

# Biblical Support for Intergenerational Ministry

When the specific definitions of intergenerationality are taken into consideration, the rationale behind IG methods includes theological and practical imperatives. In this article, I will begin by providing the theological support, which stems from biblical illustrations and mandates that indicate intergenerationality was normative for the Christian faith community.

While many agree that the New Testament church models age-inclusion, they fail to follow this model in church education. Bulls (2007) states, "While almost every church promotes and funds, and encourages a youth and children's ministry based on a Youth or Children's pastor who is responsible for the discipleship of the youth and children in the Church, one question must be asked: Is this a biblical approach?" (p. 2). Roberto (2007a) states, "The call for one generation to share its faith and story with future generations is deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition....From the first century onward, Christian faith communities have been intergenerational communities" (p. 5).

Allen (2009) emphasizes the presence of intergenerationality in the early Christian community:

God's directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming. In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. (p. 5)

Kirk (2003) reinforces this idea, stating, "When God set His people Israel in order, he placed each individual within a family, each family within a tribe, and each tribe within the nation. No

generation was excluded, no child left out, no older person put aside. Within each tribe were the components of family; they were community" (p. 17). The annual feasts and celebrations of the Israelite community included all generations. The core purpose of the feasts was to remind the Israelites what God had done for them in ages past. Allen states, "As children and teens danced, sang, ate, listened to the stories, and asked questions, they came to know who they were and who they were to be" (p. 5). Kirk states, "When God created the family He wanted an expression of Himself; He wanted His image to be reproduced in unity and harmony. God Himself is community. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, relationally communing and flowing together" (p. 17). God created mankind in the image of the triune God; we were created to live in community.

Intergenerational community exists throughout the Old and New Testament. Ross (2007) states, "The term 'generations' itself is often used in Scripture, but more importantly, Scripture reveals God's desire that people of one generation would tell of His works to the next generation, and that people of every generation would unite to share the Good News of Jesus Christ" (p. 27). Psalm 145:4 states, "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (NASB). Joel 1:3 states, "Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation" and 2:16-17 states, "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the Bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber...." Regarding Joshua 4:4-8, 21-22, Kirk (2003) states, "The nation was being shown by God how to make time and space for the children to ask questions, and how to carry their godly heritage into the generations to come. The children had been a part of the troubles that the nation had experienced, but they were also a part of the victories" (p. 9). Not only did God ordain for His commands, promises, and faithfulness to pass from one generation to the next through telling and teaching, but also through an experiential component. In regards to

Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Kirk states, "This, I believe, is the environment in which God intended our children, and ourselves, to learn – within the context of life itself, and in relationship with others" (p. 9).

Allen (2009) acknowledges the early church as a "multigenerational entity" (p. 5). She states, "All generations met together, worshiping, breaking bread, praying together, and ministering to one another in the context of the home" (p. 5, see Acts 2:46-47; 4:32-35; 16:31-34). Children and teens were also present in other settings. Lydia's entire household was baptized in Acts 16:33, and the jailer's entire household was baptized in Acts 16:33. Eutychus, a youth, fell out of a window after falling asleep while listening to Paul preach in Acts 20:7-12. Acts 21:5 states, "When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another." The children were present to send off Paul and joined with their parents in prayer to the Almighty for this man whom they loved so dearly. It is also clear children and youth were present in the body as the New Testament letters were read. For example, Paul directly addresses the children in Ephesians 6:1-3, stating, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph 6:1). In Colossians 3:20-21, Paul addresses the children again in reference to obedience to their parents. Generations listened together to the encouragements, teachings, and exhortations of Paul, Peter, and John. Together, generations heard of the profound mystery of God, the living hope that they had as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection, and God's eternal purpose for their salvation. Children, youth, and adults together learned of their great God and rejoiced as one family of believers.

Ross (2007) and Kirk (2003) also cite the many intergenerational relationships modeled in Scripture. The relationship between Samuel and Eli in the Old Testament is one wonderful example of intergenerational relationships. Kirk states,

Samuel needed Eli, and Eli needed Samuel. They had lived together in a trusting and loving relationship that opened the door for the voice of God to be clearly heard and understood, not only by Eli but by all Israel...What a time that was, when a child was taught, seen, heard, respected and nurtured in the house of God not just by his peers but by the man of God" (p. 10).

The relationships between Elijah and Elisha, Naomi and Ruth, and Paul and Timothy also provide examples of deep intergenerational relationships. In 1 Timothy 5:1-3, Paul shares his concern for all generations when he instructed Timothy to care for both younger and older men and women. He also taught how families of widows must care for their parents and grandparents in 1 Timothy 5:4, and Paul explained the role of older women training younger women in Titus 2:3-5.

Ross (2007) cites other biblical themes that point to intergenerationality as well, including references to the church as "the family of God," "the body of Christ," and "the community of believers" (p. 27, see Rm 8:14-17, 12:4-6; Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 12). In her dissertation work, Ross found that "IM leaders within the congregations that were researched believed that IM provided an opportunity for their members to both better understand and live out these biblical themes" (p. 27). The theological imperative is clear for churches to model and cherish the intergenerational themes illustrated in Scripture as the unified body of Christ to the glory of God.

## Reference

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