



## TIME OF GRACE®

### *Leave No One Behind: Embrace Your Role*

#### Study Notes

#### *Summary*

This message expands to include all of us—pastors, teachers, church members, godparents, older siblings, friends, aunts/uncles, grandparents, etc. We can share stories from the Scriptures and our experiences about people the Spirit brought to Jesus from the wider family of God. Singles and non-parents have a role too because they are people who, like Paul himself, may not produce the next generation, but absolutely want to see them in heaven with Jesus.

- **Matthew 18:14:** In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.
- God uses \_\_\_\_\_ to reach the next generation.
- **Acts 9:10-11:** <sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. <sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.
- God uses \_\_\_\_\_ to reach the next generation.
- **2 Timothy 1:5:** I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.
- God uses \_\_\_\_\_ to reach the next generation.
- **Acts 19:18-20:** <sup>18</sup> Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. <sup>19</sup> A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. <sup>20</sup> In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.
- God uses \_\_\_\_\_ to reach the next generation.

#### *Points to Ponder*

1. Who did God use to reach you with the message of the gospel? If possible, send them a thank-you for being part of God's plan to bring you into his family.
2. **Evaluate:** It was less likely that Christianity would survive the 1st century in Israel than it is that Christianity will thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in America.
3. Meditate on Romans 1:14-17. What gave the apostle Paul so much confidence as he shared the gospel in his generation? What can we learn from Paul as we share the same message with a different generation?

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Matthew 18:15-35.

*"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts."  
—Psalm 145:4*

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Leave No One Behind: Embrace Your Role**  
Acts 9:10-11, 2 Timothy 1:5, Acts 19:18-20  
February 16, 2020

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

Dr. Jean Twenge is a psychologist from San Diego State who's really studied generation to generation and she noted that this next generation, what some people call Gen Z - those of you who are in your schooling years up to your low twenties - not only do you tend to be the most irreligious generation in American history, a generation where many people never go to church, never pray, don't even believe in God, you are also the generation who were raised by the least religious and passionate parents.

No matter what your age, no matter what the year of your high school graduation, let's remember what Jesus taught in Matthew 18. He said, "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." As Jesus thought about the kids, the little ones, the next generation, he said, "Our Father in heaven is not willing to lose a single one." And so, whether you're a teenager or a college student or you're pushing retirement or middle age, whether you had to be brought here with the help of someone who dropped you at the door because your final years have come so quickly, God doesn't want to lose any of us.

And I think as get older, you know, it's so easy to notice the difference and the kids at the coffee shop who all have their phones out, it's easy to get frustrated and notice what's different. But instead, I want you to embrace the heart of our Father that never changes. And from generation to generation, he doesn't want to lose a single person. And so in the sermon series, we've talked about that. As a church and as a Christian community, how can we do that to make sure that teenagers and the grade school kids and the twenty-somethings have the same passion that so many of their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents have had for Jesus? And just in case you weren't here last year week, let me do like a one-sentence review of what took me about 45 minutes to say seven days ago. It was this - if you're taking notes in your program - that God uses fathers to reach the next generation. Where are all my dads at today? Quick show of hands. Yeah, a bunch of fathers here. If you didn't hear that message, I need you to go back online and check that out because God has given like a really special privilege and responsibility, a really sacred calling, to dads.

But there's a problem with that and you probably know it. I mean, scripturally, even statistically, we've seen that good dads are one of the best ways to pass the faith on to the next generation but the problem is not every kid has a great dad and we can't change that. Some of you didn't grow up with amazing, humble, passionate Christ-loving fathers. Maybe you grew up in religious households, maybe not, but there's no like big rewind button I can push and go back in life to re-give you that experience. And even as we look out at our friends and our nieces and our nephews and our grandkids and our next door neighbors and our classmates and our teammates, we can't like push some button and change the experience of their home. I mean, there might be

some great Christian fathers in our church but we can't like kidnap all the kids and cram them into those couple homes; the kids wouldn't fit and it just wouldn't work. Which is a really, really scary thought. I mean, if this is the number one factor to keep kids connected to Jesus in their twenties, their thirties, and beyond, what happens when lots of kids don't grow up in homes like that?

Sometimes, when I look at the statistics, like I get right to the edge of plummeting into despair and hopelessness for our country's future. I see what's happened just in my lifetime and it seems like things are only getting worse. I think of what I know about Europe, which once thrived with Christian churches, and now it's almost impossible to talk about God because no one even believes that he exists. And it seems like we're on the fast track to repeating that experience. But just before I take that step over the edge and lose my hope, I open this book because there's a little section in this book, the Bible, that gives incredible hope when it seems like we are so close to losing the Christian faith. And it's a part of the Bible that I want to share with you today called the book of Acts. In case you haven't read it, Acts is really the story of the generation that came after Jesus. The New Testament starts with those four biographies of Jesus - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - and then Jesus returns to his Father in heaven and Acts is what comes next. It really tracks the history of Christianity from about 30 A.D. to 60 A.D. And if you start the book of Acts, you should be very, very scared because there are only, what, about 120 people who are Christians. And the people who are running the church, the people who are running the government, are not fans of freedom of religion; they're trying to stamp out this early Christian movement. And yeah, by the end of the book, what happens is simply astounding - that Christianity, against all the odds, escapes its little corner of the world in Jerusalem and explodes to new countries, new continents, this little church of 100 explodes into thousands until we arrive at where we're at today, 2,000 years later, where Christianity has affected billions and billions of lives around the globe.

But here's what I want you to know today about that story: What happens in the book of Acts when that little church explodes and spreads throughout the earth is primarily not because of fathers. As valuable as the Bible says that a good Christian father is, it's not the only way that God works. In fact, in the book of Acts, it's not the usual way that God works. And that's what I want to share with you today; to give you hope and to help you see your role in helping the next generation know how glorious it is to know and trust in God. Let's let the book of Acts tell this little snippet of the story. Acts 9 says, "In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask him for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.'" You all remember Ananias from the old Sunday School stories? No, you don't; I saw maybe two nodding heads in this whole church - because we don't know who Ananias was, right? He wasn't Paul's best friend, he wasn't his relative. Here's who he was: He was the neighbor who just happened to live next door to the guy whose heart God was working on. And there's a powerful word in that sentence: He was the neighbor who lived next door to the guy whose heart God was working on.

If you're taking notes in your program, I'd love for you to write that down. It's not just fathers; that God actually uses neighbors to reach the next generation. Which is so, so, so, so important

for you to know because I have a feeling that you have a neighbor who is a little bit like Saul; a neighbor, coworker, a classmate, a cousin, you know, someone you work with, someone in your family, one of your classmates who's three lockers down from yours. I bet you know someone who seems like the last person in the world who would ever want to come to church and worship Jesus. Maybe it's a classmate who's always posting like really bold things about church being fake and for hypocrites and he wants nothing to do with religion. Maybe it's that classmate who's such a confident atheist and has, you know, 15 reasons why Christianity is dead wrong. Maybe it's that person in your family where they've been really clear, you've tried, you've invited them to Christmas Eve, they're not even coming to that because they have no interest in the God that you worship. And maybe you've given up hope, to which I would say, so did Ananias.

If you would have told him that Saul was in a house just down the street, he wouldn't even have knocked on the door. But he had no clue what God was doing in that man's heart and you don't either. Right now, they might not be interested. Right now, baptism might be the last thing from their mind. Right now, praying to Jesus and making him the sun around which their entire life orbits might seem like an impossibility but you have no clue in this next year what God will do. You have no clue when the car accident happens and they lose their ability to walk and their dreams and their plan for the future. And they're looking, scrambling, falling, trying to find a rock upon which to put their feet. You have no clue when one of your classmates dies and there you are at the funeral and now you can't get past it, people die all the time, and sometimes you don't get until age ninety-two. You never know when the breakup or the divorce will happen and their life will be crushed and they'll be searching for unconditional love because they thought they had it and then they lost it. You never know when the addiction will really take its toll and they'll hit bottom and they'll be reaching, calling out, for a higher power, for anyone that could forgive them, love them, and accept them and what they've done. Maybe their depression gets worse and the medication stops being effective and they just need something to give them joy; something to give them hope after everything they've been through. And so right now, it might seem like an impossibility but you never know what's going to happen tomorrow. You never know when God is going to be working hard on the heart of your neighbor and tap you on the shoulder to reach him.

Which is kind of what happened to Francis Collins. You know this guy? Francis Collins is one of the most famous scientists in America. He's currently the head of the human genome research project. He is a brilliant man who has a degree, I believe, in quantum mechanics from Yale. And for most of his life, Francis Collins was absolutely convinced there was no God. He was a man of facts, a man of science, and a man who had no place for faith. But then something happened. During his medical residency, Francis Collins noticed something about the Christians he witnessed in the hospital; that they suffered in a different way. And it wasn't just because God worked miracles every time they prayed and healed them and they got out of their faster than the atheists in the room next door. It was the way they found hope in God when he didn't heal them. It was the way they didn't get mad at God but they still trusted he had a plan even when things didn't get better. It's that their family and friends knew that there was a life to come a billion times better than this one so they didn't have the fear of death that so many others did. And it made Francis Collins curious and it kind of dawned on him - and I give him so much credit for this - that he realized that he had studied medicine and science so deeply but he had not

done the same thing with faith. That when it came to Christianity, he just, you know, looked to the worst hypocrites in the church and believed the rumors that he had heard about the contradictions and false things in the Bible and so he reached out to a neighbor. He went to a Methodist pastor who was the campus minister of the place where he was studying and according to Collins himself, he came in bold. He admitted saying blasphemous things about Jesus, he made blunt assumptions about the Christian faith, but the pastor was ready for Francis Collins. He didn't kick him out of the office, he didn't tell him he was being disrespectful to the God he worshiped. He simply challenged him to actually read the Bible for himself. He had read a thousand books; why not read the bestselling one in the world? Fathers are great to tell the next generation but so are neighbors like you.

So that's the first story I want to tell you and here's the second: Timothy. You ever heard the name Timothy before? If you look at an index of your New Testament, two of the 27 books are named after this guy; 1st and 2nd Timothy. He was perhaps the Apostle Paul's best friend and his closest coworker in ministry. Timothy was apparently so strong in the Christian faith and so solid in what he believed and how he behaved that when it came to leaving a pastor to look over the church that Paul loved with his whole heart, the church at Ephesus, he tapped Timothy on the shoulder. But here's something you should know about Timothy. Acts 16 said that Timothy's parents weren't just from different cultures, Jew and gentile, but they had different beliefs and Timothy's father was not a believer. He wasn't raised by a great dad who taught him to pray to God and trust in God and love God. So where did Timothy's incredible faith come from? Here's my favorite passage of the day; it comes from 2 Timothy 1:5 where Paul wrote, "I'm reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." You don't remember those Sunday School stories about Lois and Eunice? No? Me neither. But if wasn't for those two women, there might be only 25 books in your New Testament instead of 27 because they were the strong women in the faith who raised Timothy to be strong in the faith, too.

Everyone, but especially you ladies, write this down: That God doesn't just use fathers and neighbors; he uses mothers to reach the next generation. And I love that thought! You know, as pastors, we try to walk this really, really hard tightrope when it comes to telling you about the power of a Christian father because we know that men so often, they get infatuated with their careers and what's happening at work and they forget about what's happening in their home and in the hearts of their kids and so we never want to lose sight of that. And yet, as I sit here even now, I look out and I see some of you who are married and who are parents but you don't have a strong Christian man sitting next to you. There's a ring on your finger but you're the only spiritual one here on Sundays and so when you hear us talk about fathers, sometimes I know, you've told me, it breaks your heart. You want him to be here but it's not the perfect Christian family. You know, sometimes you get pregnant by a guy who doesn't love Jesus and he leaves and there's no dad to embrace that calling. And sometimes you get married and you really hoped like he would follow you to the cross of Jesus and love Jesus as much as you but you're not there just yet. And so when you read these passages, "Fathers, bring up your kids," it weighs heavy on your heart.

Which is why 2 Timothy 1:5 should be your life-verse; because Timothy's faith, his sincere faith, his faith that was so strong that in Acts 16, the other believers were buzzing: "Have you met this kid yet?" A faith so strong that Paul said, "Hey, I have to have someone to take over this church that I love. Timothy, it's got to be you." Where did it come from? From a woman who loved Jesus and told the next generation, which is why I took this selfie for you. This is like a crazy, nostalgic picture for me because that is the hallway that I used to walk during every one of my pastor's sermons. That's a picture from St. Mark Lutheran Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin and every Sunday, when my pastor would get up to preach, I would tell my mom I needed to go to the bathroom. I didn't actually have to go to the bathroom; I just didn't want to hear the sermon. So if any of you kids tell your parents you have to go to the bathroom, I know what's happening so I'm watching you. And I wouldn't go to the bathroom; I took a picture of this hallway because I would never walk like right down the middle. I would meander, right? That's probably the right verb. I would just like take my time and kind of - it was like I had gotten into the communion wine because I couldn't walk a straight line. I would just mosey down the hallway and actually, just around the left if you fishhook, was the boy's bathroom. And I'd go in there and I'd sit in the stall, even if I only had to go number one, and I'd just stare at the floor for a while and I'd count to 100 in my head and I'd look at the little tiles. I still remember, they're about an inch by an inch; little gray, light blue. I learned if I relaxed my eyes enough, like little lines like a magic eye kind of thing, would happen. And then 10 minutes later, I'd meander and mosey back to my seat and I'd sit down. My mom dragged me to church, Sunday after Sunday, month after month, year after year. I used to actually, on Sunday mornings, I would pray to Jesus that my mom would have missed her alarm so I wouldn't have to go to church.

But then one day, you know what happened? What was a "have to" suddenly became a "get to." And the sermons I used to duck out of, I used to stay and listen to. And the church my mom would drag me to, I started to attend even when she couldn't make it. And a new fire for Jesus actually led me to open this book and study it for myself and suddenly, when I was 16 years old, after planning my entire life to go to Madison and study business like my older brother and like my dad, I read a passage in this book that made me want to do this instead. My whole life was different because of that one passage where Jesus said, "What good is it if a person gets the whole world and yet gives up their soul?" And I walked into this church and I found out how to become a pastor.

So do you know why I'm here today? Because of my mom. I didn't have a Lois and a Eunice; I had a grandma, Laverne, and a momma, Judy. Sometimes, all it takes though is a Judy to get you to a Jesus. And ladies, don't forget it. Maybe you'll raise the kid and sometimes it'll feel like you're dragging him and sometimes you wonder if he's really going to the bathroom, why it happens Sunday after Sunday, but you never know. You never know the day when the Holy Spirit will change that heart. You never know when the "do we have to?" turns into the "can we get to?" And you never know if the kid that you raise becomes the one who will tell the next generation about Jesus. So ladies, do not give up hope. The sincere faith that exists in your heart can exist in the heart of the next generation.

So that's the second story I wanted to tell you, which means we've got one to go. God uses fathers, he uses neighbors, he uses mothers, and the last point I want to make to you is about this

lady. Do you know her? I'll show you a picture. This is a PG-13 picture of many breasted Artemis, the goddess of the Ephesians. I visited the city of Ephesus back in 2013; I bought this little statue at the gift shop. And if the sticker on the bottom is right, there used to be a massive statue that looked just like this in that city that was nine feet tall because if apple pie's American, then worshipping Artemis was Ephesian. In that city, people were rabid for this religion. If you would read Acts 19, you'd find out that when the apostle Paul showed up in Ephesus and he said she wasn't real and Jesus was, the place exploded. They tried to murder Paul for that claim; they actually rushed into this massive stadium and they shouted, they chanted, for hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Can you imagine the kind of passion they had for that religion? For three hours they screamed it! When I went to college, there were a bunch of college dudes who tried to repeat the experiment and they walked around campus for hours trying to say, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." I think they made it 17 minutes before they got tired and gave up. I mean, these people had no time for Jesus; they did not believe in the God of the Bible. They worshiped her until one day, something changed. One day, a Christian church started in Ephesus; a church so important that the apostle Paul spent three years in that city; his longest stop of any of his church plans. A church so important that Paul tapped Timothy, with his sincere faith that he got from his mother, to be the pastor of that church. And do you know what happened? Do you know how people stopped worshipping her and started worshipping Jesus? It wasn't because of all the Christian dads in Ephesus. Let me show you my favorite thing that happened in that city. In Acts 19, it says "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." You all remember the Sunday School story where the sorcerers burn their scrolls in Ephesus? How good is that? The sorcerers had a public scroll burning. Oh, 50,000 drachmas - if the math is right from the scholars, that's \$8.5 million. They brought out their scrolls and what did they do? They openly confessed the evil things that they had done. And the passage says, "In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

Which is my favorite thing I get to tell you tonight; that God can use sorcerers to reach the next generation with Jesus. Or maybe to put it more generically, you can fill in this last blank: That God uses sinners. I'm talking notorious sinners, unexpected sinners, to reach the next generation. Which is what I love, love, love, love, love about our church. You know, we don't have like a life group for sorcerers and as many of your stories I've heard, I've never heard that one but do you know what I love about our church? Is that like those sorcerers, so many of you openly confess what you've done. And I want to tell you, our church has weaknesses and flaws and there's things you really need to work on but if there's one thing that I believe is like the secret sauce of our church community, it's that we confess that we are sinners. Like not just generically and safely, "Okay, I confess, I'm not perfect and I've sinned in like those generic categories - my thoughts, my words, and my deeds." No, what I love about so many of you is that when you come to church or when you join a life group, you actually talk about the messed up stuff you've done. And God has used that in such powerful ways.

When I think about the dozens and dozens and dozens of people who come to our church from AA and NA and SA, when I think of those of you who've battled addictions and taken pills and

been through depression and tried to kill yourself. When I think of those of you who've done time and who've prostituted your bodies and have had terrible things done to your bodies and, yet, instead of like hiding and playing it safe, you talk about it. And instead of pushing people away from Jesus, it actually has the effect that Jesus intended and it draws people to him. Instead of convincing our community that we're not just a bunch of like terrible hypocrites and stay away from them; it makes people rethink what they've heard about the Christian faith. That what we do here on Sundays is not just a bunch of like good people who are trying to get a little bit better so we are not just like holier than thou but holiest than thou. No, instead, we prove that the Christian church is about messed up people finding mercy at the cross of Jesus. You put it all together and you have the incredible book of Acts and this incredible thing that God uses to reach the church. I want you to know before you leave today it's not just dads that have an incredible opportunity; it's the whole village that Jesus uses to raise up his Christian church. You might be a neighbor or a stranger like Ananias; you might be a grandmother, a mother, like Lois and Eunice. You might be a notorious sinner like the sorcerers from Ephesus. But the book of Acts where Christianity exploded proves that God uses the whole village to raise his church.

So brothers and sisters, let's do it again. There is an entire generation that is dealing with depression, anxiety, because they don't know the rock that is Jesus. They have no hope for eternal life and they are living for temporary things that will fail them sooner or later so let's give them Jesus. Moms and dads, neighbors and strangers, you notorious sinners, it is time for us to let our lights shine, confess our sins, and even more, confess the incredible Savior whose rescued us from everything. Let's tell the next generation about Jesus. He's called us to do it, he's given us his Spirit. What a great mission for the great people of God.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we love you! Who else would love us as much as you? I love the fact, God, that when I get to the end of every single day - whether it was my best spiritual day or my absolute worst - there is your mercy and there is your cross and there is your grace. I thank you, God, that this isn't some manmade religion of some good rules and rituals where we try to earn our way to you. This is a gift and it's exactly what we need. God, I'm honestly scared sometimes for the next generation. I think of how many people are growing up and they're being shaped by something but it's not the gospel and the good news of Jesus. But I know God, I'm looking at the proof in church, Sunday after Sunday, that you don't have to obey the rules and you can be the God of surprises and exceptions. So surprise us God! Bring people we'd least expect. I pray that you'd ignite the heart of fathers that they would see of all the things for which they exist, nothing matters more than the next generation. I pray that we would believe that we don't just happen to be at work or a class or in a neighborhood next to these people by chance but you have put us in that place and at this time that we could let our light shine; that people would see our good deeds and glorify you.

God, we can't force anyone to believe and we can't literally change a human heart but you can. You can give people faith and hope at the cross of Jesus. So do what we can't and help us to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. It's in the Lord Jesus' name that we pray.

And all God's people who want to reach the next gen, they join their voices and they said, "Amen." Amen.