

WARMLY INVOLVING ALL AGE GROUPS INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Every pastor hears it. Every shepherd receives *that* phone call. Every minister faces the same question. Someone comes to the elder and says that he doesn't feel plugged in because the church doesn't '*have what I need.*' Or, to phrase it slightly differently, a churchgoer may quibble: 'I don't feel as though I can relate all that well to others in your church. There's not that many people my age' (or, my season of life, etc.). Every man of God serving in leadership in Christ's church has been there. He's faced it. He's dealt with it. So, how *do* you involve various and *all* age groups into the beautiful and unified body of Christ in a local assembly?

A local church will have lots of groups, from twenty-somethings, to high school students, to the divorced, to the widowed/widowers, to the middle-aged singles who have never been married, to the teenagers, to the empty nesters, to the hurting ones who have been divorced, to families with young children, to the young children themselves, and to senior saints.

What follows does not attempt to exhaust ideas as to how to incorporate various age groups but it does seek to provide some ideas as to how a local assembly can corporately worship together and consciously, deliberately, compassionately, and patiently extend the arms of Christian love to any and all ages in the body of Christ.

1. Teach on the BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH.

Jesus does not define the body of Christ by class, race, age, gender, cultural background, likes, hobbies, or interests. Rather, the church consists of all those whom Christ redeemed with His own blood. The church serves as a mosaic of God's glorious power, majesty, and creativity. The church comprises both Jews and Gentiles who have come together *in Christ* to worship Christ! Teaching this, and reinforcing this with regularity, is necessary in reminding everyone of the church's beauty, diversity, glory, and vastness.

2. Plead for the ATTENTIVENESS OF THE MIND.

Whether the instructions are directed to the five year old boys, or the teenagers, or the emotionally crushed divorcees, or the senior saints, all must hear the important reality that they must listen attentively to the Word of God. They must engage their minds. Jesus calls for it and demands it. Let him who has an ear, let him hear! Church leaders must call for young and old, regardless of the season of life, to pay attention to the Word preached as a precious jewel that was cast forth.

3. Instruct for genuine MERCY TOWARD ONE ANOTHER.

Ministers should patiently and tenderly instruct all ages to demonstrate supreme mercy toward one another. Older saints should have mercy toward younger families with toddlers. And teenagers and twenty-somethings must exude overwhelming honor and grace toward senior saints who move slowly down the aisle in the sanctuary. The body of Christ must live with mercy and compassion toward one another. A church that encourages all ages to be present in corporate worship must remember this with frequency and strive to confess failures and implement change where needed.

4. Show the UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL.

The same gospel that the stay at home mother of four needs is the same gospel that her one year old, three year-old, six year old, and eight year old need. This gospel is the same gospel for the eldest saints who grow ever closer to

graduating to heaven and for the teenagers battling with the cultural onslaught of pressures, sins, and temptations. It's the same gospel for the businessman as it is for the middle-aged single woman who has never been married. The gospel that saves is a gospel that far surpasses the entire universe of background, age, and past histories. The gospel is not bound to an age group. The gospel must never be changed, manipulated, altered, or more palatable for various age groups. The little ones learning to walk need to hear of God's glory, His justice, Christ's righteousness, His atonement, repentance and faith, and their full surrender to Christ for life in the same way as the empty nester couple remembers the glory of the gospel.

5. Reinforce the NECESSITY OF BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP.

So how does one really *plug* into the church? Is church involvement *really* dependent upon one's age? What a church has to offer? What programs the church presents? Are these really the issues that get people plugged in and keep them involved? Or is there something deeper — and more biblical — that can shed light on this? One should recall that Moses disciplined Joshua. Paul disciplined young Timothy. Godly men are to take spiritual truths and pass it on to other faithful men who can teach others also. Titus 2 commands older women to take younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, submissive to their own husbands — all so that the Word of God will not be dishonored. Imagine a church where older men (empty nesters, senior saints, fathers and husbands) came alongside of younger men (new believers, teenagers, young dads, new husbands, twenty-somethings) and walked with them weekly in the Word of God and in prayer. Consider the beautiful portrait of women meeting with other women for regular prayer, fellowship, discipleship, comfort, encouragement, and stimulation to love and good deeds. Singles could meet with young moms at their home while the kids are napping. Senior saints could reach out to the hurting divorcees. A culture of discipleship should repeatedly be reinforced in the local body. Indeed, the dads have the responsibility of shepherding and discipling their own children first and foremost. God instructs fathers particularly to instruct, discipline, disciple and pass on God's Word, God's works, and God's ways to the children in the home throughout the week. In a church culture like this, not one person is left out. There is a place for everyone since the heartbeat of this kind of ministry is people-work, discipleship work, intentional life-on-life growth.

6. Pray for the UNCTION OF THE SPIRIT.

The only way true godliness can pervade the local church is when the Holy Spirit effectually implants His Word into people's souls. Thus, the power to bring about change and growth in a local church resides in the Spirit of power. Believers must pray in the Spirit for godliness. Christians should cultivate holiness and prayerfulness in seeking to honor God and magnify Christ, all by the power of the Spirit through the reading and application of the written Word. The ultimate need of every soul irregardless of age, season of life, background, or status is the same. All men need the gospel of Jesus Christ. All must hear of their pervasive sin, God's unbending righteousness, His supreme mercy, Christ's once-for-all atonement, and the demand for repentance and faith in counting the cost to follow Him. The Holy Spirit raises the dead. He opens blind eyes. He unlooses mute mouths. He gives a heartbeat to the lifeless corpse. He makes men twice-born, that is, born-again. In the fabric of the local church, all believers must remember that the ultimate need that *everyone* has is the hearing, receiving, applying, delighting in, and submitting to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is made effective through the preaching of the Word and its application all by the effectual power (=unction) of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, instead of suggesting that a local church does not have the demographic preferences that one may hope to find and thus allowing that to serve as an excuse to leave a good, Bible-teaching local church, one should reconsider the importance of diligent and deliberate discipleship that biblically should come through the ongoing ministering of the Scriptures to one another. Indeed, *every single Christian* has the responsibility to warmly accept other believers into the fellowship regardless of these cultural (preferential) issues and strive to incorporate all people into the discipling web of interpersonal relationships built on Christ, Scripture, prayer and holiness. Amen.