

Closing the Christian Generation Gap

There's too much awkward silence when it comes to old and young. It's time to start a conversation.

One of my core passions is training younger Christians. Whether I'm doing an online Bible study with a friend overseas or taking a couple of guys with me on a mission trip, relational discipleship has become a priority now that I'm older. Young leaders need more than stuffy talking heads who just preach at them from acrylic pulpits; they want approachable mothers and fathers who will share a meal, listen, ask questions and invite co-equal participation.

Shyju Matthew is a young leader I met last year in India. Based in Bangalore, he serves on the staff at Bethel Assembly of God Church. He's only 24, but Shyju conducts evangelistic events around the globe. He has exceptional maturity and spiritual anointing. Yet he recognizes his need for input from the older generation. In fact, he seeks it out.

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My correspondence with Shyju made me realize that a huge generation gap exists in the American church. In many sectors, old and young simply don't communicate. There has been a serious discipleship breakdown. We're suspicious of each other. Emerging Christian leaders have created their own trendy culture, complete with buzzwords, technological savvy and rock star pastors. And some older leaders are stuck in boring ruts of tradition.



We're drifting apart. I'm concerned that if the generations don't link arms and start working together, this chasm will widen. And the result will be huge lost opportunities for the gospel.

Last weekend Shyju sent me a list of simple questions about life and ministry. He asked if I could e-mail him answers that he could pass on to his friends. Here's a short snippet of our conversation, which I'm sharing in hopes that this kind of dialog can become more common:

Q. What's the most important advice you could share with a young leader?

A. Avoid pride at all costs. Don't let the devil convince you that you are so great. No matter how anointed you are, no matter how many people are healed in your meetings, and no matter how many fans are begging for your autograph, realize that you are young,

inexperienced and
immature.

Stay humble. Don't ever get to the place that you
can't take out the garbage or clean the toilets in the church.
The moment you
are too "powerful" to do those things is the moment the devil
will have you on
his leash. This is the main reason leaders fall into moral
failure.

If people are trying to make you a Christian
celebrity, run the other direction! Don't let that haughty
spirit anywhere near
you. Jesus was a servant and He washed His disciples' feet. If
you can't do
that, you have no business being in the ministry.

**Q: Who is the one person who most helped to shape
your leadership, and how did they help you?**

A: I have several mentors. One man, Barry, discipled
me when I was a teenager. He hosted a Bible study in his home
and spent a lot
of time with me during my high school years. Even though he
was a busy minister
he invested a lot of his time in young people. He is still
involved in my life
today. He is like a spiritual father. He modeled for me the
concept of a
Paul/Timothy relationship.

Another mentor, Doug, prays with me about important
ministry decisions and is always available for counsel. And I
have another
close friend, a pastor named Chris, who is both a mentor and
an accountability
partner. This man knows everything about me, including all my

faults and weaknesses. He asks me the “hard questions” about my attitudes, my thought life and my marriage—and he’s willing to challenge me. These kinds of relationships are so important if we want to grow spiritually.

Q: Who else has helped shape the way you view life and ministry?

A. I have built some very meaningful relationships with leaders from other nations. One of them is Mosy Madugba, an apostolic leader from Nigeria. Even though he has seen many miracles in his ministry, what caught my attention was his humility. I have also become close to an evangelist from India, Harry Gomes, who is based in Coimbatore. Harry has spoken into my life at key times. He prays for me and has been a huge encouragement. And he has helped me to understand how church leaders outside the United States are thinking. It is so important for us to gain a world perspective. We cannot be effective leaders today if we don’t think outside our own cultural context.

I’m praying that this kind of back-and-forth sharing will happen on a wide scale between old and young. We have a lot to learn from each other. (I’m planning to send him my own list of questions because I want to learn from him.)

Most of us recognize the absolute

necessity of breaking racial barriers in the church, and a growing number of churches are challenging gender prejudice. Yet we are often blind to the discrimination that exists between old and young. Ageism is a reality, and it works both ways.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church, Peter declared that both old and young would receive supernatural power. "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams," he said, quoting the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17b, NASB). Implied in that promise is the idea that God wants the generations to work together. If we want to experience that same level of anointing today, we must end this awkward stalemate, reach out to each other and bridge the gap.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. You can find him on Twitter at leegrady. He will be one of many leaders speaking at Empowered 21, a conference designed to bring older and younger Christians together. For more information about Empowered 21, to be held April 8-10 in Tulsa, Okla., [click here](#).