



REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Psalm 78:1-8

5:30, 9:15 & 11:00am Grace Church October 4-5, 2008

We Will Tell month

A lot has **changed** in just **3 generations!** But something that **remains constant** is **God** and **His Word** and how He **still uses people to reach** and affect other people, including the **next generation**. Ever since the days of the Old Testament, **God's plan** is for the **older generation** to reach the **next generation**. Today is no exception. In fact, reaching the next generation is **absolutely critical**.

Derek introduced me to a book called **No Perfect People Allowed** by **John Burke**. His book is a call to recognize the **difficult times** in which we live and **to not pronounce the last rites** on the next generation. Rather, he says that it's **construction time!** Jesus intends to **build His church** with the **next generation** just like He's always done.

But here's what it's **going to take**—churches that are willing to **do whatever** they need to do to reach them. We can't put our **heads in the sand** and expect that the next generation will **automatically come** through our doors. American pollster **George Barna** says, "Our goal cannot simply be a timid, powerless survival; it must be the role that Christ called the Church to play, that of a loving, authoritative, healing, and compelling influence upon the world."

We have evidence of **what happens** when the **church doesn't reach** the next generation. **England** averages about **7%** of the population in church and **Europe** lags **behind that** with **Sweden** at about **2%**. We're already seeing the **seeds** of that kind of **trend** in America. **Missing in many churches is the next generation.**

This past spring, I went to hear **Tony Campolo**, noted Christian author, speaker and **humorist**, speak at the **celebration** an Erie church's **historic anniversary**. He's in his 70's and he **looks over the audience** and said, "Where's the **next generation?** I got to tell you, you **old ladies** are **looking pretty good** to me these days. But unless you reach the next generation, you **won't make** the next 50 years."

Let me tell you, that's **not happening** at Grace. The **median age** of worshipers at Grace since our move, **not counting our guests**, is **47**. Since the move, the **median age of just our guests** is **36**. The **age group of 18 to 39** beats **all other ages combined 2 to 1!** God is bringing the next generation **to us** and with His help, we're going to make reaching the next generation a **major priority** at Grace.

One day I was cleaning out the **glove compartment** in my car and I found a **garage door opener** I didn't recognize. It **wasn't ours** and I had no idea how it got there. I can't throw stuff like that away. So about 11pm, I decided to ride around Millcreek **pushing the remote button** on any garage doors that I thought might be a **good candidate** to open—basically **people my kids knew** because they had **used my car**.

After about **an hour** of driving around, I decided to **return home** when I thought of this **1 last possibility**. So I drove there and I pushed the button. The **door began to go up** and the **opener light** went on. I hadn't quite **thought this whole thing through**, like, what if I find a door that works. Now what do I do? Let it **go up** or take it **back down**. It's still going to **make noise**.

Inside, this **couple was sleeping**. Panic **set in**. They're **empty nesters** and **nothing should be happening** to their garage door. A **light** inside the house **goes on** and out comes this guy kind of **armed to the teeth**. I'm saying, "**Sorry, it's me!** This is going to be kind of **hard to explain!**" In a few moments we were **laughing about it**.

Well, reaching the next generation **isn't like me** going around trying some **garage door options**. Reaching the next generation is a **moral imperative**, not a list of a number of ministry **options** that **might be nice**. At our **Annual Meeting** a few weeks ago, we **shared our vision** with the church as the **future comes** at us. I don't have time to develop the **1st two parts** today. It's the **3rd one** I want to deal with—**Prioritize future generations by mobilizing the mature to empower the young to love Jesus and lead the church**. Part of our vision at Grace is to **reach young people** for Christ.

We're at the **half-way point** of our "**We Will Tell**" effort at Grace. **We Will Tell** is a **venture** to raise a **large amount of money** towards the **cost** of our **relocation** to this **new mini-stry center**. Why a new ministry center? Because we're **ser-ious** about reaching more people. And it's really happening.

We've had **707 guests** since we opened our doors last Nov-ember. We've jumped nearly **300 in attendance**. Our 11:00am service is nearing **80%** capacity. We're overcrowd-ed in the **children's wing** at 11:00am. The **past 2 weeks**, people were **parking on the grass**, no parking spaces.

The **text** we chose for "**We Will Tell**" was **Psalm 78:4-7** almost **2 years ago**. We took the words "**We will tell**" right out of **verse 4**. I want to **revisit that text** today because it speaks to the **heart of our vision** to reach the **next genera-tion**. Let's read **verses 1-8** together.

This **Psalm** was written by **Asaph**. Asaph was a **musician** and his **musical family** was **1 of 3 families** given responsi-bility for **music and song** in the Temple (I Chron. 25:1-9). Asaph wrote **12** of the Psalms. **Psalm 78** is about his **vision** to reach the **next generation** so that they wouldn't make the **same mistakes** of past generations. So he says in **verse 1**, "People, **listen up!** I've got something **very important** to say to all Israel." He goes on in **verses 2-4**, "I've got a **strong message**. We can't fail to teach the next generation."

Asaph had at least **3 generations** in mind in **verses 3-4**. In **verse 3**, Asaph speaks about **his parents' generation**. **They told Asaph** about the Lord and His ways and com-mandments. Now **his generation** are **parents** in **verse 4**. They **have the truth** about God. They're not going to **hide it** from their children. They must **tell** the **next generation**.

You may not know this, but there's a **cooling down effect** in the **transfer of spiritual vitality** from generation to genera-tion. **Generation 1**—the generation that **finds the Lord** is really on fire for God. They're full of hunger and passion for **spiritual things**, sometimes overzealous. **Generation 2** comes along and, while they have a **spiritual sensitivity**, they don't seem to be characterized by the passion and drive for God **like their parents**. They're **warm** to spiritual things.

Then along comes **Generation 3**. Their parents kind of prod them along, but their **parents' faith** hasn't really become the **children's faith**. And **that** generation tends to be **cold**. There are exceptions to this, but that's the general pattern—from **hot to cold** in 3 generations. So we have to

keep the next generation **before us** at all times, to do **all we can** to **stimulate them** towards God and not let them **drift away**.

Speaking of the next generation, **ABC News** reports that a **record number** of babies were born in 2007—**4,315,000**—more than in **any previous year** in American history including **1957**. Signs are pointing to **another baby boom** in the U.S. It's interesting how the **article ends**. One **potential benefit** of another baby boom is that the **new boomers** will pay for the **old boomers social security**.

Well, **Asaph, how do you propose that we reach the next generation?** Asaph tells us **2 important ways to reach the next generation**.

1. Tell (vs. 4).

Look at **verse 4**. We're supposed to **tell** our children something. **What is it?** The **incredible things** God has done **in our lives** and **in the past**. Our kids need to know that **God is alive** and powerful and at work.

The **Old Testament** is a kind of "**show and tell**" book. Do they **still have** "show and tell" in **elementary school**? I used to **look forward** to show and tell. I was always trying to get **something impressive** to show. I had written to **Captain Midnight** for a special **secret decoder**. I knew **no other kid** had one. Something **finally came** in the mail. It was this **disappointing letter** from Captain Midnight telling me that he **ran out** of decoders. So what did I do? I **bragged** that I was the only kid that got a letter from Captain Midnight.

Listen, the Bible **isn't like** an **empty-promise letter** from **Captain Midnight**. It's **story after story** about the mighty works of God that our **children should know**. So when **God parted** the Jordan River, memorial stones were erected so that when their kids asked **what the stones meant**, Mom and Dad could **tell them** the incredible story (Josh. 4).

And when Israel would **celebrate the Passover** and the kids would ask **what that was all about**, Mom and Dad were to **tell the kids** how God brought Israel **out of Egypt** with a mighty hand (Ex. 12:26-27). And from **my early days**, my **parents** would read me **Bible stories** and show me pictures in the **story books** about God's works. My parents **told** me.

But **that was then**. Our kids need to **see evidences** of God at work **in the home** in which they live **now**. They need to **see love**. They need to be **part of prayers** and then **marvel** at the **answers**. They need to see **amazing things** happen as **families involve themselves** in ministry to the church and to **people outside** the church. There need to be **God stories** and **God sightings** going on in our homes. Our kids must **learn at an early age** that God **still works wonders** among us. And when the **neighbor kids** come over, they get to **see what God's up** to as well!

Friends, our homes need to be **environments** in which God is **able to do** some mighty things. We need to **draw that** to our **kids' attention** along with **what God did** while we were **growing up** and what God did **in the Bible**. Kids will not be attracted to a **wimpy God** and **hollow religion**.

Those of us who **have kids**, those of us who **teach kids**, those of us who are **around kids**—what are we **telling them**? Are we helping them to see **God's muscles**?

Asaph goes on. He says there's **something else** we must do for the **next generation**.

2. Teach (vss. 5-8).

Look at **verses 5-6**, “He appointed a law in Israel which He commanded our fathers to **teach** their children that the next generation might **know** them, the children yet un-born, and arise and **tell** them to their children.” God gave a **code of morality** by which He expected His people to live. The code is the **Scriptures**. And God says that it’s the **re-sponsibility** of each generation to **teach** the command-ments of God to the **next generation**.

Perhaps the **clearest example** of this is found in **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**, “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall **teach** them diligently to your children and shall **talk** of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.” God gave the **primary responsi-bility** to parents for **teaching** the commandments of God.

God didn’t have in mind a **formal classroom** setting. He wanted His commandments to be taught as a **lifestyle**, a **way of life**. The parents were to be **living in obedience** to the commandments of God and **as they lived them out, they’d coach** their children **in the commandments**.

The **reality is**—there’s **not much of this** going on in our **homes** today. Parents are **not teaching** the command-ments of the Lord—all the way from **walking by faith to loving relationships to biblical sex education to generosity to honesty to** not learning the **unholy ways** of the culture. The **best book** in the Bible for parents to teach their children **these things** is the book of **Proverbs**. It was written **expressly for** the next generation. A thorough **living out** of that book would **transform** most homes.

But **what have we done?** We’ve **transferred** parental life-style teaching of God’s commandments to the church. We’ve **hired people** to do that for almost **100 years**. We’ve done what American **manufacturing** has done—**outsourcing** to other countries. The home has **outsourced teaching** to the church. The **church** needs to teach the commandments. But as a **supplement** and in **partnership** with the home.

What happens if there’s a **breakdown** in the teaching? The rest of **Psalms 78** addresses that in the next **64 verses**. **They’ll walk away** from God and **suffer** some pretty **serious consequences** in life. We **can’t let** the next generation **tank!** We’ve got to do **all we can** to reach them—**tell** them that God **still shows** Himself mighty. And **teach** them how God wants them **to live** so that they can **set their hope** on God and not experience **needless pain**.

Conclusion

So, how does all this **tie together** for Grace? We’re going to **reach** the next generation. We’re going to do all we can to **help parents tell and teach** their kids. And we’re going to do all we can to make Grace an **inviting place** for young people to come to.

You might be wondering, “Well what’s that **going to do** for us **older folks?**” Good question. I’m going to ask you to **do all you can** to reach the next generation. I’ll tell you **why**— Judges **2:10**. It says of Israel, “And there **arose another** generation after them that **did not know** the LORD or the **work** that He had done for Israel.” Friends, do you know that the church is potentially **1 generation from extinction?** That **almost happened** to Israel!

I’m now in the “**older ranks**”. Yes, I’m in **denial**. When a **clerk** gives me a **senior citizens discount** without me saying anything, I get a little **miffed**. Yes, I’m a **senior**. We’re not going to **forget about the seniors!** We’re going to minister to **all ages** at Grace and beyond. But **my heart is to see this place crawling** with kids, teens, and 20’s. **Europe cannot happen here!!!**

I remember the day **Rose and Jack Switzer** came into my office 13 years ago. They were **about 70** and they said they wanted to make a special **financial donation** to the church. Do you know **what they gave?** The **big Worship Center screen** in the 38th Street church so we could have our **contemporary service**. They gave for the **needs of the next generation**. That was such a **great help**.

We **older people** may not like **all that the youth like** these days. When **my office** was in the **old church**, I got **loud music** from both directions—**below me** in the basement and to the **side of me** from the **Fellowship Hall**. The music is definitely **not my style**. But I was **excited** that they **wanted to be there** and **part of our faith community** and not **out in the streets** somewhere.

I have a couple of **children in their 20's**. They've let me know that the **music of my generation** is **not their music** in the church. We're **not going to reach** the next generation with the **music that I like**.

Do you see this **little book?** It's a **hymnal** printed in **1838**.

No music notes. Just **592 pages** of words. I bought it for **2 reasons**. I **like** old books. **And** I want those who want to **sing just the old hymns** to sing from this hymnal. **Guess what?** There are **only a few** we'd recognize. **Things change** and it's **usually to reach** the next generation. **Youth for Christ**, started by **Billy Graham** in the '40's, had a slogan, "**Geared to the times, anchored to the Rock**". To reach the next generation, we must **understand their culture without compromising the message**.

Two examples stand out to me at Grace. They didn't let the **differences in generations** affect them—**Grandma Harding** and **Dorothy and Dale Ross**. Their **trademark?** **Intergenerational mixing**. **Grandma Harding** died at 91 and the church was **full of young people** at her funeral. **Dale and Dorothy Ross** are now with the Lord. But where did they **hang out?** With the **young people**.

I want to tell you **why I'm in the ministry** today? When I was a **teenager**, **older people** in my church **paid attention** to me. They **encouraged** me. They **poured their lives** into me. I wish I had **time** to give you **their names** and some **stories**. The **same thing** has to **happen now**. I want to **embolden** and **empower** the older generation at Grace to **in-vest** themselves in the next generation. It's **not the time** to think retirement and **pull back**. You have a **wealth** of know-ledge and **experience** to teach our youth. **They need you!**

We're **bucking national trends** at Grace. The younger generation is **coming to us**. We have to **make more room** for them. We need to **position ourselves** more than ever to reach them! I don't know **how many generations are left** before the **Lord returns**, but I don't think it will be too **many**.

When you look at our staff, you're going to see a lot of youth. **It's for a reason**. We need to **reach the next generation!** You've seen some **big changes** at Grace in the last decade or so. **It's for a reason**. We need to **reach the next gener-ation!** We'll be making **more changes** in the future. **It's for a reason**. **To reach the next generation!** We moved to a **larger campus** last year. **It's for a reason**. **To reach the next generation!** We're asking everyone to **give generous-ly** to our "**We Will Tell**" capital fund effort. **It's for a rea-son**. **To reach the next generation!** I don't have a **lot of years left** in the ministry. I'm going to do **all I can** to pro-mote this vision. **It's for a reason**. **To reach the next generation!** I'm Al Detter and I **approve this message**.

Reaching the next generation can be **thrilling** or it can be **threatening**. Don't let it be a **threat!** Make it a **thrill** that God is **claiming young people** in a darkening world and **snatching them from the clutches** of the evil one.

Incredible things are happening at Grace **these days** and **all this month** we're going to talk about it. **"We Will Tell"** has **1 major reason**. It's not to build a **great church**. It's to build **great people**. That's what I'm **calling you to—building great people for God into the next generation**. That's **what this is all about!**