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## Generationally Speaking: A Review of Speaking Across Generations

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## Generationally Speaking: A Review of Speaking Across Generations

### Abstract

"Sermons need to be written and delivered with an awareness of the unique cultural characteristics and stage of life needs that reside within the hearts and minds of those who are listening."

Posting about the book *Speaking Across Generations* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/generationally-speaking-a-review-of-speaking-across-generations/>

### Keywords

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### Disciplines

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### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

# **Generationally Speaking: A Review of *Speaking Across Generations***

**Todd Zuidema**

**January 12, 2023**

**Title:** Speaking Across Generations: Messages That Satisfy Boomers, Xers, Millennials, Gen Z, and Beyond

**Author:** Darrell E. Hall

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The pastor offers a prayer while the organist settles onto the bench ready for the final hymn. Maybe it's the worship team quietly playing in the background, before the closing set of music. For some churches, this is the time within the liturgy that worshippers make the transition from Word to Sacrament and they prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Depending on the church and its tradition, the pastor has been speaking somewhere between 15 and 45 minutes. Whether you call it preaching or teaching, the sermon is finished.

The sermon has predominantly been the central event within protestant Christian worship since the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Volumes of books have been written about what the content of sermons should contain, the structure it should take, or how to make sermons more effective and engaging.

*Speaking Across Generations* by Darrell E. Hall<sup>1</sup>, investigates the expectations that different generations in our current time have for a sermon. In cooperation with the Barna Group, a Christian research organization, Hall looks at five different generational groups: Elders, Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z, identifying the expectations these generations have for sermons and providing suggestions how a preacher or teacher can satisfy these needs.

"The gospel of Jesus is good news for all time, in all places, for all people," Hall proclaims.<sup>2</sup> Starting with this presupposition, Hall provides helpful demographic statistics as well as results from surveys about the takeaways that those who listen to sermons want to receive. Then, with this data, Hall proceeds to highlight what is unique to each generation and provides a helpful sample of what a sermon might sound like to one specific generational group.

Hall identifies three main things that people expect to receive from a sermon:<sup>3</sup>

1. 1. Practical application to their life.
2. 2. A deeper understanding of the specific text.
3. 3. A feeling of personal connection to God.

Each generation, while expecting each of these characteristics from a sermon, may tend to emphasize one over the others.

Hall encourages the preacher to become a “generational polyglot.”<sup>4</sup> Sermons need to be written and delivered with an awareness of the unique cultural characteristics and stage of life needs that reside within the hearts and minds of those who are listening.

While the statistics and survey information are interesting and seem to accurately identify in broad terms the unique aspects of each generation, it all leads to what Hall desires the reader to receive from this book. Hall’s vision for the church is to become more than a multigenerational place where each generation has a ministry or program specifically focused to cater to their unique wants and needs. Instead, Hall encourages churches to become *intergenerational*.<sup>5</sup>

This is a much broader vision than simply having a sermon that connects with the different generations represented in a congregation. Hall provides a more holistic vision where the ministry of the church honors seniors, but through the nurturing of meaningful relationships, adopts a child-centered agenda<sup>6</sup>.

This vision encompasses the desire to serve and provide for the spiritual needs of those who are older, but also seeks to equip and enfold younger generations so that they have a sense of belonging, knowing that they are valued. This sense of ownership will pass from generation to generation as the church seeks to be the visible expression of the family of God.

While the main body of this book is engaging as well as practical, some of the most helpful content is found in the appendices, especially C-E. In these brief sections, Hall outlines an understanding of intergenerational ministry that is rooted in covenant theology, where God pledges to care and provide for His people so they will flourish and grow. In turn, God’s people uphold the covenant by pledging their fidelity to God and commit themselves to pass on this faith from generation to generation.

Hall then returns to the importance of the sermon within worship. In Appendix E, he makes this bold statement:

*“The divinely chosen medium of communicating God’s words to humanity is preaching. This cannot and will not change. Though a multitude of mediums should be employed in service of the gospel, none should replace preaching as the primary medium of gospel communication.”<sup>7</sup>*

Sermons certainly are an important part of gathered worship. While not divinely inspired like Scripture, the sincere hope is that sermons will be Holy Spirit guided from beginning to end—from composition, to presentation, reception, and finally, application. Part of that Spirit-led guidance is discerning and being aware of the audience who is listening to the sermon.

Hall's book is a service to preachers by providing suggestions of how to craft a sermon that appeals to the needs of each generation. *Speaking Across Generations* is a good addition to the preacher's bookshelf and an encouragement to build congregations that are rooted in God's covenant promises and intergenerationally woven.

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1. IVP 2022
2. pg. 17
3. pg. 61
4. Chapter 2
5. 115 ff
6. pg. 177
7. pg. 160, *italics by the author.*