

Let's Talk About It; Putting Away Stigmas in the Church

Text: Leviticus 19:32

Topic: Discipleship and Intergenerational Relationship

Big Idea: To be obedient to God, we love and honor our elderly neighbor.

Application Point: Believers need one another; we all can grow from multigenerational involvement, discipleship, and care.

Talking Points:

1. The book of Leviticus was written by Moses and was meant to show Israel how to live as a holy nation in fellowship with God, and to prepare the nation for the service of mediating the redemption of God to all the nations. Leviticus 19 begins with the direction for Moses to deliver the words that were to follow to all the people of Israel, not just the priests (Leviticus 19:1–2). These commands were meant to help the people stay committed to a holy God and to love one another well. The verse we key in on in this chapter is verse 32: “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” God makes it a point to remind his people to honor the aged.
2. Many churches find themselves in a complicated relationship with their gray-haired members. Sometimes a church is made up of only folks who can get the senior discount, and when they pass away, the congregation will die with them. Other times a church may be filled with younger believers who have minimized the input and value of the aging saints, driving them away. Or perhaps there is a multigenerational congregation, but the older members of the congregation have checked out because they have “paid their dues” of service. These are not healthy churches. Psalm 145:4 says, “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.” **We need one another.** Honoring the most experienced believers in our congregations means caring for them, encouraging their gifts, and not giving them a free pass to retire from ministry. As the life expectancy of Americans continues to improve, the church can purposefully benefit from the sage wisdom that comes from these valued members.
3. The best life lessons come from someone who has lived them, and we want to keep those wise counselors around as long as we can. Megan Hill talks about her experiences getting to know the elderly women at her church: “Over the years of worshipping alongside these women, I learned their stories. One woman had survived a car accident that killed her husband and left her the disabled single mother of two. Another had lost a child to cancer. One woman had suffered domestic abuse. Another spent her days caring for a husband with dementia. Altogether they had suffered illness, mistreatment, and the death of loved ones. They had experienced trials that, for others, might have been the first page in a story of spiritual wandering. In the church, too, they persevered. Over a lifetime of churchgoing in various places, they had at times been frustrated by the worship, offended by the members, and disappointed with leaders. And yet, here they still stood. They had worked and worshipped, suffered and yet rejoiced, asked God hard questions and searched diligently for his answer. They had stuck around. And out of their experiences emerged a single story: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4–6). ... We must never assume that someone who is happy is naïve, someone who is content must also be ignorant, and someone who is faithful just comes by it naturally. Do we want to overcome doubt and persist in the faith? We can learn how from the church ladies” (Megan Hill, “The Casserole-Toting Church Ladies Hold the Secret to Happiness,” Christianity Today, August 1, 2016).
4. The fact is that the church needs everyone! There is no retirement age from serving in the body of Christ. We need the prayers, presence, wisdom, and encouragement of the older generation. As our fallen bodies age and we grow closer to natural death and a glorious eternity with Christ, the younger can honor the older through service. Christians value and honor life. Many believers would claim to be pro-life, but we should remember that being pro-life should mean honoring all life, including our elderly. As our beloved elderly sisters and brothers become more dependent on others, it should not be seen as a burden but as a privilege. The church can be diligent in meeting practical needs: providing meals, visiting those who reside in assisted-living homes, providing transportation to and from doctor visits or errands, and caring for the caregivers. The church can serve our aging neighbor in love, in and out of the church, with kindness and respect. We can “honor the face of an old man” or woman.