

BCL ep381 Gen Z Mental Health: Insights from the Barna Report with Stephanie Shackelford

What if the biggest challenge facing Gen Z, that's those who are 14 to 29 today, isn't anxiety, which you hear so much about, but it's really lack of purpose. The Barna Group calls them a generation of paradox, more connected than ever, yet more isolated and uncertain about who they are and why they're here. For us as Christian parents and school leaders, formation is a critical part of education, helping the next generation to have a clear and grounded identity and a purposeful calling in life.

Today, Dr. Stephanie Shackelford, a senior fellow at the Barna Group and author of *You on Purpose*, shares six practical ways to help this generation rediscover connection, faith, and purpose. All this and more on this episode of Base Camp Live. Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation.

Get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Base Camp Live.

Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live. Davies Owens here with you, host on the journey with you, raising the next generation.

Thanks as always for joining us each week. You hear me say every week how grateful I am, and I do mean that. I'm very aware of the never-ending onslaught of things for our time and attention.

It's getting even more complicated by the day, especially with the rise of AI and the challenge of just distractions in our world today, and so it's a joy just to get to be with you and talk with you, and wish it was a two-way conversation. If you wanna chat back with me, info at basecamlive.com's a great way to hear back from you. As always, I like to say thank you and a shout out to different schools each week.

Jenny Martin is head of school at Anthem Classical Academy in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Reed Robbins, head of school at East Palmyra Christian School in Palmyra, New York. Thank you to both of you for being a part of the Base Camp Live and Zipcast communities. Thank you for being so committed in your respective communities of raising up the next generation and doing so with education that moves people to formation and depth and substance of thought.

That's really what we're talking about in this episode with Dr. Stephanie Shackelford, which is how do we move students, not just from knowing and from loving well, but ultimately having a calling that guides them in the direction that God has placed on their life. Dr. Stephanie Shackelford is a senior fellow at the Barna Group. If you've been listening to Base Camp Live for any amount of time, a number of years ago, with some frequency, had Brooke Hemple, who was with Barna on in past episodes.

By the way, if you go to BaseCampLive.com, we have, I think, a fairly effective search engine there. You could look up Brooke Hemple and other conversations we've had with Barna. As you know, one of our commitments on the podcast is to exploring what's happening in the world around us.

It's changing all the time. Maybe it's just the sociologist in me, but I think it's fascinating, and Barna is, without a doubt, one of the most significant voices and researching entities that are looking at those shifts and those changes. So, so glad to have Dr. Stephanie Shackelford join us.

She is a senior fellow at the Barna Group, and she primarily studies and researches vocation and calling. In 2012, she founded a career coaching company and has since helped hundreds of students and graduates and working professionals live out and find their purpose. She received her doctorate from Northeastern University and her master's and bachelor's from Vanderbilt University, where she's also an adjunct instructor and she lives with her husband and her two children in Georgia.

She's the author of the book, *You on Purpose*, and we're gonna be jumping into six practical ways to help this generation rediscover connection, faith, and purpose. Before we do, as always, a quick thank you to this episode's sponsors, to Wilson Hill Academy, to Robert Littlejohn, Chuck Evans, and their book, *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents*, the folks at Wyze Phone, great alternative to the smartphone, Life Architects Coaching, the Herzog Foundation, and our very own Zipcast. By the way, did you know that 76% of moviegoers pick a movie after they have watched the trailer? Zipcast works on the same principle.

Each week, parents and staff hear in short form the highlights of the week at school, parenting tips, insights on classical education, and they can click and listen to go-to, longer-form content if they're inspired in that short-form trailer, if you will. But that's a part of what we do, meeting people on the go in under about 10-minute schools around the country using Zipcast. If you wanna know more, check out zipcast.media. Well, without further ado, here is my conversation with Stephanie Shackelford.

Stephanie, welcome to Basecamp Live. It's so great to be here. I am so glad to have you on.

It is a joy to have a voice from the Barna group to be able to represent a lot of the things that are happening in the world today. But before we get into all that, tell a little bit of your own story. Sure, so when I was in college, I really thought I wanted to go into nonprofits and I just loved that nonprofit space, but couldn't really figure out my niche.

And so I kind of stumbled into this realm of coaching and realizing that a lot of students a little bit younger than me were entering college not knowing who they were, what they wanted to do, how God had gifted them. And so I wanted to study that a little more. So I went on to start my own coaching company, but for students and recent graduates, which then prompted me to want to

study vocation and calling.

And so I went to get my doctorate and study this. And that led me to do a research study and work with Barna group on calling and vocation and Christians at work. And so that kind of what prompted my research journey, realizing that I loved this research space and getting to apply research in really practical ways.

And so I've been with Barna for over a decade now and I've worked on a variety of studies on work, on discipleship, and then most recently this Gen Z mental health crisis that we're seeing. Yeah, we're gonna jump into that. I love the fact that you also have your own children in a classical Christian school.

So you have a familiarity with that part of the world too, as far as education and school go. Yes, yes, we have three kids, two are in classical school and then one is a toddler and we're counting down until she gets to join her big brother and sister. That's so exciting.

Well, as many folks know, and you may know, I may have mentioned it, so I was a sociology major. So I kind of nerd out over statistics and what's happening in the world around us. And it's really a part of what we talked about for years on the podcast here is we go out and launch our children into the world.

We need to know the world they're growing up in, but the world that they're having to navigate around them. And so it's important to understand this. And I'm so glad to reconnect with you.

I know your friend, colleague, Brooke Hempel has been on Base Camp Live before from Barna. She's now doing some other things, but I'm so glad to have kind of latest updates and research. And I love hearing your story.

I know you wrote the book as well, is it You on Purpose, which is kind of helping folks navigate their purpose and their calling. So there's a lot of topics here that we could dive into. For again, for those who maybe are not totally familiar with Barna Group, just a quick backstory.

Who's Barna? I know David Kenneman's been leading it for years. It's a wonderful organization. Share a little bit about what Barna does.

Yeah, so Barna does a variety of research in churches and the Christian space and understanding what are the latest things happening in regards to believers, ministries and the church at large. And then especially looking at just generational data. And so how are different generations experiencing their faith in different ways? And so I've worked on a variety of projects through Barna over the years that are all really fascinating.

Like you said, from a sociological perspective, it's just really fascinating to see where the church is headed. So one of the things, and we're gonna get into this study, but just kind of by framing this up, I think there's sometimes, I guess kind of two schools of thought when it comes to kind of

generational distinctions. And I know we're talking about Gen Z and we're gonna, you know, you're talking about, like on paper, there's this very airtight definition.

Gen Z is born from 99 to 2015. And so these are kind of middle school children up to young adults, maybe young parents. And on the one hand, it seems very scientific to say this particular generation's like this and this particular, but help us understand as we get into this conversation, I mean, these trends that were discovered are not just for Gen Z. There's certainly some millennials that, and maybe some older Gen Xers like me that even have fallen into these challenges or these habits or these, you know, the culture is blurred more these days, it seems.

So what's your general frame? How do you frame up generational analysis like this? Yes, yeah, the generations are broken down specifically by years just to help with framing with research purposes. And generally they're designed around just specific common experiences that that cohort of youth had while growing up. But certainly the trends that we'll talk about today and what we're seeing in the research definitely blends to all generations.

What I kind of like to explain it as is whenever there is say a crisis, like say if there's a country's experiencing malnutrition, you first see it in the faces of the children. And that's kind of how this research is too. A lot of these things we'll talk about, we just see very dramatically in our youth because this is really what they grew up with from day one.

And yet it's also showing something that's indicative of society at large. And so I think these things we talk about are relevant, not only for Gen Z, but really for all of us. And that's something also I really wanna stress if there's parents listening or teachers, administrators, you know, we can't begin to really help Gen Z in a lot of these areas if we're not paying attention to how these things are affecting our own selves as well.

It's such a, I was leading with the Herzog Foundation, I lead a parent engagement training for about two and a half days, four or five times a year. And I always ask of those in the room that are basically school leaders and teachers, what generation are you? And it is even now 90, 95% of the folks in the room are typically like Gen X boomer. And you're starting to get a few millennials in leadership.

And yet the people we serve are to your point, these Gen Zers and even Alpha, whatever's coming next. I mean, so we are like, the people we serve are not us, which means there could be some very strong biases towards, well, that's how we do it. And just put, everybody needs a flip phone.

Come on, everybody. You know, you get these sort of attitudes that come from generational differences. So all that by way of background to say, this is really important research.

And so we've defined Gen Z in terms of this age group. Let's jump into just, you know, what are some of the things that you set out to do in this study? Just kind of again, frame up how broad

was it? What were you trying to accomplish? And then we'll get into what you found. Sure, so many listeners may be aware that mental illness is more prevalent for Gen Z than any other generation.

So a couple of years ago, the CDC had a report that showed among high school students, really all indicators of poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors had worsened in the last decade. And so Barna really wanted to understand what is going on here, not only from a problem standpoint, but really more of a, okay, as Christian leaders and parents, how can we step into this and faith and what are we seeing? And so as part of this study, I looked at all of the literature and the research and a lot of studies coming out. And then I also spoke to over a dozen experts in various fields.

So child psychology, education, clinical psychology, research, school systems, just across the board, and was hearing some very similar things over and over by these experts that are in this space. And so that's how we developed these six themes that we'll highlight. And then one thing I'll just say about Gen Z, really what we're seeing that kind of categorizes this generation is that they are very curious about the world.

They're very, the most connected generation, because that's all they've known from day one. They're very emotionally aware and spiritually curious. And yet on the flip side, they're the loneliest generation, the most anxious, depressed, and they really lack a religious foundation.

And so we're really seeing those two, those things in tension. And I think that will really become apparent throughout this research as well. Yeah, and I know we have an ambitious objective here in this very small window to get through these six major themes.

So I wanna get right into them. But one of the things that I read in the study, and by the way, we'll put the link at the end. I know this full study is available for anybody listening.

So you don't have to take every little note. You can get access to it for free from Barnett then. And there's a lot there that's worth looking at.

One of the things that stood out to me just in the introduction and describing Gen Z, you say that it's a generation marked by nuance and paradox. And I think that's kind of what you're starting to get into there. There's this tension that's very much a part of who they are.

So, well, let's get into, I mean, how bad is it? What was the diagnosis? Here's the report back. Everybody hold your breath. What did you find? What surprised you? Yes, well, it's not great, no surprise.

If anyone is familiar with Jonathan Haidt's *Anxious Generation* book, I think that really did set the stage for a lot of this research. And I spoke to his research team as well doing this study, that we really are at this new kind of inflection point just because of all the technological changes and

screens being a part of this generation from day one. That's the first generation that's had access to screens their entire lives.

And so we're really seeing some of the repercussions of that. And so we're not gonna be anti-technology here, but we do want to talk about how we can create some tech-free spaces for our kids, which is really what the first theme that we found was, is that they really need some space in order to help with just the skyrocketing depression and anxiety that we're seeing among adolescents right now. So when you talk about, so this first theme, which is really these six themes, are really six maybe solutions or areas to put concentrated effort.

So to your point, not a surprise. In fact, all six of these, I would say, grandma 50 years ago would have been like, well, I could have told you that. You didn't need to do the research.

But the research is important too. So number one is create tech-free spaces. Again, help unpack that.

What does that mean? Especially, I always say we can't even, we have refrigerators now that have screens on them. I mean, how do we do that in this modern moment? Yes, yes. So I think this is just a really important one.

We may, as parents or educators, be really aware of some of the negative impact screens are having, but really highlighting of how we can put specific boundaries and guardrails around them. If you just think of teens are more than a third are on social media almost constantly. I was really blown away by this statistic.

Over half are using their phones overnight between midnight and 5 a.m. So it's disrupting sleep. And then just seeing the connections, there's just a lot of research there. Teens who are spending more than five hours a day on social media are two and a half times more likely to express suicidal thoughts or harm themselves.

And the same is true for heavy video games, which is linked to higher risk of depression. And interestingly, this risk begins increasing after only one hour of use per day. So there really is a very strong correlation between the types of screens like social media, video games that our kids are using and their mental wellbeing, mainly because technology is designed to foster an obsession.

And young minds are not equipped to handle the constant content that is put before them. I would say most of us are not equipped to handle the constant content that is put before us. And then if you just think just practically, the more time a child spends in a virtual environment, the less opportunity they have for building social skills, for learning to relate, connect, adapt, persevere.

And so that's why really the first solution is to create environments for kids to have screen-free time to really just be kids. And we can talk a little more practically what that looks like too. Well,

and again, I know we're gonna take a break in a second and continue on with this, but before we do, I wanna finish up just some thoughts around the tech, because this is such a big topic.

And I think most of our listeners are going, yeah, we already know that. In fact, we are anti-tech in our home. We're already there, we already do all that.

And yet I know that even in this desire to kind of be balanced, what I've seen, and I've referenced, I'm sure you've seen Claire Murrell's book, *The Tech Exit*. She kind of parallels a lot of this theme in which she says even like 15 minutes a day for some children who are even more addiction prone, just that 15 minutes of being on a video game can unravel the rest of the 24 hours in their mind. And I see that a lot, especially in our classical school world where it's like, yeah, they've had such a long day, they've been reading books all day.

They just need a few minutes to unwind and get on their video game, and now you have inadvertently created something that's counter to everything you're hopefully striving for. So maybe speak to that just because this idea of, well, it's only an hour a day compared to everything else. It's not that much.

That's a danger zone too, right? It is, yes. And one thing actually the experts were talking to me about is we hear a lot about screen time, which is important, but we don't really often consider screen type. And so there's a very big difference between FaceTiming a grandparent for 20 minutes and playing a video game for 20 minutes or watching a 30-minute show with your siblings on the couch in front of the TV versus by yourself scrolling through YouTube Shorts for 20 minutes.

So considering also, it's not that we're anti-technology, but we are pro-connection. And so thinking of it that way as well. And there's just two really big things that the research shows that can really mitigate a lot of what we're seeing, and that is screens at family meals and screens in children's bedrooms are associated with adolescents' problematic use of screens.

So even just having very clear no screen places in the home is vitally important. Yeah, and just as a final point, I mean, again, from my observation, this part of the elephant in the room is it's not just the kids and their phones, it's the parents and their phones. And so it reminds me of the smoking world that we all came through in the pre-80s world that I remember, where the problem with secondhand smoke, it's like, well, yay, my kids are on a phone, but you're sitting there all the time on yours, quote, doing work, and you're setting up a precedent.

So again, it seems like this is a holistic problem and holistic solutions are needed. It does, and the research bears that out. So greater parental screen use is associated with worse outcomes for their children.

And so all those social media use in children has a lot of consequences. Actually, the parents' use of social media affects the children even more. And so parents are not off the hook here.

You're not off the hook? Like, oh, they're all, yeah. Well, it's to the point earlier, I mean, these aren't just hard and fast generational lines. These are, it's the world we're all swimming in, and therefore we gotta create spaces for our families that are a little bit more analog.

So let's take a break. We're gonna come back. We've got a few more, five themes in particular we wanna jump through here quickly.

This is all such helpful research. Stephanie will be right back after the break. Hi there, classical Christian parents, students, and teachers.

This is Robert Littlejohn, co-author with Charles Evans of *Wisdom and Eloquence*, a Christian paradigm for classical learning, published by Crossway Books. We want you to know about our new book with well-known family counselor, Keith McCurdy, published by Classical Academic Press. The book is titled, *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents, How Classical Christian Education Can Transform Your Children, Your Family, and the World*.

We have written this shorter, parent-focused book specifically as an admissions and parent education resource for schools and families. We are excited to be proud sponsors of Zipcast and Basecamp Live, and we hope you are enjoying these two great resources for classical learning as much as we are. And we would invite you to visit our website, wisdomandeloquence.org, to explore the various services offered by the authors of *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents*, and to let us know how we can best serve you.

We look forward to hearing from you soon. Today's episode of Basecamp Live is brought to you by my friend, Chris Casper, who you heard on a recent episode. His invention, the Wyze Phone, is a much-needed third way, providing a solution from the dangers of a smartphone on the one hand, and the limited capacities of an old-school flip phone on the other.

His simple, distraction-free phone design for families who want technology to serve their real lives and give us and our older children a way to do basic essentials, like calling or texting or maps, without the web browser and the social media and the endless apps that can pull them and us into the addictive, time-wasting aspects of a smartphone. I personally have a Wyze Phone, and I can vouch that it is an excellent solution and an appropriate way to use technology that supports virtue and focus and healthy habits. Check out the link in our show notes and on our Basecamp Live website partners page, where Chris is offering Basecamp Live listeners a discount.

Stephanie, we're jumping in now to the other five of these themes. Tell us what the second one is. Yes, the second theme is support the parents or support the guardians, so the caretakers of the family.

They need just as much support for their own well-being as the children they're caring for. So one thing we see is that parents are suffering from anxiety and depression at about the same rates as their teens. And mainly that's because today's parents are extremely lonely, 65% report being

lonely.

And also we live in this age of experts and this endless access to information, and parents have really begun to doubt their ability to parent. And so we really wanted to emphasize in this theme that living the Christian life together as a family and in community is the ultimate buffer for kids' mental health. And that showed up again and again in the research of that kids really need a steady presence in their lives in order to navigate these wild waters we're all swimming in.

Well, I always think when I hear stats like that of Chap Clark who wrote years ago, Sticky Faith, and talked about what is it that causes children to continue in their walk with Christ and to college, I'm sure you've seen the report. But he talks about the five to one ratio where you've got to have in addition to mom and dad these other adults that are walking and living out their faith. So having that kind of great cloud of witnesses, it seems basic, but it is very critical.

Yes, it is. Children need that support, especially as they're learning just to navigate their own emotional turmoil as they grow up. Do you have, again, for time, but I wanna still emphasize a couple of practicals, what does that look like? If you could say to a parent, here's just a couple of things.

Hey, this weekend do this differently to kind of create more presence. What would that look like? Yeah, the main thing that we saw here is just really emphasizing authoritative parenting. And so if you think of a spectrum, one end of the spectrum is authoritarian and the other end is passive or permissive and then the middle is authoritative.

And so what you really wanna balance is warmth and structure and boundaries. And so one end of the spectrum of authoritarian is very low warmth, but very high structure. And the other side is very high warmth and low structure.

By and large, what we tend to see families moving towards is really more of this permissive side, where it's like you really wanna engage your children's emotions and it's very high warmth and loving, but there's not a whole lot of boundaries or structure in place. And kids just really, it's hard to thrive in that because they don't actually feel as safe and protected. And so trying to encourage families, like even just the boundaries we've talked about and the tech theme, like really setting boundaries for the family, for your child to be able to feel safe and feel the freedom to engage within the boundaries helps their mental health and overall wellbeing.

It's really just, it's just be the parent. I mean, be the parent. And I know that that modern moment we're in where things like gentle parenting are sort of in vogue, especially when Christian families, it feels very grace centered, completely undermining the home as you're talking about.

So supporting the guardians. Okay, let's keep rolling. So the third theme is what? This is increased connectedness.

And so we asked what the number one focus should be to help kids in this mental health crisis. And every single expert said relationships. And so this really ties a lot to what we said in the tech theme, because we're in this day and age that you might've heard we live in a disembodied time where everything is virtual and connection is virtual.

And what has this has created is a very thin community and what Gen Z and all of us need to thrive is embodied experience and thick community. So actual in-person connection and just having youth see that they're not alone, that they belong and that they have responsibilities that others expect of them, that they are needed to show up and engage and be a part of something beyond themselves. I think the main thing here too, that's really encouraging for Christians is that there was a study that showed of all the different types of social connections.

So how many friends you have or family members or how recently you were with a friend, out of all of those, actually attending church is the strongest predictor of being a buffer against mortality, suicide, depression, than really any other type of social connection. And so kind of going back to that, supporting the guardians theme of just attending church together as a family is creating that connectedness that youth really need in order to thrive. We often make this statement or I quote parents, I've heard many times that say, I was looking for a school for my child and I ended up with a community for my family.

And that's kind of one of the rich hidden blessings of so many of our schools is that they really are by reality of just hours in the week that you spend at the school, not to minimize the need to be at church on Sunday and to be connected there as well. But that is such a blessing that I think to your point, if families see schools, not just as the place they outsource the education of their child, but really as a hub of their family, that speaks into this idea of rich, thick community. Yes, and the more schools can also create opportunities for that engagement.

And we just had a mother son game night. And so that was a great time at our school. And there's a daddy daughter dance and all those things that just seem like maybe one off events, but they really are creating this community that we want.

But what I'm seeing more and more schools that will even maybe less complicated programming, like let's open the gym up on Friday night and set up tables. We're gonna have family game night. Everybody brings these board games out.

It doesn't take a lot of time, money and effort. And it creates environments that become kind of hubs of community, which is something that we're, everybody's to your point earlier that even the parents are like, oh, I finally get to meet other adults and have conversations. There's things that are so again, seemingly so basic, but we're having to kind of supplement in this moment that we're in around Connectedness.

So let's take another break. And I wanna come back. We've got a few more to do here as far as

just getting into these solutions.

I love how practical these themes are. And they are things that are not hard to do. We just have to make a commitment around them.

So we'll take a quick break. We'll be right back and continue the conversation. The road to graduation begins early and takes many paths.

And without a skilled guide, it can feel overwhelming. The career coaches at Life Architects empower students to discover who God created them to be through our unique vocational discipleship model. You can bring this graduation game changer to your school through one-on-one student coaching, on-campus workshops, or even faculty training.

Visit lifearchitectscoaching.com today. During this short break, I have a special invitation to all school leaders, administrators, and teachers. I want you to imagine for a moment stepping away from your everyday routine at school and diving deep into the rich foundations of Christian education, surrounded by world-class scholars, seasoned classroom teachers, and administrative experts with years of experience running schools with a lot of wisdom to share.

That's exactly what the Herzog Foundation's Institute is offering. I've had the joy of serving as a training coach for the last few years, leading their two-and-a-half-day training on spiritual formation and another one on parent engagement. They offer close to 50 unique training events, ranging from board governance to marketing to classroom best practices.

They even offer a training on how to teach the great books. And the best part of all, well, thanks to the generosity of the Herzog Foundation, these training events, including lodging, are completely free for Christian educators. Institutes are located around the country in beautiful locations, including at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara.

Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at theherzogfoundation.com. Okay, Stephanie, we've got three more themes. Again, this is, we needed to do a six-part series on this.

This is a rapid-fire version. I have never, I'm like, oh my gosh, this is such rich, important, on the one hand, so basic, but also so absolutely essential for our homes and our schools. So let's jump in.

So what's the fourth theme? The fourth theme is what we call Change the Story. So this one is maybe not quite as intuitive as the others, but this is all about teaching Gen Z how to contextualize struggles. So what we really see, and this was interesting because I spoke to people in the field of psychology, and everyone was saying that we are oversaturated in this therapeutic language of self-help and self-diagnosis.

And so what has happened is that our youth are learning that problems are to be solved rather

than an invitation into a healing process in the context of relationships. And so when every emotional distress in life is seen as a problem that could affect you for the rest of your life, it really becomes this self-fulfilling prophecy. And even a word like trauma is being very overused as a specific example, which not only takes away from those who have experienced actual very big, capital T, trauma in their life, but it also, again, is just teaching kids that if this thing in my life I'm calling a trauma, if that's a trauma, then when this big thing happens, there's no way I can ever get over that.

And so what we need to do as parents, as educators, is help them change the story from really this deficit problem-oriented mindset into a growth mindset and this picture of what well-being can be. And the word, I know you've used the word on the podcast a lot too, this sturdiness that we need to help children develop and allow them to experience some struggle, obviously with our help and support and love. So it's not about telling children to get over it, but it's about helping them in the struggle and be equipped to navigate it, not rescuing them or ignoring them.

And it seems like in general, just we're a culture that celebrates victimhood. I mean, that's just kind of the secular world around us. But again, we've sort of, it's leeching into the Christian space where church has become much more moralistic, therapeutic deism, it's all about therapy and it's all about feelings.

And you're right, Keith McCurdy is on off to talking about living sturdy. So you're talking about reframing the story so it's not just woe is me and let's all grovel in our brokenness, but let's move through it and gain strength. Yes, I mean, I think it's really the Christian way of holding both lament and hope at the same time.

I think that's really what it's all about. There's a really fascinating study of 2000 children who had experienced severe childhood maltreatment. And what the study found is that how these experiences were recalled or processed really correlated to their risk of psychopathology.

And so in simpler terms, basically how we interpret a native experience often has more of an impact on our wellbeing than the experience itself. Interesting. That makes sense.

Parents, as teachers, as leaders, how we help our children interpret what they're going through is a really big role that we have to play. And again, it's not ignoring things or just get over it, but it is really how do you approach something with resilience? That's a great word. Resilience is a word.

And again, as we keep coming back to, yes, this is for our children, but it's also us. If we, the adults, everything becomes trauma and woe is us and the world is falling apart and everything's horrible, our children resonate with the tone we set. So that's an important consideration.

Again, not to fake it, but at least see if you can, I guess, step it up a little bit in terms of the way you contextualize it. So that's really good. Makes sense.

What about the fifth one? Let's go to the fifth theme. So the fifth theme is returning to faith roots. So we kind of mentioned we're very individualistic, morally relativistic culture.

And the church offers this anchor and security that can really ground our youth and enduring truths. And so this was really interesting. Even when I interviewed experts that were not believers, they were saying, we need the church to step up and be the church.

That's fascinating. Yes, they see the power of it. And they're like, why aren't you guys leaning into this? And so I think also, as Christian schools, just as a body of believers, we have really an opportunity to just engage children in their faith and specifically to return back to maybe some of the spiritual disciplines that we know are just so beneficial for our own wellbeing.

Obviously, that's why God gave us things like communal worship and prayer and Sabbath. And so just practicing those things as a family and in community. And we're really seeing, youth are really drawn to this.

There's a lot of research right now that Barna has done that Gen Z in particular are really desiring this. I think that's something that's been really fascinating to me is in a world that feels so chaotic and so ungrounded that they're really finding a lot of peace and desire to enter into a church experience that is grounding in kind of these ancient truths and finding a lot of hope in that. And so I think there really is an opportunity here.

One person I interviewed said it this way, that the future of youth group is old. And so just bringing youth back to spaces that again have opportunity to be off of screens, connecting with one another in worship, in prayer, things like that. What I hear you saying, and give me your thoughts on this because it seems like broadly speaking, sociologically, again, there's a large movement towards the more sacred liturgical historical churches.

And I think that the idea of church is a TED Talk on a stage with some entertainment is incredibly empty for so many young people that I hear all the time among my own children and their peers, and not to be dismissive of sort of the seeker type of church but that idea of church needs to be different and sacred and rich. That I think, I mean, that's part of this, right? There's a rootedness of the church. So not to split theology here, but I think there is a reality that if church is nothing more than kind of therapy versus like, no, let's actually deal with our sin, you're gonna lose.

That's what's been lost in the modern church movement it sounds like. Yes, and I think the research bears that out as well. And I mentioned earlier that attending church is an ultimate buffer for our mental health, but that was only if you actually attend in person.

Those results do not hold true if you watch online. And so, yes, and if you look at, if you ask Gen Z, what are they looking for in church? The three main things they're looking for are peace, healing, and purpose. I think they really are wanting something meaningful and deeper than what you could maybe just get sitting on your couch watching a service.

Right, kind of disembodied worship. Yes, exactly, that makes sense. Okay, let's jump to the last one.

What's the last theme? All right, last theme is cultivating kingdom purpose, which of all the themes may be one I have a fondness for just because I've done so much research in this area, but really helping teens see that they have something that is beyond themselves. And so, we all know that most teens for all generations, not just this generation, are all just wanna be happy. That's their main kind of goal in life.

But what the research shows again and again is that purpose is really what is correlated to wellbeing. And so, in order to have purpose, you have to have a pro-social focus on others, not just yourselves. And so, inviting teens to be, or kids to just be a part of serving certainly out in the community, but also cultivating a culture of service in your family.

So, there is a lot of power in doing chores as a family. And it is also asking your kids to step up and be a part and contribute. And then they start to see, oh, I'm needed here.

I have a purpose here. Even if they're not gonna say that, and they're not going to like it and always be joyful, but it's really powerful. And so, part of this also is helping them see themselves as a part of a larger gospel story that we're invited to love and serve others because we first have been loved, of course.

And so, this is, yeah, I think there's lots of ways to also do this in a school environment of having kids contribute. I know we have book buddies at our school and we have a house system where the older kids are with the younger kids. And after lunch, they take turns of who's wiping the table, who's sweeping.

And so, having these things carry over between school and home, I think is really rich as well. That's a great, well, and it's such a sense of kind of pride of ownership and responsibility. I think you're right.

There's such a loss in the culture of what is my purpose? What can I be able to contribute? And I think especially as AI continues to come in, there's more of the sense of we're just basically helpless in some ways to the world around us, having that individual agency and serving and impacting. I mean, that's what we were made for, we're made to have purpose. And so, it sounds like, again, practical examples to the schools that are helping just to create a sense of ownership.

I know many schools, as you're just describing, have amazing house programs. And part of that is giving students ownership of managing everything in the building and serving in their community. And so, it's more than just finding you do you, that's the whole modern moment.

So, you do others is what we're trying to move towards. Yes, I think ownership is a really great word. I think that was something we also are seeing in the research is that there's just not enough

is expected of our kids as they get older.

They are really capable of a lot more and they will rise to the occasion with the proper help and guardrails and all that, but they are able to do a lot more than we probably think that they can. Yeah, Keith McCurdy talks about that often on podcasts with just, you go back 50 or 100 years. I mean, kids used to get up at four in the morning and milk the cow and have an array of fairly dangerous chores before they even got to school.

So, now we're just, everybody's got a helmet to go get the mail out of the mailbox. It's like, oh my gosh, like can we just live a little bit more courageously? That's what I hear, yeah. We have actually 70 chickens and so our kids are helping care for all the chickens.

But their hand might get pecked while they're getting an egg. So, yes, live a little bit more purposefully and redemptively, I love that vision, Stephanie. Well, for folks who are, hopefully we've whet their appetite, there's just the tip of the iceberg of this research and there's a lot of great, not only research aspects, but just more practical, how do I go do this elements to it.

So, share with folks how they can get the access to this research and then other resources you might wanna mention. Yeah, so as you mentioned, this is a free report made available through BARNA. So, if you go to [barna.com slash mental-health](http://barna.com/mental-health), you can download the report for free.

And yes, any research that was mentioned today will be in there along with a lot more. This is about 100 page report. So, there's a lot more you could dive into if a topic sounded interesting.

And BARNA's website as well has some really great resources on trends of the church, AI, Gen Z. So, if any of those are interesting to you as well, you can find that there. And we'll be sure to link this report as well in our show notes as well as resources that you're gonna provide for us. I know folks would love to hear more about the book you've written, *You On Purpose*, because we've talked about that theme as well.

So, Stephanie, thank you so much. It's so good to hear what the research is showing these days. And we'd love to have you back on in the near future to continue to keep us updated.

Oh, thank you. It's been a lot of fun to be able to talk through these with you. So, thank you.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Basecamp Live. Be sure to check out our website, basecamlive.com for more than eight years of timeless episodes that you'll find helpful and encouraging, as well as the helpful resources offered on our partners page. The views and opinions expressed in this program are those of the speakers, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of our partners like the Herzog Foundation.

See you back next week.