

Series: The Benefits of Intergenerational Spiritual Formation

Sermon Text: Psalm 23

Title: Intergenerational Community Sermon 2 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)

Hello again church family, it's good to see your faces and to be with you week after week, which is a really good opportunity to move beyond acquaintances.

We are 2 weeks into our 4 week mini series on intergenerational community, focusing on what the benefits are for having each age and stage with us...

Q: Why is it good for our community to have children with us;

Q: What benefits do adults bring our community

Q: What benefits do our old age folks bring,

Q: and finally, what benefit do those at the end of life bring to our community?

Last week we counted the benefits of having our children with us in our community, and the rewards are enormous!

Here are the three take aways from last week if you missed them:

1. Children let us catch a glimpse of God's character and how he parents each one of us in loving kindness and gracious patience.
2. Children remind us that we need to come to God in humility, as his needy, vulnerable and curious kids.

3. Children showcase that every single person, no matter how different they seem, bear God's image, so we are to treat others with honor and dignity.

This week, we are focussing on adults and the benefit they bring to our intergenerational community.

For this, like last week, we will be anchored in Psalm 23, so you can turn there now if you want. And if you are planning to memorize with me, you can say it with me, as it will be on the screen.

- 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.*

Last week, we spent time in verse 1 through 3...

Now that our focus is on adults, we get to sit with just one verse... verse 4. Psalm 23 might be the most famous Psalm of all time, and rightly so. As we are realizing, this psalm covers the entirety of our lives and experiences, it speaks into our lives truth, reality, and ultimately comfort... Psalm 23 speaks of a God who is always with us, from beginning to end, a God who meets us at every stage of our lives and treats us with dignity and honor... A God who treats us like his children, "made in his image." And verse 4 is at the very center of the psalm... if Psalm 23 was a book, it would fold in half right at verse 4. That is no coincidence. Verse 4 is also the center of the poem, it's the central idea, the most important point if you will.

If you want to track what I'm talking about, look on your phone or in your physical bible. You can see that there are two major visual breaks in the psalm: in between verses 3 and 4, and between verses 4 and 5. This is intentional, and we will get to the importance of this in a minute.

So let's cozy up to verse 4 and find out what it has to tell us about why adults are so beneficial for our intergenerational community.

*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.*

Boy, for one verse, it sure does take up a lot of lines on the page, right? This is the writer's way of slowing us, the reader, down. Let's walk through it together.

Welcome to adulthood right? What happened to all the nice stuff like, “God is my shepherd, God takes care of us, lays us down in nice green pastures and still waters, and restores us?” Adulthood doesn’t sound like any fun. It sounds serious, scary, like real heavy stuff. It sounds like if I’m not careful, I’ll get in real big trouble. And actually, that’s all true. If you steal from your neighbor or get in a physical fight as a child, you might get in trouble, probably get grounded or maybe have to pay back what you stole. As an adult, if you steal or get in a fist fight, you could get into legal and financial trouble, get a restraining order put on you, or even go to jail. And all that stuff stays with you... it’s hard to clear your name and your reputation. Consequences seem to grow up too. Your actions matter as an adult in ways they didn’t before. And all of this is a weird tension and reality when you throw in our current cultural idea of adolescence.

Our adolescent years, a term that showed up in literature in the early 1900’s and gained academic awareness and acceptance in the 1940’s, was a foreign concept to our biblical writers, both Old Testament and New. But for our purposes this month, we can think of adolescence, mostly our teenage years, as a stage within adulthood where we are being encouraged to act like and strive to be adults, but without fully adult consequences. Does that all make sense? I didn’t want to skip over a very common cultural age stage that we are all familiar with. But we must move on. Whatever images and experiences this “valley of the shadow of death” brings up for you, they are scary, difficult, something that you didn’t desire to go through. This valley of the shadow of death evokes fear. Fear has always been part of our lives because there’s always been danger and threats to our wellbeing in our lives. In fact, not to feel fear, dread, terror, or scared at the appropriate and right times would be foolish. I worked at the V.A. hospital listening to Vietnam vets share some of their stories overseas, and helping them process and cope with parts of

their lives. Were they afraid when they experienced the dangers and violence and horrors of war? There is much in this life where fear is the appropriate response. Nowadays, I work with folks who are close to dying. As I listen to their stories, fear of dying, fear of the unknown, fear of suffering, pain and a million other things is common. And as I listen to my people's stories and experiences and fears, I find myself asking the same question... How do you cope with your fears? How do you manage to keep on going with all these fears? What's your secret?

If tears in their eyes haven't come yet, this question usually brings them.

I'll ask you all the same question... How do you get through your valley of the shadow of death? How do you cope with an unfair and brutal world that kicks you when you're down? I mean, suffering is a universal reality for people everywhere, especially God's people. How do you keep going when the evils of this world chase you down, grab ahold of you and drag you through the mud of trauma? Or when the good life you worked so hard for gets swept away like a sand castle on the shoreline? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. What was that!? You will fear no evil!? How is this possible?

And now we come to the heart of the Psalm, to the heart of our mini series, to the heart of life itself...

You are with me... God! You are with me!

Once I hear my Vietnam Vets tell me this, once I hear my hospice folks tell me that God is with them, I know most of my job is done. "God is with me, Tim... I'm gonna be alright." This doesn't mean everything is all better, that from here on out, life is gonna be rose petals and ice cream. But when God is with you, you're in his arms. Evil and the brokenness of this world will not have the final word. When God is with you, you can endure. You can make it, you can thrive and flourish, you

can have peace and joy. When God is with you, you are resilient. And maybe you picked up on this, but in the psalm, verse 4 is the first time the writer directly speaks to God. Let's look at Psalm 23 up on the screen real quick.

IT went from, "The Lord," and "He makes... He leads...He guides... He restores" to "YOU are with me... YOUR rod and staff, they comfort me."

The audience changed, now the writer is speaking to God himself. This is huge! This is the key to a flourishing life friends. Not only is God with you, but you can address him directly! Gone are the days of being passively directed by God and his creation. That time of childhood has passed, you're an adult now! Now, just like the consequences of your actions have grown up and gotten bigger. So God's invitation to partner with him has grown. No more Tonka trucks and hot wheels and baby dolls... those were merely shadows of what God has in store.

Now as an adult, God gives you more responsibility, more power, more say over how you want to join him in bringing more of heaven to earth. And as he gives you more, he also creates space in your relationship with him to pursue him. You are ready to now pursue God, you are ready to take an active role in the relationship you have with him and his people. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, **FOR YOU ARE WITH ME!** For the adult now can say, "I notice you now, I see your activity in my life a bit more, I can respond now to your presence in my life in ways that previously I couldn't."

And here's the beautiful yet hard truth... God desires you to partner with him to bring more of heaven to earth. But he also wants you to partner with him to bring more of heaven into yourself. Yikes, Tim! That sounds like really hard work. I

know it is church family. Pretty much all of the world's wisdom literature leans into the reality that the road to maturity is to first and foremost work on thyself. Verse 4 is an invitation to let the light of truth, God's reality, shine forth into the cracks and crevasses of your soul, and be courageous to let God begin to speak words of healing into your life.

You want to talk about walking through the valley of the shadow of death...

So often God reveals parts of ourselves that we do not like, that we are not proud of... this is where shame hides. These parts of you are where you feel the most alone, rejected and isolated. So often God gently shows us the mask we wear to fool everyone, to fool ourselves, that we use to shield ourselves from pain and shame. To partner with God as he meddles in your soul can be terrifying. To allow God into the tender places of your history, your pain, your fears, your experiences is a great act of bravery. But, the psalmist writes, You are with me. God is with you. He knows you through and through. Do you remember? He makes you lie down in green pastures, he leads you beside still waters. Do you remember? He restores your soul! He leads you in paths of righteousness for his namesake! Do you remember?

Friends, God seems to require your participation in your own healing and restoration. He does not simply want to heal you... he wants you to share in the victory of a transformed life he is actively working in you! This is a double victory for God and for us! What better way to swallow up sin and death, what better way to heal trauma and restore our brokenness than to make us part of the solution? As we partner with God, as we participate in God's work in the world and in our own

lives, the more his tools of protecting against evil and guiding life onward, his rod and his staff will comfort us!

What benefit do adults bring to our intergenerational community?

Those in the stage of adulthood showcase the ongoing restorative work of our heavenly Father, in each of our lives and in the world. Where children benefit our intergenerational community by keeping us humble in a receptive posture to God, Adults benefit us all by actively grasping onto both parts of God's restorative work in creation, both external and internal.

Where might God be inviting you to partner with him in this world? In yourself? Don't be surprised when you find that God tends to weave both of those answers together. Be comforted by this even, for God knows you through and through. He loves and delights in you. And what also brings me peace and comfort is that our church family, those here, sitting next to you, God has placed in your life, in my life, to partner with us and God to bring even more healing and restoration.

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 might God be inviting you to actively partner with Him right now?
- **Next Step:** This week we reflected on the gift adults bring to an intergenerational community. Adulthood is often where life becomes heavier. This is where adults contribute to the community of faith, bringing a testimony that has walked through fear, grief, failure, and pain, and has learned to cling not just to God's promises, but to God Himself. Adults show us that maturity is not avoiding suffering, but to lean on God through it. An intergenerational church needs this witness. A faith that says, "I have walked the valley, and God was with me."
- **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. How has your understanding of God changed as you've walked through hardship or loss?
2. How can different generations in our church support one another as we walk through valleys together?

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)