

## Multi-Gen Mojo 9.5.10 Morgan Young <http://oakbrookchurch.com>

Let me start by sharing an allegory (that I wrote) with you.

“The Invisible Lines of Plain City”

There was a city in the middle part of a well-to-do country. This city was like hundreds of others. In fact I could tell you this story about any of them. But this is the story of Plain City.

Like a lot of cities in the middle part of the country, it’s a great place to raise a family. Housing costs are low---getting lower all the time it seems. People like raising there kids there. Schools are good. Neighborhoods are safe. People are warm; all you have to do is smile and they always smile back.

After high school, many kids go off to college. A lot of them come back. Some never do. But Plain City has a history of several generations settling down there. It’s nothing for parents, grandparents and even great grandparents to live within driving distance.

The youth in Plain City are living at the most amazing time in history. They have more computing power in the cell phone in their pocket than the Apollo astronauts took to the moon. Most have their own room, own TV, own computer and multiple video gaming systems that they can play online with other kids in their own rooms.

They carry around tiny electrical devices that have more songs on them than their parents owned in their entire life. And just like their parents before them, what the kids like musically, is anything their parents do not. The music changes, but the angst of youth and the rigidity of parents do not.

These tiny electrical devices come with tiny headphones that apparently come with very strong adhesive on the ear bud. For as they put them into their ears, they seemingly never come out. And the parents talk. And the kids cluelessly groove and go on their way.

In the safe neighborhoods, the kids with the earphones may do things that annoy the grownups; it’s what youth has done for centuries. It’s their job. And the adults shoot a disapproving look or shake their head, but rarely anything more. They think their anger somehow effects the earphoners; but *head-shaking* and *look-giving* only ensures that things stay the same.

The parents hang out with other parents. Not so much at leisurely parties or gatherings, but during the games they’re kids are playing in or on the cell phone as they run all over Plain City in their mini-van or SUV.

The parents are carrying heavy packs every day. They’re running a household, trying to raise kids, keeping up with the bills, working full time jobs in places that have downsized people, but not productivity. They’re stewing over job security, looking at colleges, planning their older children’s wedding...*maybe* by 10 o’clock it all settles down.

These parents are anywhere from their 20s to their 50s. Some are single. Some married—at least once. The parents in Plain City are living lives that the teenaged version of themselves would have never predicted. Could have never predicted.

Deep down, in the places that busyness never allows to surface...these adults wish that every once in a while some older trusting and confident soul would come and put an arm around them—and tell them everything is alright—and that they’re doing a good job—just the way

these same parents do for their own children. Deep down, the Parents in Plain City wonder if they're doing it all, right.

There's another group in Plain City. Their children have grown up. Moved out. Married. Some have had kids. A few, even their grandchildren have had kids. These people have retired or will soon. They have grayer hair but have the grace, wisdom and experience that one can only get by living more years.

They are done carrying the heavy packs of their parenting years. They have made the mistakes and learned from them. They have been through what the parents are in the middle of right now. They know what it is to carry the weight of wondering if you're raising your children correctly. Wondering if your marriage will make it.

This group knows more than every other group in Plain City. Life and their long and storied relationship with God have taken them through the places the other groups are struggling with now. This group has so much to offer. If only someone would ask them.

And so it goes in Plain City. The kids with the kids. The Parents with the other hurried and harried parents. And the older ones with the older ones. These are the invisible lines of Plain City.

### ***The End.***

This service is called Multi-Gen Mojo. What that means is the MAGICAL-like POWER of Multiple generations coming together. (Disclaim Austin Power's use of "mojo.")

What I wanted to capture in that allegory is this general truth that, in our culture we tend to keep to ourselves—along generational lines.

Here's what I mean: I'm 45. I will naturally engage people that are 10 years +/- my age. In other words, we naturally will hang out with people that could be our older/younger brother or sister.

When we're younger, the age range is smaller. To my daughter Meg who is 17, +/- 10 years is a LIFETIME.

But regardless of your natural connecting range (5 yrs, 10, yrs...) here's the cutoff: 20! At 20 years there's an invisible line.

Why? Because, when another adult is 20 years older or younger than you—they're old enough to be your parent or be your child.

Subconsciously its, "They're my PARENT'S age!" "They're my DAUGHTER'S age!"

So I want to surface this reality that as a culture, **we're fairly segregated along generational lines.**

We are, for the simple reason, that we have **lots of affinity** with people of our approximate age. We have lots of things in common. We like a lot of the same stuff, same musical styles, same shows, movies etc.

Cultural Reality #1: we hang out with people our approximate age because we have lots of affinity with them.

Here's another cultural reality I want to bring to light:  
Generally in our culture we **celebrate & elevate youth** and **don't really value older people**.

Let me throw out some marketing examples. Here's a SMALL list of things that commercials sell with young people:

Clothes of any kind.  
Food of any kind.  
Drinks of any kind (except for the "most interesting man in the world")  
Cars.  
Music.  
Household products of any kind.

What commercials feature older people? The commercials we all make fun of!!

"I've fallen—thanks life alert."

"I'm incontinent so I wear these big OLD boy pants."

"This is my new JITTERBUG cell phone—each number on my keypad is as big as *your* entire cell phone!"

"Just one of these little yellow pills, then later my wife and I can soak in separate bath tubs on the beach or on top of a mountain." (grrrrrr)

And just anecdotally, as I've been talking with people about this subject and mentioned how we don't value older people like we should, almost everyone said, "**Yeah, like they do in Asia.**"

(selah)

Alright—the term "old"—let me just define this & shake up everybody:

If you're 20, to an elementary age kid, you're old!

If you're in your late 20s to early 30s; to a student—you're old!

If you're anywhere close to 40; to a 20-something—you're old!

If you're anywhere close to 50; you get 10% off at Banana Republic ;- ) (true!)

And at 60 and above every restaurant is so thrilled that you can **still make it in**, they'll give 10% off something!

Seriously—one study I looked at did surveys and found that:

18-35 year olds define old as 50.

20s define old as 58.

65-74 year olds define old as 80!

My point:—by a certain age (an age before YOU think you're old)—there will be a group of people who view you as old.

And here's some crazy data about our cultural view of aging: research done by AARP, teamed with the National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging, found that a majority of American children hold negative views of the elderly.

And you don't have to look too far to find reports of older people in the US described with words like: excluded, un-needed, irrelevant.

Alright. So here we are with this "cultural reality"—this general view of older people—that we've talked about to this point.

But culture doesn't define reality. **God defines reality through His written Word.**

So let's see what God says about older people.

"And **if** you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a **long life.**" 1 Kings 3:14

God is telling Solomon that being older is a REWARD. It's not an **affliction**—it's not a more **marginalized** place in the culture---being older is a PRIZE---a REWARD!

Or in Proverbs it says

"Gray hair is a **crown of glory**;  
It is gained by living a godly life" Proverbs 16:31

Lots of "crowns of glory" in here—workin' on one of my own! ;-)

Again—**God**, defines age as something which should be **esteemed**—so much so that the outward sign of gray hair is a CROWN! Not CURSE.

And I don't know about you--but I know that I am guilty of, at times,--thinking of older people as not having as much to offer, or that their input is diminished because of their years. Maybe they should have **smaller or lesser roles now...**

But I would be guilty of ungodly thoughts. Look at what God says:

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am El-Shaddai—God Almighty. Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to make you into a mighty nation. At this Abram fell face down in the dust. Then God said to him, 'This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations! What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will give you millions of descendants who will represent many nations. Kings will be among them!'" Genesis 17:1-6

At **99**—God calls Abraham to STEP UP his work in the Kingdom. God takes a man who could get **free coffee at McDonalds**—and establishes the line of Jesus' birth.

God uses this man who we'd think his **best years were behind him**—and he becomes the father even of THIS nation and the father of every Christ follower in this room!

And in Joshua:

"When Joshua was an old man, the Lord said to him, "You are growing old, and... **much land remains to be conquered.**" Joshua 13:1

From there the text spills into a quarter of a page—listing lands and people that need to be defeated. God is **not reducing** Joshua's "to-do" list because he's old! God says, Chop-chop—still LOTS to do Joshua—let's get rockin!"

Biblically, as we age we are not supposed to "bow out" of the impact and influence we can have in our culture. Check this out:

"Even in **old age** they (*the godly*) will still **produce fruit**:  
They will still remain **vital and green** (growing)." Psalm 92:14

So I want to say to all of you sitting here today who are wearing your gray crowns of glory:

That long life is a REWARD from God.

That God STILL wants you to “serve Him faithfully.”

That YOU have “much land” to be conquered!

That like Abraham, God might use your **older days** to make your BIGGEST IMPACT

YOU will still “produce fruit” because you are “vital & growing!”

(selah)

So clearly—by God’s standards, to be older is to be in a place of respect and usefulness.

And at the same time, youth is no **less** important the way God defines it. Really simple biblical example here:

Who did God use to take down Goliath? **David.**

How old was David? Not old enough to be a soldier—not old enough to be called a man.

When God called the great prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah responded with, “O Sovereign Lord, I can’t speak for you! **I’m too young!**”

Jeremiah 1:6

Who did God entrust with birthing and raising Jesus? **Couple teenagers.**

And this powerful statement that Paul speaks into Timothy:

“Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”

1 Timothy 4:12

When we look through the Bible we see young people providing the same things that young people provide now:

Zeal. (“Intense enthusiasm”)

Energy.

Optimism.

Strength.

When we look through the Bible we see older people providing the same things they do today:

Wisdom.

Experience.

Knowledge.

And in our culture today—too often—those lists—are **separate** from each other. Why? Because the tendency is for young people to stay to themselves and for older people to stay to themselves.

And there are **pitfalls** of young and old people being separated from each other.

A pitfall of age: **Resentment.**

"They don't appreciate me—they don't appreciate the things I did to make things possible for them...They think life is all about them...I was young once too...they don't include me...they don't value me...it was better times when **we** were younger..."

And yet, resentment is not a fruit of the spirit—but joy is. And Ecclesiastes 7:10 warns us: "Don't long for the 'good old days,' This is not wise."

If you find yourself resentful of young people, perhaps that is God telling you, you need to get close to some young people...

A pitfall of youth: **Arrogance.**

They don't understand me—they don't want to understand where I'm coming from...They aren't relevant to my life...this is MY time...I don't need them—I can blaze my own trail..."

But 1 Peter 5:5 says:

"Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" NIV

If you find yourself feeling a little too much of yourself & that you have all the answers—maybe God is telling you, you need to get close to someone older who has more answers or who can ask better questions...

(selah)

But what happens when we bring the best parts of the young and the old together? We get a church and culture that's personified with these words

Zeal. Wisdom. Energy. Experience. Optimism. Knowledge. Strength.

If that was a resume, would you hire THAT person?

When the church comes together ACROSS generational lines, it becomes what the New Testament church **family** was meant to be!

And God defines our relationships with the close-knit imagery of a FAMILY.

Notice all the familial words:

"Never speak harshly to an older man,<sup>[a]</sup> but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father. Talk to younger men as you would to your own brothers. <sup>2</sup> Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters." 1 Timothy 5:1-2

Paul is defining the relationships of all the different age groups in very CLOSE KNIT terms. There is no doubt that the biblical picture of the people of God is NOT a separated segregated one—they **interlock—it's multigenerational by God's design!**

Let me seal this shut with this verse—where Paul is talking to his "**son in the faith**," Titus. And this is THE picture of the multigenerational church:

"Teach the older men to exercise self-control, to be **worthy** of respect, and to live **wisely**. They must have **sound faith** and be filled with **love** and **patience**. (Why? Love & patience is attractive. Bitterness & "I know all the answers" isn't)

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, teach the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers.<sup>[a]</sup> Instead, they should teach others what is good. <sup>4</sup> These older women must **train the younger women** to love their husbands and their children, <sup>5</sup> to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes,<sup>[b]</sup> to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

<sup>6</sup> In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. <sup>7</sup> And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. Titus 2:2-7

God's plan is for a multigenerational church. Where young and old interact. God's plan isn't "**church splits**" where young people go this way, and older go the other... The power of any church—lies in the cross pollinating of the young and the old.

To show you what this looks like and to show you what I want you to do, I'd like to invite up some friends.

*(This was free form...)*

*( Slater 15, Jonathon 21, Cameron 25, (me 45), Ron 60s )*

*Show the relationships between these people (I build into Jonathon, he builds into Slater. Cameron and I hang out. And Ron and I hang out.)*

Where are YOU in this picture? You will have to be intentional to get some cross-generational relationships going. You will never be all God wants you to be without being part of this picture.

### **Closing from Cameron Sprinkle's blog:**

<http://cameronsprinkle.tumblr.com/>

*On Sunday at Oakbrook during the Advance series we heard a message about how as followers of Jesus who are called to love each other, we can and should be influencers in everything we do. We watched a powerful video that featured several different people explaining that there's more to them than meets the eye.*

*"I'm more than just a pregnant teen who you think is a bad influence on your kids—I'm a lonely girl with no father figure, and I'm watching you to see how to be a mom".*

*"I'm more than just the grouchy lady who is always in her garden. Gardening is the only thing that makes me feel useful since the divorce. I heard you became a Christian. I'm watching you to see how your life changes."*

*"I'm more than just your mechanic. I'm physically and emotionally worn out by years of working underneath cars. I'm looking for someone to show me something that will help me keep moving forward"*

*"I'm more than just the accountant in the corner cubicle. I have a child with a disability and a wife who is losing her smile. I know you're a Christian. I'm watching you to see your definition of success"*

*Me, I work for an insurance company. I was called to the front desk to serve a walk-in customer. When I got there I found that the customer waiting was an old man with white hair, white shoes, white socks pulled up to his shins, as much hair in his ears as was on his head, hearing aids, and a frown on his face. I know this type. Hard of hearing, grouchy,*

*upset with me personally because I'm the face of the company, probably because he's confused by a bill he received.*

*He was upset to see me because he is usually helped by another lady I work with, but we've moved to a new rotating model where people aren't assigned to a particular agent anymore. His attitude annoyed me because I knew that I could answer his questions and service his account as well as the lady he wanted to see.*

*I did my best to speak loudly and be friendly. When he again said, "Usually it's a lady that helps me", I said, "Is it ok if a man helps you this time?" with a cheesy overtone, hoping he'd pick up on my humor. He dismissed it by mumbling something incoherent as we made our way down to the office where I was taking him.*

*When we sat down, he said sternly, "I've got some questions about my policy". Here we go. He's had auto insurance for 60 years and he still doesn't get how it works? Trying not to be annoyed, I prepare myself to loudly answer some basic insurance questions.*

*He produced a small card from his pocket and said, "I've lost my wife..." and trailed off, visibly upset. The card was from her funeral. It had her picture on the inside with her favorite bible verse. She looked like a sweet lady. She's been gone for a month. He said, "I'm not doing well with it...I'll never be the same without her." His eyes were distant and searching; he really just didn't know how to go on.*

*Inside I've got a hurricane of emotions and thoughts: I'm such a jerk!; I want to go home and hold my wife, right now; what is his insurance-related question going to be?; poor guy; don't cry, Cameron! Do not cry.*

*I realized at that moment that I was no longer an insurance agent, but an influencer.*

*I realized that this man was more than just a grouchy old man. He'd lost his beloved wife, and he was looking for comfort. He's reaching the end of his life and he doesn't have many people he can talk to. This card he fidgeted with in his trembling hands was all that was left of the love of his life, the woman he shared years of joy, laughter, and tears with.*

*I couldn't help but imagine what it'd be like if a small piece of card stock was all that was left of my beloved Karissa. I could've thrown up, it made me so sad.*

*Turns out he was going to sell one of his vehicles because she wouldn't be driving it anymore, and he wanted to know how to get it removed from his policy. That's all. The reason he was so upset about not being helped by the lady he usually works with is because he knew that she knew his wife from helping her in the past, and he wanted to show her the card and let her know that his wife had passed. Somewhat breaking protocol, I went and got the associate he used to work with.*

*He told both of us the heartbreaking story of how his wife got sick, how he had held her hand and called her "baby doll" and asked her to squeeze it if she could hear him, and how she softly squeezed his hand not once but twice, just to make sure he knew that she understood what was happening. Then he told us how he was holding her hand when she passed. He said, "If there's a heaven, she's there".*

*I'll be honest, it wasn't an easy situation. There were a lot of awkward silences as my associate and I tried to find things to say, and he went into greater detail about her sickness and surgeries than what I'm comfortable with hearing. We endured and gave our*



*sympathetic smiles and condolences the best we could; since he was hard of hearing, it made it difficult to say anything meaningful.*

*When he got up to leave, my associate gave him a hug, and he offered to let her keep the card since he had more. She barely knew the lady, but graciously said, "I would love to keep it". I was proud of her for that. He needed to know that his wife still meant something to the world. Then he turned and shook my hand and said, "I'm sorry, young man. I didn't mean to imply that you couldn't do your job well. You took real good care of me, and I appreciate it".*

*A sense of humility washed over me as I again got the sense that the Lord had entrusted me with an opportunity to influence one of his hurting children. I put my hand on his back and offered to walk him back up to the front of the building, saying "It's easy to get lost in here!" As I held the front door open for him, he slowly turned and mustered up a smile as he looked me in the eye and said, gently, "thank you". It was the kind of thank you that you give someone when they've done more for you than they realize, and I knew it.*

*As I walked back to my part of the building, another lady that had worked with him before jokingly said, "Did he tell you his life's story?" and smiled. I said, "Kind of. His wife just passed away."*

*I went and stood outside for a minute, in an extremely sentimental and reflective mood now. I watched the breeze blow through the trees. As some dry leaves tumbled by, I thought about how life changes. For me it was a beautiful, ordinary day. For this man, it was another tough day to get through without his wife.*

*As I ponder our mortality and our finiteness, I am grateful for the Lord's permanence. And as I compare the old man I had perceived with the old man I met, I am grateful for the message of influence I heard at Oakbrook, and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to remind me that I am an influencer, even in the seemingly mundane moments of life.*