

Chapter Two

Issue Invitations

Once you've decided to embrace a generation into greatness, you'll be jaw dropped in discovering that this generation is looking for you. Me? Yes, you! It may be hard for you to wrap your mind around, you may find it befuddling, but I assure you it's true.

Perhaps you're thinking; "Oh Yeah? You don't know the mistakes I've made with my own children." Maybe your own biological children are rebellious, emotionally distant. Maybe they even hate you. You may be filled with deep regrets, wishing you'd been more attentive, more present, more intentional, less preoccupied with personal fulfillment, you've gone over and over it a thousand times. Time sped by and before you knew it your children were grown and perhaps bitter. You're not expecting them to rise and give you a world's greatest parent mug, anytime soon.

If this is your story, I'd suggest you call or write your children and tell them your regrets. Humility will open an amazing door of healing. Don't talk about their failings, talk about yours. It is one of the best gifts you can give your children. It is never too late.

No matter how great a failure you perceive yourself to be, you have the opportunity now to flip the script. Your pain can become a curriculum of compassion, an agenda for mercy.

Mark it well friend, your tomorrows are not predicated on your yesterdays.

This Generation Is Not Looking for Perfection

This generation isn't looking for perfection. They've been born and bred in a media age. They've seen the mighty fall, multiple times. This generation is looking for *authenticity*. People who have wrestled with life and still preserve hope. People who know that evil is never ultimate. Authenticity is what catches the eye and heart of this generation.

They are looking for you. This is a well-kept secret you have to know. The reason this is still a secret is they don't know how to tell you. When I was growing up in the sixties, people who were accepted by the younger generation, were cool, hip up to date, they had their finger pressed firmly on the culture's pulse. They spoke the right language, watched the right shows, they listened to the right groups and wore the right clothes.

I, on the other hand, was singularly not happening, completely un-cool. My mom had distinct ideas about modesty, so I wore peculiar clothes. I was not only more serious than God, but because my mom was brilliant, I had a prodigious vocabulary. I was decidedly non-athletic. (Team captains would argue vehemently over who had to take me). I wore, (this is still true) thrift store clothes. So, you can imagine my utter incredulity, when I started noticing this generation wanted to hang around me. I was floored.

Unlike the Boomer generation (those born between 1946-1964), whose mantra was "Don't trust anyone over 30!" and "Question Authority!" This generation wistfully longs for someone older to befriend them. This generation thinks older people are wonderful. They have what I call "elder crave". They ache for people like you. They are yearning for someone, anyone, to notice them and welcome them into their world.

Learn To Issue Invitations

Here's the rub; we are waiting for an invitation into their lives, and they are waiting for our invitation into ours. People who've changed history, never waited for invitations, they issued them.

If you don't remember anything else in this conversation, please remember this; *Learn to issue invitations*. It doesn't have to be an invitation to some amazing event, just invite someone out for coffee or tea. Invite someone into your life with a smile, and go wherever love takes you.

Recently a friend who sometimes travels with me graduated from high school. I called and said "Jesse, I don't know what kind of graduation gift you'd like." Jesse replied immediately; "What I'd like is time with you. Let's have breakfast!" We feasted on a scrumptious breakfast, as we told each other stories, and laughed our way through berries and French toast.

Issuing invitations is like handing out Valentines. It's simply saying "Hey I see you. I'd like to be your friend. How about it?" You'll find that issuing invitations is much simpler than you initially thought.

Learn to ask, "So what's your secret ambition?" Conversations of substance are rare between the generations. Most young people only hear; "My how you've grown!" It can get very old. Ask about their dreams and hopes, ask if they could do anything, go anywhere, play any part, what would they love to do?

A few years back I spoke in a city called Malibu and a young woman who heard me emailed me the next day. I invited her to dinner and a few weeks later, we shared stories about our childhoods. Even though I was decades older, we found our stories were similar.

I found myself apologizing to her for the way my generation had spiritually misled hers. She sobbed as I apologized. I dimly realized I needed to hold her. As I looked at this talented gifted young woman, I realized I could have easily missed the beauty of her friendship. I could have just shown up, given a speech, and left the meeting. Thankfully my heart took note of her, and I followed through. Since that night, we've become good friends. Andrea has taught me a lot about her generation. We've traveled to four countries together and hope to go to many more.

Invite Young People into Your World

Invite and welcome young people into your world. A year ago, I got an email from a Hollywood stunt man. He was appreciative of a daily email my son Joel sends to over 530 parents at a school his child attends. Wally Crowder decided to thank Joel by inviting him into his world. During Christmas break Wally offered to take Joel on the set and have lunch together. Wally understands that one of the number #1 predictors of a young person thriving in life, is that they have nonrelative adults in their lives who care.

I enjoy being highly intentional in inviting young people into my world. A while back I was speaking in Westlake Village. Most of my speaking is not local, so it was refreshing to have a talk close by. I invited my lovely sixteen-year-old friend Jess, to come with me. I wanted her to do whatever she liked before I spoke, dance, sing, talk, the choice was hers. Jess ended up dancing and people were so touched; they were predisposed to like absolutely anything I said. They thought I was brilliant because she was so lovely.

Issue invitations every chance you get. Make it your goal to become a world-class invitation issuer. I was speaking in Indiana where I met a gorgeous young 16-year-old. I hugged her a little longer than a perfunctory hug. The next day she asked if she could sing before I spoke. I said a hesitant yes. I said yes because I believe in making room for young people and their gifts. I was hesitant because it occurred to me maybe she only *thinks* she can sing. Perhaps she is tone deaf?

To my huge relief, Holly got up and sang with a voice as gorgeous as her face. Holly was bold to ask, because she picked up from me a non-verbal cue from a slightly longer hug. I issued an invitation hug, and she stepped right in, bold and desirous to share her gift.

The Power of Simple Invitations

Don't underestimate the power of simple invitations. You don't have to be a speaker or a stuntman to give who you are and what you have. Merna Muffins is a perfect example. Merna wasn't smart, articulate, or

beautiful...she had no talent that might catch your eye. But Merna could love, and she could bake muffins. She poured what she could into our lives and loved us like there was no tomorrow.

When we'd travel across America by van doing concerts, a large bag of Merna's famous bran muffins (You see, she was practical as well as generous), went with us. We had austere diets when we were on the road. Steak, my favorite meal, was rarely on our menu. I'll never forget Merna welcoming us home after a long trip, serving up a wonderful steak barbeque. She'd spent her little widows' mite on a meal we'd never forget.

We are sometimes hesitant to issue simple invitations because we think they'll be rejected.

Henri Nouwen says; "Perhaps it's because we think that these simple acts, which are often embedded in our ordinary mundane life rather than in the spectacular, relevant and powerful events, do not make that much of a difference in the long run when in fact the reverse is true. I know that in my life, what spoke volumes into my soul were the small consistent acts of love shown by older people. Yet, when I turn around and try to do it myself, when I don't see visible fruit immediately, I tend to want to summarily dismiss it. It really takes intention, perseverance, vision, and God's humility and love to carry out these simple, seemingly small acts of kindnesses."

It's really very simple to respond. Just make yourself available. Issue invitations. Push past your fear. Just begin. All you need to be is alive, awake, aware, and willing. Find a young man or woman. Right now, is the perfect time to start.

Ponderings

1. Describe an unexpected invitation and how it made you feel.
2. How has my parenting experience affected my view of embracing non-related young people?
3. In what way could you invite someone into your world?
4. When you think of issuing invitations, what is your greatest fear?