

# Reaching or Changing the Next Generation

Good Morning,

Colossians 1:13 “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:”

I am not trying to reach this generation, I am trying to change this generation and future ones.

When churches speak of reaching their generation, they are simply trying to get them into church. My desire is to get them saved, teach them to be honest, and hard-working, to stay married, and to learn how to train their children. My desire is to get this generation to teach the Bible to children, give to missions, read their Bibles, win souls to Christ, and be prepared to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ where they will face the reality of their useless or useful life.

One of our converts from long ago found himself having heart surgery. When I visited him after the surgery, he said, “Now I know why I am here;” I said, yes, because your heart was a mess. He replied, “No, the doctor and two nurses got saved.”

A lady from our church, who was over seventy years old, was in the hospital for a major surgery. She witnessed and won folks to Christ daily. She began to speak to one orderly when he said, “I prayed with you already...” She was embarrassed that she had forgotten to whom she had and had not witnessed. I assured her that was not a problem; it was the rest of us who should be embarrassed.

When I started our church, I came with the desire to change the generation in front of me, from heartless retirees to servants with gray heads. Honestly, it took a while. In fact, I had to wait until my 40-50-year-old members became 60-70 years old before I had real servants in my retired folks’ world. But my goal was the same:

Acts 26:18 “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

I could care less about reaching this generation, if my end result will be to find my members sitting at Starbucks and talking about Jimmy Fallon, or becoming workaholics who never come home to their families, or grieving over the sad state of affairs because they cannot find a good job to pay them to stay home and wear pajamas while playing video games and taking selfies. Reaching that generation is of no interest to me; I want to change that generation! I was not impressed with a church full of older people who could only talk about medicine and motorhome trips. I wanted folks serving the King of Glory, and we sure have that today.

Ephesians 5:8 “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:”

While others try to build a large youth group, I seek to change the teens within my reach, and then let parents and teens bring in others as God leads. (As most people know, the youth group became very large.) My early youth activities started with picking up teens on Wednesday from public schools; we went to a park, threw a ball, sat on swings and talked, and ended up at Taco Bell or some fast-food restaurant. Before anyone could eat, they had to quote the memory verse for the week and pass out at least one tract. This was the beginning of our teen soul-winning program that grew to two busloads of teens on Wednesdays. From day one, our church has been focused on Bible memory, souls, serving God, and living a separated life.

1 Peter 2:9 “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”

Jesus did not set out to reach everyone; yes, tell everyone; yes, preach to everyone, but He focused on changing those who had a heart for God. Our Lord sought to see a few lives surrendered and to change the next generation.

Pastor Joe Esposito and I were only a couple years apart in starting our churches. We kept standards, strong preaching, and separated living right out in front. From the beginning, what we were and what we were not was very clear! Today, I would guess there is no one who started a church who put more young people into the ministry than he has. From the beginning, he and I preached purity and holiness and staying away from school dances and rock music. From our first camp, we had dress rules (not at activities or Sunday school but camp). Brother Esposito's youth came to camp with us for many years; we preached surrender to full-time service. Within two years of Faith Baptist starting, we had young people headed off to Bible college training for the ministry. Two of those first three are still in the ministry today (thirty-three years later).

The goal? Changing the next generation, not reaching the next generation.

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