

Generations Seeking God Together

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Lesson 1 - Generations Need Each Other

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Lesson 1 Generations Need Each Other

It is a natural human tendency to want to spend time with people who are in the same stage of life you are in. It only makes sense to go through life with other people who are going through the same issues. Church ministry often reflects that by grouping various ages together into age-segregated ministries like a youth group, 20s & 30s, group, senior ministry, etc. There is a lot of good that comes from fostering those relationships with people who are at the same place in life as you are.

If we are not careful, however, the generations can become too isolated from one another and when that happens there are a lot of good opportunities for growth, learning, and loving that are missed. If we are going to reflect our theme for the year, “Generations Seeking God Together” then it only makes sense that during the year we will spend more time with people in other stages of life than our own.

Every age has its own set of strengths and weaknesses.

What are some of the strengths that of our elderly Christians (things that come with age)?

What are some of the strengths of our young Christians (things associated with youth)?

What are things that get difficult as you age?

What are some things that are difficult when you are young?

After answering those four questions, what do you think about this statement – “When different ages get together our strengths and weaknesses balance out and we are stronger together than we are apart.”

The blessing of older Christians (Read Proverbs 2:1-11)

Who does this proverb say is giving this wisdom and who is receiving it?

- This is an older father giving wisdom to his son.

The father says in 2:2 that he can give wise teachings all day long but ultimately who is responsible for doing something with it?

The father wants to pass on his wisdom to his son but knows how hard it is to gain wisdom. It is going to take quite a bit of effort. Notice, the father uses 8 different verbs that the son is going to have to do between 2:1-2:4 in order to get the benefit of the father’s wisdom.

Who is it who ultimately gives wisdom (2:6)?

When generations seek God together, the older have a great opportunity to pass on their godly wisdom to the young. Wise counsel from the older generation to the younger generation has to ultimately come from God. Who is in a better position to pass that along than those whose walk with God spans a half century or more?

The blessing of younger Christians

But older Christians aren't the only ones with something to offer. Young people have many gifts and abilities as well and it is important that they find space to exercise their God-given gifts.

Read 1 John 2:14

What four positive things does John say about the children and young men?

There is a strength and an energy that comes with youth that can be contagious. If you spend time with young children it is amazing how much energy they have. As we age we lose some of that vitality but we can be encouraged by the strength and energy of our young people.

The church is made up of older, wiser Christians who can pass on faith and wisdom to the younger. The church is also made up of younger, energetic and strong Christians who are able to get the things done that some of our older Christians may no longer have the energy or strength to do. With all of that comes balance and mutual support and encouragement.

We need each other.

Application

How have you been impacted by someone of a different generation than your own?

What was it about them that made the difference?

How has God gifted you to impact someone of a generation other than your own?

Big question – what can you do or even will you do to make a difference in the lives of those who are not of your generation?

Lesson 2 – Age Means Nothing to God

Before we go any further in these lessons, let's put age in perspective.

Who are some people in the Bible who did things at very young and very old ages? Any guesses how old they were at the time?

Here are some examples. Feel free to have your group look up anyone else not listed here:

- Noah – 600 when the flood came
- Abraham's call – 75
- Jesus' disciples – in their early 20s
- Joash became king – 7
- Not in the Bible – Alexander the Great conquered the known world by age 32.

What does that tell us about how God views our "age" and "usability"?

What was the common factor driving the success of each of these people (except for Alexander the Great)?

The question is not are you old enough or too old for something. The question is what is God empowering you to do and when are you going to do it.

It is tempting to think that our usefulness to the kingdom depends upon our own strength and abilities. **Read Acts 17:28**

Where does the source of everything point back to?

Why is it important for us to realize that and not think that everything that happens is up to us and our power and ability?

This verse in Acts teaches us that in all things all of us, regardless of age, rely completely on the Lord.

There is a popular idea that retirement from a career means retirement from involvement in the life of the church. That is just not the case. The senior years can be some of our most productive. There is also a misconception that youth gives one a pass on service to God or involvement in the life of the church. We often expect the middle aged to carry on the life of the church but we should all be a part. This is all part of our generations seeking God together.

How do you see old and young come together to please God?

How might we do that better?

Last, time means nothing to God. **Read 2 Peter 3:8.** So age means nothing to God either.

How does age (both young and old) make some things more difficult?

The truth is, none of us are as strong as we think we are. So we must rely on God in everything and in every way.

Do you ever struggle to rely on God, trusting instead, in your own ability?

Exercise: If there are older members in the group, have them share some perspective on how they have grown to trust in God to provide as they have aged.

Question for the younger people: *What do you appreciate about what you just heard?*

If there aren't any younger people: *What do the rest of you appreciate about what you just heard? How might you spend more time with the younger generation, teaching them these kinds of things?*

Application

How do you feel God has gifted you for service in the kingdom despite your age (young or old)?

How might you use those gifts alongside other Christians for the serving God or others?

Lesson 3 - The responsibility of the older to the younger

The Bible makes it clear that older generations have responsibilities toward younger generations.

What do you think some of those responsibilities include?

We are going to look at a couple of things the Bible tells older Christians to do for younger Christians but first we have to talk about something that has to be in place before any of this will actually happen.

That thing is availability. If we aren't available to each other and can't or won't spend time with each other we won't have the opportunity to pass along the things God has called us to pass along.

What obstacles do you face toward being more available to the older generation (if you are young) or the younger generation (if you are older)?

So what obligations does the Bible talk about older Christians having toward young people?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9

What does Moses tell the older people they are supposed to do?

Is that being done well today? How might we do a better job or be more intentional about passing on faith to the next generations? (Imparting Faith has been a big help with that for Northwest but people still have to incorporate it into their family life).

What are the parents supposed to "impress" upon their children?

Commandments are important. The Bible is not a list of rules but the Bible does have rules in it and it is important that we know those rules and live by them. The system God put in place for that to happen are the older people (typically but not limited to parents) passing on faith to the younger.

For those who are younger, is it ever hard to receive that kind of instruction? If so, what makes it hard?

Also, what do you appreciate about those who take the time to pass on their knowledge of God and faith to you?

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4

These verses are particularly aimed at elders but they can certainly be said to the older generation that they are to shepherd the generations that follow.

What does it mean to shepherd someone?

If you are older, who is it God has placed "under your care" as Peter says and how do have you or will you guide them closer to God?

Peter says a few things that the older generation is not to do. They aren't to serve the younger because they must but because they are eager and willing to do it. They mustn't do it for their own gain but to give. They must not do it to be big shots, lording it over those under them, rather to be an example that others can follow.

Application

If someone followed your example where would it take them?

Would it take them closer to God or further?

How can we be sure our example will lead people closer to Christ and not push them away?

What does Peter say all this results in (5:4)?

We often think about the younger generation needing to serve the old but these verses remind us that older people have much to offer and need to serve others too. We never retire from being God's people or fulfilling God's purposes for our lives. In fact, we actually get much better at some of it with age.

Lesson 4 Responsibility of the younger to the older

Last week we concluded with 1 Peter 5:1-4. Let's pick up there and read **1 Peter 5:5-7**

The older generation can be the best role models, shepherding and serving the younger to the best of their ability but if the younger generation doesn't listen or submit to it then it won't do any good at all.

Notice, Peter actually tells the younger to submit to the older. Here is what that doesn't mean. This is not about who gets to pick the songs, the sermon style and everything else. He is saying that the young need to submit to the very leadership of the older that he describes in 5:1-4. We often think of submission in terms of submitting to someone else's preference. This is not what Peter is talking about. Peter is talking about submitting to someone's leadership and shepherding. There is a big difference.

What quality does Peter say it takes to be submissive (5:5)?

It is easy when you are young to think you don't need the old to lead you or shepherd you. You feel pretty bulletproof when you are young. Peter warns against that when he writes "God opposes the proud". You don't want to ever be in a position where God opposes you!

How do you think God opposes the proud?

Next, in 5:6, Peter tells them to not just be humble toward the old but for the young to also humble themselves to God.

What does Peter say God will do if we humble that?

So Paul says if you are proud God will oppose you but if you are humble God will "lift you up in due time".

What makes being humble difficult at times?

What do you think he means by "in due time"?

- It means when the time is right...it may not happen immediately but God will do it when God wants to do it. So be patient and trust God.

Last, what does Peter say the young need to do in 5:7?

How do you actually cast your anxiety upon the Lord?

Often this is done through prayer but it takes more than words. There are times we just have to let go of things we have no control over and give it all over to Jesus. In fact, if we were really

honest with ourselves we would admit that we have control over far less things than we think. Remember back to what Peter just said...don't be proud and have God oppose you. Be humble and allow God to lift you up at the right time!

How might humility actually help with anxiety?

- If we humble ourselves it takes the pressure off and puts the burden on God.
- That doesn't mean we stop trying. It means we realize ultimately the solution will come from God and not from ourselves.

Application

In what areas do you need to work on submitting to others?

In what areas is humility difficult for you?

Do you ever struggle with anxiety, how might these verses and handing it over to God help you deal with it?

Lesson 5 – How Can A Church Seek God?

What does it mean to seek God?

How do you believe the people who make up a church can seek God together?

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14

This is one of the most popular verses in the Old Testament because our society is so individualistic, wondering why God has planned for us personally. But if you read all four of those verses you recognize that these verses had a very important context. They weren't written to an individual.

Who were they written to and what was their dire situation?

- They were written to the Jews in exile. They had been torn from their homes and moved to a far away land. They lost their temple and lost their way. God is calling them back and says the way to find their way back to God is going to require that they do some serious **seeking**.

What kind of seeking does God say it is going to take to find Him?

- Seek with all of your heart

What sorts of things in your life have do you feel like you were seeking with all of your heart?

What was it about those things that made you seek like that?

Now, think about God...have you ever really sought God with all of your heart? If so, what is that like?

For the church to seek God together, we first have to realize just how desperately we need God. Most of us don't seek out helium on a daily basis but if you required it to breathe, you would make sure you had some ready! Ok, that is a ridiculous example but it makes the point and leads us to the question that may seem like an easy question but is still an important one to discuss together. Here it is,

Exactly why do we need God – list as many reasons as you can in a reasonable amount of time?

Life is 100% dependent upon God's willingness to sustain us. If you don't agree read Acts 12:23 and Acts 5:1-11. Here is how Paul said it to the people of Athens – **Read Acts 17:24-28**

Why does Paul say God made mankind (17:26-27)?

What couple of things does Paul say God provides for us that is essential to our survival?

Now, back to being a church and generations that seek God together. *How can we, as a church and as individuals really seek God together?*

Prayer - We can seek God in our prayers. When we do this our prayers turn from a laundry list of requests and thanks to seeing our prayers as approaching the throne of God with confidence.

Reading scripture – *How can reading scripture actually be seeking God?*

Congregational worship – As we assemble together as Christians and worship the Lord, we seek Him out.

The tension between God being close but still seeking Him out:

It is a strange thing because we know God is among His people and still He calls us to seek Him. It seems strange to us because we don't seek things that are already near. But Paul told the people of Athens that both God is near and God is to be sought out. God wants us to be people who seek, that is people who are actively pursuing a closer walk with the Lord. That takes time, effort, patience and a great love for God to be disciplined in doing that for the long haul.

Application

What, if anything, ever makes you hesitant to seek God with all your heart?

Sometimes we know there are things in our life God won't approve of and that to seek Him will mean getting rid of some of that. See **Hebrews 12:1**

Is there someone you know who might be helpful to seek God alongside: a friend, spouse, mentor, etc?

How might you have someone else encourage you in your pursuit of God?

Prayer – Pray that we will seek God with all of our heart and that we will throw everything aside so we can run to Jesus.

Lesson 6 – What Happens When You Find Him?

What happens when a church or a person or a LIFE group seeks God together and they find Him? Remember what God told the exiles in Jeremiah 29:13, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” God’s people were in a foreign land and God told Jeremiah to write them a letter to tell them that. That was a big deal for the Jews. They had lost their homes. They had lost their temple. They were tempted to lose their national identity. Jeremiah calls them back to searching for God, even when in a foreign land.

The first thing we have to cover here is that you can’t box God in and predict exactly what He is going to do in any given situation. In other words, we can’t say that if you really seek God that there is a whole list of things that are going to happen every time. We can look at scripture and examine how he responded to others who really sought him out and see how God responded. So what we cover in this lesson are general **principles** and not universal **promises**.

1 – God responds with grace

Who are some people in the Bible who went looking for God and/or Jesus and were received with grace?

When people really seek the Lord, He responds with grace. God doesn’t have to take us back when we stray but he does.

Why does God continue to take us back time and time again?

What would life be like if God was not a God of grace?

2 – Forgiveness of sins

Read 1 John 1:8-9

What does it take for God to forgive our sins?

Why is it important that we seek him for him to do that?

3 – Provision for your needs

Again, this is not a promise that if you seek God that he will fill your bank account. But here is what Jesus said about seeking God – **Read Matthew 6:33-34**

God will provide. *Can you think of anyone in the bible who really trusted God would provide if they just had faith?*

- Abraham – **Gen 22:8**

It is important that we recognize this does not mean we sit back and wait on God to do the providing. Abraham still had to go and try to offer up his son. We still have to do our best for the Lord and he will partner with us. Honestly, he will even partner with us at times when we fail but it is still important that we seek the Lord.

Read Hebrews 11:6

Again, this is not the “health and wealth Gospel” where you pray and God sends you a million dollars. That is not the kind of rewards we are after. First and foremost we are seeking a relationship with God. We don’t marry God for His money. We seek Him because he is our creator and sent his son to die for us on the cross.

What has God provided for you? How are you using it to glorify God?

Application

One of the biggest ways we can seek God together is to pray together. *What might a prayer seeking God sound like?*

Spend some time praying together that we can seek God with all of our hearts and that we can spend our lives drawing closer and closer to Him.