
Addressing Second and Third Generation Challenges & Opportunities

Addressing the challenges of the second and third generations deals with strategies directed towards the difficulties identified. Of course we need the supernatural. Even so, it should be stated. God indeed can do exceedingly abundantly more than all we could ask or think (Eph 3:20). Our part might have to do more with trusting God. Our engagement might count more for obedience than cleverness or craft.

In broad generalities we have several key elements. But we should acknowledge that what may be ideal for 95 percent of young people may miss the mark for the other five percent.

Paul wrote about the Body being one yet composed of many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12). Metaphors like this invite an array of responses and an expectation of operating in a complimentary fashion rather than a competitive one. “We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular” (White, 1942, p. 483).

With this in mind, consider the following four primary ways to address the challenges of the second and third generations. Those gathered for the 180° Symposium prioritized these as the top four.

1. *Discipleship.* (Matt 10 and 28) Jesus called his disciples to follow him. He taught them, mentored and coached them, empowered them, sent them out, instructed them more, corrected them, challenged them, frustrated them, warned them, supported them, died for them. Following his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all that they had learned from Christ. And

Jesus gave his promise to be present with them in this mission.

Taking Christ as the model, the number of disciples won't be large for any one person. A piper isn't the necessary ingredient. What counts is presence—availability for relational contact and friendship. This includes lots of listening, support, earning the right to be heard, communicating acceptance, sharing their joy, and picking them up when they fall. Openness includes vulnerability. As the relationship develops, mentoring can increase on either a formal or informal basis. This still includes listening, but also providing pointers, recommendations, challenges, accountability, feedback, celebrations, and testimony.

Inherent in generations are families. Instead of substituting or replacing families, the 2nd and 3rd generation calls for inter-generational families, including discipleship. Parental responsibilities can be shared within the church as individuals mature at various rates and through stages. The content includes all things Christ taught his disciples, plus what the Holy Spirit would lead his disciples into, right now, in your specific context or culture. Congregations can help to bear each others' burdens and assist or equip families to disciple their own children. In this sense, congregations will partner with the families to nurture and shape one another through the ins and outs of daily living. It gets as specific as teaching families how to do family worship and assisting in securing resources to do so. As might be expected, some will be more receptive to this than others.

2. *Safe and Loving Climate.* (Matt 18:1-12) Christ's message, “Come unto Me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28 KJV)” seems every bit as necessary and inviting now as it did when he first gave it. Providing a safe, accepting, secure, and loving environment usually

requires intentionality and even some training. Many churches have greeters who give an initial, "Hi, how are you?" That's a start in the right direction, but the feeling tone of the congregation as a whole must go beyond the assigned greeters.

It also includes the supernatural ability to love those who others might not love, looking more at the heart than the outward appearance. The real litmus test comes when conversations develop to the point that people in a given generation feel safe enough to talk about anything. This may require time and attention and initiative rather than interacting only with the same people from week to week.

Instead of maintaining a plastic veneer of superficial niceness, can church become the place where repentance leads to confession? Is church the place where forgiveness flows—from heaven to earth and from one person to another? Let the first generation model this practice and encourage it in the younger generations. "Get ride of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Eph 4:31-32 NLT).

3. *Religious Education.* (Deut 6:6-7) Jesus taught with parables. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 admonishes parents to instruct their children with intentionality, throughout the day. Today, some look to teachers to provide all of the instruction. This responsibility rests first with the parents and gets supplemented by others. On a foundational level, establishing the Bible as the source of authority provides access to God's love letters, instruction, and guidance. It also enables the reader to have an external source of authority that can be internalized through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Establishing the Bible as the source of authority paves the way to teach a biblical worldview—a growing understanding of one's world from God's revelation. This process includes Bible literacy, but also the Bible as communion with the Almighty. It is information, but also intimacy. It deepens faith and broadens understanding. It enables one to engage in conversations with others about God and life and what one believes about God. Include critical thinking skills by giving permission to question, explore, experiment, trust, pray, and grow in faith. In this way they will become "thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts" (White, 1952, p. 17). It not only accepts, but encourages critical

thinking. God is Truth and God is large, so we have much to discover and no need to fear the pursuit unless we assume we have traded places with God.

The training also includes practical application by actively serving others, experiencing the joy of self-sacrificing love, and sharing one's faith. This can take place with friends and strangers, in church settings and community service, with religious entities and secular ones. It's discovering what Jesus would do, and then doing it. This moves the religious instruction beyond the head through the heart and into action.

The benefits of Adventist education aren't always accessible for those who desire it. Distance and high cost call for creative solutions so young people can increase social connections, a community of believers, quality education, faithful role models, prevention of at-risk behaviors, positive peer relationships, and an expanding biblical worldview and purpose in life.

4. *Authentic Christian Leaders.* (1 Cor 11:1) Our desire to see Jesus matches up with glimpses of seeing Jesus in Godly people. These people are authentic and demonstrate Christian character. They quickly become positive role models of what to do and the spirit in which to do it. Instead of promoting one's ego and using others for personal gain, they willingly support others and rejoice when others succeed.

This stands in contrast to what seems "normal" in the world. Jesus told his disciples, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45 NLT). The attitudes and actions of Christian leaders demonstrate service and also self-sacrifice.

But how can this be? All Christians have this high calling in response to Christ's claim on their lives and the availability of an active Holy Spirit in the heart and life. This may test a person's trust that God will truly provide. It will also show that God often provides through people, and Christian leaders are those people.

In addition to these four primary ways to address the challenges of the second and third generation, the think

tank that gathered for the 180° Symposium at Andrews University in 2011 identified four additional ways to respond to reaching successive generations. Individuals and churches should implement the four primary recommendations above. After do so, they could attend to the follow secondary recommendations.

1B. *Seeking God.* (Jer 29:13) With the 2nd and 3rd generations, one's drive and desire to seek God may be misunderstood if the pathway one takes differs from the previous generation. The misunderstanding can go both ways. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that a different path must take someone to a different destination, probe for motivations behind the actions.

2B. *Empowerment.* (Matt 19:14) Younger generations usually lack power due to size, skills, experience, representation and voice on decision-making committees, and financial resources. When someone from an older generation immigrates, that person tends to lose power, especially when immigrating to a country whose language the immigrant doesn't know. Empowerment opens doors for a person hampered by a lack of power for whatever reason. It usually involves sharing and swallowing one's pride.

3B. *Identity.* (Matt 16:13-19) Some limit identity crisis or identity formation to the adolescent years. It may start at that time, but it doesn't end there. To find one's identity in Christ provides a root, but that still challenges the need to operationalize that in practical ways (what college to attend, what major to take, should I be an SM for one year, can I change majors? etc.) Transitions throughout life continue to challenge one's identity. Church roles and responsibilities can play into this. Spiritual renewal beckons or challenges a new identity as one matures. Language skills often influence one's identity, usually in very practical ways.

4B. *Embrace Multiculturalism.* (Gal. 3 & 1 Cor 1) Strict and straight ethnic lines have blurred. Multiculturalism seems more dominant that ever. While older generations may accentuate pure blood lines, younger generations already have the mindset of multiculturalism. God told Abraham, "All families of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3 NLT). Paul said that in Christ, it makes no difference if one is a Jew or a Gentile, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28), for all become one in Christ. That may be the only things that unites some. If all you have is Christ, is that enough? The testing has begun!

Summary

Theology and culture can appear in the same sentence. They need to intersect in real life. Drop the stereotype that theology should be reserved for only seminary professors, or that culture means evil or worldly. Theology develops as we wrestle with God and life. Culture provides a canvas on which we can paint God's interaction with life and vice versa. In times and places of rapid change, the canvas can easily get messy and confusing. Staying with the canvas, going to scripture, relying on an active Holy Spirit, learning from those who have gone before us, and humbly coming together may seem difficult, but certainly worthwhile.

When it comes to addressing the second and third generation, whether it's simply new generations of more complicated through immigration, the same recommendations from the 180° Symposium apply. Address these challenges with discipleship, creating a safe and loving climate, providing religious education, plus modeling and mentoring authentic Christian leaders. The task is huge. Our God is greater. With that assurance, we grab onto both God and life.

References

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