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Older Men, Younger Men Need You¹

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There is a sad and wide gulf between older men and younger men today. Generational discrimination and segregation are alive and, well, discouraging.

We have to pass the torch somehow, but so many of the bridges have been burnt. Younger guys *need* older guys. Older men, by God's design and grace, there are things we will get from you and no one else. Especially those of us without dads, or Christian dads, or engaged and intentional Christian dads. Yet the decades sadly so rarely seem to play well together.

As a younger man myself, I have tried to identify how exactly older guys can love, exhort, and invest in younger men around them — men like me. On behalf of other younger men, with humility and boldness, we plead with our older brothers for five things.

1. LOVE

Young men are often asking of older men, "Do you care about me? Do you *really* care?" We can watch YouTube videos

for advice, wisdom, and inspiration for life's complexities. With Christian blogs today, we can access answers to most every life question without even picking up the phone. We should still ask you, but we don't need older men mainly because they're smarter.

Young men need steady love, a love that shadows the love of the Father (1 John 2:13-14). We *need* that, and we are on a journey with monsters on the horizon — monsters deep in our own hearts and all around us. You, the older man, are not necessarily our dad, but you are a “father's friend” — a “neighbor who is near” (Prov 27:10), who teaches us about “reproach,” “prudence,” “suffering,” “adultery,” and “cursing” (Prov 27:11-14) — how to *do* (or avoid) all of it. The king says “do not forsake ... your father's friend.” So, we're here. At least some of us are. Not forsaking. Maybe annoying, but not forsaking.

2. STORIES

Young men need to hear, “Everything's going to be okay.” Most days we're pretty sure our lives are an utter failure, a disaster zone even.

We hear: “You're not a man.” We need: “You *are* a man. Let's act like it.” We hear: “You can't beat this.” We need: “I know that voice. This is *how* you fight it.” We hear: “She doesn't love you, so life is worthless.” We need: “This is a season. God knows your needs. Talk to me about it.”

God taught you lessons when you were young. You pray, “From my youth you have taught me,” and, “Even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come” (Ps 71:17-18). Now, for every gray hair, we want one story of God's faithfulness, one lesson from years of learning God and his world. One “you'll be okay” for every silver lock.

Was there a time when you had that same life experience? Tell us about it. We need to hear, “God is faithful in that situation, because I've seen it — I have *felt* it. I don't know what it will look like for you, but he *is* with you, and he is faithful. And so am I.” Tell relevant, helpful stories. You can't see the end of

any young man's story. But you can be a historical anchor for the hope that God is *actually* involved in this tragic world — in a young man's tragic life — because sometimes we're not so sure.

3. PRAYER

It's hard for most Christians to spend time alone with God. For you to take time with the Father — with *your* Father — to intercede for us, to pray for our good, and to ask for wisdom for us, means more than you know. With all the brokenness between generations today, it would be an unusual and undeserved blessing to take your prayers for granted.

Paul feared the Ephesians would “lose heart,” so he prayed that God would, “grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit” (Eph 3:13, 16). We often lose heart while we make our own way. We need strength. We're praying our immature hearts out. Take those ten or fifteen years you have on us and do with them in prayer what we haven't learned to do yet as unskilled, inexperienced, and scared younger men.

4. SELF-SECURITY

Don't feel the need to compete with us. We're not your peers, so don't measure yourself against us. If we need your more mature, fatherly help, chances are we're not getting it from our dads. Most guys who have distant or absent fathers feel like they have been competing with other men their whole life — for stats, for affection, approval, and acceptance.

Be a friend in the war of life — a fellow soldier. We need support, friendship, and non-competitive camaraderie like that — we need a person to manifest to us, face to face, God's disinterest in comparative performance. It's *really* hard to “do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). But we might just learn how to do it for others through your example.

One of the most practical shapes this takes is in the form of *good listening*. In listening to a young man talk about himself, you will

hear embedded in his words a “plea for grace” (Psalm 86:6), and you will be more equipped to speak “a word fitly spoken,” which is “like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov 25:11).

We also might need help hearing you, because we can be impatient and stubborn and defensive (what do you do with an apple of gold anyway?). God models this humility and patience: “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance” (Romans 2:4). God is kind because he doesn’t have anything to prove. That security produces amazing results in relationships, and in men in general.

5. VULNERABILITY

Be patient. We are slow. Don’t feel like you need to yell at us. We’ve been yelled at. Be firm if we need it. We need to be able to ask you anything — and get an honest, non-judgmental answer. This includes wisdom for Christian growth in general — in fighting sin. We need to feel, “We’re in this together,” not, “You’re such a failure.”

Most men *already* feel like failures. Be original, and be with us. Is 1 Cor 10:13 really true? “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.” Help us to learn to practice the tension of that verse: that it is “common” — not weird or stigmatized or something to keep in the dark — and to embrace the call to “endure it,” which is nearly impossible without community. We need a place — a man — that challenges us to grow, but also makes it safe for us to confess.

EVERY BOY WANTS TO BE A MAN

This was not written for the courtroom, fathers. These “needs” are not a condemnation of *you*. No, they are meant for your veneration. “I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who has been from the beginning” (1 John 2:13). Young men have failed older men in many ways — through incompetence and inconsistency, through shortcomings and shameful acts, through critiquing everyone else and coddling ourselves — our lives our fraught with failure. It’s true.

No matter what the young, stubborn punk in your life says, we want to mature; we want the skilled, heavy, healing hand of corrective (not punitive) discipline; we want to be told we’re wrong;

we want to grow. Every young man wants to be a man who can receive the love of Christ, and out of that, become a skilled lover of God, a helpful lover of friends, and a serving lover of a woman.

We want to be like you inasmuch as you are like Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

ENDNOTES

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