

Next Generation

Next 45 Series, January 23/24 | Joshua 5:2-12
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HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE NEXT GENERATION?

Ronald Reagan teased the next generation.

In October of 1984 President Reagan was running for re-election against former Vice-President Walter Mondale. President Reagan was 73 years old at the time.

Debate had swirled for weeks over whether the President was too old to function as President.

The debate's moderator asked President Reagan a question about national security. He noted that, during the Cuban Missile Crisis President, Kennedy had gotten very little sleep and asked if under similar circumstances President Reagan would still be able to function.

In response, President Reagan said, "I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." Classic. Even Mondale laughed.

In some ways, we idolize the next generation.

As the 19th century turned into the 20th century, we began treating youth as a time of innocence, freedom, exploration, and preparation. Instead of young people immediately transitioning into the work force, we started protecting them.

By the 1950s, teenagers and young adults were establishing their own culture.

Young people developed a distinctive style of dress and their own language. To borrow the language of previous generations—they defined "cool."

Marketers saw that they were spending money; they tried to define youthfulness, piggyback on its appeal, and get young people to buy their products.

Then they realized that we all wanted to appear "young" and "cool," so they started marketing the youth culture to us all.¹

Sometimes, we wring our hands about the next generation.

Lately, we worry that our young people are turning their brains to jelly with digital media.

A generation ago we worried that our kids and teenagers were too protected.

Before that we worried that latchkey kids would be the death of civilization.

We've always worried about our young people. Young people have always seemed dangerous and different, and the future of society has always seemed to dangle by a dangerous thread.

¹ Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, "The Glocalization of Youth Culture," *Journal of Consumer Research*, September 2006, pp. 231-233.

A poem from Mesopotamia written 4,000 years ago already looked back fondly to the “good old days.” It read: “Once upon a time, there was no snake, there was no scorpion.../The whole world, the people in unison/To [the god] Enlil in one tongue gave praise.”²

How do YOU feel about the next generation?

JOSHUA RAISED UP THE NEXT GENERATION

Let’s set the scene.

For 400 years, the children of Israel languished in slavery in Egypt.

Then God delivered his people through a leader, Moses, and a series of miracles.

The Israelites set out for the land God had promised to their ancestors.

Now, 40 years later, the nation had grown. A new generation had risen up. They had a new leader, Moses’ apprentice, Joshua.

They were camped in the Promised Land, ready to begin taking possession of it.

Joshua circumcised a new generation of Israelites in Joshua 5:2-3.

At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.” So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.

We see Joshua emerging as a very active leader at this point, after serving as a second chair leader alongside of Moses for most of the 40-year wilderness experience.

Joshua was even a gifted military leader and administrator, and now we see him emerge as a profoundly spiritual leader as well.

God affirmed Joshua as his chosen servant and leader for the people. God parted the waters of the Jordan River so that the Israelites could walk across on dry ground, God was making a way for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. It served as a message to the people of Canaan that God was powerful and working. God was also reminding a new generation of his miraculous power. Plus, God was setting up Joshua as his favored servant, as Moses had been.

Then Joshua made sure that the people affirmed that they too belonged to the Lord.

According to the Lord’s command, Joshua commissioned flint knives for the circumcision. Flint knives were made of hard, sharpened stone. In the days of Joshua, metal tools had become common, but stone knives harkened back to an older day. Flint knives were used for important ceremonies. In a sense, Joshua was marking the serious nature of the moment by using the most precious tools available.

The Lord said that this was the second time Israel had been circumcised. Commentators debate what this means exactly, but it seems to indicate that Israelites had been circumcised from the time of Abraham right up until they left Egypt. As the people left Egypt, they stopped the practice for some reason in the wilderness. Now, as they entered the Promised Land, this would be a second time that Israel began circumcising its males as a sign of God’s covenant with them and of their covenant with him. The Lord was their God, and they belonged to him.

² https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-we-cant-stop-longing-for-the-good-old-days-11608958860?st=obvxtco32123h9m&reflink=article_email_share

The previous generations had almost entirely passed away as we learn in Joshua 5:4-7.

And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

After leaving Egypt, the people of Israel repeatedly grumbled against God, disobeyed him, and even chose to worship idols.

A defining moment came when the Lord directed Moses to send spies into the Promised Land.

The spies came back with reports of great abundance but powerful people. The majority of the spies reported that the Canaanites were so large and powerful that there would be no way to defeat them. Only Joshua and Caleb said that, since the Lord was with them, they could certainly win the battle and take the land.

The Lord was ready to destroy the people of Israel for their faithlessness. However, the Lord ultimately decided that the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years, until every man of fighting age (20 years or older), except Joshua and Caleb, had died.

After 40 years of wandering, the previous generation was entirely gone except for Joshua and Caleb. An entirely new generation was ready to enter and take the Promised Land.

God used this moment to “roll away” the “reproach of Egypt” in Joshua 5:8-9.

When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

It took a while for the men of Israel to recover so that they were ready to travel and fight.

As they healed, God helped them to understand what was happening. This moment and their circumcision meant that God had removed or “rolled away” the reproach of Egypt.

What does that mean?

“Reproach” means “shame or disgrace done to us.” God was removing some dishonor Egypt had done to the Israelites. We don’t know exactly what it was, but we can guess.

The Egyptians took away their sovereignty when they made the people of Israel slaves. They commanded their lives and deaths for a very long time. Is that the reproach God rolled away?

The Egyptians practiced circumcision for the sake of cleanliness. In all likelihood, their parents and grandparents had been circumcised by Egyptians according to Egyptian standards. Did it mean that God removed the shame of being circumcised by a pagan for the wrong reasons?

The Hebrew slaves did not practice circumcision in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt. Had the Egyptians so traumatized them that it caused them to forget who they were as God’s people?

Whatever the case, now the people of Israel were sealed with the sign of their covenant with God by their own people. The reproach of Egypt was gone.

They named the place where it happened “Gilgal,” which means “rolling.” They called the place where they camped “rolling” because the Lord had rolled away the reproach of Egypt.

God used Joshua to raise up the next generation at a critical moment for Israel.

It was a critical moment, because this is the moment we fear in terms of faith. We always say that faith is just one generation away from disappearing altogether. We wonder if there will be anyone of faith left when we’re gone.

The entire previous generation was gone, and the future of God’s covenant people could be seen as hanging in the balance from a human point of view. Would the children of Israel continue to have their faith or not?

Joshua led the next generation in this moment to adopt the faith of their ancestors. In some ways, they had a more vibrant faith than their parents or grandparents had possessed.

Joshua raised up the next generation.

THE NEXT GENERATION IS DIFFICULT TO DEFINE

“The Next Generation” should refer to the next disciple we make.

We should be thinking about generations primarily as a concept in disciple-making.

If I am a disciple and I make another disciple, the disciple I make is the next generation.

“The Next Generation” could refer to kids and students.

We always want our children and teenagers to have faith.

If you look at the history of this church, we have consistently provided excellent ministries to children and students. It has always been a reason why people have come to Valley—they found us to be a church that had something critical to offer their children and teenagers.

As we start the Next 45 years in the life of our church, we will continue to be a church with excellent ministries to children and students.

“The Next Generation” could refer to young adults.

For decades, the young-adult years have been the ones when people wrestled with their faith, sometimes stepped away from that faith, and then came back to that faith.

For the past couple of decades, young adults have been the ones whose changing values and beliefs have consistently taken them farther and farther away from the church.

What young adults in our community will do with faith is an open question.

But the place of young adults here at Valley is not an open question. It is critical that we reach young adults, help them to become multiplying disciples themselves, and release them to do the great things for God that they are capable of doing.

The very concept of “the next generation” is always rolling.

At one time, Baby Boomers were the “next generation,” and they challenged the world around them in every way. We can’t think of Baby Boomers, though, as the next generation any longer.

I come from Generation X. When we were coming of age, other generations worried about us. But it’s kind of impossible to call my generation “the next generation” anymore. I turned 50 this past year and started receiving AARP’s magazine. I still think of myself as “young,” but I can’t really say that I’m young or the next generation any longer if I’m getting stuff from AARP.

Does that mean that Millennials are “the next generation?” Millennials are those who were born roughly between 1980 and 2000. Are Millennials “the next generation?” I’ve got bad news for you, Millennials. You’re starting to turn 40 this year! In just a short decade, you’ll be receiving AARP magazine too!

Generation Z is already beginning to come of age. They will once again redefine what it means to be the next generation. It’s always a moving target.

What, then, are we talking about?

In some ways, we’re talking about it all. We’re talking about the next generation of disciples, kids, students, Generation Z, and the Millennials.

In some ways we’re talking specifically about young adults, those who are roughly 20 to roughly 40 years old right now.

We have to reach the next generation, and we need to prioritize them right now.

THE NEXT GENERATION REQUIRES EFFORT

The effort required to reach the next generation makes me think back to my days as a youth pastor.

When I was a youth pastor, I took my youth groups to youth camp each summer.

The centerpiece of youth camp was always evening worship. Each night we’d gather together to sing and hear the Gospel.

Of course, we’d sing youth-camp types of songs, mostly loud praise choruses.

The church I served when I was a youth pastor didn’t do praise choruses.

I assumed that the teenagers probably hated worship back home and thought of camp as a chance to try something more to their liking.

I was surprised one night when one of the teenagers slid up next to me while we were singing and said, ‘Man, what I wouldn’t give for a verse of ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ right now.’”

Truthfully, I sympathized with him. It was how I felt at the time, multiple decades ago.

Then in the late 1990s, I had an experienced that changed my mind.

I went to a children’s ministry conference.

We sang mostly praise choruses, but they felt different to me.

It’s the conference where I met the chorus, “Lord, I Life Your Name on High.”

Everyone was singing. I finally realized that this was the music that appealed to more people in my generation.

When I came back from that conference, I slowly became a proponent of worshipping in ways that felt natural to my generation.

Last year I was reminded that music continues to change. It's constantly changing!

One of the radio stations I listen to started playing music by Billie Eilish.

The song was so different from anything I expected that it caught my attention.

I grew up loving 80s music. Nothing about Billie Eilish felt familiar to me and my musical tastes.

I could barely understand a word she was singing.

It made me realize that music was changing again.

And that means that eventually music in the church will change again.

And when it changes this time, it's not going to feel familiar to me.

And I will face a question: will I fight the change the way people fought when I wanted the music of my generation sung in church? Or will I choose the next generation the way someone chose my generation when we were the next big thing?

Dr. Rick points out that change becomes more difficult as we age.

Dr. Rick is the fictional star of a series of commercials from Progressive Insurance.

Dr. Rick has a consulting practice for new homeowners. He says that when we buy a new home, we inevitably turn into our parents. He has the difficult job of helping us overcome that tendency.

There's an episode where he has an intervention with a new homeowner who has covered her entire sofa with decorative pillows. "You have nowhere to sit," he says as he throws pillows off the sofa and onto the floor.

There's an episode where he takes the crew into a home-improvement store. While shopping, two guys see a young man with a blue mohawk walk by. They want to say something, but Dr. Rick quietly reminds them, "We all see it ..."

One of my favorites is the episode when he is helping the group figure out how to open a pdf attachment on an email. And that's so funny, because adapting to new technology really does become more difficult as we age.

Change becomes more difficult as we age!

What is the question?

Sometimes when we face questions of innovation and change, we think that we're dealing with questions of right and wrong. Sometimes we are!

Far more often, we're dealing with matters of taste. It's regrettable that sometimes we make what we like and don't like a matter of right and wrong and try to force our tastes on others.

Don't get me wrong. We aren't the first culprits in history. In the Middle Ages, when musicians added harmonies to Gregorian Chant, people said that they were making the devil's music.

When Luther began writing hymns in the 1500s, other Protestants objected that singing anything other than the Psalms was heresy!

In the 1700s, when the Wesley brothers wrote many of our favorite hymns, they were accused of compromising music and theology.

In the 1800s, the authors of many of our other favorite hymns were accused of ruining church music by taking the focus away from God.

Then, in the early 1900s, the use of pianos was condemned as a dangerous nod to jazz clubs.

So whatever kind of music you like, trust me—someone thinks you're dangerously wrong.

The question should never be what we like or don't like. The question we really face is—**Will we do the difficult work required to reach the next generation?**

THE NEXT GENERATION MAY LEAD THE WAY

In Joshua 5:10-12, the next generation led the way.

While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

They reached the Promised Land during the first month of the festival year.

They observed the Passover and renewed practices that their parents had forsaken.

Not only that, but they were camped in the land their parents and grandparents had refused to take. In a relatively short period of time and with God's help, they overwhelmed the military forces of the people their parents and grandparents had feared. While they didn't do everything that God told them, they did take possession of much of the Promised Land for the first time ever in their history.

And after God sustained them miraculously for 40 years in the wilderness, they started to feed themselves again.

This was an extraordinary generation!

You might call this Israel's "Scooby Doo" moment.

Scooby Doo is an animated series about a group of teenagers and their Great Dane, Scooby Doo.

The teenagers have their own language, sayings like: "Zoinks!", "Jinkies!", and "Ruh-roh!"

They're always on their way somewhere, and they always run into mysteries to solve. It makes you wonder where the adults are who should be solving these mysteries. But that's the point. Scooby-Doo reminds us that teenagers, young adults, and the next generation are always capable of more than we give them credit for.

Because one of the most famous lines from the show is the one that comes at the end of almost every episode, when the kids solve the crime and unmask the criminal. The culprit almost always says, "And I would have gotten away with it too, if it weren't for you meddling kids and your dog!"

The next generation isn't just a group we have to reach because our survival depends on it. It's a group that we need to unleash because sometimes young people save the day!

The first foreign missionaries from the United States were young adults.

Adoniram Judson, his wife Ann, and three other people set sail in 1812 on a journey that led them to evangelize Burma.

Judson symbolizes everything that's good and worrisome about the next generation.

Judson grew up a Christian but walked away from his faith as a young adult.

However, he was still a young adult when he came to his senses, realized the value of eternal life, and realized how imperative it was to share that faith with those who didn't have it.

And he was still a young adult when he began to study for the ministry himself.

And he was still a young adult when he and his friends persuaded his association to start the first foreign missionary society in this country.

And he was still a young adult when he raised the funds to send the first missionaries.

And he was only 25 years old when he sailed for the foreign mission field for the rest of his life.

Sometimes it's the next generation that does the biggest, boldest things for God.

Let's determine to do what we must to add more kids, students, and young adults to our congregation.