

Leadership Through Example: Reconstructing the Timothy Model for Fostering Spiritual Maturity in Generation Z at GBI Light of City

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine whether Timothy's leadership style, specifically the role of a role model as described in 1 Timothy 4:12, can influence the spiritual development of Generation Z (Gen-Z) at the GBI Light of City (LoC) church. As we approach an era in which the majority of the productive generation will retire, Gen-Z must be prepared as future leaders. However, challenges such as skepticism toward traditional authority, spiritual vulnerability, and the influence of digital technology pose major obstacles to their spiritual maturity. This study aims to identify leadership factors relevant to Gen-Z's values and provide practical insights to enhance church programs targeting their spiritual growth. Using a qualitative approach with text analysis, this study found that Timothy's leadership qualities, such as authenticity, integrity, unconditional love, steadfast faith, and moral purity, resonate strongly with Gen-Z's values. The results highlight the importance of the role of the pastor, exemplary leadership, and the use of technology in supporting the spiritual formation of Gen-Z. A novel contribution of this study is that Timothy's leadership model can be effectively adapted to meet the spiritual needs of Gen-Z in the modern era.

Keywords:

Generation Z, Spiritual Maturity, Timothy's Leadership Style, Role Modeling, Mentorship, Digital Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

In this context, spiritual growth is a crucial aspect of personal development, helping Gen-Z face challenges with resilience and a clear sense of purpose (Kristiyowati, 2021). For young Christians, a faith-based leadership model offers a path to cultivate values such as empathy, service, and integrity. (Bhoki, 2025, p. 14) One example of leadership that is highly relevant to Gen-Z is the leadership of Timothy, as depicted in the Bible, particularly in 1 Timothy 4:12: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young. Be an example to the believers—in your speech, in your conduct, in your love, in your faith, and in your purity.” rooted in spirituality. (Lafau et al., 2024) This verse highlights the importance of exemplary leadership, a principle that aligns closely with Gen-Z’s aspirations for leaders who are authentic, transparent, and have a tangible impact on others’ lives. (Rusli et al., 2024, p. 12) Timothy’s leadership style is not based solely on age or experience, but on his ability to serve as a role model in various aspects of life—words, actions, love, faithfulness, and purity.

Along with demographic changes in Indonesia, Generation Z (Gen-Z), born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, is playing an increasingly important role in shaping the nation’s future. In the coming decades, the majority of the productive workforce will reach retirement age, creating a leadership and decision-making vacuum. (Prasetyo, 2019) These demographic changes underscore the importance of preparing Gen-Z to effectively fill these roles. Amid rapid technological change, shifting social values, and complex global challenges, this generation faces unique pressures to develop strong and ethical leadership qualities.

Similarly, in the book of Timothy, he sets an example for Gen Z. These qualities reflect the values cherished by Gen Z, such as honesty, integrity, and a commitment to the common good. Although he was still young, Timothy was entrusted by the Apostle Paul to lead the Christian community in Ephesus. Paul encouraged Timothy to set an example for others, showing that leadership is not just about age or titles, but about character and the positive influence one has on others. This message is highly relevant to Gen-Z, who are often skeptical of traditional authority and place greater value on leadership that is values-driven and focused on tangible actions. They seek leaders who not only talk about change but also live in accordance with the values they teach. (Padakari & Korwa, 2024) The importance of studying Gen-Z’s spiritual development through the lens of Timothy’s leadership style is reinforced by indications of spiritual vulnerability among Indonesian Christian Gen-Z members, who tend to neglect their identity as followers of Jesus and exhibit anarchic, destructive, and immoral behavior. (Hasiholan, 2024) A 2021 survey also showed that Gen-Z in Indonesia has the lowest spiritual index, particularly in terms of self-image and motivation. (Gultom et al., 2022) This underscores the urgency of understanding and addressing their spiritual maturity.

The church serves as one of the primary settings for the faith formation of Generation Z. Spiritual maturity must be cultivated through the various forms of support available. Therefore, a formation model must be implemented within the church. Faith and formation must go hand in hand so that Generation Z will understand the importance of engaging in formation within the church. However, challenges will arise as long as Generation Z continues to perceive the traditional authority structures within the church that are still widely practiced. Trust must first be established between pastors and Generation Z; only then will the process of opening hearts during formation proceed naturally. Previous research conducted by Regen et al. (2021)

indicates that the contextual synthesis model serves as an important framework for the next generation.(Wantalangi et al., 2021) On the other hand, research by Yuli (2021) suggests that Generation Z requires creative ministry approaches and needs support in their faith formation models.(Kristyowati, 2021) There is a research *gap* indicating that this generation requires not only creativity but also a leadership model relevant to their current needs. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the Timothy leadership model can be effectively adapted to meet the spiritual needs of Gen-Z in the modern era.

This study aims to provide a discipleship model based on the principles of Timothy's leadership that can be adapted to support the spiritual formation of Gen-Z members in the GBI Light of City (LoC) church community. Specifically, Timothy's emphasis on being a role model offers a valuable framework for meeting the relational and spiritual needs of Gen-Z. Therefore, this study will address the following questions: What specific aspects of Timothy's leadership, particularly in 1 Timothy 4:12, resonate with Gen-Z? How can this principle of being a role model be effectively applied to support the spiritual growth of Gen-Z within the church community?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach.(Sugiyono, 2017) Additionally, the researcher interprets the meaning of relevant texts, including Scripture (1 Timothy), theological literature on Timothy's leadership, and academic journal articles discussing the characteristics of Generation Z, spiritual growth, and the role of leadership within the Christian context. This method allows for the identification of patterns, themes, and principles in Timothy's leadership that can be applied to the context of contemporary church leadership and understood in terms of their relevance to the spiritual journey of Generation Z. Qualitative text analysis enables a deep understanding of complex concepts and nuances of meaning that might be overlooked by quantitative approaches.(Moleong, 2007) This study will conduct an in-depth analysis of 1 Timothy 4:12 to identify key aspects of Timothy's leadership. Furthermore, this study will review the academic literature on the spiritual characteristics of Generation Z in Indonesia and the principles of spiritual growth in Christian theology. Finally, the analysis will connect these findings to formulate a discussion on the relevance of Timothy's leadership style to the spiritual maturity of Generation Z at GBI Light of City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Theology of Timothy's Leadership in 1 Timothy 4:12

1 Timothy 4:12 provides a comprehensive framework for exemplary Christian leadership that transcends age boundaries. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to be an example to believers in five key areas: speech, conduct, love (agape), faith (pistis), and purity (hagneia). In terms of speech, Timothy is expected to use language that is edifying, truthful, and full of grace, avoiding unwholesome speech. His conduct must reflect a moral and spiritual life, in harmony with his Christian faith. The Greek word "anastrophe," translated as "conduct," emphasizes how a person interacts and relates to others, encompassing behavior, lifestyle, and

character. The love (agape) that Timothy demonstrates must be unconditional and self-sacrificing, reflecting the fruit of the Spirit and prioritizing the well-being of others.

Timothy believed that faith must demonstrate strong trust and conviction in God and Jesus Christ, faithfulness in various situations, and an unwavering commitment to sound doctrine; finally, holiness (hagneia) demands moral purity, especially in thought and conduct, freedom from immoral acts, and the maintenance of pure motives. Paul emphasizes that although Timothy is still young (the Greek word “neotes” referred to someone under 40 years of age at that time), he must not allow others to look down on him because of his age, but rather through his exemplary character in these five aspects.(admin, 2025a) The concept of “tupos” (example) in this verse emphasizes the importance of pastoral leaders providing a living expression of biblical teaching through their words and actions.(Akpan & Nigeria, 2022)

This leadership demonstrates that role models can serve as examples for Generation Z. Setting an example in both words and actions is the standard that must be set for them, so that they recognize that youth is worthy of emulation. Conversely, being older does not automatically make one worthy of emulation; rather, the attitude of the heart of every leader is evident when they seek to be a role model for their peers.

The Relationship Between Timothy’s Leadership Values and the Characteristics of Generation Z

The qualities of Timothy’s leadership, as reflected in 1 Timothy 4:12, resonate strongly with the values and needs of Generation Z. Gen Z highly values authenticity in all things, including leadership.(Abioye, Isaac Ademola Fortunatus & Ademola, 2023) Timothy’s words, which are expected to be edifying and truthful, align with Gen Z’s desire for honest and transparent communication. They question whether faith truly transforms a person’s way of life; thus, leaders whose words align with reality will earn their trust. Furthermore, Gen-Z seeks leaders with integrity and ethical principles.(Purnomo, 2023, p. 46) Timothy’s conduct, which reflects a moral and spiritual life, as well as his blamelessness, provides a model of integrity that can address Gen-Z’s doubts regarding the inconsistency between leaders’ words and actions. Timothy, at a young age, was chosen to be a leader, meaning that Paul believed he had passed the stage where he was worthy of being a model of faith for the local congregation at that time.

Gen-Z also highly values inclusivity and empathy. Timothy’s unconditional and self-sacrificing love (agape), which prioritizes the well-being of others, can meet Gen-Z’s need for a caring leader capable of building an inclusive community. For God Himself possesses agape love, and every follower has the right to follow in His footsteps.(Ian H. McDonald, 1993, p. 103) They have a strong emotional connection with God and others, making leadership rooted in love highly relevant. Although Gen-Z demonstrates a religious spiritual approach.(admin, 2025b) Timothy’s strong faith (pistis) and commitment to sound doctrine. They are seeking something real and transformative in their faith, and Timothy’s steadfastness in faith can serve as an example of deep commitment. Finally, in a digital world filled with immoral content, Timothy’s emphasis on purity (hagneia) is crucial.

On the other hand, the profound example set by Timothy himself opens their eyes wide. Generation Z can become part of or be directly involved in the church to serve as a tangible example. Such exemplary leadership will shape the church's development in a meaningful way. (Diana et al., 2023) Action and speech must, of course, go hand in hand; neither can be neglected. Therefore, leadership values must first be instilled in every member of Generation Z, for one day they will become influential leaders of the future.

The Relevance of the Timothy Model at GBI Light of City

The principles of Timothy's leadership can be practically implemented at GBI Light of City to foster the spiritual maturity of Gen-Z members. Drawing on the mentoring relationship between Paul and Timothy, the church can establish a mentorship program that connects more spiritually mature church members with Gen-Z individuals. (Frits Octavianus Tatilu, 2022) . This program can provide personal guidance, support, and a lifestyle that aligns with Christian teachings. Gen-Z highly values guidance from adults they can trust. In addition, the church needs to encourage leaders and older members to consciously model Timothy's qualities in their daily lives. This can be emphasized in leadership training and church communications. (Octavia, 2025) Providing an authentic communication platform where Gen-Z members can ask questions and express doubts without feeling judged is also important. This aligns with the emphasis on words that are edifying and truthful.

Opportunities for service and community outreach can foster love and community engagement among Gen-Z. Meaningful service activities can connect them to Christian values in a practical way. The church also needs to offer in-depth Bible studies and discussions that encourage critical thinking and personal application of Scripture, thereby strengthening their faith. This ties into Timothy's commitment to sound doctrine. Finally, facilitating small groups that focus on accountability and promote moral purity in the digital age can help Gen-Z navigate the unique challenges they face

The Role of Pastors in the Spiritual Formation of Gen-Z

The spiritual formation of Gen-Z in Indonesia presents its own challenges and opportunities. One of the challenges is digital distraction. Timothy's emphasis on conduct and holiness can be taught as a way to navigate the digital world with integrity. (Banfatin & Rompa, 2022) The church needs to recognize the impact of social media on spiritual formation. Another challenge is skepticism toward church leadership. Leaders who exemplify Timothy's qualities—such as integrity and genuine care—can rebuild trust. Reports indicate issues with church leadership in Indonesia. Furthermore, the relativistic worldview prevalent among Gen-Z can be addressed by emphasizing sound doctrine and Timothy's steadfast faith.

However, there are also opportunities that can be capitalized on. Although it presents challenges, technology can also be utilized for ministry. Timothy's example can be shared through digital platforms. Gen-Z's desire for authentic community can be fulfilled by leaders who model Timothy's love and foster a genuine community within the church. The community that is built will produce quality leaders in the future.

Therefore, pastors must view these challenges and opportunities as preparation for the future to equip the upcoming Generation Z. Without the necessary step-by-step process for the youth in this church, there will be a significant setback in the church that is currently being prepared. (Telaumbanua, 2019) The model provided by Timothy is to be a proper example within the community they are building. In instilling the values needed by Generation Z, it is important for pastors to provide the right support and influence to each person who embodies the model set by the church.

The role of a pastor is not limited to delivering God's Word from the pulpit but also includes being a spiritual guide present in the lives of the congregation, particularly Generation Z. They need a leader who can accompany them, listen to their struggles, provide guidance, and demonstrate a life consistent with Christ's teachings. Such support can be realized through mentoring, small-group discipleship, leadership training, and providing opportunities for the younger generation to actively participate in church ministry. In this way, they do not merely become listeners to the Word but also undergo a process of character formation through the experience of serving alongside leaders who serve as role models.

Furthermore, a pastor's influence will grow stronger when he builds authentic relationships with Generation Z. This generation tends to value leaders who are willing to be present, open to dialogue, and understanding of their life realities more than leaders who merely give instructions. Therefore, pastors need to create a church environment that is safe, supportive, and fosters continuous growth in faith. When church leaders demonstrate integrity, humility, love, and faithfulness in ministry, Generation Z will emulate these values. Ultimately, the church will not only produce congregants who actively participate in spiritual activities but also give rise to a generation of Christian leaders who embody the character of Christ, are able to be a light in society, and pass on a culture of exemplary faith to the next generation.

Exemplifying Faith as a Form of Leadership for Gen Z

Exemplary faith must be the foundation upon which a leader's attitude is built. Generation Z is a unique generation; they demand not only *role models* but also that every leader provide the right kind of *example* for them to follow in their faith. Exemplary faith opens their eyes to see that leadership succeeds when one views Jesus as the absolute prerequisite for hope. The church is a place where people can come to know Christ; however, within the church is the body of Christ, which can help people come to know God even more deeply. (Peter Wagner, 1997) Therefore, the church today is predominantly made up of Gen Z members in its local congregations, who need a leadership style that is appropriate for them. Leadership is not merely about providing them with an expression of faith; it can help ensure that the church is not a place where they experience hurt, but rather a family. It is essential for the church to build strong relationships with its members. (Dully, 2021)

Previous generations served as advisors and mentors. The church must provide examples of quality leaders. (Sunarko, 2020) For Jesus is the model for everyone's faith within the church. Therefore, the church's role is to serve as a space for shaping the next generation—especially Generation Z, who will hold full control in the future.

Generation Z is a generation born and raised amid the development of digital technology, the rapid flow of information, and dynamic social change. These characteristics make them a generation that is critical, creative, open to change, and has a strong desire to find meaning in every aspect of life. (Moses Palmero Hasibuan, Antoni Manurung, 2022) However, behind all this potential, Generation Z also faces significant challenges, such as an identity crisis, social media pressure, a culture of instant gratification, and a decline in trust toward leaders who lack integrity. Therefore, leadership for Generation Z can no longer rely solely on power, position, or the ability to speak; rather, it must be built through a genuine example of life lived out in faith. From a Christian perspective, the most effective leadership is that which is rooted in the example of faith.

An example of faith is a form of leadership that demonstrates harmony between words, beliefs, and daily actions. A Christian leader not only teaches the values of God's Word but first lives them out in their personal life. This principle aligns with the Apostle Paul's advice to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12: "Be an example to the believers in your speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity." This verse emphasizes that leadership is not determined by age, but by the quality of one's character and the consistency of one's faith. For Generation Z, who tend to judge people based on their authenticity, setting an example is a far more influential means of leadership than mere instructions or advice.

Exemplary faith also reflects service-centered leadership. Jesus Christ is the prime example of a leader who leads through love, sacrifice, humility, and service to others. He did not use His authority to seek personal gain, but rather to build up, restore, and save humanity. This model of leadership is highly relevant to Generation Z, who value relationships that are equal, collaborative, and empathetic. Servant leaders will more easily gain trust because they are able to demonstrate genuine concern for the needs of others. (Nani et al., 2025) In the digital age, examples of faith must also be reflected in the use of technology and social media. Generation Z spends most of its time in digital spaces, so a leader's life is not only seen in direct interactions but also through their digital footprint. Christian leaders need to demonstrate integrity by using social media wisely, avoiding the spread of hate, misinformation, or speech that demeans others. Instead, digital media can be used to spread the values of love, hope, truth, and a spirit of mutual encouragement. When a leader is able to maintain consistency between their real-life and digital lives, their example of faith will gain greater credibility in the eyes of Generation Z.

Furthermore, this example of faith encourages Generation Z to become leaders who possess the moral courage to face the challenges of our time. They are called to uphold Christian values in the midst of a culture that often prioritizes moral relativism and self-interest. Leadership rooted in faith produces individuals who are honest, responsible, humble, self-disciplined, and courageous enough to stand up for the truth even in the face of external pressure. These values serve as a crucial foundation for shaping future leaders who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually and emotionally mature.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Timothy's leadership style, as described in 1 Timothy 4:12, offers a relevant and potentially impactful model for the spiritual growth of Generation Z at the GBI Light of City church. Timothy's leadership qualities—edifying words, exemplary conduct, self-sacrificing love, steadfast faith, and holiness—resonate with the values cherished by Gen Z, such as authenticity, integrity, empathy, and the need for moral guidance in the digital age. Practical implementation of the Timothy model at GBI Light of City could include an emphasis on pastors setting a good example for Generation Z. Additionally, there is a need to provide authentic communication platforms, create meaningful ministry opportunities, strengthen Bible study and faith formation, and support small groups for accountability. The church needs to address challenges such as digital distractions and skepticism toward leadership by actively exemplifying Timothy's qualities and capitalizing on opportunities such as technological engagement and Gen Z's desire for authentic community. The role of pastors in guiding Gen Z's spiritual growth. Further research can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of programs that adopt the Timothy leadership model within the specific context of GBI Light of City and to explore in greater depth the dynamics of Gen-Z spirituality in Indonesia.

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