

Series: Being an Intergenerational Community (Old Testament Examples)

Sermon Text: Psalm 71 Passing Down Our Faith (Use **app** to get lesson/slides, ask questions)

Today, we're exploring the treasure of passing down our faith across generations. On our resource table in the back is the September issue of Table Talk Magazine. Those little booklets can really deepen your understanding of all things theology, and this issue, especially toward our series on a biblical call for intergenerational Christian formation. R.C. Sproul taught that, "God initiates the relationship with humanity through His sovereign grace, which is a free, unmerited favor (or gift) that overcomes human sinfulness and resistance, leading to faith". Grace bridges the gap between God Himself and His creation, in particular - people, emphasizing that God seeks them out before they seek Him. It's by grace God even reveals Himself and guides our steps through His providence. Grace shines brightest in salvation – Jesus laying down His life for His friends, sacrificing by paying our debt with His life so we can respond to God in faith. Isn't that just the best thing to pass down to our kids!!

Passing down the faith through generations is a faithful response to God's grace and His design for intergenerational faith families. None of this is random; it's God's choice. Our faith starts with His grace, which isn't just - "enough" – it has power and delivers results= God's grace has power to build generations like He did with Israel's 12 tribes (Numbers 1-2). His covenants wrapped everyone up in intergenerational communal families – men, women, kids, elders, babies, even unborn generations. Where spiritual formation is born and it's God's choice that we be, about passing down our faith - through stories, teachings, and relationships so every generation, from children to elders, grow together in Christ.

Let's see how God's plan for faith ripples through families and nations. Telling the story of God's faithfulness is like one person's faith dropping into water and rippling out, wave after wave after wave. shaping families and nations for generations throughout history and God's grace holds it all together so that no one that God is seeking is left out. This grace doesn't just save individuals - it builds communities across generations. Through Abraham's faith, God promised descendants that became the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 17:7; Numbers 1-2). God's

work and mighty acts of providence were passed from family to family to generations of families and finally to generations of a whole nation of God's people.

Some personal acts of passing faith down include Hannah's dedication of her longed-for son Samuel to God and a passed down faith that rippled through his mentorship with Eli, Moses-Jethro, Elijah-Elisha, David-Saul, Ruth-Naomi. Young Josiah, only eight, when he by God's Grace led Israel as a faithful King. In 2 Chronicles 34:3 it says he; "began to seek the God of his father David." All these Old Testament stories show how passing down the faith impacts a generation and shapes families and nations for God's glory. In them we witness how faith provokes obedience that impacts future generations. Their traditions and practices flow into New Testament generations. The author of Hebrews dedicated a whole chapter to these examples for their generation to follow, exemplified perfectly by Jesus. We'll make those connections in part II of this intergenerational series coming early next year.

Modeling and passing down faith is a vital part of our own inheritance. Paul encourages Timothy who is experiencing opposition to such practices saying, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." (2 Timothy 2).

Mentoring faith is the act of sharing an historical legacy of belief, an historical love for God, and an historical obedience to His Word. It's about creating a spiritual environment where next generations are more likely to receive and respond to God's gracious gift of faith. This ensures the continuity of the covenant family and the ongoing witness of God's work in the world that opposes this with all its heart, all its soul, all its mind and all its strength. Have we not discovered this in our Revelation studies? By leaping into the past, we can see the future.

Okay, you know how, sometimes when you read a passage from the Bible, you just develop a kinship to it. Studying through some of these scriptures for this series, ***Psalm 71*** is one of those for me. I suppose it's because it strikes the age stage that I've broken the plane on. The writer of this Psalm is unknown, but many believe it was King David late in his life. The Psalmist starts by saying he's always found his safety and hope in God, ever since he was a young boy. He says: ***In you, O Lord, do I take refuge... you are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.*** It's a beautiful picture of a life lived with God and Him at the center. But then, as he's gotten older, he gets real personal with God. He prays: ***Do not cast me off in the time of my old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent.*** He's pleading, "God, stick with me, I'm old and I'm tired." Remember a couple weeks ago when I quoted David Mathis; "It makes me happier, for you to have my time, my energy, my attention, my initiative than for me to keep them to myself." I believe this is the heart of the Psalmist and should be ours as he's saying: ***Even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.***

It's what connects us all as God's family, young and old. It's the kind of continuity we see in Old Testament Israel. It's the kind of continuity we see in the early church. It's the continuity of an intergenerational family of God where everyone plays a role and they're played up and down and side to side, where older and younger people can learn from each other and breathe new life into our church for generations to come. It's not just a good idea; it's a biblical model. It's what will keep our family strong, and hopefully it's what will raise up the next pastors and leaders of this church. Psalm 71 ends with a triumphant note: ***And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long.*** It's a reminder that no matter what we face, our ultimate hope is in God, and we proclaim it together across generations. Those of us in this older genre (Picture), "Can we say we have the same diligence, stubbornness even as this Psalmist (71) to talk of God's righteous help all the day long even in our older age?".

We've talked about God's design for intergenerational faith, now let's see how God's Power in Intergenerational Relationships Delivers Results. One of our

reference books for this series is called, *“Faith For Exiles: 5 Ways For A New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon.”* In this book by Matlock & Kinneman; Barna research group studied young adults (ages 18-29) who grew up in faithful church attendance. They found out what made their faith last. I suppose it’s a bit bittersweet but their studies show only about 10-20% of churches foster intergenerational ties. Because of this they discovered 70-75% of youth bail from church after high school. They found that only a small group - 10% of those young adults (18-29) whom they call *“Resilient Disciples”* are still truly connected to their faith and their church. And guess what was the biggest reason for their strong faith and persistence in attendance through their teen and adult years? You guessed it: Meaningful, Intergenerational Relationships! The research showed that nearly all of these *“Resilient Disciples”* had close relationships with non-family adults in the church while growing up. On the other hand, the numbers for young adults who drifted away from church were much less relationally connected intergenerationally.

I wonder, *“Is it important to you, to see people come to know Jesus and then stick with the faith their whole lives?”* Based on their research, Kinnaman and Matlock argue that biblical, intergenerational relationships must be a top priority for reaching and keeping our youth in the faith throughout young adulthood. But it won't be easy. Our *“Digital Babylon”* style culture thrives on dividing us. We face challenges and oppositions, and we have our work cut out for us. Statistically here are a few challenges we face:

- **Aging Trend:** Research from organizations like Barna Group and Faith Communities these days shows that the average age of religious leaders has been increasing for decades. For example, the average clergy age rose from 50 in 2000 to 57 in 2020
- **Succession Crisis:** This aging trend is leading to concerns about a “succession crisis” in many denominations, as a large number of older pastors are approaching retirement with fewer younger leaders prepared to take their place.
- **Individualism:** A lot of people today think their spiritual life is a private thing, something they can and should do on their own. Empire is all for this divisive isolating belief, but the Bible shows us that faith is meant to be lived out in community.

- **Stereotypes:** The different generations have a lot of preconceived notions about each other. Younger people often feel older generations don't listen and de-legitimize their youth, while older people can feel dismissed as outdated by younger people. Language is a huge barrier in this process.

These are the facts we must face and consider. When isolation and mistrust are norms, Kinneman and Matlock say, *“Forge meaningful and Intergenerational Relationships.”* The idea is reciprocal discipleship. It's not just about older people teaching younger ones--it's about a two-way street of learning and growing. Forging a culture where everyone is both mentor and learner is the goal. A key part in this is engaging with new ideas, having meaningful conversations and bridging the gap between generations.

Now that we've talked about God's design for intergenerational faith, and the power of intergenerational relationships, let's get practical and discuss best practices for passing down the faith. Kinnaman & Matlock in *“Faith for Exiles”* put it perfectly: *“We'd better be ready to admit that we need the next generation of exiles just as much as we hope they sense the need for us.”* They give 5 practices for building an intergenerational culture of following Jesus.

1. **Experience intimacy with Jesus.** In a society where identity is often tied to self-curation and personal branding, resilient disciples find their core identity in a deep, personal relationship with Jesus. This means moving beyond a surface-level understanding or mere “religious clutter” to find joy and connection with Christ.
2. **Develop muscles of cultural discernment.** Younger generations spend far more time on media and screens than on church activities. This practice involves learning how to critically engage with culture and filter out the constant narratives and messages of the world, allowing the Christian story to remain prominent.
3. **Forge meaningful intergenerational relationships.** Many young people feel isolated and mistrustful of institutions and authority. Resilient disciples cultivate deep, family-like relationships with older believers who can serve as honest mentors and guides.
4. **Train for vocational discipleship.** Rather than compartmentalizing faith, this practice encourages young people to live out their discipleship in all areas of life, including their ambitions and careers. It grounds their motivation and purpose by integrating their work and life's calling with their faith.
5. **Engage in countercultural mission.** In a culture that often promotes entitlement and self-centeredness, resilient disciples are characterized by a

selfless, countercultural approach to mission. This practice encourages them to look outward and serve others in the way of Jesus

In conclusion, building intergenerational relationships may stretch us, but it's a stretch worth making to strengthen our faith family. We're like a garden where faith grows. By sharing stories, wisdom, and experiences across ages, we nurture a vibrant faith that shapes our church family into this (family tree pic) for generations. One of the many things I've noticed here in 25 years is that the next generation pays attention. Lemme ask you this, and you don't have to be a great theologian like R.C.Sproul to figure this out: "What if we skip all this or even continue to not prioritize it more highly? What if we join together and embrace it - fueled by grace and God's righteous help?" I look around and I see several families here who were here as children themselves. Think about the importance of these interactions in your own journey of spiritual formation. Think about how you might contribute to this new vibrancy? How might these moments inspire your faith and make you feel a part of something larger? We've spent the last several weeks exploring the Old Testament gatherings in critical moments and feasts and OT examples of passing down faith. I've found them truly inspiring, I hope they've been just as meaningful for you. They shape not just who we are today, but who we'll become tomorrow. Taking steps like this, it's necessary we take them together.

Sunday to Monday Connection: Psalm 71 ends with a triumphant note: "And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long." It's a reminder that no matter what we face, our ultimate hope is in God, and we proclaim it together across generations.

- **Question:** How much of God's righteous help does each of us miss out on when we only interact with others that are the same age, have the same likes and experiences?
- **Next Step:** With curiosity and humility, ask someone at least 15 years younger or older here at Landmark, how they experience God helping them.
- **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!):

1. Is celebration important, and is it important to you?

2. What do you celebrate, how often, and who is typically included? Share some stories.

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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- 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).
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