

---

# **TARGETED TECHNOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATIONS**

---

## **Session Description**

The first technological breakthrough may have been a sharp stick by Homo erectus and it seems to have served them well for a couple hundred thousand years, but when it comes to worship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century technological breakthroughs barely last a generation. In this episode Drs. Bill and Kris explore the technology “needs” of the four adult generations in the church today.

## **Session Outline**

Contrary to popular opinion, technology is a means, not an end. Its purpose is to facilitate authentic worship. However, each generation is immersed in the technology they were raised with to the point that their technology has largely shaped their learning style. It's this “learning style” that either aids or gets in the way of worship. Use a familiar technology and it's virtually invisible. Anything else just isn't the same.

In the church today, we find four adult generations, each one raised with and comfortable with a different level of technology. We'll look at each generation, its dominant technology, and try to provide some insights to facilitate worship. In an upcoming episode we'll touch on how to bridge the generations in worship.

Notes: First, this session is not about style. It's not about which music works best or whether traditional or contemporary, liturgical or modern, emerging or alternative is the end-all, be-all answer for worship today. Second, this is a bell curve sort of overview. There are those at both ends of the generational spectrum who have never adapted to their own dominant technology and those who have leapt from one to another. This session addresses the vast majority in the middle.

## **The Radio Generation**

These are those who were born and raised before the 1950s and who are more familiar with the radio show *Little Orphan Annie* than early television's *Toast of the Town*. Magazines were mostly text with supporting imagery (with only a few obvious exceptions). *The McGuffey Reader* was popular in schools (largely text based).

Image: Listening attentively with one ear towards the wireless.

Visualization: Word pictures – little need for images.

Participation: Attentive listening, concentrating, evaluating.

Interactivity: Conversation after the program is complete. “Did you hear ...?”

Technology: Amplification.

Learning Style: Lecture, storytelling, and reading.

Worship: Corporately focused; hymns with a theological message; congregational reading/responsive readings; sermons with multiple layers, educationally based and logically constructed – exegetical. Thought-provoking worship.

### **The Image Generation**

This generation was born and raised with a television in their living rooms and magazines that sported images and text that supported the images. *Fun with Dick and Jane* books were popular in schools (largely image based).

Image: Family eating TV dinners on folding metal TV trays watching television.

Visualization: Image-centric.

Participation: Watching, feeling, thinking, personalization.

Interactivity: Conversation during breaks. “Did you see ...?”

Technology: Image-based screen technology.

Learning Style: Watching. Individual focused. *Mr. Rogers, Captain Kangaroo*.

Worship: Individualistically focused; words with images on screens; music that is personally focused (I and me); life-applicable sermons supported by imagery, drama, and video.

### **The MTV Generation**

This generation was born and raised with a television in their bedrooms. Networks and cable offered 24/7 programming with global scope, racial diversity, and real-time reporting. Fast paced, always in color, and characterized by short attention spans. *Sesame Street* and *Reading Rainbow* were educational staples.

Image: Latch-key kids in front of the babysitting TV.

Visualization: Fast-paced video driven. Little is left to the imagination.

Participation: Experiential.

Interactivity: Social-group driven; casually conversational.

Technology: Video-driven; video-games.

Learning Style: Movement; in-person interactivity; social-group shares and collaboration; peer-learning.

Worship: Community/tribal based; video-driven; fast-action/quick-scenes; practical, relevant sermons with both personal and social applications.

### **The Digital Generation**

This generation has been immersed in screen technology and cannot remember a time without the Internet, instant messaging, or cell phones. They are characterized as always on and always connected. Multi-tasking communications are the norm. Participation, interactivity, and connectivity are the educational expectations.

Image: Texting and video-driven conversations.

Visualization: Sound bites (and IM bites).

Participation: Digital connections.

Interactivity: Constant connectivity and group sharing.

Technology: Digitally embedded.

Learning Style: Interactive and participatory. Peer and network connectedness.

Worship: Interactive and impersonal participation; instant feedback loops; digital embedding; multiple streams; community connectedness; sermons are participatory, experiential, digitally diverse, and depend on crowd sourcing.

## **Group Discussion**

1. Discuss how different churches reach different generations. Which paradigm best describes your church?
2. Which paradigm would best suit your church? Your church's future?
3. What changes would need to be made to accommodate your church's future?
4. What do you need to do next? Who will do what?