

# DISCIPLE MAKING

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A PODCAST WITH DR. JOHN TOLSON

## Episode 6: Sliding Home

It's interesting to look at the development of humans at different stages of life. For many years, not much work had been done on adult development. Then a man came along by the name of Erik Erikson, and he developed the Six Stages of Adult Development. Stage three was very interesting to me. It's the stage of Generativity versus Stagnation. The word generativity simply means productivity.

The observation I've made over the years is that when people get to be about 65 or 70 they often are sliding for home. They say "I've already done my part. Let the young people take over." This is especially true in the church.

I think that at every stage of the Six Stages that Erik Erickson mentions you either succeed or you fail at developing in that stage. One of the observations that Erickson made was this: "serving as a mentor or disciple-maker can help you resolve the third stage in favor of productivity or generativity"

I think many people in the Christian church today are not developing and growing the way god wants them to and means for them to. And i think a lot of times churches and leaders are big into church growth and not so much into church health. I believe that if you have a healthy church with healthy people, the church growth will happen automatically.

So let me leave you with this challenge as you think about your own personal life as a follower of Jesus Christ and whether you really feel that you are productive or you're stagnant.

Dennis Rainey writes this: about a dozen grey haired men sat at a table at a prestigious country club, all former executives who have been highly successful, leaders, champions, bright intelligent minds, these were risk takers who had led big lives checkered with success and failure. There between 45 and 60 years these men clearly had plenty to impart to younger generations. As I prepared to speak to them, I couldn't help but think that their gray heads only added to their dignity. They had asked me to speak for 10 min about what family life (that's the work that Dennis does) was

doing to strengthen marriages and families. As i unpacked what we would be doing, i mentioned that i would be speaking at a gathering of executives a couple days later about three qualities of a patriarch. What happened next was fascinating. It was as though i had touched an open nerve. For 45 min they peppered me with questions, peeling back their hearts, sharing their disappointments, frustrations, and desires. They talked about how their adult children were critical of them, pushing them to the fringes of their lives. They were treated as unnecessary except as babysitters, and they felt their family really didn't want their influence or their involvement. They said the only opportunities that their church had offered were ushering, serving on the stewardship committee, and giving to the building programs. They lamented that the culture had become so youth oriented. They felt emasculated, treated as if they were done and had nothing left to give. These men who had once been kings in their families and their businesses and their communities were for the first time uncertain as to what their role should be. Like broken antiques gathering dust in the attic, they were without purpose. But as they interacted, i could see in their eyes that they longed to be challenged again. War hardened and saddened, the sage soldiers wanted to fill their nostrils with the smoke of the battlefield and engage in the fight again. They really didn't want to trade their swords and armor for 5 irons and golf shirts. They realized they were made for something far nobler than watching the news in a lazy boy recliner. I sat their astonished in what amounted to grand theft men robbed of their glory, no longer dreaming because of a complicity of forces that had cruelly swindled them out of their courage to step up. These men had been left behind, disoriented, and lost.

So how about you? Are you productive or are you stagnating?

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