

Blessed to be a Blessing

Thank you

It's a pleasure to be with you today in this chapel - a place where many of you likely sat as students, singing hymns and worshipping. Usually, I'm speaking to a slightly younger audience, Gen Z, of which I'm part. Today, though, I'm speaking *for* Gen Z - both as one of them and on their behalf.

I want to begin by saying thank you.

Thank you for the ongoing role that you play in the lives of your grandchildren, in shaping them into the people they are. Thank you for the ways in which you have blessed them, with knowledge, with wisdom, with stories, perhaps with finances, and with your faith.

Culture doesn't honour the aged

It's important to me to begin with thanks because it's not lost on me that we live in an age that can be increasingly dismissive of the elder generation. Where hurtful comments get thrown out like *"They can't keep up with the times, they're out of touch with technology and cultural trends...they're a burden on the system, etc"*

This is rhetoric that emerges out of the false idea that people's value is directly proportionate to their capacity to produce. And in many ways these attitudes are reflective of a broader shift in society away from Judeo-Christian values which honour the value of all human life towards a utility-based society, which says, *"you are valuable to the world to the extent that you have something to contribute to it."*

I reject that ideology entirely, not least because I believe in the value of human life, but also because I believe that the elder generation has an enormous amount to offer the world, even if they are no longer employed or need active healthcare.

And after all, you've paid your taxes, 40 or 50 years of them! You have a right to it.

The theologian and author, Gordon Smith, says that with the increased life expectancy rising *significantly* and the average age of childbirth rising *not* so significantly, grandparents have the capacity to be much more involved in the lives of their grandchildren than in times past.

He writes, *"this means that increasing numbers of grandparents are available to have a profound and influential role in enabling young people to move into adulthood and maturity... while we do not have the same physical, or perhaps emotional capabilities...we must affirm the capacity that we each have to make a difference in our world."* (93)

He notes that in the Bible, the key way that we see the elder generation outworking their influence in the world is by imparting two things: blessing and wisdom.

In Genesis 48, we see Jacob, near the end of his life, blessing his Grandsons, that is, Saying, *“May the God before whom my father’s Abraham and Isaac walked... bless these boys.”* (v. 15).

In Deuteronomy, 31:7-8, before his death, Moses encourages and blesses Joshua, passing on the leadership of Israel. *“Be strong and courageous [he says]... the Lord himself goes before you.”*

Here we see an Elder not only *blessing* but *entrusting responsibility* and courage to the next generation. This is again something that Smith highlights as a key task for seniors – letting go of formal roles and offices and entrusting it to the next generation – and blessing them in those pursuits. I realise that this isn’t easy to do, particularly when we, as the younger generation, often don’t appear overly qualified, or enthusiastic, about taking over the reins.

He writes, *“the temptation is to assume that those who follow us are not as committed, not as dedicated, not as good as we are... (97)*

And unfortunately, there **is** real justification to think this way. The sociologist Jean Twenge wrote an article in 2023 entitled *Gen Z really does have a work ethic problem*, she tracks data from a study called Monitoring the Future which has been monitoring work attitudes in 18-year-olds since 1976.

Twenge concludes her analysis of the data by saying: *“Young people today are less willing to work overtime, less likely to want to work if they had enough money, less likely to say work would be a central part of their lives, and less likely to expect that their future chosen work would be satisfying. Gen Z, by their own admission, has a work ethic problem.”*

She offers a few reasons why this might be: such as post pandemic burn out, the popularity of a poor work ethic spreading via social media, or perhaps because Gen Z is more pessimistic about capitalism than previous generation.

But if we put this data alongside other studies that address more existential questions, we see that the work ethic problem is perhaps symptomatic of larger issues. A recent study notes how high schoolers agree with the statement ‘life is often meaningless,’ more than any previous generation. Myriad studies show the massive demise in teen mental health concerning anxiety, which affects 1 in 4 teens, and depression which isn’t far behind.

Gen Z Needs Wisdom

In summary, my generation is overwhelmed by a growing sense of unease, fear, and loss of place within the world. And what they need more than ever is resilience in the **face** of it, and wisdom to **encounter** it. Both of which, your generation has plenty of. You’ve lived many years, endured many hardships, made many mistakes and acquired the lessons from them. And we need those lessons, we need your wisdom.

This is particularly on my mind as we find ourselves on the verge of the AI revolution, which will change things immensely in the next decade. One person has said that *“what*



*the **Industrial** Revolution did for **manual** work, the AI **revolution** will do more **knowledge** work*” it’s going to become extremely adept at problem solving as it can sift millions of data points in minutes. Something no human mind can do. But there is a form of knowledge which it can never attain, and that is wisdom.

Wisdom

Wisdom comes living in the world, and AI can never do that. AI can give me data on anything I ask, from politics to history to theology, but it can never look me in my eyes like my Grandad did, when we’re out on the farm, as say, *“no matter how much work there is to do, Maxy boy, we always go home for lunch with Nana.”* What is the wisdom underpinning that?

There’s always more work to do, but we show up for the people that matter most. Quality relationships is what life is about, and it’s something my generation struggles with immensely.

You grew up in a world where if something is **broken** you **fix** it, and you treated your relationships and marriages like that too; your children grew up in a world where if something is **broken**, you **replace** it; and they treated relationships and marriages like that too; my generation is growing up in a world, where if something is **outdated**, or not brand new, you **replace** it, and we treat relationships and friendships like that.

We need the wisdom on resilience, we need to hear your stories of difficulty in work, in marriage, of your persistence and how you faced up to those challenges. Despite the modern world not paying homage to it’s elders, the truth is you have a crucial role in society, in the world, and in your families.

My grandad never spoke to me much about faith, he never really talked to me about God, or about how to be a good husband, and although it’s something I really wish he did do, I still learned from him. I learned by watching. What I saw was someone who lived slowly, and it was infuriating as a young person full on energy that I had to move at his pace.

Now that I’m a bit wiser I see that in biding his time, and never rushing anywhere, that wasn’t an expression of **inefficiency**, but rather of **wisdom**. In a world where the buzz word is ‘busy’ – a boast as a complaint – Grandad didn’t fall into that trap. His life was one that was well paced, he had time, for himself, for God, and for others.

I can see that now, and I’m so grateful that he modelled that for me. So, my question for you is, what is the wisdom that you have to offer to your grandkids? What has the Lord taught you in all the years you’ve walked with him?

The importance of wisdom

It’s one thing to bless them with finances and enable them to be here in this great school acquiring a good education, but what more important than knowledge, is character.



We'll get smart before we get wise, and the challenges that my generation will primarily face in this cultural moment – with the global geo-political landscape changing, the advent of AI and the revolution of the workforce, the various ideologies that beg for their allegiance – **these challenges** will require that they be rich not in material goods but in wisdom and character, not least in, rich in faith.

For that, Solomon tells us, is the very beginning of wisdom: *“The fear [the reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* And it is this wisdom that God desires be passed on from one generation to the next, as our reading today reminds us:

This is what the Lord commanded to be repeated daily by his people: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.^[a] ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

A favourite singer of mine captures the importance of a grandparent's faith in his own life in a song called *Talking to Jesus* it begins like this:

Grandma used to pray out loud
By her bed every night
To me it sounded like mumblin'
Like she was out of her mind
She said, "Boy this kind of praying
Is what saved my life
You oughta try it some time"
And now I know she was right

Your grandchildren might make the same blunder I did by confusing your pace of life, and your thoughts on life, or your faith, as outdated, irrelevant, and unimportant. Don't let them. Your stories matter, your words matter, your lives matter. Share them.

Thank you, for all that you've done and for all that you continue to do. May you be cared for by the Lord in your caring, loved by the Lord in your loving, and blessed by the Lord in your blessing.

Amen.

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