, "Do you know I'm trustworthy and I won't say anything that, like, I won't repeat this to other people, if that's something you don't want to happen?" So, um, I think again, **just affirming you're a safe place. And then lastly, um, we've gotta be a really good listener.** And in discipleship, I think often we can we can go into a mode where we're trying to teach other people and we're not necessarily listening well. And so, one of the – there's like probably three things I do to try to listen well.

The first is, someone told me once that, "If you want to understand someone's theology, listen to them pray," and, it is one of the most true statements I've ever heard. So, I will, a lot of times, I think it would be really easy in a Bible Study to let me lead, to let me pray, to let me facilitate like our spiritual conversations; but, if I want to know where my girls are at, I probably have to stop talking a lot more. And so, I'll ask, I just call them out, at this point like they are comfortable enough that they call me out right back, but I'll just call them out and say, "Hey, Sydney, you're gonna pray for us." And she does, and it's awesome. But, as she prays and open us up in our time, I listen to: what is she highlighting about Jesus? What is she thanking Him for? Is she thanking Him for His grace? Is she thanking Him

for His holiness? Is she only praying for – is she only asking for things? Um, that's a really good, uh, if you hear girls only *asking* God for things, um, that's a great launching point into saying like, "Hey, I noticed that when you pray, uh, you're really asking God for, to bless your day and bless everything that you do; are you wanting to be about His Kingdom, or are you wanting to be about *your* kingdom?" Um, so **listen to what they pray for and follow-up with them and ask them about it, and don't be afraid**– if they trust you, they're not gonna be offended, they're gonna feel known. So, the **first is listen to them pray. Second, listen to the patterns**, um, that they talk about. One thing we do before Bible Study is I always ask, "Happy/Crappy." So, I say, "What's a happy moment of your day? What was a crappy moment of your day?" Um, you'll see trends really, really quickly. So, what is, uh, what are the things of disappointment that are ruling their life? Um, is it bad grades? Um, I know there is – I've disciplined a couple girls who are just so overwhelmed by perfectionism, and so they'll say over and over like, "I just have so much homework, I can't do anything right; blah blah blah blah." Well then, we get to talk about, like, what it means to rest in Christ's grace. Um, but I have other girls who really struggle with bitterness, and so they'll talk about like, "Well, and then this person did this to me and it was just the worst." Are they painting themselves in the light of the victim, because then we get to talk about our own sin and what it looks like to walk through forgiveness and extend grace. So, listen to what are the trends that they say, um, this sounds super creepy and weird, but **don't be afraid to take notes on the people you're discipling**. Because you're not gonna remember everything they say, so when I make observations, especially when I first began discipling people, in the back of my notebook I would write their names and write down things that are important to them. You know, so I would say like, "Shay said this that this was really important to her, I need to remember this. Um, this verse really stuck out to her for some reason. I need to look into this verse more

and ask her why that was important." **So, I'll take notes on what they say and what is important to them [Jack: Sure!] so I can see trends in what God's doing.** And then the last thing is: **ask questions.** I think we feel so much pressure in discipleship because we think we need to have the right answer, and yet we are, like, we have the opportunity to bring them to Jesus and show them who Jesus is. **And so, I just ask a lot of questions in my discipling relationships, and I rarely give answers.** So, if someone has a really, um, one of the, you know someone has a "crappy" that kinda sticks out to me, or a "happy" that sticks out to me, I'll say, **"Why was that so important to you? What about that moment was so defining for your week? Would you tell us more about that?"** Or, if someone makes, um, you know, tells me a situation that's hard, but then they try to brush it off – um which high schoolers do all the time – they'll say like, "Well, it wasn't *that* big of a deal though." I'll stop and say, **"What did that feel like? Could you describe that to me? How did that change what you believe about Jesus?"** And I think, as you ask those questions, they'll answer. **They'll surprise you with their authenticity and their honesty. But, you have to be able to go there with them and not react or be afraid by what they say.** Because, if they can tell you their doubts, their fears, and you can respond in love and acceptance, then you all of a sudden have the space and the trust to be able to speak into those places.

Jack: Boy, that gets to their core identity too. That's good. Well, Abby, is it, uh, is it really just about meeting with them? Or what is it, uh – what is it your long-term vision that you're thinking about?

Abby: Yeah, that's a great question. I think **my vision and my prayer has been that the next generation would know and love Jesus for the rest of their life.** And I think that last part is so key: for the rest of their life. Because we see a lot of people, um, a lot of my generation (and I anticipate Gen Z) leaving the Church after Graduation. Um, when it's not their

parents' faith anymore, it sure doesn't often transition into being their personal faith. And so, I think one of the things that has been really helpful is I, um, there's like a really easy diagram, um, that I've used in the past that you can easily pinpoint kind of where people are in their spiritual growth. And so, um, really there's four quadrants: one where they have never heard of Jesus and don't know the Gospel, the second quadrant would be they've heard the Gospel but they're not sure if they believe it, the third would be they believe the Gospel but they don't know how to practice it and continue to grow with Christ, and the fourth quadrant would be they know the Gospel, they know how to grow with Christ, and they can reproduce other disciples. And so, what I've been intentional to do is just because all my girls have heard the Gospel, just because all of them are in Bible Study, does not mean that they are all in the same quadrant. And so, I need to be intentional to truly understand where they are in their walk with Jesus, because that's going to change how I approach, um, my discipling relationships with them. And so, I have girls who very much understand the Gospel, and yet they're still deciding like, "Is Jesus worth it? I know it's gonna cost." I have girls who understand the Gospel and, you know they're now learning, "Okay, what does it look like to walk with Jesus every day? How do I continue to grow in my, um, my spiritual disciplines and, um, how to read the Word by myself." And then I also have girls who like, they understand the Gospel, they get what it looks like to walk with Jesus – even if I were to step back from discipling them – they, I mean they're running and they are ready to make disciples and so I think my goal is always, I always want to have a vision for all of my girls being in the fourth quadrant. **I always want them to steadfastly be walking with Jesus for the rest of their lives and making disciples in that process.** But, I think we also need to acknowledge that not every girl I'm discipling is there; and so, my prayer is always – they're moving into the next quadrant, they're moving into a deeper, more steadfast, faithful relationship with Jesus that will extend

to the rest of their life and then they will be able to continue to make disciples. And so, um, I think it's been cool to, uh, I there's probably like two or three different girls, um, in the past that I've really spent a lot of intentional time with, and some of them, um, is because they are walking through that question of: "Is Jesus worth it? Do I actually want to follow Him?" Um, but then some of them, like, they're ready to share their faith. They're ready to go out and make disciples. And so, in our conversations, we're talking about like, "Okay, who's a friend we can pray for that doesn't know Jesus that we can share the Gospel with?" And so, I think we need to have a vision for: how do we help these girls move to that fourth quadrant, where they can begin making disciples in their schools – sometimes in their families, sometimes they come from unbelieving backgrounds – um, at college, with younger girls, and that really is **the vision of how do we begin to ask the question: what does it look like to make disciples right where you're at?** Because like we said, you can do it with anyone, anywhere, um, and that's what I want to talk to my girls about.

Jack: That's so good. Well, it really does reflect John 17 – Jesus's prayer and His modeling to his men – and I think it's exciting to see you do that as well, Abby, with your girls. So, thank you again for your time and we'll wrap it up at this point.

Jack: We've learned today some of the keys to *how* to disciple Millennials and Gen Z – moving from understanding foundational truths of their generations to *how to actually reach them* where they are individually, in their unique context and climate. Abby shared the importance of setting high expectations, being authentic and consistently committed to the everyday lives of those we're discipling. But most importantly, Abby shared some keys to how she listens to the Holy Spirit as she prepares to meet with Millennials and Gen Z, leaning into His wisdom and how that leads to winning

people to Christ, not ourselves.

We hope you've enjoyed this episode, learning community and feel encouraged and better equipped! If Millennials and Gen Z is a topic you're enjoying learning more about, we've got two other podcast episodes you don't want to miss! [Podcast 008: "Leading the Next \(and Now\) Generation of Disciplers" with Mark Heffentrager \(Director of Eagle Lake Camps\)](#) and [Podcast 011: "Foundational Truths You Need to Know About Gen Z and Millennials \(from a "we" perspective\)"](#) with Abby Anderson (which is part one in this series) are **great resources on this topic!**

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And let me encourage you to share this with a friend!

Until next time, this is your host, Jack McQueeney, believing God for generations of men and women like you!

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