# Voices: Can we emphasize generational gifts rather than gaps?

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Millennials are low-hanging fruit these days. Every few weeks or so, a video goes viral on social media making fun of some aspect of perceived Millennial habits like laziness, entitlement or a lack of commitment. Some even go so far as name-calling an entire generation with demeaning tags like "snowflake," "hypersensitive," "whiney" and "technology dependent." As the largest generation since the Baby Boomers, Millennials are an easy target.

The tone from some critics is shaming and has created a combative relationship between the generations. When I hear shame-based critiques and stereotypes of Millennials, I think, "Really? Have you observed every single Millennial?"

I'm all for a good laugh and appreciate the self-deprecating humor concerning those who share my birth range. Sure, there are generational differences. Generational differences have been around a long time as each generation is shaped by defining moments during their lifetime. The world looks different for each generation, and they face the world from somewhat unique reference points.

Studying generational differences can be helpful, and I'm all for understanding those differences. However, the way I frequently hear Millennials talked about is that Millennials are the first generation to get it wrong, and leaving them in charge would be the worst thing in the history of the world.

Do some Millennials fit the stereotype? You bet. But then again, are there Builders, Busters, Boomers and Gen-Xers who fit the Millennial description, too? I think you know the answer to that question.

If you do your homework, you quickly realize each generation—from America's Greatest Generation to Baby Boomers to Gen-Xers to Millennials—has its issues. Keep in mind, the world Millennials entered is a world created by previous generations. No generation has been perfect.

If you seek it, you will find it, and if you want to find lazy, weak Millennials, you can find them just as you also can find the lazy and weak among other generations. Likewise, if you want to find Millennials who sacrifice for causes greater than their own, create meaningful work, and stick with their families, you can find them, too.

**Might there be more similarities among the generations than differences?**

Stereotyping is making an oversimplified image or idea of a person. Stereotyping is wrong because people are people, and all people are different and unique.

When one stereotypes another person, one fails to see the influences that shape that person or a group of people and does not allow room for individuality. Stereotyping creates an assumption of a group that often is used to shape others' understanding of the stereotyped person or group. Stereotyping dehumanizes all of us by creating caricatures of us from a few carefully cherry-picked habits that may characterize a few—but not all—people in a group.

From a Christian perspective, each generation has strengths that need to be affirmed and weaknesses that need to be challenged. In the church, workplace and larger society, we need the best of all generations.

We all have different understandings and influences that shape who we are as individuals and who we are as a community. I'm thankful to be part of a church community at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church that values and shares life with all generations. Because each generation is unique and brings wisdom, perspective and energy to our community, we do our best to accommodate, challenge and love each person as best as we can.

As we gather together across the generations this year, can we emphasize generational gifts rather than gaps? Can we graciously lay aside name-calling and over-simplified caricatures? Can we laugh about the differences between generations while also learning from the best of what all of us have to offer?

We need each other—and we need the best of each other.

*John Whitten is lead pastor of the gathering, a minister of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas, and is a member of the Baptist Standard board.*