

Series: The Benefits of Intergenerational Spiritual Formation

Sermon Text: Psalm 23

Title: Intergenerational Community Sermon 1 of 4

BIG IDEA: Our lives are a shared journey following Christ from infancy through death.

(**App** to get lesson/slides, ask questions. Color Pg)

Good morning church family, I'm Tim Gauci, one of the leaders here at Landmark. It's good to see your faces and enjoy your company.

We just came out of the church season of Advent, the month leading up to Christmas, where we as God's people anticipate and long for our Lord to come. And God did not disappoint! A child was born, the savior, the long awaited messiah, Jesus Christ! At long last, at just the right time, the creator God of the universe came to us as a child, a fully human little bundle of squeaks and cries, of pudgy legs rolls and poop explosions, ready to experience all of what it's like to be one of us. As we start the new year, we turn our attention, looking forward to life with God with and in his family, and what some of the benefits are in his community.

Sermon wise, we've got a three lane highway this year, as we:

1. journey through the gospel of Matthew,
2. pick up where we left off in Revelation,
3. and sprinkled through this year, intergenerational community.

What a year we've got planned!

I get to kick off this year with four weeks on the benefits of different stages of life that we experience as an intergenerational community: childhood, adulthood, old age, and end of life. Now, I realize that there is no nice way of putting "old age." We could say, elderly, but no one likes that, and "elder" gets confusing with our church structure... how about seniors; or geriatric (ew, gross, too medical). I feel like I'm digging the hole deeper here... "golden years" is too close to Golden Girls; what about retirement age, that constantly changes; how about debility, decrepitude (ouch, that one's just mean)... thesaurus.com is not helping me out

here. I do want to point out that there is a reason why we in America don't really have an honorable way to describe old age, but you'll have to wait till week three for that. So let's stick with old age for now.

And one last bit of set up, we will be in **Psalm 23** for these four weeks, as we make our way through this mini series... if you want to turn there now with me. If you want to join me in memorizing this Psalm, there's only 6 verses and we will be spending 4 weeks in it. If you want, you can read it with me right now to kick start the learning process.

- 1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
- 2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.*
- 3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
- 4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
- 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*
- 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So how are children, [and for our mini series, let's bracket the age range from newborn to 13 years old]... how are children a benefit to the whole church?*

Why are children so important to the church body as a whole? Jesus didn't have to come into this world as a baby, he could have shown up as an adult, ready to gather disciples and proclaim the good news of the gospel. We just came out of Advent, singing and teaching on the birth of baby Jesus, so clearly, childhood is quite important to God. **But how are children important? What is the benefit of having children in our community?**

This is a huge question, and there is no way we can fully do it justice in the time we have this morning. So let's narrow the question down a bit by asking Psalm 23 to give us some clues. And for those who would like a road map for this mini series, here's how we will break down Psalm 23 for our four weeks:

- Verses 1, 2, and 3 are for children
- Verse 4 is for adults

- Verse 5 is for old age, and
- Verse 6 is for end of life.

Psalm 23 is far greater and way more complex than what we are utilizing it for this month, but it's a fabulous scriptural anchor point for our studies, as it spans the entirety of our life cycle.

So, without further ado, let's play around in Psalm 23, verses 1-3.

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

The Lord guides, leads, protects us. He keeps us alive and watches over us. There are plenty of stories and videos about how foolish sheep are. And we laugh, because it's funny. In fact, the older we get the more painful we laugh, because we realize that we are still prone to making silly choices. Truth hurts sometimes. And in a very real sense, we are all God's children, so let the parallels hit home today. What is it like to be a child? Do you remember? Do you remember that part of all of our experience of childhood is to be needy, dependent on others? A baby's only defense against the harsh realities of this world are its cries. "I have needs," the cry goes, "Someone help me!" And what lovely sounds these cries make at 3 o'clock in the morning. A good parent, imitating God, provides for the child. Children need, they are dependent on others, they lack the skills necessary to keep themselves alive. And so, a good parent shepherds their child, making sure that their needs are taken care of.

2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

To be a child is to be vulnerable. The momma bear knows this truth. Momma bear is fearsome in her own right, but when you feel the earth trembling as she gallops to defend her cubs, you know you're not long for this world. Children are weak, not having the strength to stand up against threats to their safety. God knows this, that's why he makes us lie down in green pastures. "Stay right here child, I'll handle this." God knows where to take us, where those green pastures are; he also knows when to press onward, when to rest, when to lie down. Another part of a child's vulnerability is that they are not in control. The developing mind and heart and body of a child is a marvelous thing to witness. Precious and special are a

baby's first steps, and later on those steps become awkward when their legs grow faster than the rest of their body. But a good parent, like our Heavenly Father, leads their child beside still waters... not too much or too little to handle. Children are susceptible to forces beyond their comprehension. Certain waters are toxic, dangerous. "Don't drink that water," the shepherd says, "trust me, I'll take you to where I know the water is safe for drinking."

3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

God restores my soul... He restores my soul. What does it feel like to be restored... to have your soul restored? I remember one Christmas morning, I was 5 or 6 years old. It was still pitch black outside, like 5 am or something, and I slowly crept downstairs from my bedroom to find the presents just begging to be opened. And off to the side, my eyes moving slowly, straining to make out what the clump of shadows could be. My parents got me my first bicycle! It was blue and had a kickstand, and I swear it had these cool flame decals on it. My soul was restored! My mom and dad knew me through and through. And later on, when they took me out into the neighborhood, with the wind blowing through my hair (this is before the helmet law mind you), my soul was restored! I was free! I was as free as my 5 year old heart could fathom. Within the loving watchful gaze of our heavenly Father, his children are free to wonder, to be creative and curious, to explore his world. And in the strong and powerful arms of their parents, the child can safely have their time of innocence. "My dad is strong," says the little boy to his friend. And in those mighty arms of daddy, there is no fear. Good parents, like God, lead their children in healthy ways of living. Under the careful watch of mommy, children begin to associate bad smells with disgust, learning to clean it up or keep their distance. Mother teaches healthy relational skills too... how to get along with the other kids, how to take turns, how to be patient, delay gratification, and to help out around the house. And God is proud of his kids too. There's no one quite like me, or you, and God designed us that way. Each person is given the divine spark in such a way that no one else bears the Creator's image quite like you. God wanted you, desired to have you, enjoyed making you, and enjoys you now, just the way you are.

Last week, Dave highlighted some of our biblical giants of the faith: Noah, and Moses, and King David, and the apostle Peter... All who messed up in profoundly human ways, yet God never stopped loving them, never casting them out of his family or his presence. No wonder He invites and leads us on paths of righteousness, for his namesake. For the child, anything is possible, the border between fantasy and reality is paper thin. All of us are born into this world with profound fear and boundless wonder. Which is why when the nightmares wake us up at night, as a child, we run and jump into our parent's bed, nestling into warmth and safety. And when those nightmares hit as grown ups, we've got our heavenly Father inviting us to look up at the blanket of stars in the night sky, comforting us with his creation.

So what benefit do children bring to our church family?

So far, we've talked about children and their stage of life bringing:

- Dependence: needy, helpless, lack of skills
- Vulnerability: weak, having no control, susceptible
- Great fear and wonder: curious, creative, believing anything is possible

All of these character traits, all these attributes of children, in themselves are not all that beneficial. But when they are seen as avenues for how God loves and cares for HIS children, they reveal the character of God in beautiful ways.

In **Exodus 34:6-7**, God declares himself to be, *"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

Psalms 23:1-3 reveals that ALL of God's children are to respond to our heavenly Father in ways that resemble the stage of children... We are to come to God, our heavenly Father needy, trusting, teachable, vulnerable, full of wonder and curiosity... And by doing so, we live humble lives, and also showcase the character

of God to be: Sustaining, Patient, Loving, Knowledgeable, Kind, Wise, Protective, Possessive, Marvelous.

I'd say that is pretty beneficial, wouldn't you?

But there's another dimension to all this as well... I've been highlighting the vertical dimension, the up and down, God and his creation, Heavenly Father, and humanity. There's a horizontal dimension that is worth mentioning as well... the human to human interaction dimension. All that we have talked about has been based on the foundational declaration that every human is made in God's image, meaning that children are fully in God's image. They are not deficient [or incomplete] in their image bearing nature, God is not waiting for them to grow up more fully in order to bear his image. This truth, evidenced in Christ, our Savior, coming to us in such a way that he too was a baby and a child (and absolutely fully God in human form) has crazy big ramifications! In a very real sense, because every human on planet earth bears God's image, We, as part of God's family representing him to the world, are obligated and encouraged to treat others, especially those we see as different from ourselves, AS fellow image bearers, WITHOUT [first] needing to change them.

[Going back to children now...]

Children are not simply future adults. As we will see in week four, God knows the day and hour of our death, and death is no respecter of age, stage, or situation. All this truth presents an overwhelming avalanche of evidence to us as God's family to be about the work of honoring others, to value our fellow image bearer as we value God, for the other person IS the very image of God. God values and honors children, enjoying their natural tendencies to be dependent, vulnerable and full of fear and wonder. Therefore, let us take our cues from God's loving character about how to respond to him in childlike faith, as well as how we are to treat our fellow image bearers whom God loves just like he loves you. Psalm 23 and Exodus 34 encourage and remind us to be loving, kind, protective, patient, gracious, honoring,

dignifying. And children are remarkable reminders of this beautiful truth. What a marvelous benefit they are to our whole church family.

Would you pray with me?

And remember, wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you need not work through anything alone. Reach out and let us help!

Sunday to Monday Connection:

- **Question:** Where in your daily life is God inviting you to stop relying on yourself and instead come to Him with childlike dependence and trust?
- **Step:** Within Psalm 23, Tim reminded us that God shepherds us through every stage of life—and today we were invited to see childhood as a gift to the whole church. Through children we see God’s gentleness and wisdom. They remind us that staying under the protection of their caretakers is closely related to us staying close to our heavenly Father.
- **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!):

- What makes it hard for adults to live dependently on God?
- How would our lives change if we treated others, especially those different from us, as full image bearers of Christ without trying to fix them, first?

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)

- The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016)