



CCCNZ SUMMIT 2026

When Machines Become Friends...

AI, Gen Z & the Gospel — What the Church Must Know

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1 Peter 4:10 (ESV) "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

Today's Journey

01

The World AI Is Building

Real breakthroughs already changing humanity

02

Gen Z & The AI Companion

Who they are and what they are turning to

03

Warning Signs We Cannot Ignore

Dangers hiding in plain sight — lawsuits, research, lives lost

04

The Biblical Framework

John Lennox, Scripture and the nature of humanity

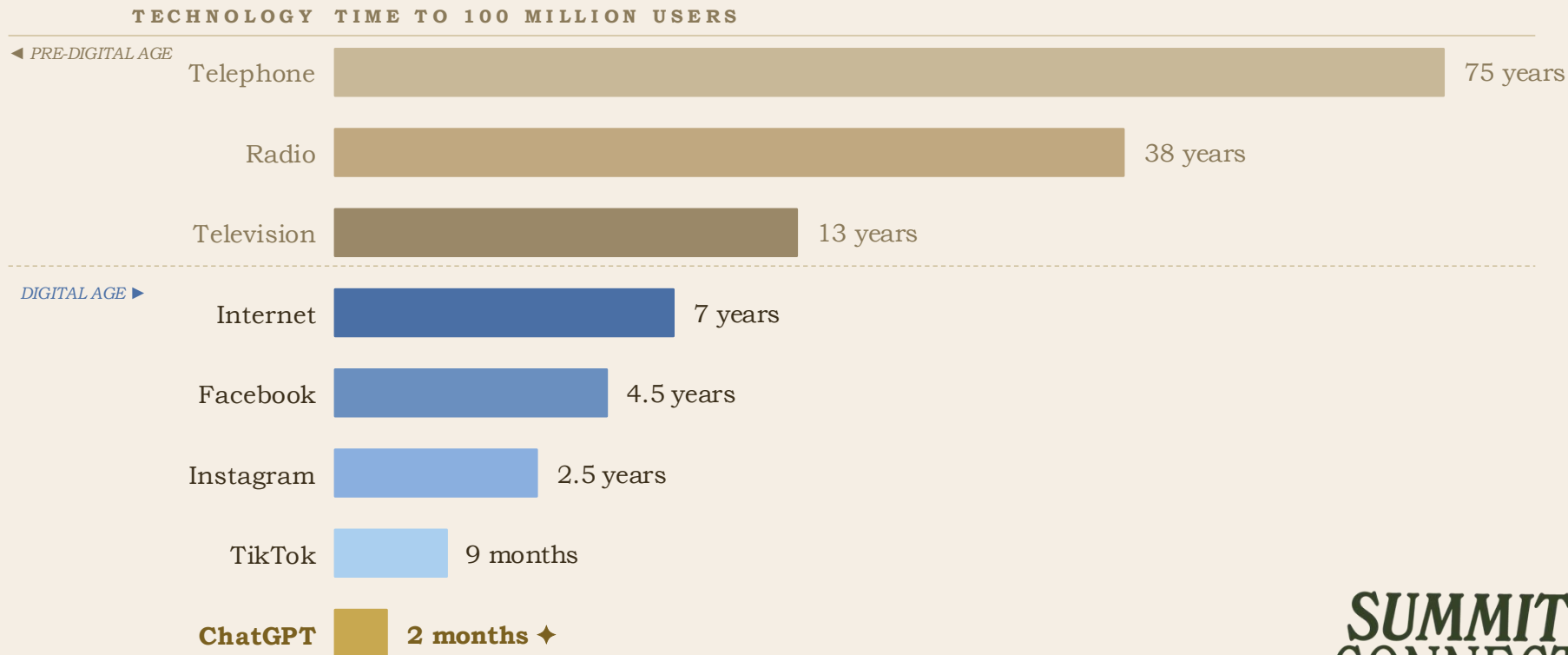
05

The Church's Response

5 Practical steps for leaders — starting this week

The Speed of AI Adoption Has No Historical Parallel

Time for each technology to reach 100 million users — every generation thought they had seen fast



The church was not caught off guard by the printing press. It must not be caught off guard by AI.

SECTION 1

The World AI Is Building

Understanding the landscape before we respond to it

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AI Breakthroughs: Medicine & Healthcare

Real advances happening right now that are transforming human health

AlphaFold 3 — Nobel Prize 2024

Google DeepMind's AlphaFold 3 predicts how proteins, DNA, RNA, and drug molecules interact — with unprecedented accuracy. It received the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Drug structures that once took months to map now take hours.

Cancer Drug Discovery

AI tools like PockDrug identify 'druggable' pockets on cancer proteins. AlphaFold accelerates the identification of new treatments and repurposes existing medications for new cancers.

The 12–15 year drug development pipeline is being radically compressed.

\$26.6B → \$187B

The global AI in healthcare market grows from \$26.6 billion in 2024 to nearly \$187 billion by 2030.

AI scribes are already reducing physician documentation burden and burnout across hospitals worldwide.

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AI Breakthroughs: Science, Climate & Intelligence

The boundaries of human knowledge are being redrawn

Climate Modelling

UC San Diego's Spherical DYffusion model projects 100 years of climate patterns in just 25 hours. AI is now empowering policymakers to act on climate with speed and precision never before possible.

Quantum Computing

Google's Willow chip and Microsoft's commercially available quantum computers (launched 2025) represent a processing leap that will accelerate every branch of scientific research.

Mathematical Proofs

Google DeepMind's AI achieved gold-medal standard in the International Mathematical Olympiad — solving problems requiring deep abstract reasoning previously thought uniquely human.

Scientific Discovery

Agentic AI models now actively assist across genomics, neuroscience, materials science and biology — accelerating breakthroughs in hundreds of research institutions worldwide.

The Speed of Change Is Unprecedented

These are not future projections. They are happening right now.

700%

surge in AI
companion
apps
2022 to 2025

25h

to model 100
years
of climate
patterns

\$187B

AI healthcare
market
by 2030

2024

Nobel Prize in
Chemistry
awarded to
AlphaFold AI

SECTION 2

Gen Z & The AI Companion

Born 1997–2012. The first generation to grow up alongside AI.

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Who Is Gen Z?

The generation that has never known life without smartphones

Born 1997–2012 | Today aged 14–29

- Raised during COVID-19 — social development disrupted in formative years
- Most connected generation in history — yet reporting the highest loneliness rates ever recorded
- 74% have used an AI chatbot at least once in the past month
- 23% of young adults report using chatbots 'as a friend'
- **Gen Z are your youth group, your young adults — and your church's future**

Sources: Mastercard AI Relationships Study 2025 | APA Monitor Jan/Feb 2026 | Statista 2025

89%

of Gen Z &
Millennials feel lonely
at least once a week

Mastercard Research 2025

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The Loneliness Epidemic

Before we understand AI companions, we must understand the wound they are filling.

81%

of all people report
experiencing
loneliness

89%

of Gen Z &
Millennials feel
lonely at least once a
week

39%

of Gen Z felt lonely at
least once a week in
childhood

1 in 3

teens already prefer
AI
for serious
conversations

The AI Companion Explosion

700% growth in companion apps between 2022 and 2025

700%

surge in AI companion
apps between 2022
and 2025

100M+

people now
interact with
personified AI
chatbots globally

74%

of young adults used
an AI chatbot
at least once in the
past month

23%

of young adults
use chatbots
as a friend

The Numbers That Should Stop Us

These are not projections. These are today's young people.

80%

of Gen Z said they would consider marrying an AI companion

Ground.news / AI Relationship Survey 2025

83%

believe they are capable of forming an intimate emotional connection with AI

Joi AI Research 2025

77%

of current online daters would consider dating an AI

Norton Digital Safety Study 2025

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The question is not whether AI is meeting a need — it is whether the church is meeting it first.

SECTION 3

Warning Signs

We Cannot Ignore

Dangers hiding in plain sight — in our pockets and in our youth groups

Warning Sign #1: Social Offloading

When we outsource our conversations, we stop learning to connect

"If you're using AI to draft your messages to friends or romantic partners, you're outsourcing the communicative act itself."

— Dr. Michael Robb, Head of Research, Common Sense Media

What Is It?

Using AI to navigate interpersonal situations — drafting messages, handling conflicts, deciding how to respond emotionally. The skill of human connection is being outsourced to an algorithm.

Why It Matters

When young people outsource difficult conversations, they never develop the emotional resilience, empathy and communication skills required for deep, lasting relationships — including faith community.

The Church's Opportunity

The church offers what no chatbot can: genuine mentors, elders and a community that holds you accountable and loves you in person. This is a strength to lean into, not away from.

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Warning Sign #2: Lives Already Lost

These are not hypothetical risks. These are children who are gone.

FLORIDA, 2024

Sewell Setzer III, age 14

Died by suicide after developing a deep emotional relationship with a Character.AI chatbot. His mother's lawsuit alleged the platform failed to implement safety measures when he began expressing thoughts of self-harm.

Character.AI and Google settled the lawsuit in January 2026.

COLORADO, 2023

Girl, age 13

Died by suicide after using Character.AI regularly for just a few months. Her family filed suit in 2025, alleging the chatbot 'friend' manipulated her emotions and deliberately encouraged her isolation from real-world relationships and support.

As a direct result, Character.AI banned users under 18 from open-ended chat.

Warning Sign #3: What the Research Confirms

Four consistent findings across peer-reviewed studies

1. Heavy daily use correlates with greater loneliness — not less

Despite initial relief, regular AI companion use is consistently associated with lower well-being, increased dependence, and greater withdrawal from real-world social interaction — not the reverse.

2. Vulnerable users are most at risk

Those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles are most likely to form emotional dependencies on AI, projecting unmet emotional needs onto a chatbot that will never challenge or genuinely love them.

3. AI companions replace, not supplement, human relationships

Companionship-oriented chatbot use was consistently linked with reduced real-world socialising. Users substitute AI for human relationships rather than using it to enhance them.

4. Dependency breeds resentment of human connection

AI dependency encourages users to find human relationships 'too difficult.'
When an AI always agrees and never challenges you, real relationships begin to feel exhausting by comparison.

SECTION 4

The Biblical Framework

John Lennox, Scripture and the nature of what it means to be human

John Lennox: 2084 — Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity

Oxford Professor of Mathematics and Christian apologist John Lennox wrote 2084 in response to AI's explosive growth — naming it after Orwell's 1984 to signal his concern about surveillance, human dignity, and the substitution of human wisdom with machine intelligence.

AI as Idolatry

"Peeling back the hopes humanity is placing in AI reveals a temptation to worship the work of our own hands — to treat AI as though it were omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. Something tantamount to a god of our own making." — John Lennox

Human Dignity Matters

Lennox argues that the soul, moral sense, consciousness and relational capacity of humanity cannot be replicated by any machine. AI may simulate intelligence — but it cannot generate meaning, love, or moral accountability.

The Problem AI Can't Fix

"The future cannot ignore the problem of human sin, addressed by Jesus Christ." No upgrade, algorithm, or AI system can deal with the fundamental human condition that the Gospel alone addresses.

Not Anti-Technology

Lennox celebrates AI's genuine potential while sounding a clear warning: placing ultimate hope in human ingenuity rather than in God is the oldest sin in the book. The church must hold both truths simultaneously.

What the Bible Says About Human Connection

God designed us for relationship — with Him and with each other.

Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

Loneliness is not God's design. The longing for connection is woven into our creation — not a weakness AI can fix, but a need only relationship can meet.

John 15:13 (ESV)

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

AI can simulate friendship — but no algorithm has ever died for you. Love requires sacrifice, not code. The Gospel is the answer loneliness is crying out for.

Acts 2:42–47 (ESV)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

The early church was the antidote to loneliness: embodied, devoted, accountable community. This is not a nice-to-have. It is the design of God.

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Can an algorithm love you back?

Can code die for your sins?

Can data give you a reason to live?

Can a machine forgive you?

**This is where the Gospel speaks.
This is where the church steps forward.**

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SECTION 5

The Church's Response

Practical steps for church leaders in the age of AI

But First — Good News

Gen Z is not lost to the church. The data tells a very different story.

×2

Frequency of Gen Z
churchgoing has nearly
doubled in 5 years
(2020–2025)

GEN Z

#1

in church attendance

46%

of Gen Z men attended
church in the past week
— Barna 2025

"For the first time in decades, younger adults are now the most regular churchgoers." — Religion News Service, September 2025

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Commission was given to people. Not to programs. Not to platforms.

*AI may be a tool in God's hands —
but the Great Commission requires incarnational presence.*

5 Steps for Church Leaders

Practical actions you can take starting this week

1

Understand the Landscape

Know what your young people are using. Host a 'digital discovery' session with your youth leaders to map which AI apps are in active use in your community.

2

Create Radical Community

Audit your hospitality honestly. Are newcomers genuinely welcomed? Do young people have mentors and real belonging? Design for connection, not just for events.

3

Equip Your Youth Leaders

Train workers on AI literacy — what Gen Z is experiencing, what warning signs to look for, and how to hold pastoral conversations about AI relationships with care.

4

Disciple Parents First

Many parents have no idea what their children are doing online. Provide practical, calm resources that equip parents to talk openly and relationally at home.

5

Lead with the Gospel

Not programs. Not events. Not another app. Proclaim Jesus Christ — the only one who offers real presence, real love, forgiveness, eternal purpose, and life.

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Jesus Offers What AI Never Can

True Presence

AI: AI simulates availability

"I am with you always, to the end of the age." — Matthew 28:20

Unconditional Love

AI: AI is programmed to please

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." — Romans 5:8

Forgiveness

AI: AI has no reset for the soul

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." — 1 John 1:9

Eternal Life

AI: AI offers no hope beyond death

"Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." — John 3:16

True Community

AI: AI offers simulated companionship

"And they devoted themselves to... the fellowship." — Acts 2:42

Meaning & Purpose

AI: AI has no ultimate story to offer

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." — Ephesians 2:10

Your Role Is Irreplaceable

A word to the church leaders

- *AI can process scripture — but it cannot embody it. You can.*
- *AI can simulate empathy — but it cannot weep with those who weep. You can.*
- *AI can deliver information — but it cannot make disciples. You can.*
- **The Great Commission was not given to an algorithm. It was given to us.**

Go. Love. Disciple.

Questions & Discussion

15 Minutes

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Key Resource: John Lennox — 2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity (Zondervan, 2020)

Research: Barna Group 2025 | Common Sense Media 2025 | APA Monitor 2026 | CNN Health 2026 | ScienceDirect 2026 | Nobel Prize Committee 2024

Matthew 28:19 (ESV) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

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