

We Prayerfully Value All Generations

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr. | IPHC General Superintendent

“For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.” Psalm 100:5

Psalm 100 is a perfect Scripture passage to reflect upon the fifth IPHC Core Value, “We Prayerfully Value All Generations.” A Psalm of Thanksgiving, it begins with a series of Hebrew imperatives calling for the peoples of the earth, not just Israelites in the land, all peoples in every land, to “*Make* a joyful shout, *serve* the Lord with gladness, *come* before His presence, *know* that the Lord, He is God” (100:1-3). The Creator of all things and all people calls us to recognize that it is He, the Lord God revealed in the Bible, “who has made us” (100:3). The peoples of the earth belong to God.

It is important to note that all peoples are invited to the presence of the Lord, symbolized in this Psalm as the temple in Jerusalem: “Enter His gates with thanksgiving, enter His courts with praise,” while expressing gratitude and blessing to God’s holy name (100:4).

The reason for this invitation to all peoples is predicated upon the very nature of God: “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (100:5). Goodness, mercy, and truth are extended to every generation, beginning with Adam and Eve, and extending to us today, and our prodigy.

Thinking About Generations

Throughout the Bible, God identifies Himself as relating to generations. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (e.g., Genesis 28:13; 31:42; 32:9; 50:24; Exodus 3:6ff). Israelites remember who they are in covenant relationship with God through their family lines. Their ministry assignments were originally by their tribal, generational connections.

Nearly every culture, regardless the historical epoch, has its ways of connecting generations through family lines. In the Western world, surnames became the way of connecting generational family ties. In the time of Jesus people were known as “the son of Joseph,” for example. In the Roman Empire surnames began to be used more widely. This expanded in the 13th and 14th centuries as surnames became more standard in European and Western culture. Sometimes these surnames were related to an occupation or location, as well as a family line.

In the late 19th century, the idea of generations became more formally studied as sociology became an integral part of university curriculums.

As we shall see in a few minutes, these studies are important for us in discerning how to be effective in reaching current and future generations.

The Generation of Our Founders

But first, let's reflect on the generations of the IPHC. This year, 2018, the IPHC is 120 years old. We were birthed in 1898 in the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina. In our archives, we can see the pictures of our great-great grandparents in the faith. Our founding parents were our ages at the close of the 19th century.

They had telephones connected to wires. They had trains upon which they traveled. They read newspapers and magazines that came to their homes via mail. They usually had gardens for their vegetables and pens for their chickens, hogs, and cattle. Their windows were opened in the summer for cooling night breezes. Their lives revolved around the cycles of sowing and harvesting in nature.

They were concerned about war as their sons fought in Cuba in the Spanish-American War. Present among them were survivors of the American Civil War. Like those who fought 40 years earlier, they were trying to reconcile among blacks and whites the consequences of slavery. In much of the American South, they were struggling with economic deprivation; in much of the North, they were struggling with industrialization.

Spiritually, they were committed to the Bible, the Word of God. They rejected the modern myth that the brotherhood of humankind could solve the problems of the world. They rejected the Darwinian social implications that were manifested in universities. They knew that humanity's real problem was sin, and that there is only one solution for every generation: Return to the Lord.

The Generations of Our Day

While our essential human nature is the same as our founding parents, much has changed. The effects and speed of change are far more drastic, disconcerting, and opportunistic than any of us can imagine. From travel to food, from clothing to media—even our own parents would be disoriented today, and some of us feel disoriented now!

Today, there are five generations concurrently living: the so-called “Greatest Generation” or “Silent Generation” that fought in World War II, the Korean War, and many in the Vietnam War. This generation is declining in numbers.

Following them are the Baby Boomers, usually people born between 1946-1964. This age group is now retiring at a pace of about 10,000 a day, a process that will continue until 2030.ⁱ Up to 2016, this was the largest generation in the United States.ⁱⁱ

The next group, the children of the Baby Boomers, are usually called Generation X. They were born between 1965 and 1980.

The fourth group is usually called “Millennials” as they were born in the early 1980s to the end of the 20th century. As noted above, in 2016 Millennials became the largest generation living in the USA.

Finally, those born between middle 1990s to about 2012 are commonly called Generation Z. There is some debate regarding their population share, mainly based on when the dating begins and ends. Christian writer James Emory White refers to them as the largest generation, having surpassed Millennials.ⁱⁱⁱ

Regardless of the exact dates and sizes, one thing is certain, in the Western world there are clear differences among these co-existing generations. These differences are reflected in sexual mores, political alliances, religious and spiritual expectations, and communications.

God's Faithfulness Transcends Generational Changes

The story of Israel's return from Babylon is important. Many Israelites had adopted Babylonian practices as two and three generations were reared in foreign exile. But when they returned to Judah and Jerusalem they had to identify themselves by their heritage within the covenant family. Even though Israel had changed, God's faithfulness to Israel and His mission for Israel had not changed.

Forms of government come and go; forms of communication and information are constantly changing; yet God continues to call people to faithfully serve Him in our generation.

God Can Reach Unreached Generations

There is much discussion about the "Nones" in our world, a tag which is used to describe people who claim "none" when it comes to religious affiliation. While we ring our hands in concern, we must remember that God specializes in doing the impossible.

I heard a Russian-speaking Jewish IPHC believer in Israel once say that his parents, who had been reared in communistic atheism, left the old Soviet Union and emigrated to Israel. They had abandoned their Jewish roots, faith and practice, and were spiritually blank. Upon arriving in Israel and hearing Jewish Messianic believers speak about the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, as their Savior, these family members immediately responded to the Good News. It was truly Good News to them, news they had never heard! They were like the Bereans who "received the word with all readiness" (Acts 17:11).

May we not despair of the secularism and godlessness of our times. Instead, let us believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to reach all people as the Gospel is shared through Word and deed.

Passing the Faith from One Generation to the Next

Individual families and local congregational families have a responsibility to share the Good News from generation to generation. This occurs as parents and grandparents share the Word of God and live faithfully. Psalm 22:30 speaks that "a posterity will serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation" (NKJV). Psalm 145:4 gives us this promise, "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts."

In local congregations, this takes on several forms. First, there must be intentional efforts of discipleship from one generation to the next. This occurs in established forms such as Sunday school, youth and children's ministries, and men's and women's ministries. But it also occurs in small prayer groups, in intentional mentoring from one generation to the next at a coffee shop.

There is one other way that we must pass along the faith. An older generation must be willing to allow change to reach younger generations. Mature Christian saints must develop an evangelistic heart that is greater than a heart of well-meaning memories. In turn, the younger generation must be willing to embrace and receive the wisdom of those who have gone before them. Past experiences of previous generations have shaped the church today and serve as the foundation for our future.

Our Place in the Generations that Have Served God

We close by remembering two things. First, regardless of our personal age or generation, this is the only time we will have on this planet. Generations have gone before us, and if the Lord tarries, generations will follow. Most of us will not be remembered. We will take our place among the billions forgotten in the history of the world. So, this is our time; we are not accidents in time; God ordained that we be born in this time, this place, this history.

Secondly, because we are people of God, we serve a Lord who is the “same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8); our place in time and eternity is with the Lord. Furthermore, from the generations gone before, there is “a great cloud of witnesses” who surround us (Hebrews 12:1).

This means that there are untold multitudes who have faithfully gone before us into everlasting life with Christ. It means they are alive and await the resurrection, the return of Christ, and the fulfillment of all promised in the Bible related to the new heavens and earth. This means that the work of previous generations has not ended. It means that our labor in our lifetime is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

This year, the IPHC turns its heart in gratitude to those older, who continue to faithfully serve. We turn our hearts to those younger, who will take our places in the work of the kingdom. We do so because God is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations!

ⁱ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2010/12/29/baby-boomers-retire/>.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.churchandculture.org/Blog.asp?ID=6368>.