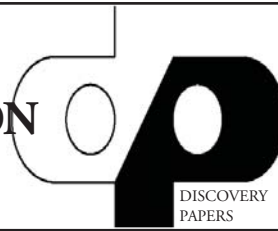


GENERATION GAP: HOW LEADERS PASS THEMSELVES ON

SERIES: THE SKIPPING STONE OF THE SPIRIT



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A few months ago, a guy in San Antonio named David Williams had an idea. To get his idea acted upon, he started a group on facebook that people could join to show their support for his idea. That group was called, “Betty White to host SNL (please?!)” After a few short months, 500,000 people joined this campaign. Shortly after, NBC announced that Betty White would host Saturday Night Live in May.

As it turns out, this episode of Saturday Night Live had one of the highest ratings for Saturday Night Live in the past 13 years. There was basically one joke played over and over again. You saw an eighty-eight year old woman saying things and doing things that you don’t expect someone her age to say and do. Many of the things would make a twenty-eight year old blush. The whole episode played off the difference between generations.

This is one of the things we do in the face of serious issues. We make jokes. The reason we laugh is because we need to. The generation gap between young people and older people is a serious issue in our culture. It affects us everywhere. In our families, parents don’t understand their kids. Kids don’t agree with their parents. Parents don’t know how to let go of their children and kids are struggling to figure out how to live on their own. In our workplaces, young people are often given opportunities older people aren’t. Where previous generations valued age and wisdom, this culture values youth and innovation. Even in our church, we are always asking the question of how we can effectively minister to children, youth, young adults, families, and the elderly. Are we paying more attention to one group than another?

One of the reasons for the generation gap is that the older generation is passing to the younger generation. They are transitioning their authority, wisdom, and position. And that is a complicated process. How do older people train up younger people so that they are prepared to step into their places? How do younger people learn from and appreciate the older people in their lives? The real question is: “How do leaders pass themselves on?” But we’re not just talking about people with positions of leadership. We’re all leaders in some capacity—how does the transition from

one generation to another flow smoothly?

To address these questions, we’ll be following the three part pattern that all the sermons in this series have been following. We’re asking these questions of the Spirit: asking Him to guide and lead us as we wrestle through these things. So in our first part, we’ll start with a story from Scripture about King Solomon and the two men that succeeded him. We’ll see how the passing of their generations took place and what we can learn from how they acted. For our second skip of the stone, we’re going to look at another man named Solomon who lived in the early days of the American colonists and how their vision for a new world was or wasn’t passed on to a new generation and what we can learn from that. Then we’ll look at today and ask what is happening today. How do we answer these questions in our families, our workplaces, and our church?

Jeroboam moves too quickly

We are going to start off by looking at King Solomon and how his kingdom was passed down to the next generation. Many of you will remember that Solomon was Israel’s third king. He was the son of King David. He built the temple of Jerusalem that was said to be one of the most beautiful things of the ancient world. But he was also led astray: he married foreign women and entered into alliances with other nations that God had outlawed. When his reign ended, two people emerged in his place. The first was the son of one of Solomon’s servants. His name was Jeroboam. The second was one of Solomon’s sons named Rehoboam.

I’m pretty sure these names are one of God’s little jokes on us—it’s like parents naming all their kids with similar names. It’s like they’re just trying to make it difficult on you. I’ve always had a hard time keeping Jeroboam and Rehoboam straight. So we’ll call Jeroboam Jerry for now. And we’ll call Rehoboam Roger. Sound good? Jerry and Roger. Jerry was the son of one of Solomon’s servants and Roger was Solomon’s son. Let’s look at Jerry first.

1 Kings 11:26 - 32, 40:

²⁶Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah.

²⁷Here is the account of how he rebelled against the king: Solomon had built the supporting terraces and had filled in the gap in the wall of the city of David his father.

²⁸Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph.

²⁹About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, ³⁰and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. ³²But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe...."

⁴⁰Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death.

There's a bunch of stuff going on here, so we need some background. In verse 27, we read about Solomon building the supporting terraces. This refers to a building project called the Millo. Solomon built the Millo as a palace for the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt, who was one of his wives. You can read about that in 1 Kings 9.

The problem is that God told all His people not to marry foreign women. He also told His kings not to enter into alliances. Solomon broke both rules. And then he built her a palace. This was one of Solomon's worst offenses against God.

He, then puts Jerry in charge of the project. Jerry was asked to lead a project that represented an offence to God.

Jerry didn't like this and we can understand that. So he rebelled. He was met by a prophet and this prophet told him that he was going to rule Solomon's kingdom. Not all of it. He was going to rule part of Solomon's kingdom. Ten parts of twelve. The two other parts would remain with the line of David, Solomon's line. Not because Solomon did a good job, but out of respect for David, since God promised him a descendent always on the throne.

If you read between the lines, it looks like Jerry must have said something about this prophecy on his Facebook status because Solomon finds out about it and wants to kill him. Then Jerry ran to, of all places, Egypt. Looks like Solomon's alliance with the Pharaoh wasn't as strong as he wanted. So Jerry was off in Egypt, waiting for Solomon to die.

Let's think about Jerry for a few minutes. Let's think about how he disagreed with this older king, how he handled working for him, and how it ended up for him in the end.

Jerry was a young man. He was a good worker. He was a smart guy. 1 Kings says that he was "a man of standing" (v. 28). He had a great job—he worked for the king and the king gave him a huge promotion. But he thought that the king made some bad decisions. So he rebelled against the king. The Hebrew phrase is literally, "he raised his hand against the king." Now, we agree with Jerry. Solomon did make some bad decisions. He messed things up. This palace was a stupid idea and it was stupid for him to marry the Pharaoh's daughter.

But it seems that Jerry's undoing was that he went too fast. He had the right idea, but the wrong way to implement it. He could have challenged the king on violating God's law. He could have asked him to stop building the palace. There are lots of ways he could have approached the situation. But the one he chose is to rebel against the king. It's not exactly clear from the text what form that rebellion took, but to rebel against the king of Israel is never a good thing to do.

Remember when King Saul chased David and tried to kill him? One of the most amazing things that David did was to continue to honor King Saul; he spared his life on several occasions, just because he was the king. Jerry didn't show this kind of respect for King Solomon.

So the first thing we can learn has to do with something primarily for the younger generation. You may be right about a lot of things. There will be ways that the younger generation sees the world more accurately than the older generation. Blind spots that are revealed and cleared up because conditions are different. You may be exactly right about what you see and what needs to be changed. But there are good ways and bad ways to approach those issues. Jerry chose to rebel against the king. He went too fast. The caution for younger people is to take it slow.

This is probably one of the hardest things to say to younger people. They tend to want to see changes happen quickly. They see something wrong and want to fix it. I think there is an innate fascination within us to affect the world. And as we grow up we want to see that at work. We want to enter into situations and see them changed. Young people want new things, different things, they want to change stuff around. But the tendency to push for things too fast comes along with that desire.

Jerry wanted to do things better than Solomon. He saw some of the ways that Solomon had done things poorly and he wanted to do them better. And at this point, we agree with him. We want someone to do it better than Solomon too. But Jerry moved too quickly and in the wrong ways. His actions eventually led to division in the kingdom.

One of the reasons younger people move too fast is a lack of trust that God is actually overseeing things. I know I've seen that in myself. For me, when I get frantic and think that I need to change things or fix things to make them better as soon as I can, it's often because of my God complex. I forget that God is God and think that it's up to me to fix everything. Now, I'm not saying don't try to fix things, but it can be done patiently and wisely, recognizing that God is in charge. Sometimes things do change quickly, but often not. Our taking it slow is an acknowledgment that God is in charge of the situation. I don't have to rebel against the structures that God has put in place like Jerry did, because I know and can trust that He is at work behind them.

Rehoboam pushes too hard

Jerry didn't do this, so he was exiled in Egypt and waited for Solomon to die. As it turned out, that wasn't too far away. Solomon did die and his son Rehoboam, better

known as Roger, came into power.

So here's our second example of a young man succeeding the previous generation. We saw that Jerry was right in his ideas but didn't handle them very well. What can we see about Roger?

1 Kings 12:1-5:

¹Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. ²When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. ³So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: ⁴“Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”

⁵Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

So Roger consulted the older advisors and they told him to lighten up on the people and they would be faithful servants. Then he consulted the younger advisors and they told him not to be a wimp. Tighten down and force them to serve you. Roger took the younger advisors' advice.

1 Kings 12:16-20:

¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: “What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!”

So the Israelites went home. ¹⁷But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

¹⁸King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. ¹⁹So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this

day.

²⁰When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

It's a bit of a complicated story. Solomon left his kingdom to Roger. Jerry, down in Egypt, found out that Solomon was dead and came back to represent the people. Apparently the people already viewed him as their leader. They talked to Roger about how hard Solomon had worked them and asked him to take it easier on them. Jerry seemed like he learned a lesson down in Egypt. He's acted respectfully and wisely on behalf of the people. But now we see Roger's big mistake.

This world has seen a lot of kings. A lot of people in power. And the world has seen those kings pass on their kingdoms to their sons or have their kingdoms taken from them by rebels or enemies. But in all the history of the world, this is one of the most tragic stories of a kingdom passing from one generation to another. Plenty of kingdoms have been split. But this is the people of God. This is God's chosen nation.

The result of all this is that Jerry led most of the kingdom up north and became their king. Roger remained behind in Jerusalem as king of two tribes in the South. Jerry went up north. Roger remained. The kingdom has splintered.

Why did all this happen? Because Roger wanted to show up his dad. Jerry wanted to do it better than Solomon, but Roger wanted to do it bigger. His father built the temple and the Millo. He thought if he worked the people harder, he could build something even more impressive. He wanted to be greater than his father, but he flexes too hard. He pushes so hard on the back of the nation that he breaks it.

We have something else that we can learn; how the younger generation responded to the older. They can't push too hard. They can't move too fast. Young people have ambitions. They have hopes and dreams about what the world could look like, about how great things could become. But he pushed too hard and broke his only chance at being great. So younger people need to learn to take it easy.

Jerry had the right ideas, but he tried to move too fast. Roger's mistake was much deeper. He was driven by raw ambition. He wanted his kingdom to be bigger than his daddy's. He wanted to make a name for himself. He tried to use his position to get there. But in the process he lost it all.

This is common for young people. They have ambition and drive. They want to become someone, to be important. They want to start the next Google or Microsoft. They want to build their kingdom. They want to be great.

But if moving too fast is a lack of trust in God, then pushing too hard is wanting to become like God. Greatness isn't defined by how big of a temple you build or how huge an army you can assemble. We're constantly tempted by this world to define ourselves on its terms. To be great in the eyes of our peers. Young people have a particularly hard time at this because they think they still have a shot at it. The temptation is to push as hard as possible to make things as big as you can. So you end up using force like Roger, or other means like scheming and manipulation in order to see your kingdom get big.

Sometimes God does do big things. Sometimes He asks people to build huge temples. But not everyone. Most of the times He works in great ways through small things. Faithfulness. Patience. Self-control. When we demand that God make big things happen, we can push too hard. We try to force it. And sometimes that makes it fall apart, like it did for Roger. By pushing too hard to make it bigger, he sacrificed his real chance at greatness.

Solomon Stoddard

We've seen two examples of young people that haven't handled the passing of generations very well. Now we want to fast forward into church history to an example of an older person who didn't handle things so well. We started off by looking at King Solomon and the young people who assumed his role. Now we're going to look at another Solomon who lived 2700 years later in the 17th century in New England, America.

This man's name is Solomon Stoddard. He was a pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts during the era of the first pilgrims coming to North America. His grandson is the famous pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. Solomon Stoddard was perhaps the most powerful religious authority in the entire area during his day. People that didn't like

him even called him “Pope Stoddard.” And he made some decisions that changed the course of church history in a dramatic way.

First of all, you have to understand that when the pilgrims came to North America and settled in New England, they had a huge vision of what they were doing. They spoke of their land as the New World. They compared their leaders to Moses and Elijah. You see, they thought of themselves as God’s people entering the Promised Land. They thought they were coming to America to set up the New Jerusalem. There are dozens of churches and towns across New England called New Jerusalem. If you remember our discussion last week, these pilgrims thought they were bringing in the City of God. This was going to be God’s Kingdom on earth. Everyone that made the dangerous trip over here and committed to living in a new place had this ideal in their minds.

But then things changed, as they always do. These people had kids and those kids grew up. They didn’t know about the Old Country. They didn’t sacrifice everything for the sake of starting the City on a Hill in the New World. This was all they had known. And, as often happens for Christian parents, some of these kids weren’t interested in God. They didn’t care much about establishing the New Jerusalem. They just wanted the cute girl two doors down to notice them. They had other things to worry about.

The problem was that the entire society had been set up around the church. City meetings were held in the church. The city government was managed around the church. And you couldn’t vote in the town unless you were a full member of the church. You couldn’t be a full member of the church unless you professed faith in Christ. So all these kids were growing up and they didn’t want to become members of the church because they didn’t believe in Christ. That meant they had no legal role in the town at all. This was a significant problem.

Solomon Stoddard had an idea to address it though. He didn’t want to let go of his vision of a New Jerusalem, of a new kind of community centered around the church. So he came up with a way to hold on to his vision. He created something he called the “Halfway Covenant.” The idea behind the “Halfway Covenant” was that you could be a member of the church even if you didn’t profess faith in Christ. You didn’t have to have personal faith, you just had to say that the church was a good thing. This allowed people who weren’t too sure about God to participate in

the civil life of the community. They could vote in the town and be a part of everything in the church. They could even take communion. And they didn’t have to profess faith in Christ.

In one sense, Solomon Stoddard’s idea was hugely successful. Church membership immediately started to increase. A new generation of people were able to be a part of everything no matter what they believed. He thought his vision was saved.

But in reality, it was destroyed. He gave up the wrong things to keep everything else the same. Solomon wanted his church membership to stay the same. So he allowed a change in what it meant to be a church member in order to maintain his vision. But he gave up the wrong things. He gave up the central identity of the church. This is a temptation for any older generation. In an effort to keep some things the same, they give up other things. And choose the wrong things to give up. So the encouragement for the older generations in our midst is to give up the right things. Let the details change, not the core. Let the right things change.

What often happens is that you think you can keep everything the same. Usually, you don’t even realize that you are allowing change in one area, you’re so focused on keeping something the same. Solomon didn’t think that he changed the very definition of what it meant to be a person of faith. He just desperately tried to find a solution to keep his vision intact. We need to be aware that things are going to change. We can’t stop that. What we can do is allow the right things to change.

So how do we know what things are OK to give up? Are we holding to some insignificant detail that can change or are we making sure the core of truth doesn’t get compromised? This is the area where the Spirit must lead us. This is where we need God’s help. But I’ll give two suggestions.

First, if you think nothing is changing, think again. Recognize that there will be change. Get used to that. It’s when you think you’re keeping everything the same, that you end up giving up the wrong things. Think about what’s allowed to change. And recognize that it will always be hard for you. It will always involve mourning and loss. When part of your vision dies, it will hurt. If you’re able to keep it from hurting, you’re probably giving up something important. Be willing to let God change things, change

your vision.

Second, the thing you can never let go of is the person of Christ; who He is and what it means to have faith in Him. One of my seminary professors used to say that the older he gets, the fewer things he believes in as absolutely central to his faith, but the more deeply he believes those things. And those few, absolutely central things are always about the person of Christ and what it means to have faith in Him.

Solomon's "Halfway Covenant" had a huge impact on the face of religion in America. More and more people attended church without any kind of faith at all. Churches became full of people who couldn't care less about God. But God used even this. Solomon Stoddard's grandson, Jonathan Edwards, was one of a great many people who ushered in what's called the First Great Awakening in American history. This was a time of dramatic religious revival. People all across the young country were coming back to God in droves: making personal professions of faith, committing themselves to Christ, and choosing a life of real discipleship. Solomon gave away the wrong things, but God used even his mistakes.

Today

So now we come to today. We've talked about two Solomons. King Solomon and the two young guys that succeeded him: Jerry and Roger. Jerry wanted to make things better, but he moved too fast. Roger wanted to make things bigger, but he pushed too hard. Then we looked at Solomon Stoddard and saw that he wanted things to stay the same, but he gave up the wrong things. So what do we do? How do older people give way to younger people. How do younger people learn from their elders?

We cannot act like those who do not know God. We cannot rely on force, manipulation, guilt tactics, political scheming, bad-mouthing or anything else to make sure that we get our way. Both older and younger generations can resort to this type of behavior to either make sure things change or make sure they don't. But we know God. We trust that He is behind the scenes. We have a different way.

We need God to guide us. We need His Spirit to be active in our midst. And He is. We've seen a few ways

that both younger people and older people tend to make mistakes. So I just want to give us one exhortation that applies to all of us. It's a simple word, but incredibly hard to do. Listen. Listen to each other. Listen.

As we listen to the Spirit, we need to remember that the Spirit speaks through us. Older people tend to want so badly to pass on the knowledge that they've gained and the experience that they've had so they fail to listen to the questions younger people are asking. They want to shape things in a certain direction, but aren't willing or able to see the direction that things are already moving in. Older people need to learn to listen to the younger people in the midst. Ask questions. Real questions, not questions like, "Are you sure that's going to work?" or "Do you really think that's the way that the world works?" Questions like, "How do you see God moving things?" or "What needs does your generation have and what is God doing to meet them." Listen respectfully, acknowledging that some things won't make sense to you. Instead of rejecting them, ask more questions. Probe deeper. Try to understand. Look for God at work in the younger generation. There's a lot to find.

The same advice goes to younger people. They sometimes find it especially hard to listen because they feel like they've been listening their whole lives. Listening to parents, to teachers, to pastors, to everyone. And they have their own ideas, so they want to talk. But you'll get your chance to talk. You will. It will come. Take the opportunities you have now to listen. You're tired of hearing what you should do, so ask questions about when your elders were confused about a situation and how they decided to handle it. Listen to their stories, to their experience. You can learn from them. Let your elders tell you what they think you should do and prayerfully bring that before the Lord. You don't have to convince them you're right. You can listen and then take some of what they say into consideration as you follow God. Look for how God worked in their generation.

Conclusion

As followers of Christ, we have the resources to pass ourselves on carefully but boldly. All our world can do is make jokes of the generation gap. Betty White is the hottest new fad because she makes light of the serious issues addressing us. But we know the God of the universe is behind the scenes. We can rest in His sovereignty as one generation passes to the next.

Older people don't have to be threatened that younger people are going to ruin everything. God is in charge. Even when people like Solomon Stoddard make bad decisions, He's still there, and He can redeem even the worst mistake. Younger people don't have to be threatened that older people won't let them become who God wants them to be. God is at work. Sometimes the direction He calls you isn't as big or as ambitious as you'd like, but He will lead you.

So whether you're a younger person who wants things to be better and bigger or an older person who wants things to stay the same, you can relax. You can trust that God is at work. And you can listen. The Spirit will guide us. Through our good decisions and our bad decisions. God has always led His church faithfully and He always will. That never changes.