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## Gleanings

### Reflections on Multi-Generational Living



Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.  
President

Strategies@Work, LLC  
Solutions that Transform

When you face the reality that one day, barring the return of Christ, you will die, then life is not simply about the tactical details of living. Life must be considered in light of a larger understanding of the purpose of existence.

Christianity claims that a purposeful Creator is executing his plan through history. The plan is known as the meta-narrative, the overarching story of history. Biblically, this is the story of creation, the fall of man, the entrance of sin and death into the world, the redemption of man from sin and death, the ultimate judgment for sin and death, and the recreation.

The focal point of the story is Christ the Creator, sustainer, and the goal of the universe (Colossians 1:15ff). Therefore, everything finds its meaning, purpose, and significance in relationship to Christ. Even our work must be related to Christ to truly understand its meaning, purpose, and significance.

One of the ways that Christ has chosen to unfold his meta-narrative is multi-generationally. His purpose is being accomplished over millenniums of time. Each person is born in a prescribed place at a certain time and lives a set number of years (Acts 17:26). While here, each person is to play his or her role in the meta-narrative. Furthermore, each generation is to prepare the following generations to play their roles in the meta-narrative.

As I age, I am more aware of my mortality. Consequently, I ask more questions about my role in the meta-narrative. Now alignment with the will and ways God in the context of his meta-narrative is the driving force within me.

Recently, my wife and I were reflecting on the fact that we are, at this season of life, involved in four generations—our aging parents, our generation, our children's generation, and our grandchildren's generation. So here are some thoughts about the roles that my wife and I believe we are called to play in the meta-narrative in the various generations that we now serve.

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#### Parents

My wife's parents and my parents were born between 1922 and 1923. They grew up during the Great Depression. Both of our fathers fought in World War II. After the war, they started families and enjoyed many tangible economic blessings associated with the post-war era in the United States. My dad lived to age eighty-five. My mom and my wife's parents are still alive. By year end, all three will be nonagenarians. Though they are all strong in the Lord, their physical and mental faculties are waning. While they have been able to care for themselves for the past seventy-plus years of adulthood, now they increasingly need help with the daily issues of life. I am reminded of the words Jesus spoke to Peter:

"I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18 NIV).

So it is with our parents. They no longer can fully self-govern; they require help. My wife and I are greatly honored with the assignment to serve our parents. We view this as our responsibility and privilege.

#### Peers

Our generation is known as the "baby boomers"—those born between 1946 and 1964. These are the people we grew up with and have experienced life with for more than sixty years. Most of our friends are in this group. Our responsibility is to be friends, colleagues, and peers;

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to encourage and help one another find and fulfill the will of God for our lives. Our desire is to be good friends so that the words of Proverbs will be true of us:

"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel" (Proverbs 27:9 NIV).

#### Children

Our children (both natural and spiritual) are the first generation over which we have authority. The major responsibility of parents is to help their children find and fulfill the purpose of God for their lives. This is known as commissioning and is a life-training process. The words of Solomon directed toward parents reflect this truth:

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 KJV).

#### Grandchildren

Our children (both natural and spiritual) are now producing the next generation. It is an unspeakable joy to assist our children in raising our grandchildren. As we commissioned our children into the destiny and purpose of God, so now we have the opportunity to help commission our grandchildren. We have guidance on how to do this from the apostle Paul wrote the epistle of Colossians to his spiritual grandchildren. Note his words:

"We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28 NIV).

Paul's purpose was to help his spiritual grandchildren find and fulfill the purpose of God for their lives—this, I believe, is Paul's sense of perfection and completeness.

As my wife and I ponder this multi-generational season, we are very blessed. We are honored to serve our parents. These are the people God ordained to commission us, so we honor them. Not only is it wise to honor parents, it is also obedient to God (Exodus 20:12).

We desire to be wise peers who live in healthy biblical community with those of our generation. Christianity is a community experience. God has sovereignly ordained that everyone has a role to play in the meta-narrative (Proverbs 16:4). So we must value one another and help one another find and fulfill our roles in the meta-narrative.

We relish the opportunity to serve our children (natural and spiritual) as parents, that is, commissioning agents who call out the destiny and purpose of God in our children. Note the words of Solomon:

"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck" (Proverbs 1:8–9 NIV).

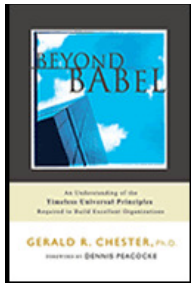
And we have a special place in our heart for grandchildren (natural and spiritual) and are privileged to serve as commissioning agents for them. Note another text from Colossians that describes how Paul struggled to ground his spiritual grandchildren in truth, that is, in Christ:

"I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ (Colossians 2:1–2 NIV)"

At this special season of our lives, my wife and I are very aware that we have never been more multi-generational than we are now. It is a privilege to serve four generations. May the Lord grant us grace to labor faithfully and help bring each person in each generation into the fullness of the purpose of God. And we pray this for you, as well.

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<http://StrategiesWork.com>  
[Gerald@StrategiesWork.com](mailto:Gerald@StrategiesWork.com)  
972 473-8655 USA

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