

I invite you to think about a person in your life that had a great impact on your Christian faith? What one person does your mind drift to? Was it a parent? Was it a youth leader? Was it a camp counselor? Was it a coach? Was it some older adult that took you under their wing? Was it another person your age that influenced you by their life story? Maybe a celebrity? Was it a person that is much younger than you are?

I invite anyone who would like to share to do so at this time. Can you tell us briefly about someone that had a major impact on your Christian faith? How did they do it?

Now I want to test out a theory. Raise your hand if that person was younger than you? Your same age? Older than you?

Our greatest experiences of spiritual growth tend to come when we are in environments with people who are a lot older or a lot younger than we are.

In their book *Sticky Faith*, the three authors examine the factors that make for a “sticky faith” during the college years. By “sticky faith” they mean faith that really connects to a person and doesn’t disappear when they leave home. The first thing that the authors discovered that leads to “sticky faith” is involvement in all-church or intergenerational worship during high school.

Worshipping with multiple ages together is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college students than any other form of church participation. In other words, young people who develop a strong Christian faith are most influenced by being in worship experiences with people older and younger than themselves.

Look at us right now. By having multiple ages together we are building faith together. Worship here does not say, “Adults only” or that kids and youth need to simply observe or have their own service. Worship that builds faith includes all ages worshipping together.

The second thing that the authors found that contributes to young adults developing strong faith in Christ is the building of relationships with younger children. Students who serve in ministries where they interact with younger children are more likely to have a stronger faith in college. In other words, when youth and children interact with one another it builds stronger faith for both groups.

The third observation about why young adults develop healthy faith is when adults in the congregation show an interest in young people and build relationships with them. The type of relationship where the young people feel welcomed and valued.

When we have a baptism in the congregation we ask questions to all of the members about making a commitment to the child to raise them in the faith. It turns out that when adults fulfill this commitment it really does impact children's faith development.

And the fourth observation about how to develop strong faith in young people is that congregations that increase the ratio of adults to kids increase the likelihood that these young adults will continue in the church when they become young adults. A ratio of 5 adults to 1 child is recommended. Think about that. 5 adults to every one youth. Now think about how our traditional model is opposite of that. We usually think 1 adult to about every 5-10 young people.

Today I have some really great news for all of us in the church. The church is the only true community in our society where all six living generations are gathered each week together. But what do most churches do with these gifts of the wisdom of the elder and the wonder of the child on Sunday mornings? We segregate and separate families from one another. We create age segregated classes where children go one direction and adults go another.

But today at Allison Creek we are initiating a grand experiment. An experiment that I am really excited about. It's charting new territory and that is something that we do pretty well, I think, in this church. Today we are going to initiate an experiment that offers you the opportunity to be a part of something that truly strengthens the faith of all of us. Today we are starting FAITH5 after worship.

We have bookmarks that you can pick up at the entrance that outlines what FAITH5 is all about. So each week after the fellowship time children and youth will have an opportunity to go into the gym and youth room and get some energy out. Then we will be invited to gather around tables and participate in the FAITH5 model.

It's not for everyone. We will still offer our traditional adult Sunday School class that meets in the Bigger Room. We will continue to offer the very engaging class of reflection that includes youth and adults that meets in the parlor. In addition to those classes we will now be offering FAITH5 to any one that is interested. It is a model that welcomes families of all sizes whether you are single, have a partner, have children or don't have children.

Each Sunday we will be invited to gather around tables with multiple ages and begin by sharing our highs and lows. What went well this week and what did not go so well. We will then read Scripture at your table. You will be invited to then talk about how the Scripture connects to your highs and lows that you shared. I have chosen Scriptures for the next few months that rely heavily on parables or stories with purpose that Jesus told. It is my belief that parables easily connect to our everyday experiences.

After reading the Scripture and talking about it we will then pray together around the tables. We will pray for each other's highs and lows. After prayer we will then offer a blessing to each other. A blessing to remind us that we are special in God's eyes.

We have a video clip of one family participating in FAITH5. This is one family with young children. But the beauty of this model is that it works for all age groups. Let's observe this one family.

Video from <http://faith5.org/>

I am excited as I think about how God is using us in creative ways to build up the body of Christ and to build up our faith in God through Christ. Join us today after worship, eat some pancakes, and give it a shot. AMEN.

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-Melheim, Dr. Rich, *Holding Your Family Together*, Regal, 2013

-Melheim, Dr. Rich, *Let's Kill Sunday School*, Vol. 1, Faith Inkubators

-Melheim, Dr. Rich, *Let's Kill Sunday School*, Vol 2, Faith Inkubators

-Amidei, Kathie, Jim Merhaut, John Roberto, *Generations Together*, Lifelong Faith Associates, 2014.

-Text: Luke 12:13-21

-Given: January 8, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian