The previous generation is always confounded by the next generation - every time. I'll give you an example; My Mother hated James Brown and the Famous Flames. Do you know who James Brown and the Famous Flames are? "I feel good - dada, dada, dada, da." If you are a little white kid in Montreal Quebec and you have an LP by James Brown and the Famous Flames you are -something-- or you think you are. My Mom liked Sinatra. She even liked Elvis, I think. But when I came home with my album of James Brown and the Famous Flames - Oh Boy. And then the Spinners, she just didn't get it. She was not into the Motown sound. 

When I grew up I was going to be a "cool" parent. I was into Motown. I knew Motown. You know, I could do the Harlem Shuffle. And for a while my kids thought, "Wow, Dad's pretty cool." And then one day screeching, dying cat like music emanated from the room of my son. I said, "What's that?" He said, "It's Rap, Dad." And, at that moment I knew what my mother felt like. I hated the stuff - I didn't get it. And once again the fault line between the generations appeared. The good thing about music is that there is plenty of it to go around and everyone is free to enjoy their own taste, young and old.

This is not the case with the gospel of Jesus Christ - we don't have that luxury. We are all called to follow Christ in every generation regardless of our musical taste. It is the responsibility of one generation to teach and evangelize the next generation to carry on the mission.
In music we can ignore the breach between the generations and pursue our own brand of entertainment - whatever that is. But when it comes to the gospel of Christ, we have to - and I remind you, we have to find a way to reach the next generation with Christ. That is what this particular sermon is all about.

Aside from music and lifestyle issues the real difference between the generations is the way that they think about things. The real difference between my generation and the one that came after me and after them, is how they, and how I, think about things - especially moral issues. How one thinks about moral issues is critical. This is where the gospel message begins its appeal to win a person's soul for Christ. You appeal to how a person thinks about moral issues.

Before we go any further, I want to have a very brief review of moral thought over the last couple of centuries so we can understand today's generational thinking about morality.

The history of moral thought in two minutes. First there was ethical theism - this is the oldest thinking pattern on morality. This thinking pattern believes in absolute truth, an absolute truth giver, who gives absolute truth that is clear to everyone - an absolute truth giver who gives truth about what is right and wrong and is easy to see - ethical theism.

Then there is another thinking pattern that came along called Modernism. Modernism is a system of thought that began in the middle ages and developed the thought that man, human beings, were at the center of the universe. Consequently, human beings should be the arbitrator; human beings should decide what is good and what is bad.

Now it seemed at the time that modern humanity was solving all the world's problems through reason and logic through scientific advancement. So it's only logical - we are solving all the problems. We invented the steam engine, we've got printing, we've got medicine, we're making so many advances - let's take on the role on deciding what's right and what's wrong, what's good and bad. We've figured out everything else, we might as well figure out that too.
After a while modernism began to see that replacing divine standards with human standards didn't work. Western society, when they found this out, moved on to what we now have today as a thinking pattern in general society. That's called Post-modernism, after-modernism, Post-Modernism.

Now, stay with me here. Post-modernism is complicated as a thought system. But in simple terms, post-modernism believes that there is no universal truth, whether it is God made or man made. There is no universal truth, there is no universal good or bad. In post-modern thinking, people and their moral standards are merely a product of their evolutionary culture and society. Whatever you think that's good or bad is simply a product of how you were raised, what culture you come from, what country you were born in.

So, in post-modern thought every culture has it's good and bad. And, what is good in one place may be bad in another place - it just depends. So the goal in post-modern thinking is not to pursue universal standards. The goal in post-modern thinking is the pursuit of tolerance, since there is no absolute good or bad, the highest morality is to tolerate all opinions - that is the highest virtue.

This type of thinking has led to all kinds of activity in the present age. This thing we call "political correctness" is a child of post-modern thinking. And we have gone to the point where we tolerate all kinds of actions and all kinds of moral conduct that was unacceptable 50 years ago. But today, we tolerate it because "being tolerant is what it's all about", not being right or being wrong.

In essence, this is the gap in the thinking between the generations - between my generation, for example, and the generation that has come after. This difference is the challenge that we face in reaching the next generation for Jesus Christ. This challenge - is also the thing we face in keeping the next generation faithful to the teachings of Christ, once they have become Christians.

The task in soul winning, in my generation, was to wean us away from self-reliance and overwhelming materialism - in order to submit to Christ and then follow Him along the narrow way of a spiritual life
versus a worldly life. That was the challenge to my generation - "We love the world - We love 'stuff'". And we don't want anybody telling us what we can do and what we can't do, that's our generation. Our generation had to learn to bend the knee to Christ, not be so proud.

My generation, trained in modernist thinking, loved self and loved the things of this world. That was MY generation. However, when it comes to this generation the challenge will be to win over a mindset that respects all forms of spirituality, that gives credit to every point of view, and is loathe to consider the possibility of condemnation of anyone, especially themselves.

In addition to this, the post-modern generation blames the previous generation, that's me, that's you, of my age, for the poor condition of the world. And we're the very ones charged with bringing them the gospel of salvation. You see, the present generation doesn't trust the previous generation to tell them the truth. So, we have a problem here, because the previous generation's job is to bring the truth of Christ to the next generation.

How are we going to solve that problem? So, as I come back to my first comment about Barry and his class for parents and grandparents - about molding the character of teens, I say it actually begins there - in that class - with that type of activity.

And so in reaching the next generation, we start with the rethinking of how the church approaches ministry to young people. In reaching today's youth, I propose that in addition to the usual array of youth ministry programs that emphasize fellowship and recreational events, we make sure that we do the following - and it's important for all of us because we all have children, and we're all responsible for reaching our generation and certainly the one that's to come.

A couple of proposals - I propose that we re-establish relevancy in the ministry to younger people. Let me explain what I mean. Much of the teaching aimed at youth has to do with what is right and what is wrong - what they should or what they should avoid doing - and that's ok. We need to help young people know how Christ is the answer, not only to their teen problems, but also to world problems as
well. We must be able to challenge the prevailing wisdom of the world, the entrenched mindset of the world, with the power of the gospel and communicate that to young minds. Young people are smarter and more aware than we give them credit for, so preachers and youth ministers need to be versed in the philosophy of the day, and world religions and modern issues, so they can speak with intellectual as well as biblical authority.

What good is it if you know your bible by heart, but can't address the issues of the day.

C teens need to be shown in practical terms the answer that Christ offers to the BIG problems of the world. Youth ministry has to become more than what is in many instances, and I speak in a broad sense -

You know the unfortunate stereotype that youth ministry is not much more than babysitting and organizing events, is a stereotype. But it's a stereotype because unfortunately in many cases it's true. That's the sad part. Not always - not here - but it's true in many, many cases.

I've witnessed too many battles between youth ministers and congregations where the bragging rights over whose group was the biggest, and who's the coolest, and who attends the right rallies to have confidence that this doesn't happen in many, many churches. You know, Jesus challenged the prevailing thought and status quo by showing the true meaning and application of scripture in people's everyday lives. If we want to reach the next generation, we have to prepare them to live as Christians - in the world that THEY are living in - not the world we're living in.

When their faith becomes relevant, it will become reliable. And when they start relying on their own faith instinctively, they will be radicalized in Christ. And that's how we begin to touch the next generation.

Another proposal in reaching the next generation for Christ - Restore meaningful relationships. Now anyone who has lived for a while knows that there is a disconnect between the generations, but that's
always existed. Most ministry to youth that I have witnessed begins a process that actually exacerbates this problem rather than resolving it. In other words, in the church we make it worse instead of better. How can we promote a healthy relationship between God, who is the unseen being, and the young people of today, when we fail at establishing meaningful relationships between the youth in the church and other age groups before them and after them? How're you gonna do that? How're you gonna teach younger people to have a relationship with God if you don't even teach them how to have a relationship with somebody else that's different than them in the church?

You know, we've created a sub-culture mentality in the church - where different ministries have their own associations and seminars and pecking order and publications. A typical Christian, growing up in the church, goes from one isolated group to another. For example, you start out in the youth ministry sub-culture, and then you graduate to the campus ministry sub-culture. Then you go to the young adult movement, the young married classes and activities, the mid-lifers, the empty nesters, and THEN - you end up in the senior class.

And we wonder why people drop out at every stage - why there's such division, why so many remain dry spiritually, and immature. We've reconfigured the construct of the church in such a way that's easier to manage it for our own "professional clergy" people, rather than allow it to function in a more natural and spiritual and an organic way.

In other words, we've taken an organization that is supposed to function as a body, as a family, and we've re-cast it as the YMCA, or a school, or depending on your doctrine, a detention center. The generation growing into adulthood at this moment in history desperately needs the thing that the church was originally designed to provide here on earth - relational living. That's why God created the church.

Families are fragmented. Personal connectedness has been replaced by digital connectedness. You know, there are more people in my 18 year old son's life than any 18 year old of past generations, but none
of them can touch him. None of them can hear him - because all of
these people are talking to him from the television set or the radio or
from diskettes, or from the internet or on the phone. Billy Joel sang a
song way back in 1977 called "Just the Way You Are". And one of the
verses in the song said, "All I want is someone to talk to." In his own
way he prophesied the coming angst of this present generation who
have access to the world, but nobody to talk to but themselves.

To win this generation, we need to teach them how to relate to
people - all kinds of people. Paul's instruction to the church in 1 Tim
5:2 shows that there were a variety of relationships being pursued in
the church at that time, between young and old - male and female.
Now there are other admonitions to bear with the weak and
courage one another, and be patient with each other. All of these
exhortations don't only speak to one age group. Paul didn't write
different epistles, one epistle to the young adults, one epistle to the
seniors. Everybody, of different ages, was reading the same epistle.

We stunt our spiritual growth when we isolate different groups within
the church in the service of convenience or comfort. I say - Let
Christians plan their own diversions. Ministers, especially those who
minister to the young, need to find ways to help young Christians
build relationships with one another, young and old. And the biblical
way to do this is not through entertainment or socializing, but
through ministry.

Ministry. What brings people together in Christ? Ministry. NOT
PIZZA!

You know, there are five biblical ministries. I've said this to you before.
Five of them: one is evangelism, preaching the gospel to the lost; the
second is education, learning to obey the teachings of Christ; the
third is fellowship, sharing our lives based on our faith - not on our
culture; the fourth is worship, the adoration of God through Christ;
and the fifth area of ministry is service, caring for the needs because
of and in the name of our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the work of ministers is to train and lead Christians of all ages in
becoming involved in ministry towards one another and the lost.
That's our job. When an old woman and a teenaged boy deliver a hot meal to a sick, single mother, three things happen. God is glorified; the church is built up; and the bond of love and unity is established by all three of these very different individuals. Ministry is what brings people together.

If we want to keep this generation in the church, we have to make them part of the body of Christ. We have to teach them to function as part of the body. We have to give them ownership within the body. We do today's youth a disservice and we sow the seeds of their future isolation if we don't help them to establish meaningful and productive relationships with every part of the body, not just each other. My hand does not only touch my other hand. My hand ministers to my face. My hand holds my heart. My hands keep my body warm.

This is the way the church has been designed. And in order to keep the youth, we need to return to this form of congregational organization, ministry, and interaction.

Finally, in reaching the next generation, I that we restore restorationism as a common cause - restorationism as a common cause. You know, we teach our young people the history of the U.S.A. And all of you have taken basic history classes. The first couple of classes the teacher teaches you - why we have to study history. Right? We want to provide texture and context for the things we do today as a nation. We study history in order to avoid the mistakes of the past. Now if we know where we came from and how we got here, it'll help the next generation chart the course for the future. All good reasons why we study the history of the U.S.A. My question is: Why don't we study church history? Why can't we spend time teaching our youth about the unique and important history of the restoration movement and how the church of Christ of today was forged from this?

You know, our youth groups are more and more encouraged to mingle, and even work with young people from denominational churches. But are they ever told what the actual differences are between Baptists, for example, and Methodists, and Catholics and
ourselves? When we don't tell them, this is a concession to the supreme virtue of this age, which is tolerance. Of course, we lose our young people to other groups who have flashier worship, or a more dynamic minister of some kind. But when you don't know who you are, and what you stand for, you're gonna go with whatever shines the brightest.

We need to get away from the idea that restorationism is some quirky, leftover idea from the fifties' church of Christ. That's not what it is. We need to renew our teaching that restorationism is an important and necessary part of the complete teaching of Christ and His word.

You know, the gospel message answers the question, "Why and how has God saved me?" The gospel answers that question. But it is the teaching on restorationism that answers those every day questions that people will ask: "Why should we live the way we do?" and "How do we please God in worship?" and "How do we organize and carry out our service to the Lord?", and "What makes us unique in the religious world?" Most young people know and understand the gospel, but rarely can answer the questions specifically addressed by the teaching on the restoration.

Christ died for the church - the New Testament church described in the bible. He sacrificed himself to create that body. How can we expect young people to sacrifice themselves or devote themselves for Christ's church if they don't even know what it's supposed to look like?

Winning the world for Christ is played out in the context of living in and building up His church. We need to know what the thing's supposed to look like before we start building it. We need to open the eyes of the next generation to see the vision of those who brought us here. They will never be able to build the church of the future if they don't understand its beginnings and journey to the present and why it is necessary - and I repeat - necessary to establish a strong, New Testament church in their own time.
My prayer - is that our youth will grow in their love for God as they discover Him in his word - that they will be messengers for truth in the next generation, and that they will be the architects of the next great revival in this country. Cause it's not gonna be us - you know? You who are of my generation or the generation ahead - we're here! This is where we brought us. It's up to the next generation to create the revival. Will they? Do they know how? Do they even know why?

I pray that they will understand and perfect the work of this generation in establishing the New Testament church. They are, in many ways, the product of our teaching and our leadership. Let us be careful in preparing them as we send them into a very difficult future.

As for the future, the Lord has told all those who have believed - not to worry - or be afraid - but to continue in trusting Him. Whether you are old or young; whether you are new in the faith or a leader in the church; my exhortation to you is to continue trusting in Jesus for your salvation in the future, and for all that you need on this very day.

If you need the prayers or the ministry of the church; if you need to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and be baptized; whatever your need, then I encourage you to come now and make that need known as we stand and sing our song of encouragement.

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