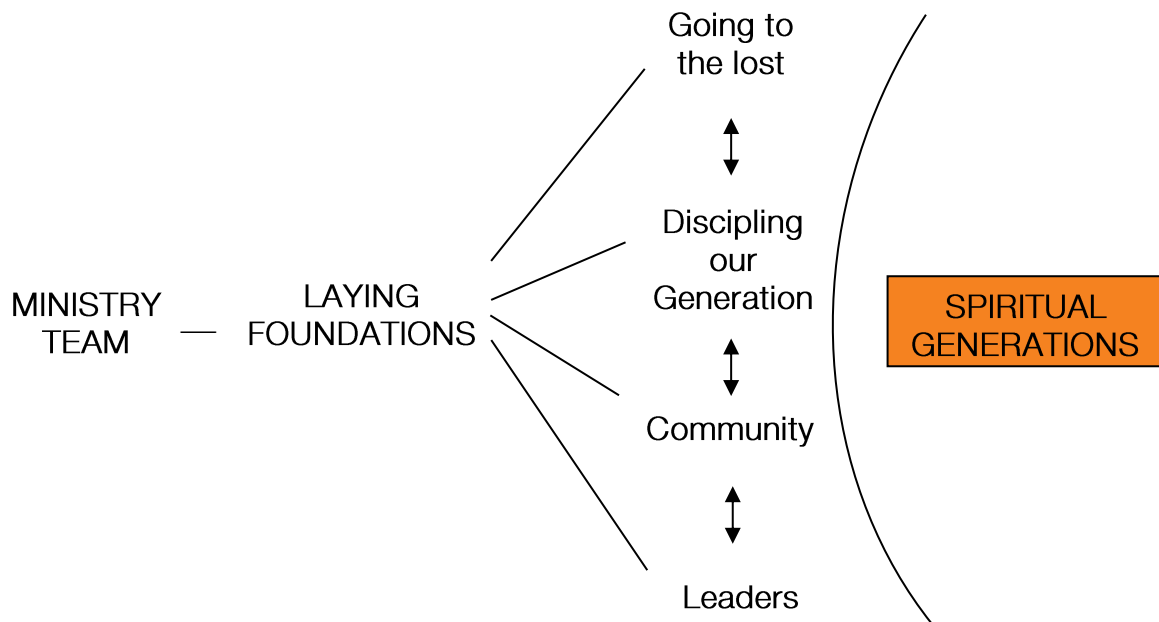


SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHATEVER HE ASKS. WHEREVER HE LEADS.

SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS



OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL FACTOR VI – SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS

We have heard the illustrations of the power of geometric progressions. But are spiritual generations a biblical idea? What is a spiritual generation and how does it happen?

SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Generational thinking is rooted in the promises of God. The Gospel is a trust, a legacy to be passed from one generation to the next. How does multiplication occur?



SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?¹

INTRODUCTION

As we read our Bibles we see a loving God searching for and reaching out to people who have rebelled and lost their way. He reaches out to all peoples of all nations of all generations with the wonderful Gospel. The Gospel is a trust that is to be passed from one generation to the next.

But how are we to think about ‘*generations?*’ Often, illustrations based upon geometric progression have shaped our understanding and expectations. Many are fueled with a vision of sharing their faith with another person so that at the end of the year there would be two believers. Those two would then reach out in the next year to two others, so then there would be four. After a year each of the four would reach one more and so on. In 34 years the total would be more than the population of the world. This has led to many becoming disillusioned and discouraged. However, the pursuit of ‘*spiritual generations?*’ is a scriptural theme. How should we think about generations as we look at the Scriptures?

Several scriptural themes illustrate the idea of spiritual generations:

- ❑ Abraham and his descendants
- ❑ Physical and spiritual generations
- ❑ Seed and organic growth
- ❑ Christ’s investment in the few
- ❑ Sustaining leadership

As you consider these themes, keep asking:

1. How do these Scriptures instruct us in how to think about spiritual generations?
2. What does this teach us on how to think about the fulfilling of our ‘calling’?

¹ This study is adapted from The Navigators 6 Critical Factors Studies 2002.



SCRIPTURAL THEMES ON GENERATIONS

Abraham and his Descendants

God chose a man and gave him an amazing promise. This old man and his barren wife would become a great nation and through them all the peoples of the earth for generations to come would be blessed.

Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 17:1-2

Genesis 22:17-18

Genesis 26:2-6

Romans 4:16-18

Galatians 3:7-9

Galatians 3:13,14

Hebrews 6:13-15



Physical and Spiritual Generations

God's purpose is to reveal Himself to the peoples of the world through the combination of spiritual and physical generations. He desires that godly parents transmit their faith to their children and their children's children. Families by their very nature are generational, and as family members embrace the Gospel we see the convergence of spiritual and physical generations.

The opposite is also true. Sin and patterns of disobedience break the transmission of the Gospel between generations. Ungodly parents pass on patterns of ungodliness to their children. However, every person who believes and obeys has a new beginning spiritually. They can be the foundation of many spiritual generations both within and outside their family.

Genesis 1:28

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Judges 2:6-10

Ruth 4:13-17

Psalms 78:1-8

Psalms 145:3-7

Isaiah 54:1-3

Isaiah 61:1-4

Malachi 2:15



The Seed and Organic Growth

Jesus lived in an agrarian society so it is not surprising that He illustrates much of His teaching about spiritual generations with stories of seeds, sowing, soil and sowers. The seed illustrates the power of regeneration.

Note the similar dynamics of physical and spiritual generations.

Genesis 1:11-12

Matthew 13:31-32

Mark 4:20

Mark 4:26-29

John 12:23-26



Christ's investment in the Few

Jesus faced an extremely challenging task. He came 'to seek and to save the lost.'² This involved living a life that revealed the Father to everyone He met; die as God's sacrifice for every sin that has ever been and ever will be committed; defeat death and then return to the Father. It was vital that He did this all in a way that every generation from His to ours and beyond would have the news of it. It all would have been in vain if the message had died within one generation.

During His last night with His disciples, Jesus prayed His great prayer for the ongoing ministry He was about to leave on earth. His emphasis was on what He will continue to accomplish through His disciples. He was planting seed for the future.

Note what He prayed about reproducing generations of believers.

Matthew 28:18-20

John 17:5-26

John 20:21

Sustaining Leadership

Imparting the Gospel to laborers and leaders who will disciple their generation with a vision for the next is vital if our ministry is to be generational.

Note the deliberateness of passing on and guarding the Gospel.

Acts 20:18-36

2 Timothy 1: 13,14 and 2:1-2

² Luke 19:10



SUMMARY

The Scriptures support the idea that God's working with people flows through physical and spiritual generational lines. Mathematical concepts, while illustrating the power of multiplication, cannot be the basis of our understanding and expectations. When this happens we fall into at least two errors:

1. Individualism - We have to reject any notion that generations need to be mine! When we need to win and disciple people to validate our own fruitfulness and success, we will be barren because we are seeking our own glory. No individual can accomplish generations on his own. We need each other. Growth will occur as *'each part does its work.'*³
2. Timeframe - We can live with false expectations for as long it takes for one generation to birth another and then another.

These errors, if perpetuated, lead to discouragement and disillusionment concerning 'spiritual generations and multiplication.'

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENCOURAGE GENERATIONS?

1. Pray and depend on the promises of God. Imitate those who *"through faith and patience inherit what God has promised."* Hebrews 6:12
2. Focus and purposefully invest deeply in a few individuals, expecting God to in time multiply that investment.
3. For those with children, intentionally disciple them and pass on the spiritual legacy you have been given.
4. Teach and talk about 'spiritual generations.'
5. Help people understand that salvation is personal, but never only for them. It is for their family and friends. They join God in His mission for the nations.

³ Ephesians 4:16



DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How should you think about 'generations'?
2. In light of the Scriptures how would you define a 'generation'?
3. How should a scriptural understanding of 'generations' influence the way you go about ministry? Reflect back over previous five Critical Factor Studies to assist you in this.
4. How does 'spiritual multiplication' take place? To what extent is it a community process rather than an individual process? Reflect back particularly on Critical Factor IV Studies to assist you with this.



4. How are you communicating a vision for generations to the next generation of laborers and leaders? Are you content with this? If not, what changes will you make?

5. How does generational thinking affect your activities, forms and content as you 'Go to the Lost', 'Disciple your Generation', 'Build Community' and develop 'Leaders?'

