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## Questions of Faith

### How does a church bridge the generations?

Community is much more than just being in the same place—whether it is with God, family, a small group, or an entire church of worshippers. Community is who you are when you are together. It's helping each other as Ecclesiastes chapter four says. It's hunger for God's Word. It's noticing and being in awe of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It's sharing in every way possible the gift of life that Jesus gives.

A God-created, community is described in Acts chapter two. Real community means, first, adding something to your heart and, second, subtracting something from your heart. Adding was going on in verses 41 and 47. Verse 41 says, *“Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”* Verse 47 says that the believers were *“praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

God's grace was being added to people's hearts. That was happening through Baptism as verse 41 says. Verse 47 reinforces that. The phrase, *“enjoying the favor of all the people,”* can also be translated *“having grace toward all the people.”* God's grace was being added to people's hearts. That's why they were being saved.

What is subtracted? Verse 46 says, *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”* Literally the text says that they ate together *“with joy and simplicity of heart.”* The word for *“simplicity”* is rooted in a word that means *“to take away, to remove.”* You see, God added His grace and subtracted clutter, the clutter of sin and self-interest. Add the gift of life, subtract self-interest and love multiplies. In God-created community, love multiplies.

No one wants to belong to an organization in which they feel marginalized. Therefore, it is important to develop a sense of community and ensure that all generations feel empowered, involved and able to contribute to the mission of the church—this is called discipleship.

Developing the disciples that are commanded of us in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) means developing relationships—between the congregant and God, between the pastor and the congregant, and between the congregant and others. To do so, we first must connect to Jesus as the source of power and guidance for all that we do (John 15:5). We move forward through faith. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is nurtured through an active worship life, Bible study, prayer and the fellowship of other believers. In doing this, a vital, organic and growing relationship is created with Jesus.

From this faith comes the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). It's all about what we do and how we live our lives that is expressed, in part, through the Great Commission. This fruit of the Spirit is fostered in a spirit of humility without selfish ambition or conceit, but by placing the needs of others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). Not all are called to serve the same purpose in the church (Romans 12:4-8), but as pastors we are called to equip His people for the work of ministry through instruction (Ephesians 4:11-12).

To do this, there must be a plan that accomplishes four things: 1) teach a curriculum designed to develop disciples; 2) model discipleship; 3) provide opportunities for practicing

discipleship; and 4) recognize those practicing discipleship. This is the method Christ used to develop His disciples and it is the one we should be following.

Teaching about discipleship is not just about plans and programs, but rather about people, relationships and equipping the faithful, and it starts with the heart not the head. Not all will become great leaders, but through specific training, a sequence of experiences and modeling, they can be ready, able and willing.

It is God who chooses and equips us (Moses, Exodus 3:1-4, 10-14). The way will not be easy (Esther, Esther 4:13-14, 15-16). If we depend on ourselves, we will fail (Saul, I Samuel 12:13-15, 13:8-14). Our best model for training is servant leadership (Jesus, Mark 10:42-45). Training disciples requires teaching (Jesus, Matthew 7:28). Such training also requires modeling (Hebrews 13:7).

In order to develop risk-taking, disciples need chances to serve in a discipleship role. Practice makes it more likely that they will develop skills. It is crucial that this be a challenge: Experience + Challenge = Improvement. There must be chances to volunteer for leadership roles in the church, such as evangelism projects that stretch them outside their comfort zone.

Recognizing successes in individuals that are bearing fruit involves first helping them understand their gifts. They need feedback both positive and negative. Encouragement is uplifting to those who are modeling Christian discipleship. In organizations, recognition means there is a moral purpose, which is a sign of God's presence. Faith must be openly expressed and modeled. Wholehearted acceptance of each person as a child of God builds up the body. This means there is a serious and equitable distribution of results.

In order to bridge the gap between generations, there must also be a deliberate reaching out to connect. Fellowship, mentoring, developing the art of listening, and having the other person's best interests at heart. All committees, the council, events and the like should always try to have as many generational, gender and viewpoints represented as is practically possible.