



SERMON GUIDE

# Generational Discipleship

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

# It All Begins Here

*Generational Discipleship | Week 25 | Psalm 78:1-8*

## Introduction

At this moment in the United States, the odds of our children walking with Jesus as adults are equivalent to that of a coin toss. According to the Fuller Youth Institute, 50% of high school students actively involved in their churches walk away from their faith after graduation. These aren't casual attendees; they were the most committed teenagers who are still choosing to do life apart from Jesus once they leave high school. As President Reagan famously said about freedom, "It is never more than one generation away from extinction. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same." The same is true for faith. Psalm 78 addresses this urgent reality, revealing how the faith of a nation collapsed when they failed to pass God's truth to the next generation. We must touch the next generation by teaching them and reaching them with biblical truth.

## Notes

## Key Points

### 1. Teach the Mind to Learn Biblical Truth

God designed spiritual formation to flow from one generation to the next in an unbroken chain of truth. The psalmist declares, "We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" (Psalm 78:4, NIV). This isn't a suggestion but a declaration of responsibility. God established a pattern where parents would teach children, who would teach their children, creating a spiritual inheritance passed through generations. This responsibility can't be handed over to churches or schools; it begins at home. When we neglect teaching biblical truth, we create a vacuum that will be filled by something, usually a conflicting worldview. Theologian Robert Dabney stated, "The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth." Passing on spiritual heritage is part of your God-given calling in this generation.



Teaching your children (or children you influence) biblical truth isn't optional; it's a fundamental responsibility that gives them the foundation from which they can navigate a confusing world with God's wisdom.

## Notes

[illegible]

## 2. Turn the Will to Love Biblical Truth

Knowledge alone isn't enough. Truth must move from the head to the heart and hands. The psalmist writes, "Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Psalm 78:7, NIV). Children will ultimately put their trust in something, whether it's prosperity, popularity, position, or politics. A recent Pew Research study revealed that 89% of Christian parents feel it's very important that their children work hard and 72% prioritize college education, but only 56% consider it very important that their children follow Jesus. There is a serious disconnect between what we claim to believe and what we actually prioritize. Our homes have to be genuinely Christ-centered, not just houses where Christians happen to live. When you think about what your children are being taught to trust in, examine what your daily choices, conversations, and priorities are actually communicating about what matters most.

**What your children see you treasuring will shape what they come to trust in. Make sure your actions, not just your words, point them toward putting their ultimate trust in God.**

### 3. Touch the Heart to Love God's Truth

The ultimate goal of generational discipleship goes beyond our behavior modification to our heart transformation. The psalmist warns what happens when we don't transfer our faith: "They would not be like their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him" (Psalm 78:8, NIV). Israel's



# It All Begins Here

*Generational Discipleship | Week 25 | Psalm 78:1-8*

pattern shows a tragic progression from forgetfulness to faithlessness, and then from foolishness to failure. Well-behaved children aren't necessarily disciples. We can raise children who follow rules without loving God. Jesus identified the greatest commandment as loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The heart of generational discipleship is nurturing not compliant behavior or agreement to a set of beliefs but genuine love for God.

When the head learns the truth and the heart loves the truth, the hands will naturally live the truth. Discipleship that transforms behavior always begins with the transformation of the heart.

## Key Takeaway

*When you faithfully fulfill this responsibility, you're raising not just well-behaved kids but disciples who will carry God's truth to the generation after them.*

## Notes

[illegible]

# It All Begins Here

---

*Generational Discipleship | Week 25 | Psalm 78:1-8*

---

## Reflection Questions:

1. What specific biblical truths do you believe are most essential to pass on to the next generation, and how intentionally are you teaching these truths to the children in your sphere of influence?

---

---

---

---

---

2. In what ways might your daily priorities be teaching children to put their trust in something other than God? What practical changes could you make to demonstrate that following Jesus truly comes first?

---

---

---

---

---

3. What is one specific step you can take this week to better participate in the generational chain of discipleship, whether with your own children or others in your church or community?

---

---

---

---

---



# Introduction

## Key Points

**Your daily choices form a blueprint that others will follow long after they forget what you said. Live in such a way that following your example leads others closer to Christ.**

## Notes





# Role Model

Generational Discipleship | Week 26 | 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Use your gifts faithfully—not to impress others but to imitate Christ, who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28, NIV)—showing the next generation what kingdom contribution really looks like.

## Notes

### 4. Motivate the People of God

Growth in the Christian life should never stop. Paul challenged Timothy: “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:15-16, NIV). We must model for the next generation that we’re always striving because we’re never arriving. This means watching both how we live and what we teach, ensuring they align perfectly. Research confirms that parents are the number one predictor of a child’s spirituality throughout their lives. When you consistently model growth, service, devotion to Scripture, and authentic Christian living, you motivate others to do the same. Some may feel discouraged by past failures in modeling faith, not realizing that **even our growth through mistakes can inspire others toward Christ.**

Pursue visible spiritual progress every day. Your consistent growth will inspire others to follow Christ with the same dedication and passion.

### Key Takeaway

*Never underestimate the power of consistent Christian modeling; it may be the catalyst God uses to transform not just the next generation but generations to come.*





# Role Model

---

*Generational Discipleship | Week 26 | 1 Timothy 4:11-16*

---

## Reflection Questions:

1. In which of the five areas Paul mentions (speech, conduct, love, faith, purity) do you believe your example is strongest? In which area might you need to be more intentional about modeling Christlike character?

---

---

---

---

---

2. How consistently are you magnifying God's Word through both private study and public application? What practical step could you take to make Scripture more central in your daily life and visible to those watching you?

---

---

---

---

---

3. Who specifically is looking to you as a role model, whether you've chosen that role or not? What one change in your daily habits would most positively impact their view of what it means to follow Christ?

---

---

---

---

---

# Introduction

According to Harvard Business School, any company that offers a product or service is in the business of solving problems. That's not just true about companies; it's true about churches. And we're facing a massive problem in the church today: We're losing the next generation. Studies project that 35 million youths raised in Christian families will stop following Jesus by 2050, which would be the largest and fastest shift in religious association in American history. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses gathered them all together and spoke these words—words that we must also impart to our children—to ensure they would maintain God's favor: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5, NIV). Every day, in every way, our generation must point the next generation to God.

## Key Points

## 1. Teach God's Truth Virtuously—Heart Before Head

Passing faith to the next generation starts with having God's truth in your own heart, not just in your head. Moses begins with the foundational truth: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:4-6, NIV). The reality is that knowledge about God's commandments differs from knowing the God of the commandments. God doesn't want you to be good parents; He wants you to be godly parents whose love for Him is evident in every aspect of life. As they observe, children will replicate what they see even more than what they hear.

**When you love God wholeheartedly rather than halfheartedly, your children will catch what you didn't even know you were teaching.**

## Notes

[illegible]



#### 4. Teach God's Truth Visually—Actions Amplify Words

## Notes

Author Lindsey Bell describes how to parent our children: “The goal of parenting isn’t to create perfect kids. It’s to point our kids to the perfect God.” That’s why Moses says we are to have God’s Word before us at all times: “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8–9, NIV). These are to be visual reminders to help you keep God’s commands constantly before you. Today, that may look like displaying Scripture on your walls, reading Bible stories together, and, most importantly, living your faith out in your daily interactions. Remember that children are watching everything. How you treat others, respond to difficulties, and prioritize your time all communicate what you truly believe.

The visual display of faith in your home should match the visible demonstration of faith in your life.

## Key Takeaway

When God's truth lives virtuously in your heart, is taught vigilantly with intention, is communicated verbally in everyday conversations, and is demonstrated visually through consistent example, you foster an environment where authentic faith can flourish.

[illegible]

# Heart to Heart

---

*Generational Discipleship | Week 27 | Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

---

## Reflection Questions:

1. How would your children or those you influence describe your love for God—as passionate and wholehearted, or more routine and dutiful? What specific change could you make this week to model a more authentic love for God?

---

---

---

---

---

2. In what ways could you more intentionally “engrave” God’s truth on the hearts of the next generation? Consider one specific commandment or biblical principle you could begin teaching today.

---

---

---

---

---

3. How many spiritual conversations have you initiated in the past month? What practical strategy could you implement to naturally incorporate God into your everyday conversations?

---

---

---

---

---



# A Line in the Sand

*Generational Discipleship | Week 28 | Joshua 24:14-15*

## Introduction

At the Alamo, legend tells us, Commander William Travis drew a line in the dirt, asking his men to choose their fate—cross the line and face certain death fighting for Texas, or leave and surrender. All but one crossed that line, choosing sacrifice over surrender. Like those brave men, we face crucial choices every day. The average person makes 773,618 decisions over a lifetime and regrets 143,262 of them. While some decisions are trivial, others shape our eternal destiny. After weeks of discussing generational discipleship—teaching God’s truth, modeling godly living, and stewarding opportunities—we now arrive at decision day. Just as Joshua drew his own line in the sand before the people of Israel, saying, “...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve .... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15, NIV), we, too, must decide which side of the line our families will stand on.

## Notes

## Key Points

### 1. Commit to Lead Your Family to Revere the One God

The foundation of generational discipleship begins with properly fearing God. Joshua instructs, “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness” (Joshua 24:14, NIV). Unlike our culture’s preference for a convenient god who prioritizes our happiness over his holiness, authentic faith requires genuine awe and worship. This reverence affects how we speak about God, pray to Him, and prioritize His house. Solomon wisely observed, “Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (Proverbs 14:26, NIV). This fear doesn’t contradict love. In fact, those who fear God most love Him best. When children witness your genuine reverence expressed through prayer, obedience, and commitment, they develop their own authentic relationship with God.

**The way you model reverence for God speaks more powerfully to your children than anything you could ever say about Him.**



# A Line in the Sand

Generational Discipleship | Week 28 | Joshua 24:14–15

## 2. Commit to Lead Your Family to Reject Other Gods

### Notes

The ancient Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness partly because they respected false gods while rejecting the true God. Similarly, today's families must recognize and reject modern idols. True devotion to God requires forsaking all competing loyalties. That's why Joshua instructs the people: "Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:14, NIV). The truth is, every person serves some god, whether the God of Scripture or gods of self, success, or society. Parents have to help children discern these counterfeit gods. As Joshua presented two options—ancient foreign gods or the God of Israel—we must help our families recognize that there's no middle ground.

You can't lead your family to truly follow God until you identify and reject the competing gods that demand your family's devotion.

## 3. Commit to Lead Your Family to Rely on the Only God

After drawing his line, Joshua boldly declares, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15, NIV). He doesn't take a family vote or consider alternatives; he commits to leading by decision and example. When you choose to follow the Lord wholeheartedly, you'll often be in the minority. Joshua himself exhibited this "last man standing" mentality—willing to stand alone if necessary. That's your mandate also. Standing and leading your family to serve God through consistent actions like attending church, reading Scripture, praying together, and giving financially show that God's people, His Word, communion with Him, and stewardship all matter. Like Joshua, we all must establish non-negotiable spiritual standards in our homes, not leaving faith optional for those who follow.



Nothing you accomplish will ever exceed the legacy of a family that knows, loves, and serves the only true God.

God doesn't just desire your family's devotion; He's designed you to give it fully and freely. Let today be a decision day. Determine that you and your family will cross the line and stand with Joshua, saying, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

[illegible]

# A Line in the Sand

---

*Generational Discipleship | Week 28 | Joshua 24:14-15*

---

## Reflection Questions:

1. If your children or grandchildren were asked to describe what you revere most based solely on your actions and priorities, what would they say? What specific changes might help them see your genuine reverence for God?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What “modern gods” compete most strongly for your family’s attention and devotion? What practical steps could you take this week to identify and reject these false gods?

---

---

---

---

---

3. Joshua didn’t just make a personal decision; he made a family commitment. What non-negotiable spiritual standards have you established in your home? Which might need to be reinforced or introduced?

---

---

---

---

---