

Series: Being an Intergenerational Community (Old Testament Examples)
Sermon Text: Various-Critical OT Intergen Moments (Use **app** to get lesson/slides, ask questions)

In the book *“Intergenerational Christian Formation”* there’s this research group ironically called the Search Institute. They’ve been studying spiritual development for over 50 years, with a big focus on how intergenerational relationships help people grow in faith. You’ve heard us call this spiritual formation--the process of being shaped into Christ’s image through faith practices and community. Eugene Roehlkepartain from the Institute says: *“One key part of spiritual formation is connecting—linking yourself to communities, practices, narratives, beliefs, and traditions that give meaning to life across time.”* My parents’ stories shaped me, my grandparents shaped my parents, and now my influence shapes others (maybe) hopefully in positive ways.

If you’re younger, this might sound old-school, but growing up, family reunions were a big deal. Everyone showed up - grandmas, grandpas, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, tons of cousins - typically from all over. These gatherings tied us or reconnected us to our roots through family stories, traditions, and beliefs and practices. The old folks shared memories, and the kids listened wide-eyed. Adults chatted and competed with one another and passed down traditions to the teens who strutted around trying their best to show everyone they were the most important people there. Everyone was welcome, the quirky ones, the less fortunate ones, even those who struggled more than usual dealing with life’s challenges. We celebrated new babies and honored those nearing the end of their lives. And the food? Unforgettable.

Cindy recently shared (what I thought) was [a heartfelt article](#) with our intergen study team about family traditions and these few sentences by the author really played a tune on my heartstrings; *“When I think about the future, I realize that I am unlikely to meet most, if any, of my great-grandchildren. I will never be able to tell them individually about what Jesus means to me - or - how Christmas is all about His being born into the world as savior. But if I pass down to my children our family traditions.... my great-grandchildren will come to know what it’s all about.”* Real

intergenerational communities include everyone: kids, seniors, young adults, couples, widows, singles, parents, empty-nesters, teens, folks in crisis or folks battling addictions - all growing toward Christ's image together. The stories we share, the traditions and practices we weave together provides a tapestry that connects generations and shapes lives to know what it's all about.

The most effective way to foster this kind of spiritual formation and to understand faith narratives and practices is by living them out together. Through *“linking ourselves to this faith community, it's practices, narratives, beliefs, and traditions we give meaning to our spiritual lives across time”* we live out and share our faith experiences and connect more deeply to growing our relationship with Christ together. An example of living this out is something Tim taught me recently; it's an Old Testament Hebrew concept called the Shema (Hebrew for hear). Like most Old Testament words, it's more than a command to listen. Shema is an action-oriented word emphasizing not only to hear but also to obey through action. At Shema's core is listening to obey because you love God and serve Him with all you have, including the relationships that God inserts into your life. Kind of like children, obey your parents in the Lord because this is right.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, the opening words of Moses is this call to *“Hear O Israel the Lord our God, The Lord Is One”* conveying to both listen and do what they are about to hear--that TEACHING and MODELING and EXPERIENCING GOD with your kids and grandkids is of the Lord. Deuteronomy 6 was a practical guide for our ancestral parents and the Jewish community to weave this truth into everyday life: talking, living together, and using reminders like feasts to celebrate God's providence and mighty acts which Bill will cover next week. Things like this keep the covenant with God and one another alive for every generation. Another passage is Psalm 78:1-8. It exemplifies for us the retelling of God's acts in Israel's history and suggests we must embody these stories and immerse our kids in them, so they experience the hope that is in God as we model for them remembering His works and following His commands. It stresses how shared narratives shape faith across ages, especially in critical moments.

Let's consider a few critical moments from the Old Testament where God called all the generations to be present and participate.

- Moses after gathering all the generations together, always gave this command to “*hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*” - like for his farewell speech which is likely the whole book of Deuteronomy but specifically in Deuteronomy 29, where he assembled everyone from elder leaders to the youngest children, even foreigners living in their camps stood together to enter into God's covenant as they entered the promised land without him. These “gatherings” became the tradition to share experiences and embrace the faith of their ancestors.
- Joshua, after Jericho's fall, gathered all the generations together to renew the covenant and read the law (Joshua 8:35). There wasn't a word that Moses commanded that Joshua didn't read before all of Israel, and the women and the little ones and even the sojourners who lived among them. Joshua, before his death (24:15) gathered all the generations of Israel for his final words at Shechem, and challenged them to make a choice, saying to them like “*Hear O Israel*” (24:2) and “*Thus saith the Lord*” (24:14-15) serve the One True God who has faithfully provided for them or serve the pagan gods of your neighbors that has infiltrated your hearts, he said; “*But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*”. But before the challenge, Joshua recounted the history of God's faithfulness to Israel, reminding them of how God delivered their ancestors from idolatry and brought them out of Egypt.
- King Jehoshaphat, facing a coalition of invaders, assembled all the families to pray: “*Lord we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on You*” (2 Chronicles 20). God replied through a prophet: “*Don't fear; the battle is mine*” and caused the coalition of invading forces to turn and war on each other. I wonder, “*How often have any of us ever felt this way, helpless in our own critical moments, not knowing what to do?*” *Do we gather our people in our tough times or go*

at it alone? Should we really post an “unspoken” prayer request, or should we assemble ourselves, share our crisis and allow God to minister to and through all the generations for everyone's good and spiritual growth and for God to become visceral and experienced and glorified? Can you see these as opposing behaviors--gathering or avoiding? Some of us have personally observed that this makes or breaks our faith or maybe even someone else's. After being exiled in literal Babylon for several generations, Israel was finally back home but morale was low, and they were spiritually far from their foundational roots because of mingling with Babylonian influences and idol gods.

- Ezra and some others saw the time as a critical moment. He gathered everyone like a huge family reunion and read God's word from the first five books all day (Nehemiah 8). No fancy speeches like Lincoln's riveting Gettysburg address or JFK's powerful “ask not” discourse, not MLK's eloquent “*I have a dream*”, just a simple dose of reading truth from the word of God. Reminding all the generations of people all that God has faithfully provided and of all His mighty works. And they listened together intently, reconnecting to their historical narratives and recommitting to God that sparked a fantastic spiritual formation as a whole and unified community of God's people.

In critical moments, God's people unite like family to pray, renew faith, and hear from God. That's the church today: all ages, backgrounds, tribes, and nations bound by Christ (Revelation 7:9) and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This mirrors the Trinity's fellowship, called *koinonia*. Like the Shema, *koinonia* implies obedience through action, participating with the gospel together. Living out what was seen and heard, sharing blessings, and building deep bonds with Christ and each other. 1 John 1:3 says, “*That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship (koinonia) with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ.*” *Koinonia* fuses the idea of knowing with sharing (e.g., our possessions, our experiences, our life, ourselves WITH one another). We're not perfect. I, like a lot of you, understand it's difficult to be obedient to this. I used to be chief of not sharing my life, but maturing in faith means ditching old habits and

growing together in community. The beauty of taking steps together is that some grow faster than others and in weakness others strength is made perfect as we carry one another along.

Dr. Holly Allen, from the book *“Intergenerational Christian Formation”* (this series’ basis) says, *“As the Holy Spirit restores God’s image in the community and its members, sin’s isolating effects fade, and both individuals and the group move toward wholeness. Maturing in Christ’s image lets all ages grow personally and relationally.”* We can all see that age-segregated ministries have pros, but we also need to acknowledge the cons. And we’re definitely not discouraging peer to peer relationships, but intergenerational interactions better fuel spiritual growth. Words like *“family and community”* and virtues like *“koinonia and Shema”* are core for us here at Landmark. Our faith family has been supported by spiritual formation through intergenerational conversations and efforts by some of us for decades. Last year, Brandon and I pushed for our leaders to focus on this as a cultural issue for the future of this faith family. This series is meant to show that now is our critical moment to *“HEAR”* actively, to partner, and to participate in building God's kingdom in this more excellent way.

I read [an article by David Mathis](#) on disciple-making’s costs that had a useful paragraph: *“In the end, disciple-making is costly because it demands continuous giving — giving time, giving energy, giving attention, taking initiative, making sacrifices, facing opposition, losing privacy, embracing obscurity, even shedding tears. Disciple-making means not just sharing the gospel but sharing our own selves (1 Thessalonians 2:8) gladly spending and being spent for the souls of others (2 Corinthians 12:15). It means giving, giving, giving.”* Apostle Paul quotes Jesus directly in his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus emphasizing the importance of giving generously saying, *“It’s more blessed to give than receive”* (Acts 20:35). On our behalf, Mathis continues; *“And so the hearts of Jesus’ disciples, in our labors to disciple others, we’re learning to say; ‘It makes me happier, for you to have my time, my energy, my attention, my initiative than for me to keep them to myself.’”*

Let me close here. A simple survey question in Allen’s book got my attention...Kids were asked what adult and senior adult ministry looked like in their

congregation. One of them honestly said, *“I don’t have any idea what they do.”* I wondered how our kids would answer? I wonder how some of our adults would answer if the question was given to them about youth discipleship? The answers speak to the point of how well integrated generationally we are in our relationships. On that note, I chatted with Kayden recently about his intergenerational relationships. He said *“Obviously I’m closer to some older people than others. Overall, he felt connected enough to most folks - regardless of age - to share his life and ask questions about theirs.”* That’s koinonia’s appeal, and we are blessed with it here. I think it’s part of the overall appeal to most of us and to a lot of visitors who stick around. Still, if you answered the questions I wondered about a second ago truthfully, you know we have to improve at intentional intergenerational culture building for sustainable healthy spiritual formation. It’ll cost effort, time, energy, initiative, sacrifices, reprioritizing, facing opposition, losing privacy, obscurity, maybe even tears. Is it worth it? We think absolutely, and we hope you will think so too! We’d like you to contemplate and explore the benefits an integrated generational culture would have on our church family’s spiritual formation. Maybe ask yourself: 1) *In what ways are you “linked” to this faith community...its practices, narratives, beliefs, and traditions?* 2) *How is this faith family giving “meaning” to your spiritual life?* 3) *What personal sacrifices am I willing to make to actively participate in building an intentional intergenerational community?* How ever you answer these questions, be encouraged to share your answers and your concerns and ask your own questions. Then remember around here, we take our steps together.

Sunday to Monday Connection:

- **Question:** See above
- **Next Step:** See above
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

Quotes related to this passage:

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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- <https://ourworldindata.org/>
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- David Kinnaman, Mark Matlock, and Aly Hawkins, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019).
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- Messianic Jewish Publishers, *Celebrations of the Bible: A Messianic Children’s Curriculum*, ed. Lin Johnson (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books A division of Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2004).
- Daniel L. Switzer, *Train Up a Child: Successful Parenting for the Next Generation* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007).