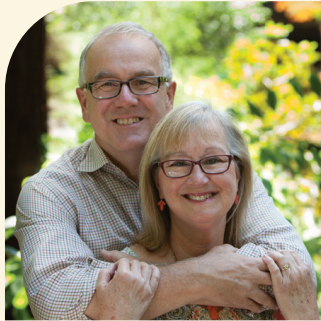


An Intergenerational Approach to Giftedness

A Q&A WITH WES AND JUDY WICK



WES AND JUDY WICK are founders and directors of YES! Young Enough to Serve (yestoserve.org), a ministry targeting the serving potential of adults in life's second half. They have intentionally engaged younger adults with them in this quest.

Wes served in several administrative positions in Christian higher education. He completed his bachelor's degree in business administration and economics at Seattle Pacific University and his master's degree in social sciences / student development at Azusa Pacific University. He is the author of *Half Two: The Quest for a God-Honoring Encore*.

Judy served as children's pastor at five churches in California and Washington. She has also worked as a donor relations consultant for a Christian financial services company and as an alumni consultant in higher education. Judy is a graduate of Bethany University where she earned her bachelor's in Christian education.

Q: *Barna data show that, when looking specifically at practicing Christian generations, older generations—in our data, Gen X and Boomers—are less likely than younger Christians (Gen Z and Millennials) to identify or be interested in developing their gifts. Why do you think that is?*

A: We think there is an assumption later in life that we—as older adults—have already figured out our gifts, and if not, there is some embarrassment that we haven't. Sometimes local churches are complicit in expecting less of adults as they get older, and disinterest in identifying and developing gifts can be part of that fallout.

Q: *How can church communities encourage older generations to continue identifying and strengthening their unique skills and abilities, both within and outside the church?*

A: Our American culture reinforces a “whatever floats your boat” attitude toward serving motivation in later years. *If you want to knock yourself out, fine; if you want to chill for*

the next three or four decades, that's fine too. Churches, too, are susceptible to mirroring our culture and may not always reinforce the biblical concept that God's call extends to the whole of life, not just up to retirement.

We have concerns about the peer bubble effect in churches and how this can short-circuit a broader vision for staying immersed in the whole body. In practice, many church programs are a reflection of older adults caring for older adults. Peer-to-peer ministry is great but also incomplete. When young Titus-and-Timothy-type leaders step in and recognize the value of older adults and their importance in reaching younger generations, that can lead to a vibrant inter-generational church dynamic. Older adults also need to reaffirm how much they need younger people in their lives. Those who are young also have the capacity to make a difference in the lives of every generation.

Q: *Practicing Christian Gen X and Boomers are less likely than their younger counterparts to say they have personally invested time to help develop someone else's gifts. What practical steps can churches take to encourage older generations to invest in the gifts of others, both within and outside of their own generation?*

A: Churches benefit when they catch a true vision for intergenerational relationships, not settling for a multi-generational structure where

each generation lives out their faith separately in their own cocoons. We like to start with looking at the leadership composition for various age-targeted ministries. The broader the age swath, the broader the perspective and impact. Leadership teams from a narrow age range tend to reinforce generational separation and stereotypes.

If a closed-circle pattern of leadership exists (e.g., all older adult ministry leaders are in their sixties and seventies), deliberately look for one person outside your age target to join you in leadership. This one addition can lead to others.

In our ministry, YES! Young Enough to Serve, focused on inspiring adults over 55, our current board has leaders in their thirties, forties, fifties and sixties. This goes far beyond optics; it's a practical reflection of 1 Corinthians 12, where the whole body is admonished to show concern for each part, and each part concerns itself with the whole.

Q: *How does rediscovering "old" gifts, or perhaps identifying new gifts, add to a renewed sense of identity both of oneself, as well as one's identity within Christ and the larger body of believers?*

A: Both rediscovery and identifying new gifts are clues that we're still listening to God's voice and not simply relying on past

performance to get us through. The physical challenges that may come with aging are a test of resilience, and many people will hit roadblocks that stop them in their tracks, or that can lead to new ideas of how to still remain fruitful. God's faithfulness throughout the whole of life is personally uplifting and a testimony to every generation.

Q: *What do communities—churches or their neighborhoods—miss out on when we don't nurture those belonging to older generations in their gifts?*

A: We see this as a colossal engineering failure and a waste of valuable resources. Life experience is a great teacher, and when those who are older shelve themselves or are shelved by others, God's generation-to-generation design

gets lost. It can also lead to a downward spiral and premature death when people lose their sense of usefulness.

Life is simply not as rich when people aren't nurtured in exercising their gifts. Old and young complement each other. Many societal deficiencies stem from generational gaps where age-vertical relationships are missing or strained.

Communities, churches and neighborhoods all benefit from an interdependent family dynamic, where every generation is valued and expected to contribute, each in their own unique ways. By marginalizing the serving potential of any generation, communities lose their sense of community, churches lose their identity as the family of God or body of Christ, and neighborhoods are not as neighborly. ●