

Charismatic Baby Boomer Pastor Says It's Time to Let the Younger Generation Run for Christ

As a charismatic pastor of Baby Boomer age, Bob Sawvelle has gradually come to a stark revelation: The younger people in his congregation at Passion Church in Tucson, Arizona—and throughout the world—can make a difference for Christ.

And it's time to start allowing them to do so, he says.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Lord impressed upon Sawvelle's heart a crucial ideal for every believer: understanding their identity in Christ. A disciple of Global Awakening's Randy Clark, Sawvelle addresses this in huge detail in his 2019 book *Fulfill Your Dreams: Seize the Day and Be Extraordinary*.

All believers, Sawvelle says—from age 1 to 101—want to know they are loved, accepted and forgiven by God. And he sees it as his job to make sure that happens.

But the younger generation, the future of the church, needs to hear this all-important message more than anyone else, Sawvelle says. It became increasingly critical following the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown, as well as a nation-dividing election and the ugly issue of racism that the enemy used to put lies in the hearts of many of his children. Sawvelle's strategy includes teaching young people what God's Word says about their authority in Christ instead of allowing them to listen to Satan's deception that they are undervalued and cannot make a difference.

"Those of us who are used to a proliferation of teaching,

there has to be a shift to more of a heart connection with these young people, and I think we are beginning to see it," Sawvelle says. "There are a lot of us out there who are teachers and pastors who can tell good stories, and that's wonderful. But people want more than that. They've always wanted more than that ... but especially now. They want to be touched, and they want to be heard. We have to look at new ways to connect with them. There has to be a relational connection.

"A lot of it, for them, comes down to understanding this whole thing of identity, what Christ has done for us and how He's adopted us," he says. "When people get saved, they need to jump right in to understanding their new identity in Christ and to understand they've been adopted by God, never to be rejected.

"It doesn't mean we can't wander from God; and it doesn't mean we can't sin," Sawvelle says, "But I'm saying there's this security in God because of what Christ has done for us, and all of a sudden, that begins to liberate someone."

And "someone" might be like the biblical character of Jabez. Sawvelle points to 1 Chronicles 4:9-10: "Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in hardship.' Then Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh, that You would indeed bless me and enlarge my territory, that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that it may not bring me hardship!' So God granted what he asked."

"In that Scripture, all Jabez really wanted was validation," Sawvelle says. "He said, 'Lord, bless me and enlarge my territory.' What he was really asking for was validation. All he wanted to know was that his life mattered, that he wasn't going to cause people pain.

"I think this is where everybody is today, especially the

younger generation,” he says. “I recently saw a poll that talked about the Gen Zers, and there were a couple of things they really wanted. No. 1, they want to know that they belong and that they have been accepted by the older generations. No. 2, they want to know they have influence.”

Intergenerational Acceptance

And that doesn’t mean decades into the future, Sawvelle says. These young people want their voices to be heard now.

“With the Gen Zers that I have, and I see it all the time with especially my younger ones, they don’t want to sit around the church and wait for 20 years until they’ve done enough that now we trust them to be leaders,” he says. “They want to jump right in. They can, and they’re not afraid to. Especially in this digital world, they’re not afraid. They are so fast on these smartphones and computers with research on so many subjects that it makes my head spin.”

Sawvelle says he’s seen many instances of churches that marginalize their young people—churches that no longer exist. Many of them, he says, do not prepare their young people to assume leadership positions, and when the older pastor either retires or dies, the church isn’t ready for the traumatic change.

“They don’t have the plans for the transition, and those churches simply die because they haven’t trained their younger people to take over,” Sawvelle says. “It’s very sad. Churches must be prepared to pass the baton.”

By way of example, Sawvelle points to another passage of Scripture: “I exhort the elders who are among you, as one who is also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, take care of them, not by constraint, but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. Do not lord over those in your charge, but

be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will not fade away" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

But that Scripture gives an exhortation to younger disciples as well. The next verse reads: "Likewise, you younger ones, submit yourselves to the elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and clothe yourselves with humility because 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"

The key to that Scripture, Sawvelle says, is for "all of you to be submissive to one another" and to do it with humility.

"God certainly does give grace to the humble, so you must value one another, work as a team and walk in humility," he says. "It's the only way it can work for your church or your ministry.

"When it works right, when we love, honor, respect and value each other in humility, I don't think you will lose as many of the younger people to the world as we're seeing these days. We must understand that we are one generation, working together to further God's kingdom."

That is one concept Sawvelle has constantly instilled in his older leaders at Passion Church, and they have adopted it without hesitation. Many have taken to mentoring potential leaders for the future, accepting that assignment with exuberance to witness spiritual growth in their youngsters.

True Kingdom Impact

One way Sawvelle and his wife, Carolyn, have seen young people grow is through their personal mentorship of many of the Millennials and Generation Z at Passion Church. Bob says that while he and Carolyn are "not quite there" yet, they have witnessed some significant changes in the younger groups as they have spent quality time with them through prayer time, meals and just doing life together.

To help the younger people of his church and other churches worldwide, Sawvelle teaches master level classes in evangelism, discipleship and church planting with the Global Awakening Theological Seminary and is an online course facilitator for Global Awakening's Christian Healing Certification Program and Christian Prophetic Certification Program.

Sawvelle says although the classes he offers are online, they are extensive in theological nature. He understands the challenges of church planting, having started Passion Church from his and Carolyn's home.

Next Great Awakening

Like most other Christians, Sawvelle is expecting another Great Awakening. However, he says he doesn't believe it will come until the next generation is released to fulfill its purpose.

"I'm extremely positive and expectant that we're going to see another major move of the Spirit," he says. "I really do believe one of the things we lean into is desiring more of God. But at the same time, we need to be very intentional about raising up others and then giving them an opportunity.

"We can't just make them sit through teaching for years and years before we finally start releasing them," Sawvelle says. "In developing countries, there is rapid church planting taking place. They are raising up leaders and turning them over quickly. It's only here in America that we're a lot slower in doing that. But I think that's changing.

"Our friend Joanne Moody was telling us she knows one leader out there in California who has been the catalyst for microchurches springing up in the Orange County area, which is mostly around Los Angeles," Sawvelle explains, "There have been house churches with 30 to 50 people that have sprung up and are going like wildfire. These are young people that are

doing this. They're having beach meetings.

"This is really interesting too because the state of California really closed the churches down during COVID, and they are just now starting to open things up again," Sawvelle says. "So all of a sudden, there is a fresh move of house churches and, again, it's younger people wanting to get together, wanting God and wanting to go after it."

"So it's coming, and I think we need to realize it's going to come in some ways that for us older ones, maybe we won't quite see or understand," he says. "We need to give them space and let them run with it."

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