

Phase 4: Young Adulthood and Early Married

Titus 2:1-8

November 6, 2016

Today we are in week 4 of our series called “It’s Just a Phase.” We are looking at the phases of life from preschool through retirement. What we are discovering is that each phase brings its own challenges and opportunities for growth. So rather than try to get through it, we can use it to take the next step with God.

I am reading from Paul’s letter to Titus 2:1-8. Like the letter to Timothy that we read last week, this was written by Paul to his young co-worker Titus. We don’t know much about Titus except that he was a gentile and that Paul and him were

very close. In fact, in 1:4, Paul calls him his “true son”. Paul and Titus conduct an evangelistic campaign on the island and then Paul leaves Titus behind to organize the new Christians and appoint leaders for the church. In this passage, Paul is instructing Titus in how to improve the character of the church members, grouped by age and sex; older men and women, younger men and women. The main way to do this, Paul says, is to have the older ones be examples of this good character. The principle reason is so that they will be a good witness to those outside of the church. I’m reading from the Message.

¹⁻⁶ Your job is to speak out on the things that make for solid doctrine. Guide older men into lives of temperance, dignity, and wisdom, into healthy faith, love, and endurance. Guide older women into lives of reverence so they end up as neither gossips nor drunks, but models of goodness. By looking at them, the younger women will know how to love their

husbands and children, be virtuous and pure, keep a good house, be good wives. We don't want anyone looking down on God's Message because of their behavior. Also, guide the young men to live disciplined lives.

⁷⁻⁸ But mostly, show them all this by doing it yourself, incorruptible in your teaching, your words solid and sane. Then anyone who is dead set against us, when he finds nothing weird or misguided, might eventually come around.

We have finished preschool, elementary, and Junior and Senior High. Today we are looking at young adulthood and early married.

It is amazing how many life changes occur during this phase. Between 1972 when I graduated from High School and 1982, I went through several life transitions: I entered and graduated from college and seminary, fell in love and married, had my first child, began my first full time job, and moved six times.

All of this took place between the ages of 18 and 28.

It is a time of emerging adulthood. Huge decisions will be made in this phase; will I continue my education and if yes, where. What will be my career, where will I live, will I marry and if yes, who will I marry? Will I have children? So many decisions are made that will impact the rest of your life.

This is the target audience for AHUMC. This is who we need to attract. Not because the other groups are unimportant. It's just this is the age group that ends up coming through our doors. What we find is that after people leave high school and go off to college, they tend to disappear from church. But once they finish their education, get married, buy their first home, and most importantly...have their first child, they take up their spiritual journey again. They come looking for a community of

faith where they can get help raising their kids and connecting with other people in the same stage.

More often than not they will tell me, “I went to preschool here.”

Attitude of Millennials

This generation is called the Millennials, people born after 1980. Sometimes they are called emerging adults. In 2000 this term was coined to explain the phenomenon of adolescence extending into the 20's. This age group no longer view themselves as adults.

Those of us 50 and older remember leaving home at 18 and being on our own pretty much from then on. Not today.

They are mobile savvy, even dependent, and heavily engaged in social media. Drive through a college campus and watch the students going to class or crossing the street staring at their smart phones. Go to a restaurant and watch a

table of young people interact. They interact more with their phones than each other.

Young adults today devour media. They send about 2,200 texts a month. My age group sends about 491.

It has become un-natural for them not to be connected. But the result is that many find themselves isolated relationally. And it becomes an issue when dealing with real life and having messy and honest conversations. They have connections without the demands of friendship.

They are heavily scheduled, especially if married with kids. They struggle to maintain a work/life balance.

But it's more than schedule. It's pressure. Here is the paradox. While they are under a lot of pressure, they are the most sheltered. Many grew up having lived protected from the harsh realities of

life by their helicopter parents, yet feel more pressure than previous generations.

They struggle to figure out how to balance their time between school and family, social life, doing the laundry and work. The reason is that their hovering parents did it for them. They sheltered their children so that they never had to manage their own time.

And they tend to be self-absorbed. They can feel a sense of entitlement. They score higher on narcissism than previous generations. Part of this is because they have been rewarded for just showing up.

So those are some of their struggles. Let me share some of the positive traits of this age group. They have a strong sense of community both locally and globally. They want a sense of community in their church too. They are not just looking for a place to worship, they want a place to belong. They are team players. They are confident, optimistic, and tolerant. They

believe the world is at their fingertips, that they can do anything. And they want to make the world a better place. They love to serve the poor and support causes that help others like Tom's shoes or Better World Books.

Finding wholeness

Millennials are the least religiously affiliated generation in America. Generally, they don't trust any large institutions, and that goes for the church as well. They are leaving the church in record numbers. The result is they have lost sight of God and experience confusion and brokenness in their lives.

Jason Garver is a good example. He lives near Minneapolis. He reached a crisis one summer day when he came to the end of his peanut-butter-and-cracker food supply in a house on the brink of foreclosure.

His hopes for a steady job had crumbled. Nearly every company where he had applied for work had recently called to turn him down. Jason thought: *Why does God hate me so much?*

He texted that question to the pastor of the church where he had gone as a teen, Corey Magstadt. Jason wasn't sure if there was a God. If there was, he thought, maybe he had written him off as a "bad kid" for using drugs and alcohol. His father had moved out of state for work, leaving Jason to survive on occasional grocery deliveries from friends.

"It was the hopelessness of not having any food, not getting a job, not seeing people," He said. "I wasn't in school. I didn't have friends coming to see me ever, and I couldn't go out to do anything. I was so hungry I didn't want to do anything."

After receiving the text, Corey asked to meet with him. He helped Jason get back

on his feet. When Jason needed short-term housing, Cory invited him into his home, and when he needed a car to get to work, Cory gave Jason his old one. He also encouraged him to turn to Scripture amid his spiritual struggles.

Jason has since obtained his GED and nursing assistant license, with his eyes set on a bachelor's degree in physics.

And he doesn't think God hates him anymore. "Now I can say, being a Christian—that's how God helps. It's not a big glowing hand coming from the sky. It's people like Pastor Corey."

Mentors

Earlier I said that young adults tend to leave after high school and not come back until that first child is born. Like Jason, those are critical years and a lot of confusion and brokenness can occur during those years away from the church. We have been talking in staff about how

to prevent that. Here is what we have discovered. Emerging adults that have a mentor are twice as likely to stay connected to church through these years. Twice! The dropout rate declines from 59% to 31%.

Interesting that this is exactly what Paul recommends to Titus; have the older ones mentor the younger. As I said last week, mentoring is and always has been the cornerstone of leadership development in the church.

Millennials are looking for older adults to pour into their lives. They are finding the goodness of God in a community of faith. In community they find purpose, they find the reason for their life.

Here is something else I have personally discovered. Mentoring goes both ways. I have learned a lot from the young staff and leaders in this church. Some of it has been invaluable!

And I have been mentored by some in this congregation that are older and more experienced than me.

Here is what I yearn for at AHUMC: intergenerational mentoring. Listen! I believe the future of AHUMC rests on our ability to connect all generations. All of us who are Christ followers must be investing in the next generation. There is no way that the small group of staff members can mentor everyone. Did you know that there are over 4,000 people connected with this church? We have four clergy, one counselor, and four program staff people. Do you think that nine of us can mentor 4000 people? It's not going to happen without you. Mentoring and discipling this next generation is everything. Right now those of us 50 and up hold all the financial, intellectual, professional and relational capital. The golden opportunity for this Church is learning how to tap into all of this capital and leverage it to equip the

next generation to lead in this church. At the end of the day, if we don't do this, if we don't have the millennials in our church, then we don't have anyone to hand off the church to. And when we are gone, the church will close and this building will become a Walmart or a Starbucks.

Mentoring is critical. But let me mention two other things necessary to stay grounded for you who are in this millennial generation.

Paul writes in verse 5 that the young are *"to be self-controlled and pure."* The first is self-control. Paul mentions self-control a total of 5 times in this short book--once in verse 2 to the older men, once in verse 5 to the young women and then in verse 6 to the young men. The only group he doesn't mention it to is the older women. Paul uses it to mean to be sensible or sound minded. The Message translates it

as wisdom, virtuous, and disciplined but it's the same Greek word (sophronas).

How do we gain self-control? Be Spirit-controlled. In Galatians 5:22 Paul lists nine fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is one of them. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. The person and power of the Holy Spirit was programmed to become a part of every believer's life. He is the key to successful living. The believer cannot be as successful as God intends unless they come to understand and experience being filled with the Spirit.

Each day we submit to his activity in our lives, to let him guide us. For the Holy Spirit wants not just to be a resident, but to be president. He wants not just to be living within but Lord within. He desires not just to be Messiah, but to be Master. When life is self-controlled, it possesses only the power that can be generated by yourself. But when life is Spirit-controlled, the unlimited power supply of

God is always available. So each day we need to turn our lives over to him, so that the Spirit, not self is in charge. A life with Christ in charge can produce a dramatic change in your ability to win the battle for supremacy in your life.

The second word is pure. Like self-control, Paul uses this word a lot, especially in chapter 1 as he deals with some teachers that are causing Titus issues. For Paul a pure heart is not one who obeys all the religious rules as it is one who has put their trust in Christ. It's about faith, love, and endurance—not giving up in the face of difficulty. In a word, it's commitment. A life that is totally sold out to Christ.

Young adults have a lot of issues to contend with. Career is one. What am I going to live on? It becomes an issue soon after you get out of school and Mom and Dad no longer want to pay your bills.

The second question is marriage. “Who am I going to live with?” That's a huge commitment. Most people eventually figure that one out. They either stay single or get married.

The third question is “where am I going to live?”

These issues can cause a lot of stress and anxiety. But you can mess up on these three and still do OK. It may bring you pain and grief, but it's not eternal.

But if you miss the important commitment, “Who am I going to live for,” that has eternal implications. You are either going to live for yourself or you are going to live for God. Once you get this settled, then all the other commitments come into proper perspective. Once you are committed to God, the other commitments fall into place.

Conclusion

I want to close with a video from one of our families—the Watson’s-- about what they have discovered that has helped them get through these early married years.

(Watson video—2 minutes)

How do we do this? We have to do it together. We need each other. The church needs to support our young and emerging adults.

I’m encouraged by the number of young adults I see coming to AHUMC. Pastor Matt has about 40 who are a part of a Tuesday evening Bible study. Their commitment to Christ runs pretty deep. They are soaking up as much as they can and trying to live it out.

Think about the opportunity you have to make a difference in the life of our young families. Would you pray about how God might want to use you, who God might be calling you to invest your life in?

(Before blessing) “Just a reminder of our Marriage event coming up on Friday, Nov. 18th. Sign up on the website or call the church office.