



“*Myth of the Millennial* is an honest and satisfying conversation put to print. It’s filled with wisdom borne of firsthand experience and solid research. It carries insights gleaned from the stories of the very Millennials that many who will read the book find so hard to reach. And it’s loaded with the down-to-earth wit of authors who take the Gospel seriously and themselves lightly. Ted and Chelsey’s words are so effective at cutting through the stereotypes and offering practical application and pastoral encouragement to all generations that one has to think it will become the go-to resource for ministry to Millennials for years to come.”

—Rev. Matt Popovits, Pastor, *Our Saviour New York, Rego Park, NY*; Author of *Tough Call: A Little Book on Making Big Decisions*



“*Myth of the Millennial* accomplishes the delicate and difficult task of exploring the Millennial generation without falling into over-generalizations or negative comparisons to previous generations. Using sound and approachable theology, the Doerings draw us beyond an academic analysis and invite us into a reciprocal and Christ-centered relationship with this emerging generation. A must-read!”

—Rev. Chris Paavola, Pastor, *All Nations Church, University City, MO*



“As a Gen X pastor of a new church, I consider this conversation to be indispensable. Ted and Chelsey write with a brave energy and a witty vitality. They don’t back down from what needs to be asked and answered, meanwhile bringing the reader smiles on every page. I’m encouraged by their bright and ambitious perspective, and all the while am fully ‘gospelized’ by their relentless passion for the mission to their generation. Simply put, this should be required reading for all church leaders in America.”

—Rev. Mark Hunsaker, Pastor, *Praise & Worship Lutheran Church, Branson, MO*



“What an incredible book! Ted and Chelsey Doering understand that if we want to make a difference, we need to do something different. In *Myth of the Millennial*, they encourage the Church to open its eyes to the ways in which we can serve vital roles in Millennials’ lives, rather than grow frustrated with them. Through story, relevancy, and the Gospel message, the Doerings teach us something honest and encouraging about how to best connect and care for Millennials in *Myth of the Millennial*.”

—Tanner Olson, writer, spoken word poet, and creator of *writtentospeak.com*



“In *Myth of the Millennial*, Ted and Chelsey Doering help mend the generation gap with stories, questions, insight, honesty, and some sass. Most of all, they show in practical ways that there is much hope for the Church when generations love each other, walk together, and focus on Jesus.”

—Michael W. Newman, Author of *Hope When Your Heart Breaks: Navigating Grief and Loss and The Life You Crave: It’s All about Grace*



“Wow! After reading this work by Ted and Chelsey Doering, this Boomer is not only intrigued but eager to see the wonderful ways in which the Lord will work mightily through those who are identified among us as Millennials. Their high desire for relationships and community, along with their sincere and strong willingness to be mentored speaks volumes about their heart for people—that ministry and God’s love is not found in programs, nor in targeting people as projects, but in loving them, getting to know them, serving with them, and sharing Jesus with them. This is good! This is very good. This is Jesus-like. I’m thankful for this work by the Doerings and highly recommend it to all!”

—Rev. Luke R. Schnake, Director of Ministries,
Christ Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE



“Ted and Chelsey cut through the media hype to offer a refreshingly simple and effective way to connect Millennials to Jesus. Every Christian wrestles with how best to share the Gospel with the people God has placed in our lives, especially if that person differs from us in some way. Many programs, activities, and experts promise to be the next silver bullet in reaching a Millennial audience. Ted and Chelsey dispel the myth of the Millennial by helping readers see beyond the stereotypes and by bringing them back to the basics of loving people and listening to each person’s unique story. May this book both challenge and encourage you in taking the first steps to loving your neighbor and sharing Jesus with them.”

—Rev. Mark Pulliam, Associate Pastor,
Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX



“If you’re not a Millennial, but care about the Millennials and their life with God, this book is for you! As you read this book, you can do this book. The Church, my congregation, and the mission of Christ will be challenged and strengthened by this work. It’s engaging, humorous, solidly biblical, sacramental, refreshing, and insightful. I could not put *Myth of the Millennial* down. Millennials, as you engage with the Doerings’ book, you will help your generation, honor Christ, bless the Church, and help the rest of us figure out our life together.”

—Rev. Allan R. Buss, Senior Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Belvidere, IL



“*Myth of the Millennial* challenged me to confront my subconscious stereotypes and consider some specific ways to meaningfully engage Millennials as individuals who are loved by God. The emphasis on relationships over programming provides a necessary corrective to my tendency to focus on what the authors might

call a ‘silver bullet’ program. The presentation style is engaging and inviting, and the illustrations and stories are fresh and enjoyable, while being specific and authentic. The authors’ style, along with the practical insights and questions for discussion, makes this a very user-friendly resource.”

—*Rev. Al Doering, Pastor, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Kingwood, TX;
Proud Father and Father-in-Law of the Authors*



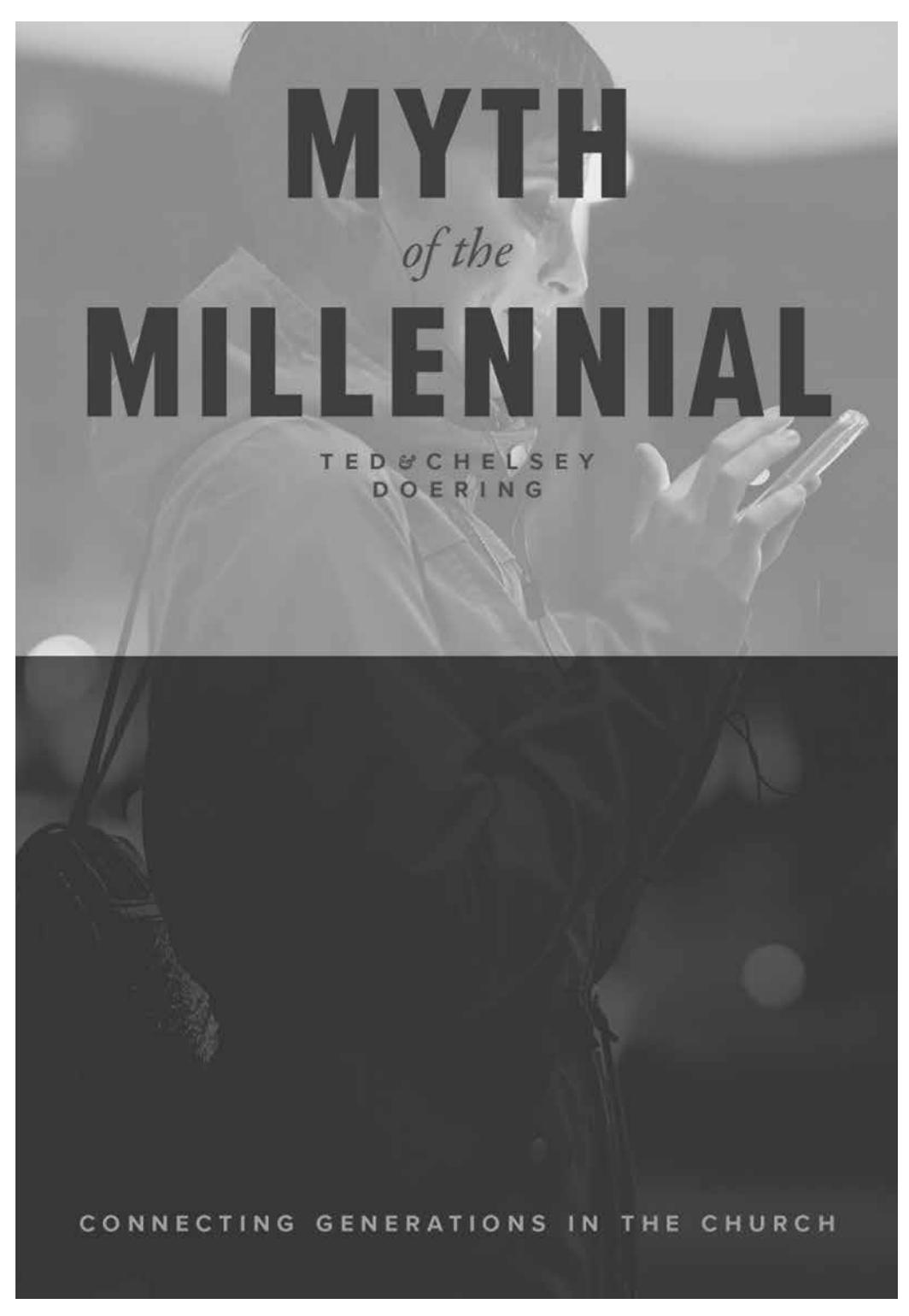
“Jesus said, ‘Therefore GO and MAKE disciples. . . .’ My heart has ached for this next generation of the Church as I have witnessed them leaving the Body of Christ. This book gives a great map for the actions involved in the ‘going and making’ of Millennial disciples. It has challenged me to be prayerful, intentional, and passionate for the Millennial generation. As God has called us by Jesus’ words, let the insights in this book be the invitation and challenge from our Lord to join Him in ‘seeking and saving’ the lost.”

—*Mary Doering, Women’s Ministry Coordinator & Sunday Morning Adult Education Co-coordinator, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Kingwood, TX;
and, coincidentally, I love the authors a whole lot!*



“I’m incredibly thankful this text is not another ‘this generation versus this generation.’ Rather, with humor and sincerity, Ted and Chelsey move us beyond stereotypes, allowing us to return to the hearts of actual people and their deep need for the Gospel. I highly recommend this book for those who want to do ministry to young and old, Boomer and Xer, and yes . . . to the Millennial.”

—*Rev. Brian West, Pastor, NextGeneration,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton Township, MI*



MYTH
of the
MILLENNIAL

TED & CHELSEY
DOERING

CONNECTING GENERATIONS IN THE CHURCH

For our parents
Paul & Cheri
and
Al & Mary

Thank you for teaching us to tie our shoes,
for extending to us God's love and forgiveness,
and for forming us into productive Millennial adults.

We love you.



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FOREWORD

In some ways, I wish I were a Millennial—specifically a Christian Millennial. Not that I'm unhappy with my lot as an early Boomer. We Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were raised in a great time for the institutional church. I'm profoundly grateful to God for my parents from the Greatest Generation, those born before 1928. The church where we worshiped was a large but closely knit faith family, including several blood-related families that spanned two and three generations. Our parochial grade school integrated faith into the three Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—and our large public high school operated with a Judeo-Christian worldview.

America has changed. Today's culture is contentious, we distrust institutions, government is ineffective, community is formed in different ways, moral issues have become gray, and the Church no longer has a privileged place. No wonder many older Christians long for the good old days!

Ted and Chelsey Doering lead us to hope. Hope looks forward; grief backward. Perhaps you've experienced grief at the loss of a loved one. We also experience grief when something dear is taken from us, like the thriving institutional church many of us knew decades ago. Put that grief about what the church has lost into the context of generations. Perhaps this will help: most of the 2017 graduates of Concordia Seminary are Millennials. They were only eleven years old when the World Trade Center

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was attacked on 9/11. Each generation sees America and church from its own unique perspective. Unless Jesus returns in judgment soon, today's Christian Millennials will age and grieve what they've lost during their lives. Now, however, they are young and looking to the future. Just like every generation, some Millennials hope in themselves to make things better, but Ted and Chelsey root hope in Jesus Christ, the only Savior of every generation who gives His Spirit through the Gospel to keep the Church faithful and also make it adaptable to the stiff challenges of the twenty-first century.

Millennials bring abilities older Christians generally do not have. Digital natives, Millennials have grown up with the Internet. They were birthed in our new information culture, unlike older people who grew up in a manufacturing society and are sometimes befuddled by new devices and apps. Millennials value loving and supportive families; many of them grew up in broken homes. They yearn for homes older Christians might take for granted. Many Millennials want to reach across ethnic divides; they don't want worship to be the most segregated hour in America. Millennials value personal relationships, but only when someone has truly earned their trust. As a friend taught me, "Don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you." The Millennials I associate with are more discerning about church and churchgoers than many who grew up in "Christian" America, when true faith easily lost its radical nature in a public culture nominally called "Christian." Millennials see hypocrisies those of us in older generations easily overlook. True, Satan can make Millennials blind to their own hypocrisies, but you'll see that Ted and Chelsey keep coming back to the sad fact of sin in each of us and the Good News that every generation has a Savior in Jesus. That's the Word of God working.

There is a future for the institutional church. I believe it is a great future, but in many ways a future different from its twentieth-century expressions. Accustomed to think of church as buildings and staff and budgets and agendas, our church life can be infused as never before

with awareness that “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:5). That will challenge us to spend more time with one another, time with no program, no agenda—relaxed time when we hear and tell our generational stories. Together, intergenerationally as the Body of Christ, older Christians can disciple and mentor in ways that twentieth-century meetings with programs to fix things cannot accomplish. While it’s in vogue to bad-mouth institutions, the fact is we need them, healthy and trustworthy institutions, especially in the Church. And might we older believers provide financial resources so the mission continues long after we’ve been taken to heaven? I said in some ways I’d like to be a Millennial. Amazing times are ahead for people of faith. In coming years, the Church will be more clearly differentiated from surrounding culture than in our lifetimes. Just as the wind blows where it will, so “the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who heard the [Gospel]” (Augsburg Confession, Article V). The Spirit of Jesus is leading His Church into and through new and for us unprecedented times. We dare not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

—*Dr. Dale A. Meyer, President, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*



INTRODUCTION

Hi • **We are Ted and Chelsey, and we are Millennials.** Born in '86 and '88, respectively, we are solidly in the Millennial generation. And a lot of people have a lot of things to say about our generation. You may even have some already-formed opinions about our generation, and therefore, about us. You may look upon Millennials as some form of fantastic beast that cannot be understood. Or you may feel as if you know us pretty well. Maybe you are . . . one of us! In writing this book, we want to help you understand our generation better. Because a lot of ink has been spilled concerning our generation, especially when it comes to why Millennials are leaving the church. For all of these reasons, we think it is important to put some of our own ink on paper concerning this generation.

Millennials are constantly in the news. Don't believe us? Simply walk over to your computer, pull up Google, and type in "millennials." In less than half a second, more than 38 million results are found on the topic. Add some meat to your search. Look up "millennials in the workplace," "millennials in the church," "millennials are the worst." You'll continue to discover a plethora of articles, stories, and websites, all about Millennials. Some will be complimentary, praising Millennials as an altruistic group looking for ways to better the world. Others will tell you that when the world is destroyed, it will be because Millennials couldn't look up from their phones.

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As you go through those articles, here are some truths you might find:

- » Millennials are the largest generation in American history, clocking in at 92 million.ⁱ
- » They are referred to as “digital natives” because they grew up in the midst of the technology boom.
- » 35 percent of the Millennial generation has been dubbed “the nones” because they do not identify with any religious affiliation.ⁱⁱ

This final statistic is the one to which Christ’s Church should be paying the most attention. That number is double the amount of the same category when compared to statistical data for Baby Boomers, and 12 percent higher than that of Generation X. This is alarming not only because Millennials aren’t coming to church, but also because more Millennials—more than any other generation thus far—do not see a need for religion at all.

Often the response to the above statistic is that Millennials will come back to the Church when they start having kids. But our generation is waiting longer to have kids and developing a sincere lack of interest in the Church. The problem remains: Millennials aren’t coming back like other generations did.

But this is what we trust: Jesus is Lord of the Church. This book is not meant to induce doom and gloom by predicting that the Church as we know it will not survive the Millennial generation. Instead, it’s about an opportunity—an opportunity afforded to us as God’s people to continue

**More Millennials—
more than any
other generation
thus far—do not
see a need for
religion at all.**

to share the Gospel. As the psalmist says: “One generation shall commend Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

As the Body of Christ, we have the opportunity to share the Gospel with people who have never heard it or who have walked far away from the Church.

As Millennials ourselves, we’d like to contribute

some firsthand insight to the bigger conversation that revolves around our generation and the Church. We'd like to share information not found in statistics or reports, but rather, found from living on the front lines. We'd like to tell you the stories of Millennials both inside and outside the Church, making them into more than just statistics and stereotypes.

We want to tell you true stories. We want not only to give a voice to people who have been reduced to statistics—a generation talked about ad nauseam as if it were some kind of scientific experiment—but also to dispel the myth of the Millennial. We want to examine the stereotypes given to this generation in various forms of media and found in the preconceived notions that can quickly develop from these stereotypes.

Millennials are the least-churched generation in our nation's history, and our generation is leaving the Church in droves. Because of this, churches have hit the panic button, trying every new program or process to try to connect with a lost generation. But what if connecting with Millennials was much simpler than hiring new staff or conceiving the next and greatest program? What if connecting with Millennials was as simple as buying them doughnuts? giving a high five? listening? What if Christians viewed connecting Millennials to Jesus as a long game instead of the instant gratification of simple church attendance?

Unfortunately, the tendency within churches is to seek to connect with Millennials because they want their churches to grow. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, yes, we do want more people in our churches! Chelsey and I are planting a church, and there have been more times than I care to admit when I have met someone and all I could think was, Wow! They should really come to our church! While that's not necessarily a bad sentiment, I ask myself: Would I still love and connect with this person if I could gaze into the future and see that they would never darken our church's door?

In this book, the focus will be on understanding Millennials. Not because they are better than other generations, but because they are underrepresented in the Church and because they, as a generation, are

walking away from the hope of Christ in a dark world. Millennials need the wisdom and truth passed down from older generations—we know we would not be where we are today without Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. Members of these older generations have shown us love and compas-

Millennials need the wisdom and truth passed down from older generations.

sion and have mentored us and invested in relationships with us. But we also believe that Millennials are of the age where they are able, in turn, to share some of their insight and experience with their elders, especially when it comes to Millennials and the Church.

We are proud of many things that have come from our generation, but we also know that we and our peers have, in some respects, earned our reputations as lazy, entitled, overly sensitive, and the list goes on. Among other not-so-flattering names, we're often referred to as **snowflakes** (and if you're curious what that means, check out the handy glossary on p. 215). And while our generation may have earned its reputation, our hope is that the stories we share in this book will help you see beyond the stereotypes and understand how to better connect with a generation who is generally labeled as inaccessible and apathetic.

But we also believe that Millennials are of the age where they are able, in turn, to share some of their insight and experience with their elders, especially when it comes to Millennials and the Church.

Think of Chelsey and me as embedded reporters, down in the trenches, bringing you the stories from a generation who is leaving the Church but also searching for something more. These are stories of Millennials who have left the Church and of those who love it as well. We want to introduce you to Millennials who both fit and defy the stereotypes, explore the stereotypes that define our generation, and reaffirm the fact that Millennials are actually interested in hearing what you have to say. We'll even give you some tips and tricks to use when approaching the beasts.

The stories we share here are not meant to become the bedrock of your church's new Millennial

ministry program. (In fact, as we'll discuss later, Millennials really don't like programs all that much.) Instead, we hope these stories will help you start asking the right questions so you can find unique ways to connect with this unique generation.

Along the way, we will give you insight into Millennials from Millennials. We will also ask some questions to help you think more deeply about how to connect with this generation. We will include activities that invite you to ask a Millennial questions, because the only way to connect with Millennials is to actually connect with Millennials. In our research, we have touched base with a wide variety of our peers to give you a "man on the street" perspective. Additionally, we know that our generation's pesky slang can throw you for a loop, so if you get confused, just be sure to refer to the glossary in the back.

As you read, you will see things from both of our viewpoints. Ted did a lot of the writing. As a pastor, he thinks about how to engage Millennials with the Church on a regular basis. Chelsey did the majority of the polishing and editing. Ted put words on a page; Chelsey helped turn it into a book. Now, because we are telling stories, we will use the first-person voice. To help clarify who's talking when, we have included the author's name at the beginning of each chapter.

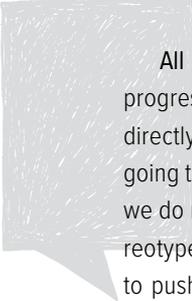
Things included in this book will (hopefully) make you laugh, and perhaps some other things will make you upset. We hope you persevere. We want to inform and challenge you. Our goal is to be as fair as possible, challenging both Millennials and older generations to take a look at ourselves to see if we are holding on to stereotypes rather than seeing real people. We want to show you all of the incredible opportunities you have to connect with our generation and to tell them about Jesus. (By the way, the use of "older generations" is not a derogatory one; it is just a simpler way for us to distinguish between generations.)

This book is divided into two parts: Breaking Down Stereotypes and Engaging Millennials. In the first half, Chelsey and I will tackle the broad brushes used to paint the people of our generation. We include examples

of Millennials who break the mold. The second half of this book will give you some great ways to tap into some of the positive aspects of Millennial culture. Each chapter will conclude with discussion questions and something for you to do.

.....

MILLENNIALS, A QUICK WORD . . .



All right Millennials, come over here and take a knee. As we progress through this book there will be moments we want to talk directly to you. At times, this will be a high five; at other times, it is going to be a convicting word. Because we need to be reminded that we do not want to stereotype our elders. Our generation lives in stereotypes every day. The sinful human reaction is to respond in kind, to push back and say, “Well, you made me this way!” This process is a both/and, not an either/or. We did not want to write this book as some form of Millennial angst manifesto.

While we want to encourage our elders to connect with us, we also want to encourage you to connect with them. These sidebars, if you will, are that encouragement and, at times, a swift kick in the pants.

.....

Also, a quick warning: some of this content will be convicting—both for older generations and for Millennials. The goal of this book is to break down stereotypes, which might mean getting uncomfortable at points or challenging a worldview or two. But keep going because the overall outcome, connecting generations to Jesus, is well worth it.

Chelsey and I will even let you in on a little secret: You already have everything you need to engage with Millennials. That’s right; you don’t need to buy a training kit or a video series or anything. You and your church can do this right here and right now.

Ready to get started?

Cool. Let’s take the plunge.



PART 1

BREAKING DOWN
STEREOTYPES



GENERATIONS

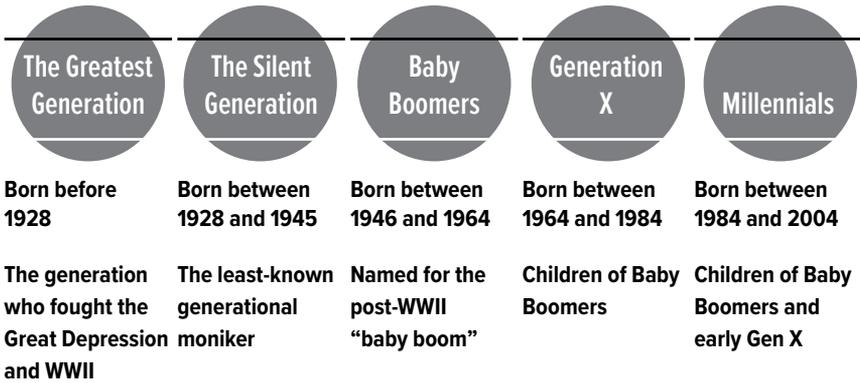
Ted and Chelsey

THE GENERATIONAL PROBLEM

Generations have always been a “thing” and are not considered modern. In fact, a quick search of the ESV Bible will show you that the word *generations* shows up 119 times throughout Scripture. In its most basic form, the term is a form of time delineation. It helps us to understand different groups of people, family, and culture.

Generational research, however, came into its own after the Second World War. As companies and corporations sought more and better ways to market their products to the right people, advertising firms built more and better ways to categorize consumers. Thus came about the understanding of generations we have today. For the sake of understanding, let’s take a quick look at the major players in the current generational game.

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The Generational Problem is not one of generations, but instead is one of stereotypes. Cultural concepts of generations are built around how to best sell products to a certain group of people in a certain age range. Instead of generations dealing with the passing of wisdom, knowledge, and love from one to the next, all that can be seen are the differences between the older and the younger for the sake of profit. In this vein, let's talk about personas.

Persona [noun]: 1. a person; 2. a character in a play, novel, etc.; 3. in psychology, the mask or façade presented to satisfy the demands of the situation or environment and not representing the inner personality of the individual; the public personality.ⁱⁱⁱ

CLASSIFYING DATA & CREATING PERSONAS

Personas are a crucial component of successful marketing, particularly for the departments tasked with sales. These personas help to bring richness to cold facts; in other words, they help to put flesh on the statistical skeletons of data. Personas are important because they do not merely divide target audiences into groups; they provide greater depth

and context by focusing on one fictional character who embodies the dominant qualities of the larger group. Put simply: marketers create fictional characters based on statistical research and then think of ways to creatively appeal to that character so the audience it represents will buy their product.

Remember the series of Bud Light radio commercials that aired years ago—Real Men of Genius? One that stuck with me (Chelsey), personally, was the “Here’s to You, Way Too Proud of Texas Guy,” because I’m a seventh-generation Texan and probably pretty obnoxious about it.

It’s fine. I’ve made my peace with it.

I don’t drink Bud Light because I prefer good beer, but after hearing and identifying with that commercial, I certainly thought fondly of Budweiser when I found myself in the liquor aisle at the grocery store. This fondness sticks with me today, and if I ever find myself in a situation where my only beer choices are domestic, I’d be more inclined to pick Budweiser over any other.

This is how marketers build recognition and brand loyalty—by appealing to personas. These personas are not inherently bad for creating stereotypical characters out of audiences for marketing purposes; rather, they are strategic and successful. The danger lies in the idea that people—especially people in the Church—would create personas for certain audiences in their minds and then refuse to look beyond them when relating to members of those audiences.

Meet Millennial Molly

Just for fun, let’s answer some questions and create a persona. Let’s call her Millennial Molly. Here is the first question:

What is Molly’s demographic?

According to Nielsen research, Molly belongs to one of the largest and most diverse generations in American history, with 19 percent identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 14 percent as Black, and 5 percent as Asian. About two in every three Millennials were born in the US. Impressively, 38 percent of Millennials report that they are bilingual.

Myth of the Millennial

Millennials are getting married at a later age than their parents; in fact, only 21 percent of them have gotten hitched compared to 42 percent of Baby Boomers at that same age. This may be due to the fact that almost one in four Millennials has a bachelor's degree or higher, making them the most educated—and debt-ridden—generation to date. Many researchers agree that Millennials may be delaying marriage in order to have more time to dedicate to the pursuit of postgraduate degrees.^{iv}

This brings us to the second question:

Where are Millennials found?

Nielsen research tells us that the top ten markets by concentration of Millennials are primarily found in the western portions of the United States. As someone who identifies with “Way Too Proud of Texas Guy,” I am happy to report that my hometown, Austin, TX, is number one on the list. Texas's other large urban areas, Houston and Dallas–Fort Worth, also make the list, along with Salt Lake City, San Diego, Los Angeles, Denver, Washington DC, Las Vegas, and San Francisco.

Interestingly, the top five markets by concentration of Baby Boomers are all in the eastern portion of the country:

1. Portland–Auburn, ME
2. Burlington, VT
3. Albany, NY
4. Hartford and New Haven, CT
5. Pittsburgh, PA

So, to continue Millennial Molly's creation, we'll pretend that she identifies as Latina, is single, lives in Austin with a few roommates, and is finishing her master's degree.

The job search brings us to the third question:

What is her job and level of seniority?

If she's like the majority of Millennials in Austin, Molly is probably looking to work for a startup tech company or a new small business. If she's not part of the majority, she might be teaching or looking to use her post-graduate degree as a registered nurse or psychologist. To get by, she is probably supplementing her income with a few part-time jobs, probably working as a barista, a restaurant server, or a nanny. Her level of seniority is most likely minimal, and her income is probably close to the median for the younger group of Millennials: \$25k per year.

Next question:

What does a typical day look like in Molly's life?

Honestly, she's probably really tired and stressed. Between her classes, her job(s), her social life with family and friends, and her worries about the future (due to the level of student debt she's accrued, her uncertainty about the job market in her chosen career field, and a general lack of clarity in life), she doesn't have much time for anything else, including church. In fact, if she does go to church, she's a member of a very small minority of Millennials who do.

What are Molly's pain points, or, alternately, what are the things that make her tick?

She's probably mindful of caring for the planet. She doesn't use plastic bags when she gets her groceries (in fact, she might even shop in a package-free grocery store or skip the store altogether and shop at a farmer's market), and she tries to ride her bicycle or carpool when she has somewhere to go. She thinks recycling is the norm rather than the exception. She is concerned with how her food is treated and grown and has probably joined an organic community garden. She is passionate about fighting injustice in her city and around the world, especially when it comes to slavery, human trafficking, and other abuses. It greatly both-

Myth of the Millennial

ers her, as it does many Millennials, when people in authority abuse their power, especially in the workplace and in politics.

Molly also quite often falls victim to what we like to call “Social Media Sickness.” This means she is constantly comparing her messy, sometimes-directionless, ordinary, and frustration-filled life to the successes of her friends. She has a hard time not being envious of her friends who just bought their second, bigger house before age 30, took a dream vacation to Europe, or scored what seems like the impossible: a job that pays well and is making a difference in the world. Molly is constantly evaluating herself by comparing her lows against everyone else’s social media highs. She fights feelings of inadequacy daily.

Exploring Molly’s pain points leads us to the next question:

What are her values and goals?

After looking at what makes her tick, it might be obvious that Molly values health and care for the vulnerable. She values social justice and conservation and probably wants her future career to include these values in some respect. In fact, if Molly can’t find a job in her career field in which she feels like she’s making a difference in some way, she will probably choose to work two part-time jobs to support herself while she pursues something she is passionate about. For example, Molly might decide to start making creative content such as a series of YouTube videos or a blog, or she might choose to write a book, a screenplay, or even design an app while she works part time at a grocery store or as an **Uber** driver. Or she might even move back in with family in order to save money to start her own business. Ultimately, Molly values the ability to do work she deems worthwhile and having the freedom to set her own schedule, thus creating a healthier work/life balance at the expense of a bigger salary.

Speaking of family, Molly greatly values connection. Like a majority of her generation, she fights feelings of loneliness. Whereas earlier generations sought to create families for themselves among their peers (as evidenced on the TV shows *Cheers* and *Friends*), Millennials routinely seek older mentors. Friends are important, of course, but many Millennials

desire to move home and learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before them (as evidenced on the TV show *Modern Family*). Part of that connection is Molly's ability to access information at lightning speed.

Where does Molly go for information?

Number one answer: the Internet. She's probably an expert in spotting fake or satirical news and bad Wikipedia information. She might call herself a **Redditor**. If Molly wants to check out a restaurant, a club, a store, or even a church, she will absolutely look at its website, social media accounts, or Yelp reviews beforehand. If the website isn't designed well, it's hard to find, or it doesn't contain accurate and up-to-date information, Molly will most likely take her business elsewhere.

Molly probably subscribes to a news service like **theSkimm** and most likely only subscribes to a newspaper or a magazine if it's available online. Like people of all ages, she probably does enjoy having physical books and may even own a turntable and a record collection—but these are curios rather than the norm. She downloads and listens to podcasts and audiobooks on her phone. If she has a computer, it's a laptop or tablet—probably not a desktop. Information is easily available to her—it's at the tip of her fingers at all times, even to the detriment of being over-connected and overstimulated.

These final two questions are probably the most pertinent ones to consider when it comes to getting Millennials into church.

What experience is Molly looking for when she “shops” for your products or services?

Well, before anything else, she's probably going to judge your church based on its website. She's going to cringe at bad fonts, bad spelling, bad formatting, and any and all Clip Art or stock photos (more on this in chapter 11). If she decides to visit, she will probably look for how your church is supporting her values: *Did they greet me and make me feel welcome, but not in a scary, overbearing way? Do they use Styrofoam cups at the coffee area? Does this community of faith seek to serve the poor and sick?*

Myth of the Millennial

Many people in older generations have been taught that Millennials require a special contemporary service with colored lights and professional bands, among other things, to attract and keep them coming back to and involved with church. While this may be the case for some of our peers, research indicates those are not solid indicators that Millennials will continue to invest themselves in church. The things that keep Millennials coming back, as we'll explore more fully in subsequent chapters, are, among other things, these: a community that feels like family, sermons that engage and challenge, clear proclamations of forgiveness, and a congregation that takes seriously the command of Jesus to serve those in need.

The last question, then, goes hand-in-hand with the one before this:

What are Molly's most common objections to your "product" or "service"?

Molly would not be engaged by boring, surface-level (dare I say "seeker-friendly?") sermons. She would not be inclined to invest if no one invests in her—that is, if others who already attend the church make no effort to connect with her. She's searching for authenticity in relationships; fake cheeriness and exclusivity would be a surefire way to make sure she never darkened your doors again. Finally, Molly would be interested in whether the church serves its community in some way. Or if she did become a member of a church that did not have any volunteer opportunities, she might seek to create and lead some.

So! Millennial Molly is complete. She's bilingual, highly educated, stressed, kind of lonely and confused, and she's broke. She has deeply held opinions about society, the environment, and social justice. You know everything there is to know about her. She's a perfect representation of all Millennials, don't you think?

No. She is not.

This is the problem with personas: they are not for ministry. I walked you through this persona creation and you probably bought it—hook, line, and sinker. Humans like categorization, after all. It's one of the first

things we learn to do as young children (*Which one is not like the other?*), and these personas are handy for putting people into tidy little boxes within our particular worldview.

But people don't fit into tidy little boxes. Not every Millennial will resemble Molly. Some will be completely different, actually. I'm sure you're just the same—perhaps you don't resemble your generation's persona either.

People are messy and sinful. This is a truth the Church has known for thousands of years; in fact, it's a truth Jesus knew very well and embraced. Do you think all of His disciples were in any way similar? Absolutely not. His circle was full of people who should have hated one another on principle—tax collectors, prostitutes, religious zealots, the wealthy, everyday folks—and perhaps they did.

But Jesus called them together, one by one, and told them all the same thing: *follow Me*.

Don't get me wrong: personas can be helpful. And yes, sure, they can also be hurtful. But they are not the point.

**This is the problem
with personas:
they are not for
ministry.**

Jesus is the point. He is the constant factor in the lives of all people. He is the gatherer of His followers and the Shepherd of His people, no matter how apathetic or irritating or messy they may be.

And we, the leaders of His Church, learners of His law, and blessed receivers of His grace, ought to go and do likewise.

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

THE GOOD OF STEREOTYPES

Again, personas are largely created for and used by large corporations that can afford teams of marketers. These teams figure out what their target audience wants, create a persona like we just did with Molly, and then invent creative ways to appeal to the group the persona represents. Budweiser did it with “Way Too Proud Texas Guy,” and it worked. At least it worked on me.

Myth of the Millennial

Another example of corporations using personas to market to their target audience is the fast-food chain Wendy's. In early 2017, the Wendy's **Twitter** account grabbed on to and ran with a style of marketing that greatly resonated with Millennials: they began **roasting** their followers.

In one of these encounters, a person tweeted this at Wendy's:

“@Wendys Roast me”

Wendy's social media wizards simply responded:

“Get one of your 51 followers to roast you.”

Over the next several days, most Millennials we knew had seen the engagement and all commented on how great it was that Wendy's had hired someone with social media acumen. Wendy's was marketing to their Millennial audience by connecting with digital natives while using humor. Instead of trying to sell Millennials on how great their burgers are, they engaged with them in a humorous way, creating a story that went viral and was later picked up by **Buzzfeed**.

There can be good in stereotypes, and this book will give you insight into the stereotypes particular to Millennials, especially ones that would be great points of connection between a lost generation and the Church. These include but are not limited to the following: a desire for authenticity, a longing for community, and a love for story.

Other generations have positive stereotypes as well. The upbeat and can-do attitudes of Baby Boomers have created new, better, and more organized ways for people to engage with one another. Members of Generation X have acted as innovators and as great “older siblings,” helping to bridge the gaps between generations. Instead of viewing these traits as stereotypes (“stereotypes” generally having negative connotations), perhaps we should start thinking of them as opportunities.

When we believe *only* the stereotypes or the fictional persona of a whole group of uniquely created children of God, we have taken a vast swath of people and made them into action figures. These stereotyped figures are no longer people; rather, they are only what you imagine them to be.

It cannot be denied that stereotypes come from places of truth. But when painted broadly across a group of people, stereotypes deny the reality of how God created humanity. God uniquely creates mankind. The psalmist tells us that God knew us in our mothers' wombs and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Uniqueness is built into us so that we can be who we were created to be. Yet a common thread runs throughout humanity: the image of God. The only piece of creation that bears the image of God is humanity. We call this the *Imago Dei*, Latin for "image of God." When looking solely through the lens of stereotyping, we are denying two things: that God created us unique and that others bear the image of God. If this viewpoint becomes a main source of information about a generation, it only builds up divisions and creates an us-versus-them attitude.

In fact, you may have already encountered this yourself. Facebook is full of shared links that lead to sarcastic songs about Millennials, including gloomy predictions for the downfall of the Church and the country due to their laziness and incessant need for participation trophies. And it's easy, isn't it? Buying into a narrative of scapegoating makes people, sinful as we are, feel better about ourselves. When this narrative is given voice, it leads to other generations crying out about the failures of this generation of entitlement. In response, the scapegoats circle the wagon and begin lashing out. How could any of us possibly understand one another?

TELLING STORIES

It is easy to get lost in the generalities and sound bites, so how do we find our way out? We think it's pretty easy: start asking better questions and really listening to the answers.

The best way to do this is to hear the stories of those who are different from you, to understand life from their point of view. As a wise man once said, "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two."¹ With that, let's start with a story.

1 That man was Jesus in Matthew 5:41. You can decide not to listen . . . but, y'know . . . Jesus.

Millennial Monday

It originally started as Mallory Monday, named for our friend. She was temporarily living in our spare bedroom as she reacclimated to the United States after returning from her missionary work as a teacher in Niger, Africa. On Monday nights, while Mallory was with us, we would make dinner and invite some friends over to reconnect. When Mallory got a job in Dallas and moved away, we found that we enjoyed these dinners together so much, we decided to keep doing them.

This was a group of friends all about the same age (all Millennials, of course) who got together weekly. The Monday night dinner has varied in number as some people moved away or moved into the area, but our group was generally no fewer than four and no more than twelve. There was no structure or vision other than gathering together to hang out and eat good food. On the Saturday or Sunday before, Chelsey would send a group text to our Monday night dinner thread to suggest sides others could bring to complement whatever delicious main course she was making.

It was no more complicated than that. Around 7 p.m., people would start showing up. We'd eat and hang out for a while, sometimes playing board games or laughing at funny YouTube videos. It has become a time set apart, an unwritten rule in our house and among our friends: Monday nights are taken. The group text thread is long now, peppered with **gifs** and inside jokes.

One week, my (Ted's) dad happened to be in town for a pastoral conference. The conference was at a hotel down in Austin, but Dad stayed with Chelsey and me up on the north side. He and I would drive down to the conference together each day. The first night he was there was a Monday. Although the conference offered options for social hours with colleagues, I told Dad that I couldn't miss Monday night dinner. He said he would enjoy eating with us, so we made plans to add a plate for him.

Around 4:30 that Monday afternoon, he leaned over to me and asked, "Don't we need to get going for your group? We don't want to be late."

His question was innocent enough, but the connotation made me smile. He wasn't just asking about dinner—he was referring to it as a planned programmatic small group with a purpose, probably one with a vision statement too.

I chuckled and replied, “Yeah, we should get going, but it's just friends having dinner. It's not really a group, per se.”

As we made our way home, I explained to him how this was simply a time for us to get together to eat and catch up. It was a little community for us. I could tell it was starting to make sense to him, but at the same time, he didn't quite understand how we had something on the books every week that didn't appear to serve a clearer, more intentional purpose.

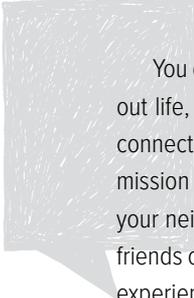
When we got home for dinner, my dad did one of the things he does best: he asked good questions and listened. Some of our friends were people he had confirmed as a pastor, and some were unknown to him. He was open to opinions different than his and did not feel a need to defend himself.

Later that night, Dad coined the name of our weekly gathering. In the midst of our conversation, after everyone had left, he said offhandedly: “I had a great time at your Millennial Monday tonight.” Since then, we have referred to our weekly dinners as Millennial Monday, though Mallory does like to remind us it started with her. In a very real way, Dad influences our weekly dinners. He has mentored several of us over the years, and this is especially apparent when he is in town to visit. Our friends who go to different churches make a point to attend worship at our church to see him and my mom on these days. Millennials seek out mentors, people who have gone ahead of them.

My parents are *thoroughly* Baby Boomers. I once sat down with my dad and attempted to explain social media. Two hours and several diagrams later, we both decided to move on . . . *quickly*. It's not that my dad didn't get it. It was that we were talking past each other. As a digital native, I took certain things for granted—things that were not native to my dad. But my dad—both of my parents, really—have a keen ability to

listen patiently and reflectively. Because of this, they are respected and loved by many people in my generation, including, but not limited to, me and my siblings.

MILLENNIALS, LET'S CHAT.



You don't need permission. That's right. You don't need it. Throughout life, and as we walk through the idea of fighting stereotypes and connecting generations in the pages of this book, you don't need permission to do what needs to be done. Get involved in your church, your neighborhood, your apartment complex. Invite your neighbors or friends over for dinner. Make it a standing invitation. One of the coolest experiences from life at the seminary was dinner with the neighbors in our apartment. Dawn and Eric were a married Gen X couple, EJ was the nurse who lived above us. Some of the best memories from that apartment building were sitting around laughing with these people with whom we lived in proximity. Sometimes there is a disconnected belief that we have to ask permission, to find the "right" way to build community. What we, Chelsey and Ted, have found is the best way to start community is just to start it. We Millennials in the Church can at times revert back and think that someone has to tell us what we are doing is approved or that we are okay to start something. As a pastor, I would have two criteria for anything you want to do: Are you going to love God with everything you have? Are you going to love your neighbors? Then do it. It's time for us to get cranking and throw some parties to meet the folks around us.

Getting into the Trenches with Millennials

Millennials are lost. We are encountering the world in new ways. We entered the full-time workforce at one of the worst times in our economy's history. We (generally) come from backgrounds in which we were taught that we could do whatever we dreamed, and that we were the absolute best at whatever we did. We are quickly learning that it is much

harder to achieve our dreams than we initially thought—perhaps because many of us did not have to struggle much as children or teenagers.

Millennials are craving to hear with their own ears that we are not the first generation to hit these realities. We want to listen to the war stories of those who came before us; to more fully understand that there is nothing new under the sun. We really don't want sugarcoating—we simply want to know we aren't alone. We yearn for the knowledge and wisdom you have accumulated.

At the same time, we want you to know that we are adults—adults who value the guidance and wisdom of those older and more experienced than us. We are ready to assume positions of leadership and responsibility. We have been told all our lives to wait our turn, but the oldest members of our generation are in their thirties, and the tail end of our generation is approaching the legal drinking age. Over the years, we have been preparing and are excited for a chance to be a part of the conversation. There has been great anticipation to, metaphorically, have a seat at the table.

Ignore the “10 Reasons Millennials Are Leaving Your Church for a Taco Truck” articles you see online, and refocus on the unpopular truth the articles miss: the Millennial generation, like every generation before it, needs Jesus. Everyone needs the Gospel, no matter the age. Millennials are pouring all of their energy and emotion into trying to fill the God-shaped void in their lives. And while you and your church can try to implement every new program and policy under the sun and start up new small groups left and right to try to attract Millennials, none of these efforts get to the root of the issue the way the Good News does.

That's why this book exists. There is no silver bullet for getting Millennials back into the Church or connected to Jesus. There are no “5 Easy Steps.” We wrote this book to encourage you and to remind you that our heavenly Father gave you a spirit of power

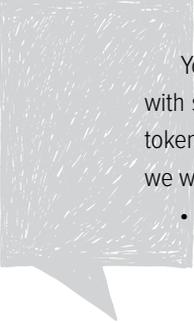
We want to listen to the war stories of those who came before us; to more fully understand that there is nothing new under the sun.

and love, not of timidity. You have all the supplies you need at your disposal. We just want to help you better understand our generation so you can better use the gifts you already have—gifts you’ve been given that can help you effectively connect with those outside of your generation, younger or older!

There is a gold mine of talent and knowledge in these young people, and many Millennials can and want to contribute to the Body of Christ. So ignore the popular narrative that says this generation doesn’t want anything to do with the Church, or you. Debunk the marketing personas. Tear down the caricatures. Jump into the trenches with us Millennials and declare the saving work and grace of Jesus Christ to the lost.

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MILLENNIALS, WE JUST TALKED YOU UP . . .



You’ve got this. If you are reading this book in a small group or with some folks in an older generation, you are about to become the token “Millennial Voice.” But we set you up for that. And here is what we would ask:

- When you disagree with us, disagree. Let people see that Millennials are different from one another. Help people see your point of view.
 - Share your story. Let folks know what is like to be growing up in this day and in this culture.
 - Admit when you fulfill these stereotypes. It’s okay, we all want to keep growing.
 - Have just as much of a heart for the older generations as we are asking them to have for you.
-

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. To which generation do you belong? What are some stereotypes of your generation?
2. Do you identify with your generation's stereotypes? Explain.
3. Have you encountered negative media concerning Millennials (TV, websites, social media, etc.)? What has this media told you?
4. If you are reading this book in a group, is there a Millennial in your group?
 Yes. Great!
 Ask your Millennial this question: How do you feel about how your generation is portrayed in the greater culture?

 No. Cool; go find one. We'll wait.
 You found one! A real, live Millennial! We are proud of you.
 Ask: How do you feel about how your generation is portrayed in the greater culture?
5. Wait! . . . I'm reading this book on my own. I feel left out . . .
 Don't worry, we are proud of you too! Find a Millennial and ask, How do you feel about how your generation is portrayed in the greater culture?
6. What is the Gospel? What does it mean for you, specifically?

DO IT

Millennials are leaving the Church. There are statistics, pie charts, and graphs that prove this. But we serve the Creator of the cosmos. The first place to start is praying over your concerns and frustrations. Take this issue, of young people leaving the Church, to the Lord. Pray simple things. Pray that He would have compassion, to deploy His Church to those who need His grace, and to open hearts to the Good News of Jesus.