

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
August 19 & 20, 2017
Growing Young Team
Trending: #millennials | Galatians 3:26-28**

For those who don't know me, my name is Jake Kirchner and I'm the Connections Pastor here at CPC. Like Rich [Phenow] said, you're going to hear from a few of us today.

The other day I was driving and listening to music when I heard this song. It's really catchy, and it made me think that a lot of us would resonate with this song. I'm not going to sing it for you because I like you, but there's a line that goes like this: "I wish I could turn back time to the good old days when our momma sang us to sleep, but now we're stressed out." Some of you have maybe heard this song. I think we resonate with it because we live in a time when culture is shifting. It's changing, right? And there's so much happening, so many things going on around us that it's like, *oh, it would be so much better if we could go back to the good old days*. What used to be known has become unclear; what was once predictable for us has become unstable. We're kind of in this culture shift that's happening around us and we're experiencing unprecedented change. Change itself is not new, right? A shift from generation to generation has been going on forever. One generation forges forward, the next forgets the wisdom of the previous, another comes forward with innovations, and the next addresses problems the previous generation ignored or created. This all can cause distress or frustration with the generation to come and the generations that came before, and on and on and on it goes.

And then we come to Millennials. Sometimes we act like Millennials are a scary thing. Millennials, #Millennials. If we put a hashtag in front of something it's to mark or identify (usually in social media like Facebook or Instagram) an idea, or a post, or a picture, or a video that makes it easy to identify, to find by searching the Interwebs. If you were to hashtag Millennials you'd get all sorts of things—the bad, the good, the ugly. A lot of the ugly, a lot of the response to the ugly. We hear about it on the news, we hear about it on social media . . . Millennials! The Millennials were born as early as 1980 and most agree that the year 2000 was the last year that Millennials were born. Here's the thing about those who have grown up Millennial. They have had their identities profoundly shaped by certain cultural realities. At a time when they are trying to make sense of the world, the world was making very little sense...September 11th, Y2K, The War on Terror, Columbine, Sandy Hook, and a half dozen other shootings, The Great Recession, Facebook, iPhone, the legalization of gay marriage, the first black president. And the reason we're talking about the millennial generation is because we're seeing more and more of the Millennials disengaged from the life of the church. The ways that we're organized around our faith apparently have less and less appeal for this generation, and we think God cares about that. He cares about how the church responds, He cares about how emerging generations respond, because from the very onset of the Jesus

Movement, labels were removed and barriers were brought down. The life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus and the sending of God's spirit from Jesus was the beginning of a new life, a new life where sin and death doesn't reign. Through Jesus we get to partner with God to be about His message, His way of life, and His ongoing purposes and plans in this world. From the onset, the Jesus Movement was an opportunity for humanity to partner with God, extended to us. In the very first days of the Church there was a quote from an Old Testament prophet that said this:

"In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'" [Joel 2:28]

That is a new creation that gets started with the Jesus Movement. Participating in God's purposes in this world is inclusionary. We say around here, one of our visions, one of our core commitments, is to have a focus on all generations because everyone . . .

Carrie Gleeson (Student Ministries staff) hops on stage and interrupts Jake while looking at her phone and then says, "Millennial problems!"

Carrie Gleeson (Director of Student Ministries)

As I was preparing for this section of our sermon, I, a Millennial, decided I would do what every other Millennial does when they need to research something or figure something out—I Googled it! I Googled my generation to figure out what types of TED talks came up, what types of articles came up, what information I could find, what news articles had been written about us...and guess what I found? I found a lot of information written on Millennials. Everyone, it seems in the past few years, has wanted to talk about us, figure us out, complain about us, learn how to deal with us, but what I also found was that in this compiling of information on a specific generation, it's not something brand new. No. Millennials aren't the first generation that people have wanted to talk about or figure out. It's just the one that we're focused on right now because we're the ones that are kind of taking over things; we're the ones being unleashed to the work force. At this point I think that some of the millennial stereotypes have become a little exhausting, some frustrating, and often times incorrect.

So let's look at the status of Millennials today. Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research says that one of the main characteristics of my generation is that Millennials have grown up in a time of rapid change, giving them a set of priorities and expectations sharply different from previous generations. Like Jake said, the things we have dealt with as we formed our identities, our beliefs, and our values, have changed rapidly. Millennials have come of age at a time of technological change, globalization, and economic disruption. These things have given us a different set of behaviors and experiences. Pew research estimates that there are 75 million Millennials—those born around 1980-2000. There are 66 million Gen Xers, and 74 million Baby Boomers, and with so many of us contributing to American society and everyday life, it makes sense that life would look a little bit different. For starters, Millennials have been putting off

significant milestones in life, like marriage and children. They've been contributing to society in different ways. The average age for marriage in 2010 was 30. In the 1970s it was 23. We are more likely than ever to have a Bachelor's Degree. We have an affinity to our technology. Our technology represents our personal space—it has shaped the way we shop, the way that we connect and interact with people, and much of the way we do business. And, we are also less likely to be religious than any other generation alive today.

So, what does the status of Millennials mean for the Church and for CPC? The Barna Group has done significant research on the faith lives of my generation and have stated that many faith communities and Christian organizations are struggling with how to make space for Millennials. Not just appealing space in their buildings and gathering places, but also space in their institutionalized core—ministry models and leadership approach. Even among Millennials who grew up in church, 6 out of 10 drop out at some point in their lives. Around 46% of Millennials surveyed in the Barna Group said that they felt like church was an exclusive club. Millennials are a very under engaged population in the church across America, and right here within our walls. The church should be one of the best places for young people to grow, but unfortunately as Kara Powell, Director of the Fuller Youth Institute suggests, many people have made the case that the church is falling short in this area. Far too often the church is content to sit back and wait for young people to approach them after they've had children or suffered some sort of set back in life. Consequently, a number of Millennials are very content to stay away from church. I believe if trends like this continue, there will be an overwhelming issue in the church of tomorrow, but I also believe there is light. There is light for the relationship between Millennials and the church. We need to participate in this dance, where the church is extending their hands to Millennials and Millennials are extending their hands to the church.

For the past year, a group of us at CPC have been studying, praying, and attempting to understand more about Millennials and how we can engage in meaningful ways with them. We believe that a healthy, vital church has all generations represented. So I, as a CPC member and a Millennial, want to dance with you in order to figure out how we can reach this generation—how to engage, how to provide avenues for relationship, avenues for service between my church and my generation—a generation that is different from other generations. I believe that in doing this we will see tremendous transformation—spiritual, emotional, missional depth will occur. I believe Scripture has a lot to tell us about what to do and how to engage with each other, so let's look there as we start this dance.

James Madsen (Pastor of Discipleship)

I have yet to meet the Millennial who really enjoys being stereotyped and lumped together with their whole generation. How does it feel to be stereotyped? Even if it's a little bit true, I don't think anyone likes to be put in a box, do we? So let me just broaden the topic here for about five minutes and ask the question, why do we categorize, and label, and stereotype people? It's like when we first meet someone, our brain

automatically sorts them into categories. We put a label on them: rich or poor, fit or fat, smart or stupid. Even my 6-year-old often asks me, “Is that a good guy or a bad guy?” Right? We make decisions about people before we really know them based on the category we have put them in. We prejudge them. What’s the fancy word for that? Prejudice, right? I don’t really need to tell you how dangerous it is to treat people this way because it’s all over the news. It’s very dehumanizing. We no longer treat each individual as someone worthy to love; we write people off. We use our category as an excuse not to love them and not to include them, and we can use our categories to put ourselves above other people. When we see an event like what happened in Charlottesville, we see clearly the dangers of this mindset and yet we tend to think it’s something only the bad guys are doing, right? But the truth is that our categories and our labels are at the very core of our identity. We live in a culture where our identity is based on whether or not we fit into the right category, or maybe more accurately, we decide if another person is a success or failure if they fit into the categories that we deem are important. These decide a person’s rightness or righteousness in our eyes, and we judge ourselves by these categories as well. Tell me I’m not right. When you see someone driving a fancy car like a Maserati, your brain is saying something else besides “nice car”. When you invite people over for dinner, you have this internal feeling that people are judging you on the size of your house, how good your cooking is, and how clean the place is, right? And when you tell someone what you do for a living, you can see it in their eyes that they’re judging your worthiness.

Did you know that in the 1950s being a pastor was one of the top 3 respected careers in our country? And now it’s toward the very bottom of the list, like 357th, and it’s true—I can see it in people’s eyes when I tell them what I do. But you know, when Jesus came He upended the categories; He erased the labels. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, he said, “So in Christ Jesus you’re all children of God through faith. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Your identity is no longer based on your category. Your identity is no longer based on whether you’re a success or a failure. Your identity is based on what Jesus did for you. If you are in Christ, God sees you as holy and blameless. Isn’t that amazing? The death of Jesus on the cross makes you righteous before God. By putting our trust in Jesus, we are right and accepted and in the family of God. That sounds like good news, doesn’t it? The mission of Jesus was to give us an entrance into this family through His blood shed on the cross on our behalf, and then He commissions us to go out and invite everyone else to join the family. Jesus continually reached out to those who are in these so-called “bad categories.” In the day of Jesus the common prayer of the Jewish man was, “Thank you God that You did not make me a sinner, a Gentile, or a woman.” He saw himself as being in all the right categories, so it’s no surprise to us that in Jesus’ day those who were the first believers were those who were the outsiders, the marginalized—like the Samaritan woman at the well who was shunned by her village for immoral behavior, and Jesus offered her living water. Or the tax collector, Zacchaeus, who was written off by his fellow Jews for collaborating with the Romans, and Jesus invited Himself over for dinner. Or the prostitute who was condemned by the religious, and Jesus forgave her sins. And then there are the

disciples. They were mostly teenage fisherman, maybe the Millennials of their day, and Jesus calls them to be His disciples and commissions them to go out and invite others into the family.

I think one of the reasons we sometimes think we just need Jesus a little bit is because we think we're in all the right categories, or at least we're clinging to the lie that life is found in these categories. The truth is that we are slaves to these so-called right categories and they keep us from finding the fullness of life that's available in Christ. Jesus promises us the abundant life. The more we find life in Christ the more joy we have in our hearts. In Christ we are accepted, and loved, and righteous, and redeemed, and adopted, and secure, and so much more. We just need to accept this truth by faith, not just every day, but moment-by-moment. We need to die to our categories. Our sin nature has bought into the cultural norm that life is found in these categories and labels. We know that comparison is the thief of joy, but we just can't seem to stop, can we? If we cling to our categories as our source of identity we will fail to turn to Jesus and find the abundant life He promises.

I've been profoundly impacted by something George Mueller said. He said, "God did not begin to use me until I died to what other people thought of George Mueller and until I died to what George Mueller thought of George Mueller." Think about that for a minute. That is real freedom from these categories and labels. You see, the more we find life in Jesus the more we can actually love people right where they are. We begin to see people as God sees people—that He is pursuing them with His love—and that is our call as well, isn't it? We start to see that we are all equal before the cross, that we are all desperate for Jesus, and the more we find our identity in Jesus, the more it becomes good news to us—a fountain of joy and grace that overflows out of us into the lives of others, so that it really just becomes natural to extend the invitation that Jesus makes to us to everyone. Jesus came to change the label of every single person to "loved by God", and that is the power He gives us as well, so that when we see people we also see that that is their label, they are loved by God.

We have really been moved by a video clip we are going to show you from the show Parenthood. It's a clip where a young boy is adopted into the family, and I think it really gives us a picture of what it means to embrace people, to invite them to come and engage in the family of God.

[Video clip shown]

Melissa Schaser

This is what we're aiming for at CPC. We are aiming to be this type of family. The first time we showed this clip we got the question, 'Why didn't you cut the clip when the adoption papers were signed'? And we said that the gavel and the running out, that chaos, needs to be included if we're going to be honest about who we are as a family and who we are as the Body of Christ. This isn't always clean. It's not always simple and organized, but more often than not when we try to be a family and try to be the

body of Christ, it gets messy. Our wires can get crossed and our differences come out, but what matters the most is that we stay together as one family. For many of us at CPC this already feels like our family. We have a beautiful representation across generations. We have seniors who are vibrant and extremely active. We have parents who are learning what it means to become grandparents. We have other adults who are learning what it means to become parents. We have young professionals. We have different life stages all represented and we bring different gifts into this family. We have one group in particular who isn't just underrepresented in the church at large and here at CPC, they're also under engaged, and that's us—I'm a Millennial. We are being underrepresented and under engaged in different ways in our congregation and so this call to be a family especially matters when we think about this group.

What we are hoping for this coming year as we envision what life at CPC will look like, is not that we'll have a bunch of new programs listed in *CPC Life* to engage Millennials. What we're hoping for are actual relationships. Now, some of you have been the people who have started up incredible programs and incredible relationships because you are starters and you're ready to go and you want to engage in these things. We want to encourage you to use your creativity and your resources—the things that matter most to you, to engage this age group—these 20-30-year-olds—in new ways that matter. But if this seems a little bit vague to you or you're wondering what it looks like on the ground, here are some ways that we're already reaching out to Millennials and trying to adopt them in new ways into our CPC family.

We have our Student Ministry and Kids' Ministry, which Carrie talked about earlier. We are praying that this year we have Millennials that not only start up as leaders for our students and for our kids, but also that we would have adults who are in the next generation up who are willing to reach out to Millennials and mentor them as they're leading, to walk alongside them and give them guidance out of their background. We also have an incredible Lay Care ministry and many of you probably don't even know that we have a Student Lay Care Ministry! These are high schoolers who become college students who learn what it means to show up for people when they're hurting the most. They go through training to learn how to listen well, how to empathize, what it means to grieve, and this year we're going to pair some of our Lay Care leaders with the Student Lay Care leaders to create mentorship, to create opportunities for us to show that we truly care for one another. In Mom's Morning, which is an incredible ministry that we have, during the Large Group sessions for the first time this year they will have a mentor mom at every single table because that's one of the busiest and most chaotic phases of life. I just saw some moms nodding in the crowd. One of the busiest and chaotic phases of life, they will have a mentor mom who has been there and who can say, "Everyone survived. We made it! You can get through this phase!" We have our Sunday Communities that meet and those are broken up by age, but they're finding new ways to engage with one another, to the point that tomorrow afternoon at 4:00PM we have a group, our ACTS community, which is age range 50-70 or so, who's going on a picnic with our E3 and Catalyst Millennial's Sunday Community groups. They're trying to forge relationships because that is at the core of what we want CPC to be.

Our goal this year isn't to create authentic relationships or to kind of force ourselves into each other's lives, but what we're hoping for is for authentic connections. The ultimate goal is that every single one of us, and especially our Millennials, would have five-on-one relationships. So one-on-one relationships are important and they're a way to get to the five-on-one, but ultimately what we hope for is that every single person who walks through these doors at CPC would be able to list 5 people in their lives who they know well, who they're praying for, who they know what's most challenging in their lives, who's faith they admire, and at least 1-2 of those people would be in this Millennial category, that they would be walking alongside them in new and engaging ways. This is what it means for us to be the church. This is what it means for our whole family to be represented. Right now we have a portion of the family that's only kind of standing on the outside looking in or slightly engaged, but not quite sure what their role is. Our prayer is that we would feel convicted to round out our family and that it wouldn't just result in new numbers for us, but it would result in new leadership, new strength, new mission for this church that we would see the vision of what it truly means for us to be the Body of Christ.

I would love to pray with us as we go from here. As I pray I would love for you to be thinking about those people in your life. Those people that maybe not just at CPC, but even perhaps at your work, the ones who maybe have been on the outskirts, the ones who you thought, *I could invite them to lunch, but I don't know if they would really want to come with me*, or even a neighbor across the street who you haven't met, but you've seen them outside with their kids and you've thought about going across and meeting them. As we pray, think about those people you have the opportunity to reach out to, to be the light of Christ to them, and to potentially invite them in to what it means to be a part of this family.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.