



Fighting for an Apathetic Generation

Chris Groover – April 14, 2019

Good morning, church. How are you? Good to see you here on this beautiful morning here in the month of April. Let me introduce myself before we jump in. My name is Chris Groover. I am the student minister here at the Flower Mound Campus, which essentially means I oversee the middle school ministry and the high school ministry. I love what I do. I love the job God has given me here at The Village. In fact, one of the things that is true about my family and me is we came here three and a half years ago.

Part of us coming here has been a true joy and a sense of belonging that has taken place, not just from the staff level and the job we do and the way we serve our students here in the ministry, but also this has been a sweet place for my family to grow and to connect, to heal in some areas of our lives. We don't want to ever stop acknowledging that. The place we come, the body of believers we have here at The Village Church is an amazing people to be a part of. So we just want to thank you from our family, and hopefully you feel the same way here at The Village Church.

This morning, we're going to dive into a little bit of a conversation around the next generation. As you saw earlier, we had two senior students do announcements. They did an amazing job doing that. We're going to talk a little bit more about the next generation, just how important this is for us here at The Village Church. If you have your Bibles, open up to Judges, chapter 2. We're going to spend a little bit of time in verses 6-10.

As you're flipping into your Bibles to the book of Judges, let me set up our time by sharing a story from my family's life that happened this past summer. We made the big move from Carrollton, Texas, 20 minutes down the road, to Flower Mound, Texas, to be more a part of the community of The Village Church and be closer to work and some other reasons as well. For us, we knew that making that move was going to be hard in a couple of areas.

First, moving is extremely difficult. Moving is perhaps one of the worst things I can imagine being a part of on the planet earth, especially when you have three little kiddos at home. That was a chore in and of itself. That was part *A* that was difficult, but then part *B* that was really difficult that we knew would be a challenge for our family was that our oldest kid, Lucas, was going to be going into first grade. He had just started kindergarten in the school he was a part of that was actually in our neighborhood in Carrollton.

The school was literally across the street from our house, so you could walk him to school. In fact, there have been a couple of stories that happened where I was off on a Friday and I would see him on the playground and I would walk outside and say "hi" to him on the playground, which caused the whole class of kindergartners to come up to the fence, and then maybe they had to call the authorities...I don't know...because they were like, "Who's this sketchy dude by the fence?"

So there was an email that went out later, like, "Hey, if you're a parent, kind of back off a little bit and don't approach the fence." So we just loved it. The fact that that was outside of our house and in our neighborhood was a beautiful thing to be a part of. We knew that moving over here that would not be the case. In fact, his new elementary school was about 10 minutes away from our house.

So we moved over here. We got settled in. We recognized that fact, that change for our son. Then the question for us and our family became, "Do we want to drive him to school every single day...?" Part of that was selfish...getting up earlier, fighting traffic. If you've ever been in a carpool line at elementary schools, you know that's where sin, for sure, comes out of people in varying ways. So we were like, "Do we want to be a part of that? Not really." Or he could ride the bus.

The tension was we knew that riding the bus meant you're around kids of different ages. I knew that when I rode the bus. When I was younger, I was the kid who was oftentimes getting in trouble on the bus, hearing things I shouldn't hear on the bus, doing things I shouldn't do on the bus. I feel like all bad things in life... Not all, but I can be a little bit dramatic here. A lot of the bad things in life happen on a bus, especially a school bus in the elementary and middle school years.

So we were nervous about that, but we just trusted the Lord and said, "We're just going to let him ride it and see how it goes." I have to report to you he has been riding it. He has done fantastic. It has been a good experience for him. One of the things that came up on one of the bus rides that he experienced about a month into riding it home from school was that there was a kid on his bus, and Lucas and this kid, his friend, began to talk about marriage. No idea how that happened. It for sure

did not happen when I was in first grade. I was trying to figure out how to eat food. He's talking about marriage. I'm like, "What do you mean you were talking about marriage?"

I got home one day, and we were talking about his day, and he was like, "Yeah, we were talking about marriage, Dad." He was kind of replaying the conversation. The conversation wasn't just about the idea of marriage or "One day I want to get married" or that kind of typical conversation you think would happen at a first-grade level. Rather, the conversation was just tangible and where our culture is in this time period of our lives.

The one boy began to say to my son, "Hey, I've heard that a man can marry a man and a woman can marry a woman." My son, being a good minister's kid, was like, "No, that's not true. The Bible says that God made men and women for each other and they're supposed to enter into the covenant and bond of marriage and it's for men and women." So they had this discussion, which I'm sure lasted a whole 30 seconds, and then they started to talk about *PAW Patrol* or something else after that.

But the fact that they had this discussion kind of blew my mind. Lucas is sitting there talking to me about his day and about this conversation, and he looks at me and says, "Dad, what is the answer to this question? Is it true?" So I did what any good dad would do in that moment. I said, "You should go ask your mom." And I ran out. No, I didn't do that. That's what I wanted to do inside, but I kind of leaned in.

I said, "Hey, buddy. This is a tough topic, but what we believe, as Christians who believe in the Bible and believe in the inerrancy of the Word and believe God designed us in a certain way, in a certain form, in a certain fashion, is we believe marriage is made for men and women coming underneath the bond of matrimony underneath our Lord Jesus Christ." It was a quick conversation, and, again, it went to Legos right after that.

I was taken aback by the fact that my first grader was having conversations like that, because back when I grew up, that was not a topic of conversation. When I was growing up or maybe when your generation was growing up, these were not necessarily the things you and I were dealing with, but these are realities the current generation is having to grapple with and deal with and answer.

So, for me, it was one of those moments as a dad where I was blown away by the magnitude of the conversation, but even bigger picture than that, it made me have this defining moment in my mind, in my heart, because I began to think about not just *that* conversation but the fact that there's a real

spiritual battle taking place right now for the hearts and for the minds and for the souls of not just *my* kids but the entire generation of young people in America.

The Enemy desires to kill, steal, and destroy and to do whatever he can do to confuse them or to get them off track and to captivate their hearts in such a way that they want nothing to do with the one true God. So for us here today, we want to dive into a quick Scripture passage and talk a little bit more about how we, as a body of believers, can do our best and beg the Lord to do the rest so we can see an entire generation of young people in our church grow up to love the Lord with all of their hearts and all of their minds and all of their souls. Judges 2:6:

"When Joshua [the leader of the nation of Israel] dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land [the Promised Land]. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua..." That's important to remember. **"...and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years."**

What we see here is a quick summation of Joshua's death, of the fact that even after Joshua died there were these elders who were keeping things going in the nation of Israel, and during that time the generation of Joshua and the generation of his elders were following the Lord, imperfectly doing that, or as best as they could do that, being humans and prone to sin, but they were following the Lord with their hearts and their souls and their minds and all the strength they had, and they were walking with him.

We have this picture of Joshua as he leaves this life, as he leaves this planet, as he dies, almost looking at the nation of Israel and having hope and thinking and probably even assuming that the generation that would follow Joshua and the elders of Joshua would also love the Lord, would also walk with God, would also serve him all of the days of their lives. But the story goes on in verse 9. Here was the reality of the situation:

"And they buried [Joshua] within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel."

There arose a generation after Joshua and after the elders who were walking with Joshua who did not know God. I think the natural question for us here today is...*How in the world can that happen?* What must have taken place for an entire generation of young people to not know God, to not walk with the Lord, not to serve the Lord all of the days of their lives?

I think maybe a couple of initial responses to that would be things like *this*: Perhaps we would think in our minds, "Well, maybe it was that typical generational rebellion type of thing we see." Maybe it was like, "Okay. This is what my parents believed, and this is what the generation before me believed and espoused, and this is the God *they* worshiped, but for me and *my* generation, maybe we want to kind of push back on that, rebel against that a little bit." So perhaps it was that idea of a second generation not desiring the things their parents' generation desired. That could be the answer to the question.

Or perhaps another response to that question as to why or how in the world a generation could walk away from the Lord is maybe it was the culture of the day. Maybe it was all of the nations that were surrounding Israel, maybe these other false gods that were kind of enticing the people of God. Maybe they got sucked into that and began to worship other gods, as we see does happen in this text here in Joshua, chapter 2. Perhaps that was the ultimate reason as to why this generation walked away from God.

I think both of those are really good reasons. I would say even both of those have a certain level of truth to explain why this happened and why this occurred, but at the end of the day, a lot of theologians agree upon the fact that, yes, it was probably rebellion and, yes, it was the culture of the day, but at the end of the day, the heart of the matter was simply that this generation of young people were apathetic in their understanding and in their faith when it came toward God.

It wasn't necessarily rebellion, it wasn't necessarily the culture of the day, but it was more this heart of apathy. *Apathy* is defined as simply a lack of interest or a lack of concern toward something or in something. A lack of interest or a lack of concern. We know what apathy is. Right? We've all experienced apathy before in our lives. When I was younger, in seventh grade, I went to a private Christian school called Immanuel Lutheran.

Part of going to this private Christian school, which, by the way, only lasted for one year, and then I had to go back to public school because of many different reasons. I think they were ready for me to go back and to leave the Christian school because of some of the decisions I made. But in seventh

grade, I remember that part of going to this school was I had to go to a religion class. To be honest, the last thing I wanted to do as a seventh grader was go to a religion class.

Part of our weekly assignments was that we had to memorize Scripture. To set up the class a little bit, our teacher's name was Mr. Binky, which was gold for a seventh grader because it rhymed with *Twinkie*. We would use that and be like, "Mr. Binky likes Twinkies." Just really dumb jokes, but we loved it, and we got into a lot of trouble with Mr. Binky because of that.

I remember what would happen is he would give you the Scripture passage and say, "Hey, memorize this." Then when Friday would roll around we'd have to go outside in the hallway and tell him the Scripture memory passage. I remember as the semester began he set this up for us. The Friday came around. I go in the hallway. Mr. Binky who loves Twinkies said, "Hey, Chris, what is the Scripture memory passage?" I looked at him. I remember saying this to him: "I don't know."

He's like, "Did you not get the assignment?" I was like, "No, I got it. I just didn't do it." He was like, "Okay. Next time do the assignment. That's part of being in school." I was like, "Okay. Yeah, maybe." So I went back to class, and then the next week rolled around. I didn't do the assignment again. He's like, "Hey, what's the memory verse?" I was like, "I don't know." He was like, "You know you need to do the assignment. You're going to get an *F*." I was like, "It'll all work out. I'll be fine."

The entire semester went by, and I did not memorize one passage of Scripture, not even "Jesus wept." I could have tried *something*. Right? I didn't memorize anything and kind of was like, "I'm good, I'm good, I'm good," not realizing that eventually I was actually going to get an *F*. The day came around when report cards came out. Back in the day, kids...this is crazy...it wasn't digital. It was an actual paper copy. It was actually handwritten. It wasn't even typed out.

I remember seeing the *F*, and I remember realizing, "Oh, I'm in trouble. This is not going to be good for me. How can I get out of this situation?" "How can I hide my sin?" was what I was really saying. I had really good handwriting at the time, and I realized I could take the *F* and use erasable ink and make it into a *B*. So I took the *F* and made it into a *B*. I was like, "Surely I can give this to my mom. She'll sign it and think it's a *B*."

She looked at it, and I was super nervous. She signed it. I was like, "Yes! My sin has been hidden from my parents." I took it back and erased the ink and gave it back to Mr. Binky. I said, "Here you go." He said to me, "Were your parents upset?" I was like, "No. Actually, they were kind of good with

it. It was amazing. The Lord just maybe showed up, and they were fine with the *F*." He's like, "Really?"

I didn't realize, at a seventh-grade mind level, that next week, after report cards would come out, there was a thing called *parent/teacher conferences*. So my mom walked into that conference and, long story short, found out that it was not a *B*; it was an *F*, so there were a few conversations that happened after that between my parents and me. I remember them pressing me and saying, "Chris, first, why did you not do the assignment? And second, why did you lie?"

I remember my response was simply, "I just didn't want to do it. I didn't have a concern for it. It just didn't interest me." What I was saying in my heart was an apathetic type of response. I was like, "I just didn't want to partake in that so I just decided not to do it." This is the type of response we see happening in this text in the book of Judges. What we see from apathy and just the danger of apathy, because not only can it take a generation and rob a generation of their faith, but the idea of an apathetic heart is like a cancer.

It spreads so quickly that it starts in one person, then it goes to a group of people, and before you know it an entire generation of young people could be walking away from the faith because they just don't have an interest in it and they just don't have a concern in it. Currently right now in the Generation Z culture... If you don't know what that is, Generation Z is anybody who was born between 1995 and 2015, that age demographic. Right now they're finding in research that the number-one thing that is drawing them away from the faith is apathy.

It's fascinating, because in a book called *The Great Opportunity* it states that every single year... This is just heartbreaking. Every single year, one million young people walk away from the Lord and walk away from the church. These aren't people *outside* the church; these are our sons and daughters *inside* the church. Through their research, they've looked at the reasons why. Why are they leaving? Why are they not interested in the faith? Why are they apathetic when it comes to the things of God?

They discovered in this research that young people, by and large, love Jesus or love the *idea* of Jesus. They don't mind his teachings. They're not antagonistic toward the gospel. They're not even angry toward the gospel, but somewhere along the line the cancer of apathy has taken root in their hearts. In fact, one of the quotes in the book and in the research that's just devastating says young people

don't think a life with Jesus is worth their time. Young people don't think a life with Christ is worth their time.

So apathy is the issue that is facing, I think, not only Generation Z but also perhaps Millennials and maybe even some in our generations as well. This is hard news. This is potentially devastating news, but I also do believe we serve a God who's sovereign and who's on the throne and who sees what's happening and is not freaking out. Rather, we have a God who is a God of hope and a God of promise and a God of restoration and a God of revival.

I believe with all my heart that this isn't necessarily bad news but, rather, this is a great opportunity for us to enter into the fray and ask ourselves the question how we, as the body of believers at The Village Church, can lead out toward the next generation in such a way they not only understand who God is mentally but they believe in the God of the universe, the God of Jacob, the God of Isaac with all of their hearts, all of their minds, all of their souls, and all of their strength. So, what I want to do with the rest of our time this morning is to talk about two things that I believe we can do as a body and two things I want to invite you into as well.

First, I believe one of the greatest opportunities we have when it comes to the next generation is to rally around this idea of the *power of presence*. From a survey Barna conducted recently about the next generation, about Generation Z, we know this truth and these facts about the next generation: the influence of adult mentors in the life of young Christian believers carries far more weight than the culture, than media, and even their own friends. The influence of an adult in the life of a young person is still the most influential thing we have going for us.

We all know this to be true, because for many of us in the room today, part of your Christian story, part of your testimony involves God bringing an adult into your life. Maybe it was your mom and dad. Maybe it was a small group leader. Maybe it was multiple adults throughout your faith formation, that God orchestrated and designed and in this providential moment brought them into your life, and you can look back upon your faith and say, "I am who I am and I believe what I believe because of *this* person."

When you think about it, there have been moments for all of us where there was maybe a tough life circumstance and we had that person who was a little ahead of us in life who could sit us down and help us process what was happening and remind us of the goodness of God. For many of us, we've had seasons of doubt where we've wrestled, like, "Is the Word of God true, and do I really believe

Jesus is who he claims to be?" yet we had someone enter into that fray in that time that we were extremely frail, and they listened and pointed us back to the truth of Scripture and sat with us in our days of doubt.

We've all had moments where someone spoke life into us and called us out of a life of sin and into a life of holiness, and that tough conversation they had was a defining moment for many of us in the room today, because we know this to be true: showing up in the life of a young person is extremely powerful and life-changing. A couple of years back, in our high school ministry, we were looking for some new high school volunteers, some new small group leaders.

Every once in a while, we'll shoot out a random email to you guys, saying, "Hey, this is what we're looking for. Is anyone interested in serving with student ministry?" This particular email we sent out to y'all... One of the persons who responded back was a lady named Paige. Paige responded back and said, "I'm really interested. I'm a mom. I have two girls in the ministry, and I think I would be a good small group leader. I'm kind of unsure, but I would love to meet up."

So we met up and we talked and did the whole orientation thing, and then Paige signed on to become part of the ministry and to become a small group leader to a group of junior girls. I remember she got on the team and she was so excited. If you knew Paige, you'd see the excitement very quickly upon meeting her, because she's super extroverted and just loves life and loves students. So we were hopeful that this group that had a ton of turnover would have a consistent leader for a couple of years before they exited the high school ministry.

So she jumped in, and I kid you not. Probably the first five to six months of her serving in the ministry, I would get a text message or a phone call from her, saying, "Hey, Chris, I think I'm done. I don't think I can do it anymore. I think I'm too old. I'm a mom. All they see me as is a mom. They're not really listening to me. They're not opening up to me. They don't trust me at the level I hoped they would trust me at this point. I just don't know that I'm the person who's right for this role."

It was almost like *Groundhog Day*. Every time I would talk with her I would say back to her, "Hey Paige, I want the best for you and I want what God wants you to do, but I really believe you are making an impact in the lives of these girls. I believe, Paige, that the power of showing up and the power of presence will take place and take root over time. You just have to wait it out. You just have to be faithful to these girls. I think eventually we're going to see God move in their lives in incredible ways."

Fast-forward about a year into her serving as a high school leader, still having frustrating moments. We had a beach camp, Suffering for the Gospel camp in Panama City Beach, and there was this beautiful moment one night during small group where about half of her girls in her group just opened up for the first time in ways she had not yet experienced. They began to share parts of their lives that she had not heard before, and it was powerful because they began to confess sin and even admit things they had gone through.

I remember talking to Paige after the camp, and it was one of those moments where she was like, "I get it now. I see how it took time. I see the power of presence. I see that showing up and showing up time in and time out, even when I don't feel like it, even when I get frustrated, even if I question, 'Am I making a difference, Lord?' I see now what the Lord was doing."

So she came back from beach camp, and the next semester she walked through Steps, one of the incredible ministries we have here, with a handful of the girls from that small group, and these girls found freedom from all the sin they were entangled in. You just look at that. We know this. Right? The power of presence, the power of showing up is incredible when it comes to ministering to the next generation.

Another thing we know is it's not just the power of presence. If you just show up and you're hanging out on the back wall, that's kind of weird, first of all. Just showing up is half the battle, because if you show up and don't actually say something and enter into conversation, then it's just weird. To take it to the next step, it's the power of presence, but it's also this idea of the *power of empathy*.

For many of us, when we hear that word *empathy* maybe we cringe a little bit. If you're like me, I'm pretty logical, so when someone comes to get counseling from my office (I'm not the best counselor; I admit this), I'm like, "Okay. There's your issue. Here's step one, step two, step three. Good luck with that." And if they come back and they're like, "I'm still struggling," I'm like, "Why? I told you how to..." So I'm not the best counselor. I understand my weaknesses, and that's okay.

Empathy, for me, is something I'm trying to grow in. What we know about empathy and what we know about the next generation, especially Generation Z and the Millennial generation, is that empathy strikes a chord with them. Here's what *empathy* means. Brené Brown describes it this

way: empathy is the ability to feel what someone feels deep inside of their core. In fact, one of the examples she uses in one of her books is that empathy is kind of this picture:

You're in a field and you're walking. You have a friend, and the friend, for whatever reason, falls into this really deep, dark, scary ditch. Maybe they're hurt and terrified and don't know how to get out. They're freaking out internally and it's dingy and they don't know what to do. Empathy is walking up to that ditch, finding a ladder, getting down into the ditch with the friend, and sitting there with the friend and feeling what they feel, and then when the friend is ready to get out of the ditch you get out of the ditch with them. That is empathy.

It's this idea of putting yourself in the shoes of somebody else. It's this idea of feeling what someone else feels. This is easy. We can see this play out when it comes to next generational ministry. Imagine a 2-year-old in our church, and imagine for many of us here today that we cannot remember what it was like to be 2, but what we *can* do is empathize with a 2-year-old. If you're a mom and dad and you have a 2-year-old, you know that's an extremely hard stage of life.

If you've ever volunteered in Little Village in the 2-year-old classroom, you might be like, "Man, Lord. Come back quickly, Jesus, because this was really, really hard." It's really, really hard, but it's also really, really a sweet season of life. So for many of us, the idea of empathizing with a 2-year-old can be extremely difficult, but what we know about 2-year-olds just from data and research and science is that 2-year-olds take 70 more steps a minute than adults do.

So when a 2-year-old is like, "My legs hurt; take me up, please," and they throw a tantrum, instead of us saying, "Hey, just get up. In my generation, we used to walk to school..." That kind of thing. Instead of saying, "Just get up and do what I tell you to do," empathy would be to say, "You know what? You've worked a lot harder walking than I did, and what if I just picked you up and carried you to where you need to go? I need to feel what you feel."

When it comes to teenagers in the church, you might be like, "I don't even want to remember my teenage years. I try to block that out. I try to not remember it for a variety of reasons." When you think about teenagers in our church, one of the greatest ways we can empathize with them is to not tell them how easy they have it but rather to feel what they're feeling and to acknowledge and identify that "What you are doing and how you're growing up and all the information you intake and hear and consume is so overwhelming. I can't imagine what it's like to grow up in your generation."

In fact, Tim Elmore says the Gen Z generation does not need people to tell them more information but rather they need adult leaders to help them understand and decipher information. They need people to help them translate what is true and what is right and what is good. One of the ways we can empathize with teenagers is to say, "Hey, you know what? I get that you have an iPhone. That's amazing. Okay, cool. I get that you have all this information, which maybe makes life easier," but to acknowledge to them that "Life is extremely hard. I want to walk with you in this. I want to help you process what you're going through."

When it comes to the 20-year-olds in our church, when it comes to the early 30s in our church, the Millennial generation, it can be really easy to have an idea of what Millennials are in your mind. Oftentimes I think what we do with Millennials is we kind of typecast them and say certain things about them, and most of those things tend to be negative. We say things like, "Man, if they could just get a job, if they could just not be so entitled, if they could just do *this*, if they could just be like us, then that would be better for our culture. It would be better for their generation."

What we do in that moment is we belittle them and we're not being empathetic toward some realities they have in their lives. Perhaps some of the struggles the Millennial generation have are because the previous generation did certain things in a way that caused some of the consequences they're dealing with. For example, the Millennial generation, people have said, are the most over-parented generation of all time.

So maybe some of the fear of stepping out, some of the fear of taking risks is because that's how they grew up. That's all they knew from the house they were raised in. Perhaps when you look at the Millennial generation you think of how they went to college at a time where college was extremely expensive, and they accumulated massive amounts of debt, so they're just trying to pay off debt. Because of that, they can't buy the house. They can't move out. They're trying to get out of this tough situation they're stuck in. Or perhaps there are other factors there.

What we can do to empathize with the Millennial generation is not to push them down and tear them down and say, "Be like us" but to say, "I want to feel what you feel. I want to empathize with you at a level so I can minister to you in a way that you need to be ministered to." When it comes to empathy in the next generation and this idea of presence in the next generation, the obvious question is...*Who modeled this for us?*

Who could show us how to do what is right? Where could we possibly go to get the direction as to how we should lead the next generation? Well, the good news is the Bible speaks to that. Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 14-16. I'm going to read out of the NIV. The translation is a little bit different than the ESV. I'll explain that in a second. Here's what it says from the words of the author of Hebrews about Jesus Christ himself:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."

What I want to draw your attention to is that word *empathize*. In the Greek, the word there actually means sympathize or sympathy. The ESV translates it that way, and the NIV translates it this idea of empathize. There are some different views on that, but at the end of the day, one of the ways you could look at empathy and sympathy being the same is that an alternate definition for *sympathy* is simply this idea of understanding people and having a common feeling or experience with somebody else.

In this case, when you think about Jesus and who he is and how he modeled this for us, Jesus is saying that in a very real and tangible way he left the comforts of heaven, he left him being with the Father, ruling and reigning, and he took on flesh and blood and came and lived a life, and he empathized with us and walked in the shoes we walk in and experienced the temptation, the types of things we experience, yet he did it all without sin.

The beautiful news of the gospel is that Jesus did what you and I could never do. At the same time, the model Jesus gives us is this beautiful understanding of how Jesus empathized with us so we could trust him and so we could know that he knows what we deal with, that he knows how we feel as human beings, and that we can fully give our lives over to him.

In fact, it says in verse 16, **"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."** So we can approach the throne of the Father because we have a High Priest who empathized on our behalf, who walked in the shoes we walk in, who felt what we felt, and he did that all without sin.

What better news could we bring in the next generation than to enter into this idea of the power of presence and the power of empathy and how we could go and meet them where they are and show them a Savior, Jesus, who understands what it's like to be human and did it all in perfection and did it all for us so we don't have to strive and earn and do better and make up for the faults of our generation but we can fully, truly rest in Jesus and who he is.

I believe if we did that, as a body of believers here at The Village, we would have powerful impact on the next generation and we would see a generation of young people grow up to love the Lord with all of their minds, their hearts, their souls, and their strength.

I would love to share a story that's a little bit more personal from our church. It's a story about a small group leader named John Ertekin and a kid he met in sixth grade named Aron Hawkins. To fast-forward a little bit, Aron now is on staff here at The Village Church. So we're going to show you this story, and then I'll come back out and close us out in a second.

[Video]

Aron Hawkins: Hey, my name is Aron Hawkins. I'm 21 years old, and I've been attending The Village since the third grade. My family was always pretty involved in church, so I went to Kids Village every Sunday but was never super involved. I met John Ertekin, who is the most rambunctious human being I've ever met in my entire life.

John Ertekin: My name is John. I've been at The Village since 2008, and I served in the student ministry for seven years.

Aron: It was me, six other students, and John who were meeting up every week just to read Scripture and talk.

John: Basically, it was the idea that we were going to memorize Scripture every week. We were going to get in the Word every week. That's exactly what we did.

Aron: Through that, just formed a really strong bond with John and with those other friends.

John: When they were in eighth grade, I wanted them to do a creative project that was worshipful or that was a way to show their faith.

Aron: Didn't really want to do it, but ended up doing it, and I decided to write a song. I had never done that before.

John: It came time for him to sing his worship song, and, basically, he was really nervous.

Aron: I had never sung in front of anyone before. I made everyone close their eyes. I was so scared.

John: From my perspective, we love Aron; it's going to be great regardless of what happens here, but he was so nervous that, basically, we had to close our eyes.

Aron: And I did it, and I am sure I sounded terrible.

John: And he frickin' killed it. It was amazing. It was really good. I'm sure he does not think it was really good. I know that, but it really was really good. On the back end of it, it's just really cool. It's really cool to have seen that in the very beginning and what the Lord was doing and now to get to see him lead out so faithfully and boldly in the giftings God has given him.

Aron: Looking back on my relationship with John, I think the biggest impact he had is he was just around. He was there. He was just consistent to show up for seven years and really modeled discipleship and how to raise up the next generation really well. Now being on staff in a position where I'm leading students and I'm discipling students, I'm just grateful that the Lord did that and the Lord used him in really profound ways in my life.

John: I would say that in the end of all of this, at the end of seven years of leading, my heart is just full. It's just really, really full, because the Lord did some phenomenal things and I got to just watch as he did some beautiful things that I don't deserve to get to see him do but that I rejoice that I've gotten to see him do.

[End of video]

Chris: Amen. One of the things that probably happened when you came in this morning is that you received a card about the next generation. It talks a little bit on that card about Little Village and Kids Village and middle school ministry and high school ministry. We get that God doesn't necessarily call every single person in here to become a small group leader, but we do want to

continue to talk about how we can be a body of believers who loves the next generation so well with the power of presence and that power of empathy and just praying that the Lord does something amazing amongst our young people.

We would love to invite you in to have a conversation with us about that and what that could look like for you on a personal level. It's a simple next step. If you are interested and want to hear more information about what we're doing in the next generational ministries here at The Village, there's going to be a number here on the screen you can text. It's really simple. We won't come to your house today, I promise. We're not going to sign you up with a one-year covenant out of the gate or anything like that.

All you have to do is text "Serve" to that number on the screen, and what's going to happen is you will receive a text message back. You can click on the link, and you can scroll down and click the ministry area that you're interested in, and all that's going to do is it's going to send an email to us and our staff, and it's going to allow us to enter into a conversation with you about serving. We would love to include as many of you as possible in helping disciple the next generation.

In fact, one of the things all of the different department heads talked about this past week is we need about 250 more of you to begin to serve in next generational ministries from Little Village, Kids Village, all the way up through the high school ministry before the fall semester hits. We're just praying that the Lord has provoked your heart this morning and that you're like, "Yes. I just want to lay down an aspect of my life and begin to engage the next generation for the sake of the gospel." If you're interested, text that number. Somebody on our staff will get ahold of you, and we'll go from there. Thank you guys so much.