

## GenZ – Generation of Hope

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### Sermon Synopsis

This episode of *World Impact*, filmed at Oral Roberts University, addresses one of the most pressing issues facing Generation Z: the rise of depression, anxiety, and loneliness among young people. Dr. Billy Wilson begins by outlining the realities confronting this generation, including identity struggles, social media pressures, cyberbullying, trauma, and the paradox of isolation amid constant digital connection. While acknowledging these challenges, the message emphasizes that Gen Z is not defined by despair but is instead a generation of hope, poised to experience God's mercy and purpose at a pivotal moment in history.

The episode anchors its theme in the words of the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah. Though Zephaniah warned of judgment, his prophecy also pointed to God's mercy—depicting a God who holds back deserved punishment, rejoices over His people, and promises restoration even in times of correction. This balance of justice and compassion is further illustrated through Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in adultery, where divine mercy and truth meet to bring healing and redemption.

Dr. Wilson applies these truths to the struggles of today's youth, highlighting that God's mercy is not abstract but deeply personal. Jeremiah 29:11 is a guiding promise that God has plans for hope and a future for every individual. This hope is not described as mere optimism but as a biblical certainty rooted in the resurrection of Christ, who overcomes despair and brings new life.

The program also includes personal testimonies, including Karl's story of navigating bullying, obsessive-compulsive disorder, suicidal thoughts, and trauma. His discovery of Christ's hope through the book of James, and the freedom he experienced in forgiveness, demonstrates the practical reality of God's mercy at work. Such testimonies underscore that no life is beyond God's redemptive reach.

The episode concludes with an invitation for viewers to trust God's plan, seek His mercy, and embrace His presence as the true source of hope. While mental health struggles remain real and pressing, the assurance of Scripture affirms that God is not finished with this generation. His mercy is new every morning, His love is enduring, and His purpose is still unfolding in the lives of all who turn to Him.

## Sermon Highlights

- God is merciful: In the midst of judgment, God's mercy endures forever. He withholds what we deserve because of His great love and rejoices over His people with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13), showing God's tender care for those who are bruised and broken.
- God is not finished yet: Even when life seems overwhelmingly difficult, and despair seems near, God's work in our lives is ongoing. We must not lose hope or count ourselves finished, for the Lord is good to those who wait for Him (Lamentations 3:24-25).
- God has a plan of hope and a future: The Lord declares He has plans to prosper us and not to harm us, to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). This promise is for every generation, including Generation Z, assuring them of purpose and divine direction.
- Jesus brings resurrection power amid death: In a generation surrounded by death and despair, Jesus displays His authority over death by raising the young man at Nain, Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus, declaring Himself the source of life and hope (Luke 7:11-17; John 11).
- Generation Z is a generation of hope through Christ: Despite intense mental health struggles, isolation, and the pressures of a complex world, God's Spirit empowers this generation. They are called to be a generation known for hope, healing, and a deep, abiding relationship with Jesus.

## Scripture Verses

### Zephaniah 2:3

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.

### Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

#### Exodus 33:18-19

Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'

#### Exodus 34:6-7

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'

#### John 8:3-11

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

#### Matthew 12:20-21

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.

#### Psalms 130:7

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

#### James 2:13

because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

#### Lamentations 3:24-25

I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

#### Jeremiah 29:11

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

#### 1 James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

## Quotes

- "God is merciful. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve because He loves us and cares for us. Mercy endures forever and is new every morning." - Dr. Billy Wilson
- "Judgment and mercy in the Christian's life are not necessarily opposites. God's judgment on our sin is His mercy at work saving us from greater pain." - Dr. Billy Wilson
- "God is not finished yet. Sometimes we try to check out before we're finished with life. But God is working and there is still hope and purpose for you." - Dr. Billy Wilson
- "Jesus' resurrection from the dead brought hope to the world, and if you allow Him, He will bring hope into your life even amidst depression and darkness." - Dr. Billy Wilson

# Bible Study

## Objectives

- Understand the struggles and pressures facing Generation Z, especially with mental health.
- Learn how God's mercy, ongoing work, and plan provide hope amid challenges.
- Explore the prophetic message of Zephaniah about judgment, mercy, and restoration.
- Reflect on personal experiences with depression and healing in the light of God's Word.
- Apply biblical truths to daily life to cultivate hope and perseverance.

## Reading and Reflections

- Zephaniah 2:3, 3:14-17 – God's mercy and rejoicing over His people.
- Jeremiah 29:11 – God's plans to prosper and give hope and a future.
- Psalm 130:7 – 'Israel, put your hope in the Lord... full redemption.'
- Matthew 12:20-21 – The bruised reed not broken; hope for the nations.
- James 1:2-4 – Joy through trials producing perseverance and maturity.

## Key Observations

- Generation Z faces unprecedented mental health challenges intensified by loneliness and technology.
- God's mercy is central: He withholds deserved judgment and brings healing instead.
- God is never finished with us; even when life is tough, He continues His work.
- Judgment and mercy coexist; God corrects us out of love to prevent greater harm.
- Jesus' resurrection power is a promise of life and hope beyond death and despair.
- God delights in us and actively rejoices over His children with singing.

## Personal Reflections

- Reflect on moments when God's mercy shielded you from consequences and brought restoration.
- Consider times when you felt 'finished' or hopeless and recognize God was not done with you.
- Recall personal or observed struggles with mental health and how faith has offered hope.
- Identify barriers—like fear or shame—that might prevent you from seeking God's healing.
- Contemplate how forgiveness can unlock freedom and peace, as seen in Karl's story.

## Lessons for Daily Life

- Embrace God's mercy daily, trusting He forgives and transforms our brokenness.
- Resist premature despair; God's plan unfolds over time, even when unseen.
- Seek God humbly in your struggles, confident He is your Mighty Warrior who saves.
- Establish safe, face-to-face community where struggles can be shared and supported.
- Engage with Scripture and prayer to discover God's hope amid mental and emotional trials.

## Practical Applications

- Begin each day with a Scripture focus on God's mercy and hope, such as Zephaniah 3:17.
- Create an intentional space for open conversations about mental health in church or small groups.
- Identify trusted friends or mentors to confide in and pray with during challenging times.
- Develop coping strategies grounded in faith—prayer, worship, counseling—and mental wellness.
- Forgive past hurts actively and seek reconciliation or professional help if needed.

## Challenges for the Week

- Reflect daily on how God's mercy has been present in your life and journal these moments.
- Choose one relationship to either restore or deepen by initiating honest, vulnerable dialogue.
- Deliberately reduce social media time and replace moments of isolation with prayer or community.
- Memorize Zephaniah 3:17 and meditate on it when anxiety or despair arise.
- Commit to sharing this message of hope with someone struggling, offering prayer and encouragement.

## Further Study

- Study the entire book of Zephaniah to grasp the full scope of judgment paired with hope.
- Explore the life and ministry of Jeremiah for complementary prophetic insights on hope.
- Research biblical examples of God's mercy like the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8).
- Delve into the Psalms for expressions of lament and trust as templates for honest prayer.
- Review New Testament teachings on perseverance through trials, such as Romans 5 and James.

## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You with thankful hearts for Your endless mercy that covers our failures and lifts us from despair. In a generation burdened with loneliness, anxiety, and uncertainty, we cling to Your promises that You are not finished with us yet and You have a plan filled with hope and a future. Lord Jesus, You are the resurrection power that conquers darkness and brings life in place of death. Fill our hearts with Your joy and peace. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to walk courageously, forgive deeply, and love fully, bringing hope to a hurting world. Strengthen Generation Z and all who struggle to find their identity and purpose in You. May Your mercy triumph over judgment in our lives. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

# Daily Devotionals

## Day 1

### Scripture Verse

Zephaniah 3:12-17 (NIV): "But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord. They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A mere remnant will survive, like dew from the Lord's blessing. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. The Lord will take away your enemies. "At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the Lord.

### Reflection

Today, as you sit quietly in your room or find a moment of peace in your day, reflect on this powerful message God gave through the prophet Zephaniah—a message of great hope wrapped in mercy. The world around us, much like the generation Zephaniah addressed, often feels overwhelming with challenges. From mental health struggles and societal pressures to personal battles that no one else sees, the weight can feel crushing. But God's Word breaks through this darkness, reminding us that He is with us—not as a distant onlooker, but as the Mighty Warrior who saves. You might feel like Karl, who faced bullying, addiction, suicidal thoughts, and unresolved trauma. Yet, Karl's story is not the end; it is a testimony of God's mercy and restoration when he turned to Scripture and forgiveness. Zephaniah's prophecy assures us that God does not merely observe our struggles; He rejoices over us with singing! Picture your Heavenly Father, not in distant judgment, but dancing in joy over you. His mercy is not passive; it actively withholds what we deserve and brings correction with love, guiding us through trials toward maturity and completeness (James 1:2-4). In practical terms, when life feels unbearable, when anxiety and depression try to claim your heart, remember that God's mercy is fresh every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Even if you feel like your flame is flickering, God promises not to break the bruised reed or snuff the smallest wick (Matthew 12:20). Take a moment to identify the areas in your life where fear, shame, or despair have held you captive. God's mercy is meeting you right there. It invites you to seek Him humbly and pursue righteousness that shelters you from the storms of life (Zephaniah 2:3). Reflect also on God's delight in you. How does it change your view of yourself to know the Creator sings over you? This truth is an invitation to embrace your identity as God's beloved child, not defined by your struggles but by His steadfast love. Let today be a day you remember: even in your darkest season, you are deeply loved, fiercely protected, and not alone.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your unfailing mercy and love that rejoices over me. Help me to trust in Your presence, to find shelter in Your righteousness, and to embrace the hope You freely give. When my heart is heavy, lift me up with Your song of joy. Amen.



## Day 2

### Scripture Verse

Lamentations 3:25-27 (NIV): "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young."

### Reflection

Have you ever felt the temptation to 'check out'—to give up before your story is finished? When troubles come, like a storm that seems to have no end, it's easy to think that God has abandoned you or that you are beyond hope. But Lamentations reminds us of a profound truth: God is good, even when we wait quietly through the pain. Waiting is one of the hardest things we endure, especially for Generation Z, who live in an instant-gratification culture. Yet, the Bible calls waiting a good and purposeful season – a 'yoke' we bear for a time, often during our youth. This yoke is not a chain of despair but a path to maturity and revelation of God's faithfulness. Think for a moment about a seed planted in the hard ground—it must wait through the darkness and pressure of soil, unseen by anyone, before it breaks forth into light and life. In your waiting seasons, God is working unseen as well. He is not finished with your story. Your present pain and confusion do not define your future. Consider Karl's journey again. His darkest moments of suicidal thoughts were not the end. Through perseverance, prayer, and counseling, God brought healing and restoration. Like Karl, in your season of waiting, God is preparing you—equipping you with strength, wisdom, and hope. Waiting quietly also invites us into deeper intimacy with God. It is a time to seek Him fervently, to cultivate humility, and to lean on His promises. When we align our hearts to God's timing, we surrender control and acknowledge His sovereignty. In real life, waiting can feel isolating. When you feel like no one understands your mental health challenges or your internal battles, remember: God's eye is on the sparrow and He notices your pain (Matthew 10:29-31). Even when the world fails to see you, He sees and cares deeply. Ask yourself: How can I actively seek God in my season of waiting? What are the practical ways I can cultivate patience without losing hope? Maybe it's through prayer, connecting with a trusted friend, or learning to express your emotions in healthy ways—as the ministry at Oral Roberts University does with counseling students, helping them find the language for their feelings. Today, pray to receive the grace to wait well, trusting God is good even when the waiting is hard. Let your spirit rest in His faithfulness, knowing that your story is still being written.

### Prayer

Father God, help me to embrace the seasons of waiting in my life. Teach me to seek You earnestly and to trust Your goodness even when I cannot see the outcome. Strengthen my heart and restore my hope each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## Day 3

### Scripture Verse

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV): "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

### Reflection

The weight of life's uncertainties can make it easy to lose sight of the future. Financial pressures, social anxieties, mental health struggles—especially prevalent in Generation Z—can cloud your vision and leave you feeling hopeless. Yet, God speaks to you through Jeremiah, declaring His personal and loving plan for your life. This plan is not vague or impersonal. God's plans are crafted with your good in mind, plans to prosper you—not in selfish gain but in holistic blessing—and to give you hope and a future. The Hebrew word for 'hope' here is a confident expectation, a sure trust that what God promises, He will perform. Think about a time in your life when you felt lost or unsure. Perhaps it was a difficult season like what Karl experienced, carrying the heavy burden of unresolved trauma and mental illness. His breakthrough came when he found God's Word and discovered the power of forgiveness and grace. Your story is not unlike his; God's grace is sufficient to carry you through any past wounds or present struggles. One of the most revolutionary truths is that God's plan includes you—your uniqueness, your personality, your dreams, and even your pain. You are not an accident or an afterthought. You are part of a divine purpose that no one else can fulfill. This truth demands a response of trust and obedience, even when the future looks uncertain. How does knowing God has a plan encourage you today? Does it free you from the burden of trying to control every detail? Does it invite you to step out in faith, trusting that He leads you on a path of hope? Life is full of unknowns, but God's promise anchors the soul. When you feel overwhelmed by the noise of the world, remind yourself that the King of Israel is with you. Like Zephaniah said, "Never again will you fear any harm" because God is mighty to save. This promise calls you to courage and action. Maybe the next right step is to forgive, like Karl did. Maybe it's seeking help through counseling or opening up to trusted friends and mentors. Or perhaps it's simply choosing today to place your hope in Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). No matter where you are, God's plan is unfolding. Today is the day to trust that plan and live boldly as a part of the generation called to bring hope to the world.

### Prayer

God of hope, thank You for the plans You have for me—plans to prosper me and give me a future. Help me to trust Your guidance and step forward in faith, confident that You are with me every step of the way. May I live as a testimony of Your hope and love. Amen.

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