

EVERYBODY PLAYS

GENERATIONS LEADING
TOGETHER, TODAY

TIM CLARK

EMERGING LEADERS NEED A TEAM, NOT A TURN!

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*Dedicated to the future leaders at The Church On The Way,
many of whom I will never meet.*

*I pray that everything we do today prepares the way
for you to lead God's people into their purpose and promise.
And to reach the people of Los Angeles who live in your time.*

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For Those NOT at The Church On The Way

This book was written specifically for leaders and teams at *The Church On The Way* in Los Angeles, California.

If **you** *aren't* at that church and you're reading the book anyway, I'm glad you're joining us. But please know you're entering a story set in a unique context that no other church in the world shares. As you read, you will find specific references to what has happened or is happening at The Church On The Way, as well as specific people who have led this church in the past or are leading it now. This book is about a journey we're *still on*, as we're learning to engage all generations (including future ones).

However, if you are reading this book, can I assume that although we may not share the same context, we share the same heart? If you're here, I'll bet you, like us, *also* desperately want to cultivate emerging leaders so that future generations might follow and thrive in Jesus.

If I'm right about that, I think this book might encourage you—maybe even inspire you—but ultimately, I hope what you read here will challenge you to contextualize what we are learning here and apply it to the journey you're on in the church that you serve.

Finally, if we at The Church On The Way can ever be a support in your efforts to raise emerging leaders through intergenerational effort, or if you have any questions about how we're trying and succeeding (and

sometimes failing) to do so, please don't hesitate to reach out. We would love to talk with you and learn from you, too, as we all give our best to reach the fourth generation and beyond.

Pastor Tim Clark, 2026

Prologue: A story of hope from the past

I WAS 30 YEARS OLD AND HAD RECENTLY BEEN INSTALLED as the Lead Pastor (actually, the only pastor) at a small Foursquare church in Newberg, a rural college town in Oregon. And I couldn't wait for the Sunday that was on its way.

You see, the academic year had just started, and our little church was within walking distance of the university. I had been a young adult's pastor in Fresno and had spent a couple of years planting a congregation in Seattle's University District. So, I had hopeful expectations about what would happen at this church after the first week of classes.

A flood of students must be on their way!

Except that when Sunday arrived, they didn't show up. Much to my disappointment, that day, there were only our regular 60 adults present, along with two students who had returned for the school year. So, I asked one of the church elders, "Where are all of the students?" His answer was disheartening.

"A few college kids usually visit us at the beginning of the semester to look for a church, but they never stick around."

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They never stick around?!

A few years later, by the grace of God, hundreds of students, recent graduates, professors, and other university staff began showing up every first weekend of classes—and sticking around!

So, what changed?

Yes, I started hanging out on campus, inviting students to church, and letting them know they were not only welcomed but wanted, but that wasn't the key.

More importantly, the church made a culture shift. It became hospitable to and hungry for these young adults. We made sure our gatherings were inviting and accessible to twentysomethings. We started delivering homemade cookies to the dorms of the students who visited us. And we got the older congregants to “adopt” younger students, offering them a home-cooked meal and a family atmosphere to connect with when they were far from home.

However, there was something even *more* important than that—what had the *most* significant impact was our asking students to serve and lead at the church as equals and partners.

Three years after that “two-student Sunday,” we had so many college students active in serving and leading at the church that we had to drop one of our Sunday gatherings when they went home for the summer, because without them, there weren't enough people to support the ministry.

Today, over 25 years later, that church is still thriving, reaching the

A story of hope from the past

town and welcoming young adults into service and leadership. Many of the students I worked with then are now either leading at the church there or have grown in ministry, going all over the world to make a difference for Jesus.

Intergenerational Effort Toward Leadership Emergence

If you're reading this, you are likely a leader, a developing leader, or a potential leader at The Church On The Way (TCOTW), and you could be from any of the six generations active in the life of our congregation.

If we are faithful and healthy (and if Jesus doesn't return first), TCOTW will be a thriving church 25 years from now. We'll have reached rising generations and will have empowered them for ministry service here at The Church On The Way and all over the world... And we'll continue doing those things far into the future.

But how can we ensure that happens?

That's the subject of this book.

What happened in Newberg wasn't a fluke. Although the scale and numbers may differ, I believe all local churches can welcome, cultivate, and release emerging young leaders into ministry.

And it doesn't need to be a "young" church for that to happen. In fact, I think a fully intergenerational church is better poised to propel rising leaders into the future than a church that's primarily filled with one or two younger generations. Because a church needs younger leaders, older leaders, and middle-aged leaders to reach and serve their *own*

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generations, but it also needs *every* generation, including the youngest ones, to consider the generations who are yet to come if it's going to realize a God-sized vision for its future.

A part of our vision at The Church On The Way is for all of us, at every age, to work together, expressing the Good News of Jesus to emerging generations, year after year, decade after decade, until Jesus returns.

Are you interested in joining us in this vision?

If you are, keep reading!

The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a chalkboard or a piece of heavy paper, with faint, light-colored tactical diagrams. These diagrams include circles, lines, and 'X' marks, suggesting a strategic or military context. The text is centered and reads:

FIRST PART:

**A PASSION FOR
EMERGING
LEADERS**

1 | What game are we playing?

“One generation commends Your works to another; they tell of Your mighty acts.” **Psalms 145:4**

On Your Mark, Get Set, GO!

Imagine you're in a relay race.

The starting gun goes off, but you're already stationed halfway down the track, waiting for the baton. When the runner with it gets close, you begin to match their speed. Then the critical moment of handoff comes. You successfully take the stick and turn on your afterburners. This is *your* segment of the race until you approach the next participant, who aligns smartly and strategically with your pace. If all goes well, you hand the baton off without dropping it, making the transition look smooth. Now, all you need to do is cheer on those running next and hope they do well, so your team wins.

That was the picture of generational leadership emergence I was introduced to as a young adult. The Lord called me into pastoral leadership in 1987 when Ted Engstrom and Robert Larson wrote a book called, *Seizing The Torch: Leadership For A New Generation*. In that book, the authors used an Olympic torch relay as a picture of ministry leader-

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ship “handed off in a solemn relay for nearly 2,000 years.”¹

They weren’t the first to discuss leadership transition as a relay, and they certainly wouldn’t be the last—in fact, I heard a pastor talk about it at a leadership conference *just this week!* There’s a lot of biblical support for the idea of leadership responsibility being passed from one generation to the next. And yet, in this book, I’ll suggest a different metaphor that’s just as biblical.

In a relay race, one person at a time carries the baton, with some people ahead of them getting ready to run, and others behind them who have already finished. That metaphor made sense for my generation; most of us *couldn’t wait* to carry the leadership baton, while many in the generation that preceded ours didn’t want to let go of it just yet.²

But as I’ve worked with hundreds of emerging leaders over the years, I’ve noticed that young adults are increasingly hesitant to enter the leadership relay race and carry the burden all alone. There are many reasons for this, but a big one is that it seems younger people would prefer to be on a leadership team with each other and with older people—all on the field together—rather than be the lone runner (or leader) on a wide-open track.

So, a *relay race* may not be such a great leadership metaphor anymore.

Rising generations are more into *soccer*, anyway.

Soccer is a sport that’s quickly growing in popularity among the youngest American generations,³ and I think, for our purposes, it’s a

What game are we playing?

more accessible metaphor for leadership emergence. Because, unlike a relay, which is a solo, consecutive endeavor, a soccer team has 11 players on the field, all working simultaneously to score and defend against goals. And though each player has a role, soccer's a fluid game in which everybody plays—and everyone has an opportunity to make a difference—at any time.

I think leadership emergence—and eventual transition—should be approached more like a soccer game than a relay race. Rookies join the team and play alongside veterans. They all benefit each other. As new players bring fresh talent and energy to the team, they get to mature alongside older players with experience and wisdom. On a soccer team, all the players share the vision and the burden. And they know that when the time comes for a veteran to retire—and perhaps go on to coach—a rookie will have grown into leadership on the team and be ready to embrace newer, younger players.

Intergenerational vs. Multigenerational

The other day, I read the BuzzFeed article entitled, “*24 Subtle Signs That Often Signal That A Restaurant Is, In Fact, VERY Good.*”⁴

(I know...BuzzFeed??? Don't judge me! It came up in my newsfeed, and it grabbed my attention, which is *exactly* what a BuzzFeed headline is designed to do.)

Let's look at sign #17. The author writes: “*If there are people of all different ages dining in a restaurant, I take it as a good sign. All young diners*

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means a restaurant might be overly trendy or just popular on TikTok, while a strictly elderly crowd might mean the food and/or vibe is a bit staid and sterile. But when you have people of all ages eating in the same place, that signals that the food is probably good enough to appeal to everyone.”

So why did this command my attention? At TCOTW, we’re not trying to develop an exclusively young church, nor are we primarily catering to an old demographic. I believe a sign of success is having people from all generations attending and active in the congregation.

In the 1990s, church growth gurus taught us “*The Homogeneous Principle*,” which states that churches grow best when everyone in the congregation is alike. This standard argued for a politically, culturally, socio-economically, and generationally homogenized church.⁵ In that framework, a church would have to appeal to a specific demographic to grow. Whether or not that principle was accurate at the time (and I doubt it), The Church On The Way has never represented it. We have long been a congregation that reflects the surrounding culture, with diverse ethnicities, cultures, genders, politics, socio-economic status, and wait for it... generations!

But success doesn’t just happen when all generations are present—that’s only the beginning. True flourishing happens when all generations work together to consider and champion the future of a church. We want to build this kind of leadership culture throughout TCOTW, and this book intends to inspire an *intergenerational approach*, not just a *multigenerational one*.

What game are we playing?

Those two words seem so similar but have an important distinction: The word *multigenerational* implies that multiple generations are present, but it doesn't mean that those generations are working together. The word *intergenerational* points to the relationships between generations. If a soccer team celebrates that it's multigenerational but isn't truly intergenerational in its teamwork, it won't win games. Similarly, I don't believe a multigenerational church can thrive into its future without an intergenerational approach.

But why am I writing about running, soccer, generations, and leadership transition? Because The Church On The Way has a fantastic opportunity. And I want us to seize it, not ignore it or be unprepared.

Generational Transition Is Coming

By 2046, The Church On The Way will have a very different generational profile.

That year, the oldest Millennials will turn 65, and the youngest will be closing in on 50.⁶

Gen Z will be between 34 and 49.

The Alpha Generation will be between 21 and 33.

And the current lead pastor team will be between 76 and 84, and very likely, will all be retired.

Although generational progression is easy to predict if you do the math, like I just did, many churches are caught off guard by the need for leadership transition. And when churches don't have successful leader-

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ship transitions, they often wither or die.

But before we talk about leadership transitions, let's briefly and broadly define what a Church leader is. The kind of leadership we're talking about here is both spiritual and organizational, because you don't want to develop and release people with organizational skills who are insensitive to the spiritual dynamics necessary in church leadership. And there is a difference.

Spiritual leadership cultivates an environment that influences others to become more like Christ; this includes one-on-one discipleship, and it should always be present when leading a ministry effort or team. *Organizational leadership* in ministry has been defined as "a dynamic process in which a man or woman... influences a specific group of God's people towards His purposes for that group."⁷

However, the essential definition of *every* type of leadership is captured in John Maxwell's maxim that "leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less."⁸

Influence is the key. Everybody who seeks to influence others at The Church On The Way ought to embody spiritual leadership, and some of those spiritual leaders will need to display organizational leadership skills, too.

Leadership transition is most often seen as a baton pass, where there's a limited, specific critical moment you must get right, or you'll drop the baton and lose the race. But in this book, I'll suggest that when we view transition through the eyes of a soccer team, we'll continually

What game are we playing?

be working on leadership emergence on many levels, and there's less chance of blowing it because of one poorly executed action or misstep.

So, over the following pages, I'll encourage us to plan for our future while we live in the present. Each chapter will be steeped in Scripture, showing God's great concern for *the next and future generations*. The Bible contains example after example of successful intergenerational relationships, discipleship, and partnerships, as well as times when a lack of concern for a rising generation led to complete disaster.

Here's What to Expect in This Book

You've already read the prologue, which introduces the book with a personal story about leadership emergence through intergenerational effort.

The first part of the book, *A Passion for Emerging Leaders*, will lay a foundation for our call and highlight some of our challenges as we serve TCOTW's future.

Chapter One: *What Game Are We Playing?* (the chapter you're reading now) presents the primary leadership emergence metaphor of a soccer team as opposed to a relay team, and defines some essential terms, creating a road map for the book.

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Chapter Two: *The Epic Opportunity* suggests a response to the challenge of generational leadership transition that we and many churches like ours face.

Chapter Three: *A Vision for the Fourth Generation* expresses God's call to TCOTW to raise ministry leaders to ensure we serve our church and reach our city and world to the fourth generation.

The second part of the book, *A Plan for Intergenerational Effort*, emphasizes *relationship, discipleship, and partnership* as three qualities we must embrace to invite emerging leaders to take ownership at TCOTW.

Chapter Four: *Authentic Relationship* suggests that a biblical model of healthy leadership emergence starts with authentic intergenerational relationships.

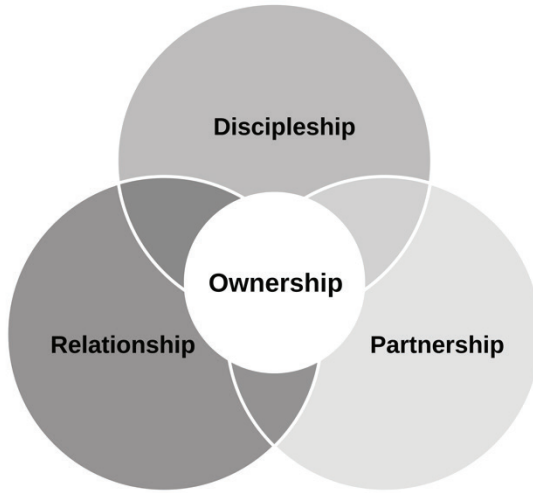
Chapter Five: *Essential Discipleship* considers how to prepare potential and emerging leaders through discipleship that brings them to the feet of Jesus.

Chapter Six: *Productive Partnership* is about empowering upcoming leaders through intergenerational ministry partnerships that invite input and provide opportunity among different generations.

What game are we playing?

Chapter Seven: *Shared Ownership* integrates the above three qualities – relationship, discipleship, and partnership, and communicates the goal of launching rising leaders into ministry here, there, and everywhere, as they feel a sense of true ownership at TCOTW.

Qualities of Intergenerational Leadership Emergence



Finally, the book's Epilogue, *A Hope and a Future*, concludes with some faith-filled dreams for what's ahead at The Church On The Way.

In the same way that I'm encouraging us to rethink the relay race metaphor, I'm also proposing that each step in developing rising leaders be considered concurrent rather than sequential. As everybody plays at the same time on a soccer field, the elements of generational emergence that support leadership transition should happen simultaneously.

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In other words, a sense of ownership can begin as soon as authentic relationships occur. We don't have to wait for relationships, discipleship, and partnership to be "complete" before younger people feel like this is also "their" church. It can happen from the very start.

As I've said hundreds of times, publicly and privately, rising generations are not the church of tomorrow; they are the church of today. If that's true, we need to help them feel like this is their church, not in the future, but now. That's one reason I wrote this book.

Goals For This Book

This book has an incredibly narrow focus. It's intended for The Church On The Way's leaders and onboarding leaders (of course, if you're reading this and aren't in that group, I hope it's useful for you, too). I want us to have a vision for a culture of intergenerational leadership that thrives when all ages feel a true sense of ownership.

I wrote this book with some specific goals in mind:

- ◆ I desire to strengthen intergenerational awareness and relationships throughout the church. Imagine a congregation where the young, middle-aged, and old "see" each other and share a family connection.
- ◆ I hope to help TCOTW welcome rising generations into leadership partnerships in every area of the church. That will help them feel an increasing sense that *"this is my church."*

What game are we playing?

- ◆ I want to encourage current leaders to seek the perspective and participation of emerging younger leaders in making church and team decisions and direction. And finally...
- ◆ I dream of inspiring all generations at TCOTW to purposefully pursue succeeding generations of leaders who will carry this church into a thriving future.

In short, in this book, I want to establish that shaping an intergenerational leadership culture is one of the best ways to raise younger leaders and reach and disciple emerging generations so that TCOTW will thrive for decades to come.

What This Book Is and Is Not

This book calls on *every* generation to participate in the emergence of the generations coming after them. When I write about younger generations in this book, I mean a younger generation than *you*, whatever your age. This book should apply to a 17-year-old as much as it applies to someone who's 71.

This isn't a book about senior leadership transitions, focused only on lead pastors, pastoral staff, or elders, but one that addresses intergenerational team leadership at every level of the congregation.

This book doesn't dig into generational differences and nuances in the worldviews and cultural approaches of various age groups. Hundreds of books provide data and insight on generation gaps, and I'll

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include some of those in a reading list at the end. While I will touch on some generational distinctions, my primary focus is on inspiring a culture of leadership emergence through connections across generations.

This isn't an academic book. Though my doctoral research provided much of the foundation for what's here, I want all our leaders to read it, so I'm intentionally keeping the tone light and conversational.

Finally, this isn't a "how to" book that proposes a program, policies, or even best practices, but one that I hope inspires and influences a passion, vision, and value for intergenerational leadership partnerships at TCOTW. However, though it *isn't* a how-to book, the questions at the end of each chapter are for small-group discussion or individual reflection, intended to lead to action and implementation throughout The Church On The Way.

By the time you finish this book, I hope you will agree that every generation is called to partner together to set the table for emerging leaders at TCOTW.

Thanks for joining me on the journey to shape an intergenerational leadership culture at TCOTW. I'm hungry for the church to be better positioned, both now and in the future, to reach and disciple rising generations in the global megacity of Los Angeles. And I pray that together our efforts will help every generation at TCOTW have the best opportunity possible to encounter and be changed by Jesus.

What game are we playing?

Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

Describe a restaurant in LA that would fit the description from the BuzzFeed article with multigenerational diners. Who would you take there to eat?

Engagement:

Consider the current state of TCOTW. Are there areas that you currently see as intergenerational?

Are there areas you would see as multigenerational but not yet intergenerational?

How does the picture of a soccer team encourage intergenerational leadership more than the metaphor of a relay race?

Share about a moment when you felt “seen” by someone from a different generation. How did that connection impact or influence you?

Activation:

Take time to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any pride or reluctance to work with other generations. Ask for wisdom and courage to play your part.

2 | The epic opportunity

Forgetting The Main Thing

After growing up as nomads in the desert and fighting enemies on every side, God's people finally settled in the Promised Land. They had witnessed some amazing miracles.

Water from a rock!

A river parting!!

WALLS FALLING DOWN!!!

This community had intimate knowledge of God's power, which had helped them survive 40 years of wilderness wandering; however, they had not shared that reality with their children or grandchildren.

Judges 2:10 is how we know this is true. It's one of the saddest verses in the Bible, and it says, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel." Throughout the book of Judges, the implications of not inviting the next generation into God's ways or including them in a life of leadership are clear: disaster after disaster occurs when there are no leaders to shepherd people toward

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the Lord's intentions. In Judges, we learn that future godly leaders are necessary to guide future generations into God's presence and promise.

Another disheartening Scripture about not considering rising generations is found in 2 Kings 20. Hezekiah is one of the great kings in a long list of bad ones. During his reign, he tore down idols and altars and turned the hearts of Judah back to God, as few leaders before him had done. But he became prideful and, in a moment of sheer stupidity, gave God's enemies a backstage tour of Israel's military might and financial wealth.

When the prophet Isaiah told him the result of his reckless act was that the next generation would go into brutal exile, but the disaster wouldn't happen in his lifetime, Hezekiah was relieved.

Relieved that *he* would be fine.

"I'll let the next generation worry about the next season."

"Not my circus, not my monkeys, not my problem."

We read that story and think there is no way *we* would ever be that callous about our kids and their future. Sometimes, though, in subtle ways, our actions contradict what we believe to be true.

Our Traditions, Or Our Children

As I write this, Erwin McManus is the 67-year-old Lead Pastor at Mosaic Church in Los Angeles (and other locations globally). He and Mosaic are well known for creatively and effectively engaging rising generations with the gospel, but that hasn't always been the case.

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Years ago, Erwin became the pastor of *The First Southern Baptist Church of East Los Angeles* (yeah, that's a mouthful) before it was known as Mosaic. At the time, it was an aging congregation that had become stuck in the past and struggled to engage the changing culture around it. These people cared about their children and grandchildren and desired to see them develop a vibrant faith. They *wanted* to be an effective church that thrived into the future. However, they weren't willing to let go of their deeply held traditions; time after time, they dug in and fought for their personal preferences.

And like being caught in the gap between two trapezes, they had to let go of one before they could grab hold of the other and be propelled forward.

Erwin wrote about that season. He said: *"At the core of every conflict was the struggle between the past and the future. Was the primary responsibility of our church to preserve the past or create the future? Both choices will cost you dearly. One will cost you your traditions, the other your children."*¹

A church that preserves its traditions at the expense of its children and grandchildren will become spiritually (and eventually, financially) bankrupt. When a congregation cares primarily about its present without thoroughly preparing for how God wants to work in its future, like Israel, which didn't pass on the knowledge of the Lord, or Hezekiah, who didn't seem to care, it has lost the plot.

Jesus seems to choose children *over* tradition. There's a story about some parents trying to get their kids to Jesus, but His disciples were

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having none of it. They lived in a “*children should not be seen OR heard*” culture, and they probably thought that having messy, noisy, smelly kids running around Jesus wouldn’t provide the decorum a *proper* Messiah deserved. Jesus quickly and firmly corrected them. “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

Here’s the good news: TCOTW *hasn’t* lost the plot. We’re passionate about the rising generations. We care about what’s next, and we pour significant resources into kids, youth, and young adult ministries. This book isn’t questioning that commitment; it’s about inspiring us to leverage it even better. And one of the *most* effective ways for a church to *welcome the children to Jesus* and prepare them to grow into adult disciples is to raise and release spiritual leaders for the future.

We Need Younger Leaders (And Older Ones, Too)

We have an epic opportunity to prepare for our future *and* to increasingly impact our current culture by intentionally developing and deploying hundreds, if not thousands, of *younger* leaders.

I’m not suggesting our current leaders are too old. Far from it!

TCOTW unquestionably *needs* the wisdom and maturity of those with decades of ministry leadership experience. In fact, for TCOTW to survive in the future, we *must* have older leaders. The thing is, we have older leaders. And we have quite a lot of them. Most of our servant leaders, who serve as team leaders, elders, deacons, and on the church

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council, have been eligible to join AARP for some time.

Which means they're over 50.

That includes me!

This revelation of an older leadership team isn't an accusation—as I said, older leaders are vital, and TCOTW will always consider them indispensable in our ministry efforts. However, at some point, those older leaders (including me) will start to age out. We'll be called to other assignments and cities. We'll retire or start dreaming about retirement. We'll move away to be closer to family. We'll have less energy, understand less about current culture, and become less involved.

And we'll die. (Morbidity, but true).

One significant study from 2024 found that one-quarter of all Protestant pastors intended to retire by 2030.² While this doesn't apply to all church ministry leaders, it does illuminate the challenge. As older leaders phase out, younger leaders will be needed to serve the church in all areas. I don't think *anyone* would argue with that.

So, for TCOTW to thrive into the future, we must cultivate leaders for future generations. If we don't, this church risks slow (or quick) death, like many other megachurches that closed in the last few decades because they didn't consider the future.

But this book isn't just about planning to fill *future* leadership vacancies. If it were, we could create a succession pipeline that acted like a relay race, ensuring that when an older leader was ready to move on, a younger leader or two was prepared to take that baton. Yes, there is a

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demand to prepare younger leaders for future assignments. But there's also a great need for younger leaders who will serve right now!

An Incarnational Missionary Strategy to Reach Our Culture

This church has a vision to equip and send Spirit-empowered disciples who will transform their world, which increasingly includes generations who are “native” to a rapidly changing culture.

Many older believers woke up one day and found themselves in an entirely different culture from the one they grew up in. Many don't understand it, some don't like it, and most have difficulty engaging with or speaking to it. But whether or not we “get” (or like) the culture, it's full of people who Jesus loves and who He intends to save and restore.

Not someday, but right now.

The Church On The Way is praying for revival. For Harvest. For an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We believe we're called to be part of the solution for a broken and hurting world, starting right here in Los Angeles.

Can I get a LOUD “Amen”?

However, ministering to a culture different from ours requires a missionary mindset. Reaching people isn't about shaping them to conform to *our* comfort zone, but about entering their world to share the transforming gospel. That's what Jesus did. He left the comforts of heaven to become human and live in the middle of a broken, rebellious

The epic opportunity

world (see John 1 and Philippians 2). He embedded Himself in a very different context than His eternal “home culture.” And He spoke to and served people from that human culture in a way *they* could easily grasp. That’s the message of the incarnation. God came to dwell among us as one of us, getting on “our” level, speaking “our” language, and integrating into “our” culture so we could understand His great love for us.

In other words, Jesus was the ultimate missionary! And we’re called to that same attitude and action in our world.

If you’ve been around TCOTW for any length of time, you’ve likely heard me speak about the *ministry* of every believer. Our goal is for every person to become a believer, every believer to become a disciple, and every disciple to become a minister.

But there’s one more step. Every *minister* is also called to become a *missionary*.

We’re sent into our world to incarnationally extend the supernatural life and love of Jesus across cultural boundaries in ways that will *always* make us uncomfortable. That’s the job of a missionary, and it’s the response of those trying to live like Jesus.

So, if we are missionaries, perhaps we should take a cue from the best missiologists on the planet, who teach us that the most effective strategy for reaching a culture different from our own is to develop indigenous leaders from that culture—“native speakers” who grasp a unique worldview and can translate God’s Word and ways into a language that other people from that culture will understand.

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When Jesus left Heaven's culture to come to earth and embed Himself in a specific 1st-Century Jewish context, His mission strategy was to shape leaders from THAT culture who would carry on His ministry and message to a people *they* understood well. Then, they, in turn, would raise leaders from other cultures to multiply the life of Jesus there.

If a church hopes to reach and disciple emerging generations, it needs spiritual leaders who intuitively understand the worldviews, hopes, dreams, and “languages” those generations speak; *those* leaders will primarily come *from* those generations. So, we need to raise leaders from generations who will become leaders for their generations, not just in the future, but as soon as possible.

Why Emerging Leaders Don't Seem to Be Emerging

OK, you say. Then let's start a leadership development program, get some young people involved in it, and let them go.

Problem solved, right?

Not so fast.

Because even with our invitation and intentionality, younger leaders don't seem to be stepping up as often as they did in years past. And for the sake of the present and our future, we need to figure out how to address *that* challenge as soon as possible.

Many people believe the problem is that younger generations are abandoning the church, leaving fewer leaders from those generations available to be invited into leadership. And study after study shows

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this is true. Rising generations are, in fact, leaving the church and not returning as frequently as young adults used to.³ American teenagers and young adults today, known as Gen Z, start decidedly less religious than previous generations. More of them “are being raised in non-religious households and more have decided not to belong to a religion anymore” than in other generations at the same age.⁴ Where many Gen X and Millennials have some church background and claim to be spiritual but not religious, Gen Z, who has, in large part, never been to church (because their Boomer and Gen X parents were “spiritual but not religious”), increasingly doesn’t embrace either a spiritual *or* religious label.⁵

We live in a progressively post-Christian, post-church culture in the US, and we can see that reality most acutely among rising generations. But as important as that is, I don’t believe getting more of the rising generation into church is our *first* challenge.

I think we have a chicken-and-egg problem going on here. “The egg” is that generations are leaving or never coming to church. “The chicken” is that we need leaders to reach and equip those generations.

As I’ve heard John Maxwell say often, “Everything in the church rises and falls on leadership.”

Or, as Jesus said, even better, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:36).

Rising leaders can and will speak to rising generations, and as we reach more people from those generations, there will be more leaders who emerge, creating a virtuous cycle. We have an opportunity

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and responsibility to find and cultivate younger leaders for the future, starting now.

But as I said earlier, finding and cultivating younger leaders is challenging—not just at TCOTW, but in churches all over the US.⁶ And I’m not just talking about senior leaders. This isn’t simply about replacing or adding to our pastoral staff or elders. It’s about leaders throughout the church: In kids ministry, youth ministry, and young adult ministry, sure, but also on the greeter team, prayer team, local outreaches, global missions, small groups, men’s and women’s ministries, servant leaders, facilities crews, pastoral care, the church council, and more.

If we’re to embrace the epic opportunity to reach rising generations through empowered leaders, we need to ask why finding and shaping leaders from and for those generations might be such a challenge. And though we can’t identify every challenge, I’d like to end this chapter by addressing three roadblocks that many churches, including TCOTW, face in finding younger leaders. Then, we’ll consider solutions in the rest of this book.

Roadblock #1. Younger Leaders Are Concerned About the Personal Cost of Leadership.

I was recently at a pastors’ gathering with Mac McCarty, a successful businessman, political operative, and former chief of staff for President Bill Clinton. He said, *“I’m not sure there is a harder job right now, including President of the United States, than the job you have as senior pastors.”*

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If a fellow pastor had said this, I'd laugh in their face and accuse them of gross hyperbole. But it just hit different coming from him. And though he was speaking to senior pastors, the truth is that *all* ministry leadership can be hard. And whether in volunteer roles or paid positions, older generations haven't always modeled healthy lives and leadership when faced with challenges. This has sometimes resulted in emotional burnout, moral fallout, ministry stall out, and personal sell out. Younger generations are looking at older ones, deciding whether they want any part of all that.

They often—rightfully—do not.

It's not that they aren't willing to pay the price of serving Jesus. It's that they aren't convinced the cost of being a leader in a dysfunctional church system is what Jesus requires of them. And when those leading the church create unhealthy and even ungodly expectations for its staff and volunteers, they might be right.

At TCOTW, we need to assess where our actions or expectations are unhealthy, dysfunctional, or even toxic and adjust to become healthy and to welcome emerging leaders more effectively.

Roadblock #2. Younger Leaders Don't Resonate with Current Leadership Culture.

In 2023, there was an epic shift at Eddie Bauer. After 59 years with the same logo, a change was made. Companies change logos all the time, so that's not the story. The reason they changed it was monumental. But

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let me back into an explanation about *why* Eddie Bauer's logo changed.

My three kids are all Gen Z, and none were taught to read or write in cursive. At first, Deborah and I felt like perhaps we'd missed something as parents until we realized that the education system had stopped teaching cursive years ago. Because kids now use computers, handwriting etiquette has gone extinct as the Woolly Mammoth.

Eddie Bauer was figuring out how to reach and engage a rising generation. They decided to start with their logo because, for 59 years, their logo was, you guessed it... *Cursive!*⁷ So, if they wanted to "reach" Gen Z and Alphas, they needed to ensure their logo was readable.

Last year, I met with a group of Gen Z and Millennial leaders at TCOTW, and I told this logo story. One of these young leaders had a response that I'm still processing to this day. She asked, "So, what's *OUR* cursive at The Church On The Way?"

What's our cursive, indeed?!

What things are we stuck in that no longer speak to a rapidly changing culture? What ways of life and leadership do we think are normal, but might be unattractive or even repellent to rising generations?

Popular podcaster Carey Nieuwhof recently discussed why rising generations may not want to join church leadership. He writes, "*Not only are many young adults walking away from their faith, but those staying aren't signing up for (roles) at churches in nearly the numbers that the ministry requires.*"⁸ He goes on to suggest that a church culture that rising

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generations don't understand or resonate with contributes to the lack of younger leaders.

Roadblock #3. Younger Voices Are Not Fully Welcomed in Leadership.

A final roadblock I want to suggest here (and, of course, there are many more) is that some older leaders are afraid of giving up or sharing the “ring of power.”⁹ Sometimes, when a leader carries a baton until they hand it off to the next leader, they also take the weight of the world on their shoulders and act like it's their responsibility alone.

When I was a 28-year-old lead pastor, I was helping run a conference for young Gen X church leaders. In a conversation with one of the Baby Boomer organizers, I suggested that my peers and I, who had already been in ministry for a decade, could take over the conference in the next year or so and even start filling significant roles in the denomination we were a part of.

The response of this man of God surprised me. He said something to the effect that he and his peers had waited a long time to finally be in charge, because the generation above them didn't want to surrender power, and we, too, would have to wait our turn before getting the baton passed to us.

While I didn't sense any animosity or small-mindedness, that conversation made me wonder whether my voice was truly welcomed or if I was just expected to carry water for somebody else's vision until I could

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wrestle the baton out of their hands. It would have been so refreshing if, instead, I felt the kind of ownership that a rookie on an inter-generational soccer team might experience in working together to win the game.

While this was a conversation between two senior pastors, I fear this attitude can also creep up among a church's ministry team leaders.

Leaders who control everything happening in their small group or team.

Leaders who operate their ministries in a transactional way instead of relationally.

Leaders who insist on bottlenecking information or authority because it helps them feel in control.

And Leaders who aren't open to suggestions or perspectives different from their own.

I recently met with a group of younger pastors at TCOTW to discuss potential roadblocks for our church's emerging leaders. These weren't disgruntled former attendees or frustrated current members, but sharp, gifted young leaders who are all-in with the vision and ministry at TCOTW and have a passion and calling for what God is doing here. We discussed why the Church at large, and The Church On The Way specifically, might lack rising-generation leaders.

Their answer was informative. They suggested that TCOTW's leadership culture can be perceived as inhospitable to potential younger leaders. Part of the challenge was that TCOTW leaders often prioritize

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transactional programs above transformational relationships, certainty over curiosity, and excellence over experimentation. (I'll unpack these more later.)

Ultimately, they claimed that an inflexible ministry model, perceived as *"The Church On The Way, Way,"* can create roadblocks to their and their peers' voices being heard and welcomed.

"What? Not at this church!"

That was my first response... more internal than audible. I wanted to push back, but I realized they had a point. And even if this isn't the reality in *every* area of TCOTW, if young, passionate, involved leaders are sensing where something is broken, we should listen to them and consider how to fix it.

I'm sharing *these* potential roadblocks to get us thinking about other possible issues. Because knowing about roadblocks is a gift; if you understand they exist ahead of time, you can better navigate around them or remove them altogether. When we know that younger leaders don't feel like they're playing on a team, but are concerned about the cost of leadership, struggle with cultural disconnect, feel like cogs in an impersonal wheel, or are not welcome voices, we can then intentionally work to adjust that reality.

God Is Doing a New Thing

How do we do that? In many ways, *the* Church—and *our* church—will need to let go of the past and be flexible about the present to cultivate

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leaders for the future.

When God told His people about the great new things He had planned for them, He urged them to “Forget the former things” (Isaiah 43:18), even though the former thing He was talking about was their deliverance from Egypt! This pivotal moment in Israel’s history would never truly be forgotten, but they needed to keep from getting stuck in the past so they could embrace a new future.

Often, church leaders become unyielding; they want to cling to the “glory days” or stay comfortable with the current ways. We must fight this temptation at TCOTW, as we follow God into the promised land together. If we don’t, an older generation will be left in the desert while the younger one steps into its promise.

We don’t want to be like a soccer team that no longer wins because it’s not open to new players or discoveries about how to play the game better; we want to learn to win together.

TCOTW’s survival requires younger leaders to step up. But this isn’t an ominous problem; it’s a fantastic opportunity for relationship, discipleship, and partnership, leading to ownership across the generations.

Keep reading, and you’ll see what I mean.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

Considering the soccer analogy, where would you currently place yourself on the team: Rookie, Veteran, Coach, or some combination?

How old were you when you first volunteered at church?

How old were you when you started to lead in any capacity?

Engagement:

What's our cursive? What things might we be doing at TCOTW that prioritize a tradition that makes it difficult for younger generations to understand our message?

What behaviors or attitudes would demonstrate that someone is leading relationally instead of transactionally?

Can you identify one or two responsibilities of your team or aspects of your role at TCOTW that sometimes seem transactional?

How can you make them more relational?

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Why do you think rising generations may be less interested in becoming leaders in the church than they used to be?

Activation:

Take a moment to pray for future generations at TCOTW. Ask the Lord what your role is in preparation for what's ahead and ask God to help us walk in obedience as we look forward to what He has in store.

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The Principle Of The Fourth Generation

One of my favorite books in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy.

And I may have just lost you!

Believe me, I understand how *most* folks feel about Deuteronomy.

At the beginning of the year, if people commit to reading the entire Bible, they usually fly through Genesis, struggle through the second part of Exodus, have loads of questions about Leviticus, skim through some of the census and ceremony in Numbers, and *finally* give up somewhere early in Deuteronomy.

In other words, Deuteronomy may single-handedly be responsible for a lack of Bible reading in our time!!!

I may as well have told you my favorite Old Testament book is Job.

But the reason I love Deuteronomy so much isn't because of the long list of laws or instructions or battles or food restrictions (though, who *doesn't* appreciate the rule against cooking a young goat in its mother's milk?).¹ No, I love Deuteronomy because it was written by a leader, Moses, who was preparing a rising generation for a journey to a place he

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had a vision for, but that he and his generation had never been to and wouldn't be able to go.

It's a book that's all about planning now for God's purposes in the future.

The Bible is *full* of situations, songs, and stories about the responsibility an older generation carries to plan for a future they won't see as they consider the rising generations. For instance, the Psalms repeatedly call God's people to make choices today that impact future generations tomorrow. Here's one great example among many:

"He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands" (Psalm 78:5-7).

The psalmist is writing about *the children* of the generation *yet to be born*.

There is us, then our children (who *have* been born), then their children (who have *yet* to be born), and then *their* children (who are a distant consideration).

Do you see that? Four generations! God's people are being called to do whatever they can to ensure that after they are gone, as far as four generations into the future, people will trust in God, not forget His deeds, and keep His commands.

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Or how about this one? Psalm 102:18 says, “Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.”

This Psalm was explicitly written so that a person born *in the future* could sing it.

Those are just two examples of many Psalms that urge consideration and concern for future generations.

But back to Deuteronomy! In chapter 6, the rising generation to whom this book is written is admonished to teach *their* children the ways of the Lord so that “their children after them” will know the Lord. That’s four generations: Moses to Joshua, Joshua to his children, and his children to *their* children, who have yet to be born.

Now, skip to Jeremiah, to the verse many Christians claim to be their favorite. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” You may have that memorized, embroidered on a pillow, framed under glass, or tattooed on your wrist (I’m not judging), but maybe you aren’t aware of the context. Jeremiah is prophesying to God’s people in Babylonian exile about a miraculous deliverance that *will* take place... *70 years later!* If you were an adult hearing those “encouraging” words, it was highly likely you would *never* personally experience the fulfillment of that prophecy. In fact, those who heard it firsthand were called to settle down, plant gardens, have kids, and encourage *them* to have kids, because it was *those* grandkids in the third and fourth generations who would inherit the promise.

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Now, let's move on to the New Testament.

Jesus was considering a post-resurrection future when He chose His 12 young disciples. He invited them to serve alongside Him so they would know how to extend His message and ministry to those future generations Jesus wouldn't be physically present to disciple. Later, in 1 Peter 5:1-2, one of the original disciples, Peter, writes to leaders who are discipling younger Christians. So, we can trace the progression: Jesus to Peter, Peter to the elders, and finally the elders to the flock under their care. Four generations! Finally, Paul writes to Timothy, his young ministry partner who he has appointed as the pastor/bishop of the church at Ephesus, encouraging him: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). Once again, we have—you guessed it—four generations: Paul, to Timothy, to reliable people, and finally to others.

Are you starting to see a pattern?

Many people who live a long life will interact with the fourth generation. For instance, if you have children, you might be blessed to celebrate Christmas with your kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids, who are the fourth generation from you. God understands that dynamic and has built it into how we prepare for the future. It's important to note that the call to consider the fourth generation often comes not after they are here, but *before* they are born.

The examples I shared above are just a handful of scriptures that

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help us understand our sacred calling to create conditions that will strengthen our church, bless our city, and reach our world for *at least* the next four generations. And it's vital to grasp that each successive generation is responsible for considering the fourth generation beyond them. As we saw in the last chapter, one of the best ways to do that is to raise leaders who will raise leaders for future generations. Frankly, *that's* how TCOTW got to where we are today; someone long ago was preparing for what might happen even now.

A Brief History Of Rising Generation Leaders At The Church On The Way

The Van Nuys Foursquare Church was started in 1926, when the President of the Foursquare Church, Aimee Semple McPherson, was 35 years old. That year, McPherson sent a group of Bible college students to Van Nuys to conduct a tent revival and prayer meeting that would birth a church, and that church would have varying measures of success under multiple pastors for 43 years.

In 1969, 34-year-old Jack Hayford was teaching emerging leaders at the same Bible college that had sent the original students, and he was asked to become the pastor of the congregation, which by then had dwindled to less than a couple of dozen regular attendees. Soon after his arrival, the church experienced exponential growth in weekly attendance. In 1972, the Van Nuys Foursquare Church began to be called *The Church On The Way*, and over the next 30+ years, numerical growth,

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decisions for Christ, and global ministry impact continued to increase. During the season of God's grace in the 1970s, Pastor Jack was in his 30s and 40s, and many of the pastoral and support staff were in their 20s and 30s, while a good number of those being reached, disciplined, and called into ministry leadership were teenagers and twentysomethings. Today, all those ages (including Pastor Jack's) correspond to Gen Z and Millennials.

It's important to recognize that while the church was young and reaching the young, it also valued honoring older saints. One mark of Pastor Jack's ministry was the partnership with and submission to those with spiritual maturity, ministry experience, and godly wisdom.

By the 1970s and 1980s, TCOTW was well known for attracting rising generations and equipping them for ministry leadership. Many of these young people stepped into various volunteer and staff leadership roles in the church, and some were sent out to extend ministry all over the world.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as those younger leaders grew older, attention was given to engaging and equipping a new rising generation. Training took place formally through a church Bible college, informally through internships and staff positions, and practically by empowering young adults to either lead or assist in leading various ministries throughout the church. A culture of raising up leaders permeated the church, with many young ministry staff serving first as janitors and administrative assistants.

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One example is our current co-pastor, Doug Andersen. In 1984, when he was 21, he started as a janitor at TCOTW. Eighteen months later, he became an administrative assistant, and finally, at 27, he was appointed as one of the pastors at the church. And it wasn't just him. Many of our long-term staff and volunteer leaders, who are now in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s, started leading or serving here when they were young. They were invited into significant service and influence even before they were fully ready to lead.

Someone took a chance on them because, whether they knew it or not, they were preparing for TCOTW's future impact.

That preparation happened in 1926 when a 34-year-old denominational president sent Bible college students to start this church.

It happened in the 1950s and 1960s when a group of older believers gathered weekly to pray for revival among the youth and young adults in Los Angeles.

It happened in 1969 when a 36-year-old Pastor Jack would begin to embrace, equip, and empower what would become thousands of twenty- and thirtysomethings.

And it happened over the decades, as rising generations of leaders either attended and served at TCOTW or learned from it from afar.

Through all those eras, the groundwork was laid for what would happen at TCOTW today. They may not have known to articulate it this way, but they were preparing The Church On The Way for the fourth generation.

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So, the question I want to ask today is this: Are we laying the groundwork for the fourth generation from now?

God Has Always Called Young Leaders

In my early years, I was blessed to be part of a church that cared about and invested in its future by raising and releasing young leaders. A big reason why I'm still in ministry today is that when I was 18, and I sensed God was calling me into pastoral leadership, I attended Bible college and intentionally plugged into a vibrant local church near the college that actively cultivated young leaders.

That church happened to be The Church On The Way.

And yes, I was a janitor and assistant here for a hot minute, too.

At 21, I was a full-time assistant to the high school pastor, who happened to be Pastor Doug Andersen.

At 22, I was licensed with the Foursquare denomination and sent from TCOTW to be a youth pastor at a large church in Fresno.

At 28, I planted a church in Seattle.

At 30, I was assigned to be the lead pastor at an established church in Newberg, Oregon.

At 36, I was the dean of students and taught at Life Pacific College, the same (but by then, renamed) Bible college that had sent the original planting team—and Pastor Jack—to Van Nuys.

At 41, I accepted the invitation to become the supervisor of over 150 Foursquare Churches in Southern California.

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And those ages now correspond to Millennials and Gen Z.

This is my story, but not all people will track with these ages. Some will start their journey much later. The point is that I wasn't a unicorn. Many of my peers were also pursuing their path into ministry leadership. And in our denomination, these kinds of leadership assignments at those ages have been the norm since its beginning over 100 years ago.

God has been working with teens and twentysomethings for His purposes in ministry leadership throughout history. Consider the stories of Joseph, Joshua, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, the disciples, and Timothy, not to mention St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Billy Graham, Jack Hayford, and many more.

But while focusing on famous public figures is easy, we should remember that God has long appointed young people to more unseen volunteer church leadership positions. Whether known or unknown, God didn't appoint younger leaders because they were "fully cooked," but because the only way to prepare for the future is to cultivate leaders for that future now. Furthermore, God called and appointed them because the best way to reach young generations with the gospel is to equip young leaders who speak their language to reach them.

When I talk about my background and discuss how TCOTW and Foursquare (and the Bible and history) were once overflowing with young ministry leaders, one response I often hear is, "*Well, kids are different nowadays.*"

I agree that generational distinctions impact how teenagers and

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young adults respond to the world.² And that includes how and how fast they may engage in leadership in the church. But I'm also convinced that God does not look at our current context and say, *"Wow, those young people sure have changed; I'm going to need to wait a decade or two longer than I ever have before I call and appoint them to lead in my Church!"*

I believe God is calling those in their late teens, 20s, and 30s into ministry leadership and service today at the same rate He *always* has. It's just that we may have stopped cultivating and working effectively with those He calls, when He calls them. And in this respect of engaging and empowering young leaders, it seems the Church has fallen behind the culture.

While writing this book, I spent a couple of weeks in Washington, DC, which I discovered is a city overflowing with twentysomethings. As I met with Congressional staffers, toured the White House, and interacted with people on the streets, I noticed that I'd never seen a city so full of sharp young adults who seemed to be running the show. I know most of them aren't making the BIG decisions. While there are some "younger" political leaders (as I write, both the White House Press Secretary and the youngest Congressperson are 27, the youngest Senator is 37, and the Vice President is 40), most of the thousands of young adults in DC plan on leading in the future. And as they *prepare* to lead, they're given huge responsibilities as part of their development.

That got me thinking about the military, which is also full of twentysomethings. Again, I know the top brass is older, but it blows me away

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that some second lieutenants in their late teens can be responsible for leading up to 250 people in battle, and pilots in their early 20s are given \$350 million fighter jets to command.

Business organizations actively invest in and pursue young leaders because, by 2030, Gen Z is projected to be the largest generation in the US workforce, and nearly one in every three employees will be from Gen Z or Gen Alpha.³

Young leaders are also working in education. In 2024, about half of all new teachers in the US began teaching at 23 years old or younger.⁴

Given the need for energy, stamina, and strength, it's unsurprising that twentysomethings populate professional sports and that the average retirement age in some sports, like soccer, is 35.

Young adults also heavily influence entertainment and social media. Though we may believe that our culture has an unhealthy obsession with youth, the point is that millions of teens and twentysomethings *desire* to have influence and *a voice* (which are two essential parts of leadership) and will work hard to attain it.

It isn't easy to think of *any* sector in society that *isn't* actively pursuing, developing, and releasing young leaders. My takeaway is that young adults are still seeking and finding leadership roles throughout our nation, while the Church is either holding them back or scratching its head, wondering where all the young leaders might be.

I also want to point out that in most of these cases, there are inter-generational partnerships between younger and older people. This helps

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integrate both wisdom and energy so the organization or initiative can thrive now and in the future. Jesus set up His Church to operate this way. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit fell on the early Church, a foundational understanding of the Church was given. Peter preached, “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...’” (Acts 2:17). This expresses different generations (and genders) carrying out the prophetic purpose of the Church, together. And *together* is a very important word.

Every Generation Is Vital

TCOTW is not only supposed to embrace a multigenerational reality, with all living generations represented, but also an intergenerational one, with all generations working as a team for the good of the fourth generation from now. And we’ll have *more time* to address this task together, because life expectancies are increasing.

The authors of the book, *The 100-Year Life*, call us to consider what we’ll do with productive lives that will often last up to and beyond 100 years⁵. This means we can tap into the wisdom and experience of older generations and cultivate partnerships between them and younger ones. In fact, as lifespans extend, leaders could have decades of life between their retirement and their physical or mental decline. This time can be used for meaningful ministry and Kingdom contribution through inter-

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generational engagement and effort. How might this reality play out at TCOTW?

The Silent Generation (1928-1945) will grow in carrying a prayer burden and providing wise counsel, relational support, and spiritual encouragement.

Baby Boomers (1946-1964) will have more time on their hands as they retire, but they will still have the energy to lead actively in ministry. For many Boomers, instead of going on a permanent cruise or golf trip, this can be a fourth quarter of effective service and sacrifice to God and His eternal purposes.

Gen X (1965-1980) has a unique opportunity as they become the oldest “non-retired” generational cohort. They can shape a more collaborative culture, work hard to be a bridge between younger and older generations, and invite them all into partnership to prepare for what God wants to do in the future.

Millennials (1981-1996) are the largest generation in US history and *currently* represent the greatest share of the US and global workforce. If TCOTW were reflecting Los Angeles County demographics, Millennials would now be the largest generational cohort in our church. As

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they grow in leadership, they should always be encouraged to consider a future beyond themselves.

Gen Z (1997-2012) represents adolescents and those in the early stages of adulthood. These are the young adults I wrote about who are stepping into significant leadership roles in every other sector of society. Partnering with Gen Z includes teaching them to follow Jesus' ways and empowering them to contextualize those ways so their generation can encounter the gospel in a relatable manner.

Alphas (2013-2025) are the youngest active generation, and we find them in our kids' ministry and entering youth ministries. If we can shape a culture of true intergenerational leadership, we'll begin to invite *them* to serve across the church and will listen to their voices when considering how to reach our world.

The above generational definitions are widely accepted (within a couple of years), and they often have significant cultural differences. For instance, a generation raised on smartphones will have a different way of approaching the world than those who weren't, just like a generation raised in the depression carried its unique quirks (did *anyone else* have a financially secure grandma who saved McDonald's ketchup packets and washed and reused Ziplock bags?).

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Some of these differences have significant implications. Younger generations are dealing with anxiety and other mental health issues at levels never seen before. They also come from a culture with strong views and values on issues like climate change, economics, politics, gender, and sexuality.⁶ Understanding cultural differences between generations is essential for effectively engaging in incarnational ministry and for discipling and training rising leaders.

However, a generational industry wants us to believe that generation gaps are the *most* important thing.

Respectfully, I want to suggest that Jesus is the most important.

This is His Church; it's His Body, and He will build it. Though we will always seek to contextualize the gospel for current generations, we're not called to dismantle and then reinvent the church with every new cultural wave. Instead, we're called to work intergenerationally to prepare to impact future generations. If we do that, we'll belong to a church with a continual flow of rising leaders who intuitively grasp their cultural context, helping every generation reach the promised land.

In other words, we all have a joyful, biblical responsibility to develop leaders who will, in turn, develop leaders who will, in turn, develop leaders so that people in the fourth generation will encounter Jesus.

The question is, "How?"

How can we engage emerging leaders through relationship, discipleship, and partnership, leading to ownership at TCOTW?

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I'm glad you asked.

That's what the following four chapters are all about.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

What's your favorite book in the Old Testament and why?

What generation are you in?

What is one stereotype from your generation that you identify with?

What is one generational stereotype that you don't resonate with?

Engagement:

Think about your workplace; what is the age range for those in leadership?

Who invited you to lead or serve on a team?

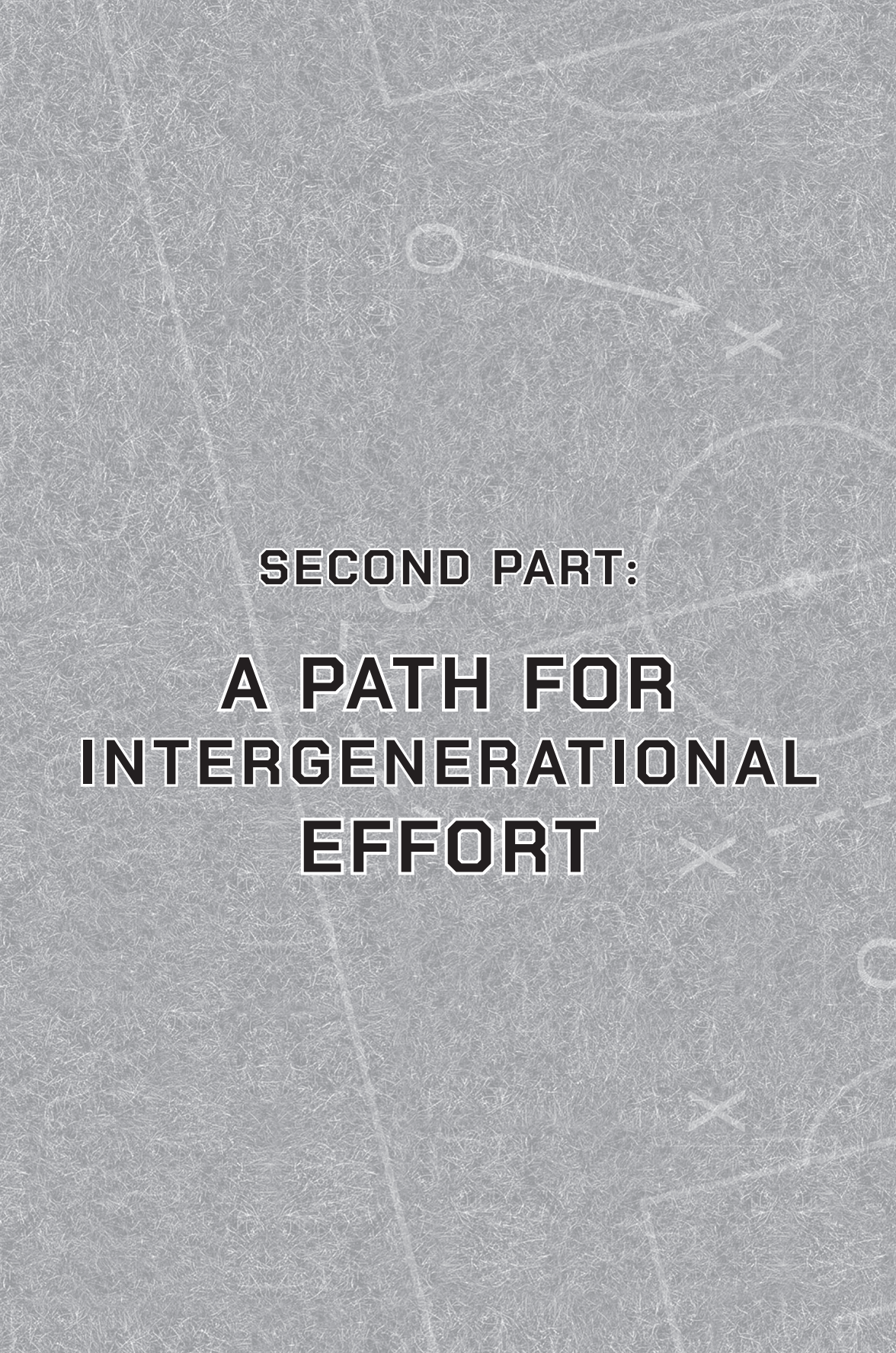
What was it about them that inspired you to take that step?

What is the difference between wanting young people to be involved in the church and changing the church culture so that they *want* to be involved?

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Activation:

Identify a specific person in a generation younger than you who you think could be a leader in the church and pray for them now and every day this week.

The background is a dark, textured grey with faint, light-grey tactical sketches. These sketches include various geometric shapes like circles, lines, and 'X' marks, some of which are connected by arrows, suggesting a strategic or military theme.

SECOND PART:

**A PATH FOR
INTERGENERATIONAL
EFFORT**

4 | Authentic relationship

Making Space For Rising Leaders

Let's take a quick journey through the Book of First Samuel.

In 1 Samuel 3, we meet Samuel as a young boy—a tabernacle servant who has never personally heard God but is woken up in the middle of the night by a voice. He had no reason to expect that voice would be the Lord's—Samuel was seen as an insignificant nobody serving the sons of Eli, who everybody thought were destined to become important priests.

After Samuel hears the voice, he wakes up the high priest Eli, who wisely turns Samuel's attention to the Lord instead of to himself, and he sends Samuel back to listen for God's voice. This was the beginning of a lifelong call to great Kingdom significance.

Fast-forward to 1 Samuel 16, when *Samuel* had become the predominant figure in Israel and was on a mission from God to anoint a king. He was looking for an obvious choice, but the Lord had something else in mind: A shepherd boy *so far* down the pecking order that even his own family had forgotten to invite him to the most important

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party they had ever hosted.

By chapter 23, King Saul knows that David will one day be the king of Israel. But instead of inviting him into a partnership to prepare him for this, he tries to kill him to prevent it.

I want us to focus on three people from that speedy overview: Eli, Samuel, and Saul.

God places people He intends to use in extraordinary ways throughout TCOTW, and we can respond *like Eli*, who made space for a young person lacking leadership credentials to hear the Lord and be called into significance...

Or like Samuel, who almost missed what God was doing because he was so distracted by his preconceptions...

Or like Saul, who actively tried to take out the threat that he saw in an anointed emerging leader.

In *this* respect, I want us to be like Eli, who represents those who welcome and create space for seemingly unqualified rising-generation leaders and urges them to grow closer to the Lord instead of ignoring or stopping them.

Over the following four chapters, we will imagine what it could look like to play together on an intergenerational leadership team, resulting in cultivating more rising leaders for the present and the future. I've identified four qualities for us to embody as we pursue inter-generational leadership emergence:

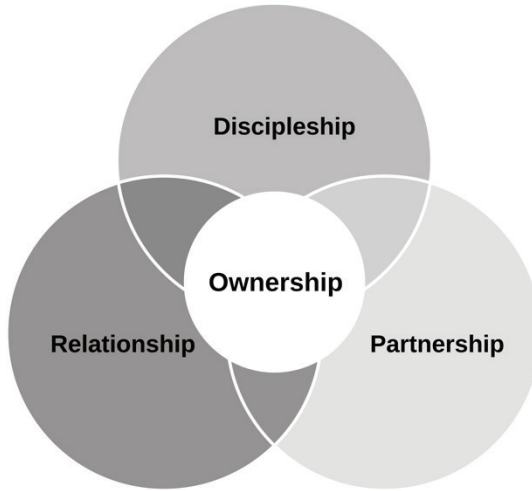
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1. **Relationship:** In Samuel's story, a young person is embraced personally before leadership gifts are identified. Recognition and release of those gifts occur because of an intergenerational relationship.
2. **Discipleship:** To disciple someone is to help them recognize the Lord's voice and learn to follow Him. When Eli sent Samuel back to God, this is what he was doing.
3. **Partnership:** During Eli's lifetime, Samuel grew up to be known as a prophet God spoke to (1 Samuel 3:19-21). This wouldn't have happened without Eli's partnership throughout Samuel's early years serving in the Tabernacle.
4. **Ownership:** Samuel would go on to lead Israel and appoint its first two kings. We see he embraced ownership for serving God's people when we read that "Samuel's word came to all Israel" (1 Samuel 4:1), even *while* Eli the High Priest was still alive. The people of Israel weren't just "Eli's job"; Samuel also had skin in the game.

Relationship, discipleship, and partnership construct three circles in a Venn Diagram, with ownership as the middle overlapping area when the other three are engaged. To prepare for the fourth generation, it's crucial that emerging generations join established leaders in feeling ownership at TCOTW.

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Qualities of Intergenerational Leadership Emergence



As I mentioned in Chapter One, although in this book we approach these four qualities separately, they should all occur concurrently as we work with emerging leaders. In other words, while building relationships, we're also disciplining, pointing rising leaders to the feet of Jesus, and we're seeking to work with emerging leaders to invite them into ministry partnerships. A sense of ownership isn't something a young leader *earns* when they graduate through the steps (or circles) above; it's something we seek to instill as soon as possible. But we're starting with relationships first, because personal connections are the cornerstone of ministry and life.

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Relationship Foundational to Leadership Emergence

Let's fast-forward about a thousand years, from Samuel to the Gospels. When Jesus selected and developed His disciples to carry on the work of the Church in the future, He didn't invite them into a class or program. He ate with them, traveled with them, spent time with them, and eventually called them friends. Yes, training, shaping, correction, and empowerment for ministry would all happen, but an authentic relationship was the cornerstone of the Church's future.

Like Teddy Roosevelt said, "People don't care how much you know unless they know how much you care." To start a real relationship with someone, you embrace them where they are; you don't wait for them to become what you want them to be.

I'm not suggesting those from a younger generation shouldn't also work on extending relationships to their elders. I know many emerging leaders who have requested mentoring from older leaders. However, the responsibility to welcome a rising generation into authentic relationships is *primarily* on older leaders.

The disciples didn't initiate a friendship with Jesus; it was the other way around.

Parents are responsible for making room for and providing resources for the children.

I first volunteered at a church when I was in 7th grade. The congregation I attended was about as large as TCOTW is now, and they *let me* run the platform lighting for the biggest service and record the

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sermon on large reel-to-reel tapes (yes, I'm that old). I appreciated being entrusted with the responsibility, but the ministry relationship was entirely transactional. I had a job to do, and I tried not to mess it up. I remember the task, but I can't recall who my leader was. After getting a five-minute crash course on the assignment, I had to figure out the rest and just show up every Sunday to do it.

It was like how I learned to swim—I got pushed into the deep end of the pool—or how I learned to drive—I was put in the driver's seat of a stick shift on a steep hill and told to figure it out.

Welcome to Generation X!

In that first church role, relationships didn't seem all that important. The task was everything. And in some ways, that's how many still do ministry.

I just don't think it works that well anymore.

But I'm not sure it ever did.

If you're running a relay race, you're handed a baton, and you run alone. In that case, the relationship may not be so important. But when you join a soccer team and show up for your first practice, the attitude of veteran players and coaches can make all the difference in your long-term success and satisfaction with the team.

I've seen books, articles, podcasts, and seminars, all promoting the fact that healthy workplace relationships positively impact employee morale, retention, productivity, innovation, and satisfaction.¹ In other words, they're suggesting that if you're looking for the secret sauce for

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an effective organization, you should focus on healthy relationships. That seems to be true, especially among emerging generations. They don't want to lead or live alone. They intuitively understand that humans aren't built for that, and they're looking for meaningful, authentic relationships.

As a 13-year-old Gen X “lighting guy,” I may not have had a relationship with my leaders, but my best friend and I worked together in the light booth at church every week. *That's* what made the job fun and kept me interested and committed. And frankly, I don't remember caring that the overseer left us alone. My generation wasn't necessarily looking for or expecting a relationship with our leaders, but rising generations today are.

Rising Generations Crave Relationships with Their Leaders

I recently read a book on intergenerational workplaces that claimed Gen Z, despite their reliance on technology, “values face-to-face communication and relationships. They want to work with people they like and respect, and they value mentorship and guidance from more experienced colleagues.”²

That's one quote from one book; other authors reach similar conclusions. When Millennials, Gen Z, and Alphas are asked about relationships, they often say they *want* to work on a team rather than alone, and they *want* older people in their lives.

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In other words, they'd rather be playing soccer than running a relay race.

And it all starts with authentic relationships.

I've noticed this openness and eagerness from younger congregants who want a real connection with older ones. They're looking for spiritual moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, and older brothers and sisters that many never had in their homes.

While this is important throughout the congregation, it's vital on our ministry teams, especially when working with potential leaders. At TCOTW, younger leaders have identified that our perceived preference for transactional programs over transformational relationships is one of the issues that creates roadblocks to their desire to be in leadership.

Transactional ministry occurs when a team member's contribution is the most important thing, and they don't feel personally invested in or considered. For example, if a volunteer or a leader in a transactional system misses a scheduled service, they are either not contacted or are asked not to forget again. But in a relational atmosphere, an absent team member may receive a phone call to ensure everything is okay and to let them know they were missed. Then, the next week, a leader follows up by asking them out to coffee just to check in.

Transactional ministry cares primarily about whether someone can do a job. A transformational relationship considers and invests in the whole person. Nobody, especially those in emerging generations, wants to feel their only value is what they can produce or contribute. They

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want to know they are cared about as a person.

Part of a soccer team's camaraderie can develop off the field. If you only attend practices and games, but don't develop personal connections with the other players and coaches, you'll miss the synergy and joy of healthy, positive relationships.

In November 2023, the World Health Organization declared loneliness a global public health concern.³ And the most extensive study on human flourishing in history tells us that the key to a thriving life comes down to the quality and quantity of our relationships.⁴ If we want our people and ministries to flourish in an age of heightened loneliness, we'll cultivate healthy relationships within our ministry teams. And it's the responsibility of established leaders to welcome potential leaders into those relationships.

But *that* can be scary! Generation gaps often feel insurmountable. We may feel like we have little to offer younger generations, and even less in common with them. Or, worse, we might sense that the next generation has no interest in a relationship with us!

In other words, we don't know where to start.

So, the question is, how *do* older leaders embrace potential young leaders?

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Three Attitudes That Will Start To Welcome Rising Generation Leaders

If you're a student of leadership, you may have heard Craig Groeschel's wildly popular leadership podcast. At the end of every episode, he says, "People would rather follow a leader who is always real than a leader who is always right." Real relationships are critical to the leadership teamwork that rising generations crave. I want to suggest three ways we can approach these kinds of intergenerational connections.

1. Humble Curiosity

The first trait I'll suggest that helps us cultivate intergenerational relationships is humble curiosity. The Apostle Peter writes to younger and older leaders serving intergenerationally: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:5).

Both young *and* old leaders are called to mutual humility. We intuitively grasp that younger people should humbly respect their elders. Still, it can be a powerful welcome into a relationship when an elder leader with positional authority shows humility toward a younger leader who has little or no power.

Edgar and Peter Schein write about this in the well-received business book, *Humble Leadership*. Their premise is that "leadership is always a relationship" and that effective leaders have humility that manifests in:

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- ◆ Openness to other people's perspectives...
- ◆ Better recognition of their own unconscious biases, and...
- ◆ Curiosity, especially during times of uncertainty.⁵

Another leadership expert, Margaret Wheatley, writes, "Humility is a brave act because we have to admit that we don't have the answers."⁶

There's a lot to unpack, but my biggest observation is that curiosity is critical to humility. That means even when we don't fully understand or agree with the approaches, life choices, or worldviews of people from generations different from our own, we maintain a humble curiosity about who they are, how they see the world, and why they embrace certain priorities, practices, points of view, or preferences.

I've heard it said that humility isn't thinking less of yourself, but it is thinking of yourself less. Humble curiosity doesn't require us to abandon what we stand for or believe in; it means we're called to listen and learn with openness, while fighting against our own biases as we create space for a relationship to incubate.

2. Gracious Hospitality

The second trait that helps older leaders extend relationships to younger ones is gracious hospitality.

Our Southern California culture is excellent at entertaining people, but not so great at hospitality. When we entertain someone, we're trying to impress them. At some level, we're putting on a show. To entertain a

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group at a dinner party may mean deep cleaning your home and bringing out your best china, which in the Clark house just means ceramic vs. paper plates!

There's nothing wrong with wanting to present your best side to guests, but the spirit of entertainment has infected our relationships. For instance, when TCOTW is looking for home group locations, we often have people turn us down because their place isn't nice enough, big enough, or they don't have enough resources to make the meeting *good* enough.

Hospitality is different. It's not about impressing people, but welcoming them into both your home *and* your heart. If entertainment is throwing a well-planned dinner party, hospitality is giving the young adult in your life a key to your apartment so they can crash on your couch and raid your refrigerator.

Even if you don't have your own home (some of you rent a room), you can have a hospitable heart for emerging leaders. Because entertainment puts on a show, but hospitality is what happens when a leader is real! Genuine relationships require hospitality. Transactional ministry might get the job done, but something special happens when we open our hearts and homes to one another. A hospitable welcome into a relationship can change a young leader's life.

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3. Unprejudiced Intentionality

The final trait I want to suggest that helps us approach intergenerational relationships is unprejudiced intentionality. This means we're so eager to find younger leaders or potential leaders and invite them into friendship that we're searching for them and not just waiting for them to come to us.

However, we must be careful to avoid Samuel's mistake of just looking in the usual places and at the usual suspects. Often, only the best and brightest are considered when identifying younger leaders. In his book, *A Work of Heart*, Reggie McNeal observes, "Personal charisma, motivational prowess, and marketing savvy rank near the top of those qualities that are rewarded... in ministry."⁷

That's nothing new; it's been this way for a long, long time.

King Saul was "handsome as a young man who could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else" (1 Samuel 9:2).

Daniel and his friends were fast-tracked into Babylonian leadership training because of their health, looks, and evident capacity (Daniel 1:3-5).

Esau was favored by his father not only because he was firstborn by a minute, but because he was bold, muscular, hairy, and could hunt up a storm! (Genesis 25)

It's not wrong to notice leadership qualities. However, in God's economy, leaders are often found in inconspicuous places.

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Seventeen-year-old Joseph was disdained by his older brothers, but by the age of thirty, he was well-positioned by God to oversee Egypt and save a large part of the world from famine.

Peter, who started as a young “unschooled, ordinary” fisherman, was given the keys to the Kingdom and would become a key leader in the rapidly expanding Church.

And I can’t imagine that young Samuel thought he would *ever* amount to anything. He didn’t have the pedigree to become a high priest and was essentially given up by his parents at three years old to be a permanent tabernacle servant. But because he and Eli had forged a relationship, Samuel was redirected toward God, who shaped him into a significant figure in Israel’s history.

I was a squirrely teenager who played in post-punk bands. I loved Jesus but lacked the inclination or talent to pursue pastoral ministry. The people I knew who served Jesus like that were good-looking, tall, had perfect hair, a deep voice, a fantastic speaking ability, and they dressed in nice clothes.

I had none of that.

I didn’t even know how to tie a tie.

I didn’t even *own* a tie!

However, I did have a relationship with older volunteer youth workers who took an interest in my friends and me. They invited us into their homes, took us out to lunch, visited us at our schools, let us

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run errands with them, and asked us to help with ministry tasks and projects.

And they weren't trying to clean me up, make me cut my hair, or stop playing my very loud, very aggressive music. They were humbly and nonjudgmentally curious about my life, they were hospitable in opening their homes and hearts to me, and they were hungry for a relationship that would help me become all God made me to be. By the time the Lord called me into vocational ministry, I still didn't think I had the goods to be a pastor, but I did have years of relationship with various leaders who spent time with me and gave me the confidence that perhaps God could use this imperfect vessel.

Often, initiating a relationship with a younger person who can't see themselves in leadership allows them to grasp that they might have the potential to become a leader. If you don't know where to start, look around at who God has put in your path. As a leader at TCTOW, you already influence others. Who are the younger people in your life you can embrace with humility, hospitality, and hunger?

TIME: A Practical Action That Will Start to Welcome Rising Generation Leaders

I often tell parents that the way you spell love with your kids is T.I.M.E.

Because if the most powerful four-letter word in the English language is L.O.V.E., then the most practical four-letter word is T.I.M.E.

There's also *another* powerful four-letter way to spell love: F.O.O.D.

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It might sound shallow compared to all the “real” ministry that needs to be done, but the best way to shape a potential leader is to live life—and eat food—with them. This was Jesus’ strategy. Yes, during the three years Jesus spent with His disciples, He had vital ministry to accomplish. They would watch Him minister, and minister with Him, and be taught and corrected, too.

But three times a day, they ate together, and they slept in the same homes. They laughed and talked together. And they traveled together—at a walking pace. (Don’t underestimate the power of slowing down to have deliberate, unhurried conversations with those you are leading.) Their relationship wasn’t just forged in ministry, it was formed through everyday life.

When I pastored a congregation in the small college town of Newberg, Oregon, every fall, we’d invite the hundreds of students who attended the church to be “adopted.” Families would host a small group of students for dinner at their houses and get to know them. Often, that would result in a four-year relationship where students far from home could get a home-cooked meal, have someone to call on in a crisis, or even do their laundry in a real house. Some of those relationships continued for decades.

That intergenerational church had the highest percentage of college-aged volunteers and leaders I’ve ever seen in *any* church. And more than a few of those volunteers ended up in full-time pastoral ministry.

I want to encourage us to make space in our lives for younger peo-

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ple, regardless of whether we think they might become leaders. This can be with those who serve with us on our teams or others God puts in our path. Let's invite them to eat with us, hang out with us, and let them know they are cared about. You don't know the plans God has for their lives, but you can be a part of encouraging those plans.

Before I knew I would become a pastor, I spent personal time with volunteer youth workers and my youth pastors. After I became a pastor, a couple of more mature leaders in my life took me into their homes. Literally. When I was a young, single youth pastor, Doug and Christa Andersen “adopted” me. I am 7 years younger than Doug, and 8 months younger than Christa, so I affectionately designated myself the younger brother they never wanted. They often had me over for dinner, let me crash at their house, and just hung out with me.

As a young married lead pastor, Dan and Connie Stewart, who were the pastors of a church in the next town over, invited Deborah and me, along with our infant son Caleb, to their house every Monday night. We would have dinner, watch a movie, hang out, and discuss ministry and life.

I can confidently say that I would *not* be the leader I am today without the personal influence of and relationships with the Andersens and the Stewarts. And although I need to do this better and more frequently, there are scores of younger people in ministry leadership today—both volunteer and vocational—whom Deborah and I have had in our house for meals, to watch TV, to babysit our kids, and, yes, to do

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their laundry.

You're probably not a pastor, and the younger people you invite into a relationship may never be, either. But who knows, when you connect relationally with someone from a rising generation, they may surprise themselves (and you) and step into a volunteer or vocational leadership role someday, too!

Let's be like a soccer team excited to include new players. We shouldn't limit our relationships to the game or to practice on the field, but we should seek to develop connections and camaraderie off the field, too. That will help us be a better team and will help us all flourish in life and ministry. Then, as relationships strengthen, we can teach each other how to play the game better. That's where discipleship comes in, and that's the subject of the next chapter.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

Which of the four qualities (Relationship, Discipleship, Partnership, Ownership) have you seen most evident at TCOTW?

Engagement:

Intergenerational connection requires humble curiosity, gracious hospitality, and unprejudiced intentionality. Which area do *you* excel in?

Which area do you hope to grow in?

Can you identify people in your life that God is calling you to be an “Eli” in their life, encouraging them to hear God’s voice?

Can you identify people who have been an “Eli” to you?

Let’s talk about some practical ways that you personally (or your teams) can help ensure that we are relational more than transactional.

Consider people you know from TCOTW who may not immediately seem like leaders. Is there someone in the background who you could see potential in? How could you encourage them to grow?

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Activation:

Who from a different generation can you contact this week to invite to coffee and begin to connect with? (For example, the person you prayed for in Chapter Three.)

What three questions would you ask them?

5 | Essential discipleship

Jesus Picks His Team

In His early 30s, Jesus attracted thousands of fans and followers of all ages. He invited twelve of them into a unique relationship and eventually appointed them as His apostles. These were the disciples He would spend the next three years with, as He prepared them to be sent throughout the world to manifest His supernatural ministry and message and establish the Church's foundation.

By most accounts, these twelve were in their twenties, and some were likely in their teens.¹ Jesus intentionally discovered and developed a select group of potential emerging leaders younger than He was. And when I say *potential* leaders, that may even be a stretch; from what we know about them, few, if any, would have been recognized or respected as leaders when Jesus invited them into a relationship.

Jesus knew He had work to do. But this wasn't His plan B. He deliberately called twelve unqualified, "unschooled, ordinary"² people that He would prepare for a ministry with a global impact and eternal implications.

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Jesus came to redeem the whole world and all of history. It was the most important assignment *anybody* had *ever* had. And what was His strategy for accomplishing it? He spent three years with a relatively small group of young emerging leaders. He mentored them and modeled healthy, effective ministry, equipping them for their God-given and God-sized purpose. Then, He sent them out to turn the world upside down.

Mentoring Relationships

When Bobby Clinton was alive, he was a world-renowned scholar at Fuller Seminary who researched and wrote about leadership emergence. He argued that mentoring relationships are the key to ministry growth.³ I agree. In over 35 years of serving the church, I've observed that most effective leadership development happens through intergenerational discipleship. Not only is it effective, but it's also biblical. Scripture has many examples and instructions about older leaders helping to shape younger ones.

- ◆ Moses mentored Joshua, who led Israel into the Promised Land.
- ◆ Elijah called Elisha to serve with him and then trained him to be his eventual successor.
- ◆ Judah's kings were supposed to teach their children the ways of the Lord so they would be prepared to lead. In fact, the Book of Proverbs was written to provide future kings and princes with the

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wisdom they would need as leaders.

- ◆ Titus, 1 Peter, and 1 John all have sections that call older believers and leaders to teach the younger ones.
- ◆ In 1 and 2 Timothy, an older leader, Paul, provides a younger leader, Timothy, with the tools and information he needs to lead well. This is after years of face-to-face mentoring.

There are many more examples of intergenerational discipleship in the Bible, but I want to end this list with one we've already noticed. The previous chapter started with the older priest Eli pointing the future young prophet Samuel back to God. Eli wasn't attempting to take God's place in Samuel's life, but was helping him elevate the Lord's voice above all others. That's the key to discipleship: helping others grow closer to the Lord and learn to hear and follow His voice.

It's not about shaping someone to look or act more like us.

It's not about getting people to do things the way we do them.

It's not even about expanding somebody's capacity to serve or lead.

As we consider how to disciple emerging leaders, we should realize that our *primary* goal isn't ministry competence, but intimacy with Jesus. Both are important. But one is paramount.

King David was chosen from an obscure place in the sheep pens because he was a "man after God's heart" (Acts 13:22). He had the core integrity and the building blocks to develop the skills to lead Israel (Psalms 78:72). However, he was chosen to be king *before* he'd expressed

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that skill or had the experience to do the job. He was chosen *because* he had an intimate relationship with God and had been faithful with what he had been given. He was selected after he'd already displayed the character that would support his skill development and that would help him carry out a much larger assignment in the future.⁴

Your primary role in developing emerging leaders isn't to teach skills that are necessary now or that may be valuable in the future. Usually, your most significant task in discipleship is leading others into a relationship with God that will sustain them through *any* assignment they might eventually be called to and in whatever skills they may need to learn.

Born Leaders vs. Built Leaders

Every leader that Jesus chooses is a work in progress. Like with the disciples, He doesn't call leaders who are already complete; He works with those who need shaping, restoration, and direction. I've often heard it said: "God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called."

But here's an important follow-up question: Does Jesus choose people who are wired for leadership from birth, or can anybody be shaped and equipped to be a leader? To be honest, I think it can sometimes be a little bit of both, but in my opinion, anyone can grow in their leadership abilities.

The Bible discusses the inborn gift of leadership that God permanently gives to some (Romans 12:8), but it also points to the Spiritual

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gift of leadership that any empowered believer can manifest (1 Corinthians 12:28). And it also tells us that anybody who *wants to be* a leader desires a good thing and can work on becoming one (1 Timothy 3:1).

Former Los Angeles Laker Elgin Baylor, who attended TCOTW for decades before his death, was inarguably one of the greatest professional basketball players of all time. Once, when I was talking to him about his career, he humbly but factually told me that he never had to practice as hard as others (or much at all), he ate pretty much what he wanted, and he didn't have access to the shoe technology basketball players enjoy today. And yet he still set records that have never been broken.

In other words, he'd won the DNA lottery and was *built* for basketball.

Compare him to another professional athlete I met. In 1999, when I was planting a church in Seattle, I helped lead a high school event where Jon Kitna, then the quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks, was a speaker. As he encouraged the group of football hopefuls, he shared that growing up, he wasn't as naturally talented as some of the other guys in his neighborhood, but he poured his life into practicing harder than anyone else to have the opportunity to play a game he loved.

In sports, success may sometimes come down to genetics, but in spiritual leadership, the hard work of character development is *always* vital. Sometimes, those who know they are leaders, the ones to whom preaching comes easily or who command a room upon entering it, don't

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feel the need to work as much on their character. And in every situation where I've seen that, a crash-and-burn was inevitable.

So, while some seem to be born leaders and others might not be as gifted with evident leadership qualities, all who desire to be leaders need to develop their integrity and character if their skills are going to be useful for the long haul. And whether someone presents as a born leader or as one who must work hard at it, our call is to disciple leaders younger than us *wherever* they're starting from.

Enter Leadership Emergence Theory

Bobby Clinton, the leadership expert I referenced earlier, taught that leaders *aren't* born, but are called and shaped. Though he recognized differences in natural talent, he denied that leadership is reserved for the "best and brightest," and he claimed that God could use anyone for His leadership purposes.

Clinton's most significant contribution to the leadership field was his widely acclaimed Leadership Emergence Theory, developed after studying hundreds of biblical, historical, and contemporary leaders. His premise suggested that God develops spiritual leaders through a multi-stage process of personal growth, spiritual formation, and important experiences.⁵ He found that the early stages of a leader's growth principally deal with their character development. While The Lord is also using and refining their gifts and abilities, "God is working primarily in the leader, not through them... God is quietly evaluating their lead-

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ership potential. He wants to teach us that we minister out of who and what we are.”⁶ Then, later stages of leadership development build on the character God previously established as ministry competencies and impact grows. (If you want to read more about these stages, go to the endnotes, or better yet, pick up a copy of Clinton’s book.)⁷

There’s much to learn from this study; however, one important observation about leadership emergence in the church is that those in one stage of development have the responsibility to influence and disciple those in the stages following them. In other words, an older person who has proven character and ministry effectiveness can shape a younger person in their first leadership experience, but even *that* young leader can help to encourage someone even younger than them who hasn’t started to lead, but in whom God is doing early foundational character work.

If ministry leadership is like soccer, early development is critical to later success.

One of my kids was on a soccer team when they were five. If you’ve ever been to a 5-year-old’s soccer game, you know that it’s just a clump of children chasing the ball or running away from it, with no actual knowledge of the game. But as the young athletes mature, and if they stick with it year after year, they will come to learn the specific skills a high school, college, or even professional team may need.

But in those early years, a player is mostly just getting comfortable with the game, and skill isn’t *nearly* as important as growing in character

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traits like teamwork, sportsmanship, and listening to the coach. Notably, in very young teams, an assistant coach (a “youth trainer”) may be a middle school or high school student still learning the game’s nuances themselves.

You might be reading all this and thinking, “Hey, I barely know how to lead my small group or ministry team, how can I possibly be instrumental in discipling and shaping the next generation of leaders at TCOTW?”

I get it. That thought may seem overwhelming!

But it’s less intimidating when we realize that discipling emerging leaders isn’t about some complex program or academic curriculum; it mostly means we help them learn to prioritize growing deep with the Lord, so they have the foundational relationship with God that will support them through *any* ministry assignment that He may give them. Our *most* important job with a potential or rising leader is to help direct their attention and intention back to Jesus.

How do we do that best?

We keep the foundations in mind.

Back To Basics

Excelling at a sport doesn’t just happen. Whether you’re Elgin Baylor (basketball), Jon Kitna (football), or Roy Kent (soccer), you learn and rehearse the basics over and over, even after it becomes second nature.

There’s a great story about how John Wooden greeted his bas-

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ketball team every year. If you don't know who John Wooden is, you need to get out more (I'm just kidding... sort of). Wooden coached the UCLA men's basketball team from 1948 to 1975. He won 10 NCAA titles in the last 12 years of coaching, and his 88-game win streak from 1971 to 1974 is a record that still hasn't been broken. Players who went on to become NBA superstars played for Coach Wooden at UCLA. When they arrived at his practice for the first time, these kids had played basketball all their lives and were the best of the best on their High School teams.

So, the players thought it was ridiculous that Coach Wooden started the first practice of every year by teaching them how to put on their socks and shoes.

What follows is a long quote, but every word is worth reading; it's what Wooden said about why he was so interested in the basics.

"I think it's the little things that really count. The first thing I would show our players at our first meeting was how to take a little extra time putting on their shoes and socks properly. The most important part of your equipment is your shoes and socks. You play on a hard floor. So, you must have shoes that fit right. And you must not permit your socks to have wrinkles around the little toe—where you generally get blisters—or around the heels. It took just a few minutes, but I did show my players how I wanted them to do it. Hold up the sock, work it around the little toe area and the heel

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area so that there are no wrinkles. Smooth it out good. Then hold the sock up while you put the shoe on. And the shoe must be spread apart—not just pulled on the top laces. You tighten it up snugly by each eyelet. Then you tie it. And then you double-tie it so it won't come undone—because I don't want shoes coming untied during practice or during the game. I don't want that to happen. I'm sure that once I started teaching that many years ago, it did cut down on blisters. It definitely helped. But that's just a little detail that coaches must take advantage of because it's the little details that make the big things come about.”⁸

While an emerging leader is building ministry competency, we help lay a spiritual foundation. What does someone's prayer life look like? What and how do they learn from Scripture? Are they being challenged to listen and respond to God, whether He speaks in a shout *or a* whisper? It's these “little details that make the big things come about,” and I'm convinced that as volunteer and staff leaders in the church, our *most important role* in developing emerging leaders is to ensure they have the basics of their spiritual life down before and as they move on to grow in the specific skills needed for whatever unique assignments God may call them to.

Working The Angles: A Heart After God

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson was well known for his writing

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about spiritual and ministry leadership. In his book, *Working the Angles*, he suggests a triangle with each angle representing a non-negotiable aspect of ministry: *Prayer*, *Scripture*, and *Spiritual Direction*.⁹ I contend that those three tasks represent the “putting on your socks” of ministry leadership.

Leaders will need to learn multiple ministry-specific skills in their various assignments. But our primary job in discipleship isn't to teach them *every* skill they will need; perhaps we won't teach them *any* of the skills they'll need. Instead, it's to help them, like David, grow in the deep and abiding relationship with God that provides the foundation for *whatever* role God may call them to in the future. These three angles provide a healthy foundation.

1. Prayer

I think the most important thing we can teach rising leaders in the church to do is to pray. Sadly, training in ministry today often starts and ends with teaching organizational or leadership skills. And while those can be valuable tools, they are useless in spiritual leadership if there isn't foundational intimacy with God.¹⁰

Jesus told His disciples, who He was about to send out to change the world, that nothing fruitful would happen through their lives or ministries unless they remained in Him and He in them (John 15). And prayer is the secret to that kind of abiding relationship with Jesus.

There are many kinds of prayer: intercession, supplication, lament,

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praise, thanksgiving, silent prayers, loud prayers, contemplative prayers, and celebrative prayers. Worship is also an essential form of prayer. But every expression of prayer helps us approach, listen to, and surrender to God. Men and women who have a great spiritual impact are always people of great prayer. Perhaps you don't feel qualified to teach another person to pray. If you have a weak prayer life, be encouraged that every leader, including me, who seeks to be strong at prayer, has fought with—and still fights with—feelings of inadequacy.

Whether you think you are qualified as a prayer warrior or not, part of discipleship is walking alongside a rising leader and learning how to approach the throne of grace together. Those prayers don't need to be long, formal, or in King James English (unless you naturally talk that way, in which case I would love to hear you). No, our prayers should be simple, childlike prayers that connect your heart to the heart of Father God.

As we work with emerging leaders, we can model a life of prayer. We can take every opportunity to stop and pray about personal issues. We can talk about the successes and struggles of our own prayer lives. And we must make prayer foundational for the ministries we lead.

2. Scripture

When he was appointed leader of Israel, God told Joshua, “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be

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prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8).

Deuteronomy 17 lays out conditions for the kings who would rule God’s people. One of their sacred duties was to copy the law in their own handwriting and read it daily for the rest of their lives so that they would be constantly reminded that leadership is primarily about fearing God and following His ways.¹¹

Jesus told the Jewish leaders that correctly understanding Scripture would lead them to true life in Him (John 5:39).

And Paul writes to the young leader Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible is God’s Word and our foundation for faith. As people who believe in the supernatural life of the Holy Spirit, we must never forget that the Bible is a supernatural book. Every spiritual impression, ministry decision, and life choice must be measured and aligned with its words and intent and with the character of God revealed in its pages. Scripture is the authority for both the ministry and the minister. Throughout Scripture, there are requirements and admonitions for leaders of God’s people, and we don’t make people leaders who aren’t committed to surrendering to God’s words and ways.

I know church leaders (including some pastors) who spend very little time with the Bible. They may study it to prepare for teaching, but they aren’t immersed in the life of Scripture. Their ministries aren’t

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marked by biblical foundations, but by human strategies.

If that's you, don't be discouraged. But let me encourage you to make the Bible your foundation for leadership and life. I had a spotty Bible reading pattern in my early years, even as a volunteer leader and a paid youth pastor. I was one of those leaders who mostly read the Bible to prepare for teaching. But in my mid-twenties, God challenged me to read every word of the Bible every year, so He could shape a biblical imagination in me and through my leadership. My goal now is not only to read all the words of the Bible every year, but also to have at least one insight from the Word of God every day that will shape my life and ministry. I don't always meet that goal, but when I do, prophetic moments often happen simply because I've been open to hearing the Lord through His Word in the morning and ended up having a conversation in the afternoon that fit perfectly with what I heard.

As we work with emerging leaders, let's commit to being exposed to God's Word regularly and let's seek to share what we hear with them. Then, let's encourage the leaders we're discipling to grow in reading and applying the Word of God, too.

3. Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is a way to help others learn to notice God's presence, voice, and activity in their everyday lives, and it includes *us* paying attention to those things in their lives, as well. Some people are professionally certified to hold the title of *Spiritual Director*, and they help in valuable

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ways. However, I'm not talking about the formal assignment here; I'm talking about the kind of spiritual discernment that we're all called to engage in, whether we're trained spiritual directors or not.

This is about paying attention to the Spirit's work in ourselves, in others, and in our ministry context. I call it *prophetic listening*. It involves helping our friends discern what God might be saying or doing in them. For instance, if an emerging leader tells you that they're struggling with a relationship problem, do you solve it for them or ask them how they've surrendered that relationship to Jesus or His Word?

Or if they're facing a crisis that you *know* how to fix, do you tell them what to do, or first ask what the Lord may be teaching them at this moment, and then silently wait for them to respond?

Or perhaps there's a big challenge in the ministry you're leading together. Do you simply put on your leadership hat and forge your way forward, or do you stop and bring it before the Lord with them, listening for possible solutions the Spirit may bring that aren't immediately evident to your human thinking?

When we provide leadership at church, we need to remember that we're not primarily *program* directors, there just to organize or administer, but that we're first *spiritual* directors. And when we're discipling emerging leaders, we want to help them understand that about their assignment, as well.

As Pentecostals, we also follow a spiritual direction that includes reliance on and desperation for the supernatural life of the Holy Spirit.

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The rising leaders we're working with should be invited to deepen their growth in the fruit of the Spirit and widen their expression of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, as well.

Growing in Prayer (which includes worship), the Word, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit are vital to an emerging leader's growth. And it isn't a matter of choosing one over the others; each is indispensable. You can't have a triangle without three angles, and like a solid three-legged stool, this triangle provides a spiritual foundation for all future ministry activity a rising leader will encounter.

Curiosity Over Certainty

Remember, we're not simply training emerging leaders how to do ministry, though that *will* happen as we develop teams and leaders. But when we prioritize training over discipleship, we'll contribute to one of the roadblocks to leadership that younger people have identified at TCOTW as "*certainty over curiosity*."

Our focus should be getting them to Jesus, letting Jesus transform them, and teaching them to respond as godly leaders instead of transactionally training them to lead the church or ministry programs the way we like. Because discipleship at its best isn't about ensuring a lock-step approach to ministry, it's about keeping an emerging leader pointed back to Jesus to find the answers. Instead of being certain about every situation, we need to stay curious about what the Lord may be doing or saying, and encourage that curiosity in those we are discipling, as well.

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And one of the best ways to do that is to embrace the idea that effective discipleship goes two ways. Unless you're Jesus (and last time I checked, you aren't), you have something to learn from a rising leader. A humble, curious, and teachable spirit is encouraging to them, but it's also necessary for you.

When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said: "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Romans 1:11-12). He starts from the perspective of a disciple-maker: "I'm going to impart something to make you strong." But he quickly turns the corner, recognizing *he* needed something from *them*, too. When we point rising leaders to Jesus, and they point us that way, too, it's encouraging to everybody, and it will change all our lives.

If a veteran soccer player thinks they have mastered the game without needing ongoing improvement, they'll miss discoveries and approaches that younger players may have learned. And if a player reaches a point where they can no longer grow, it's very likely past time to remove them from the team.

There have been countless times when, in a conversation with a younger disciple, they said something that I hadn't thought of, or they said something I'd thought of long ago but had forgotten, or they challenged my thinking, or they spoke a prophetic word to me, and they didn't even know it. It strengthens an emerging leader to hear that they encouraged me or said something that made me reconsider a position or

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even change my mind. For them to see that I'm still learning to surrender my life to Jesus and that *they* can help me do so gives them confidence that they can lead *others* in that way, too.

Because when it comes to interpersonal discipleship, if you aren't willing to learn from another person, you probably won't have much of a voice or influence in their life, either. This kind of discipleship requires humble leadership from an older leader. It also requires relational time, which is best engaged in one-on-one or small group settings that lean towards questions, conversation, and prayer over certainty, curriculum, and program.

It doesn't mean that we can't be involved in role-specific development. Some emerging leaders will need to learn to preach, administer, organize, or provide care, and if you have that gift or assignment, you can contribute to someone else's growth in those areas. But regardless of your gift or assignment, your contribution is critical to helping others grow closer to Jesus through prayer, the Word, and the Spirit—the most important things emerging ministry leaders have to learn.

Because while some ministry skill development may come from formal learning, most discipleship comes from working together on a team. When you have a relationship with a rising leader and a voice that points them back to Jesus, there's a greater opportunity for ministry partnership.

And that's what the next chapter is all about.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

Can you remember a time you asked for help from someone from a younger generation?

How did that make you feel?

How do you think that impacted them?

Engagement:

Do your conversations with team members have more to do with organizational issues or their spiritual thriving?

In what ways (other than organized classes or ministry tasks) can you encourage your team members to practice the basics of their spiritual walk?

How can we balance giving direction and advice with asking younger leaders to talk about how they process their challenges before the Lord and to provide space for them to find solutions?

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Activation:

If the primary goal isn't ministry competence but intimacy with Jesus, how could that impact your next ministry team meeting or guide your next conversation with team members younger than you? Get specific.



Intergenerational Partnership— God’s Design for Ministry

After their deliverance from Egypt and before their deployment into the Promised Land, God gave specific instructions to His people about ministry operations that would last for over 1,500 years. As part of the plan, those from the priestly tribe of Levi who served at the Tabernacle were required to retire at the age of 50.¹

I’m 57. Most days, I still feel like I have something important to contribute. But occasionally, I envy my friends who joined the military at 18 and are now collecting retirement while entering their second “cushy” careers.

This priestly maximum retirement age was for those who did the heavy lifting in the temple. They set up and tore down the Tabernacle (which was the *original* portable church), performed the sacrifices, killed the animals, and grilled the meat. They also cleaned up after all the mess. This was backbreaking labor, more like a combination of a modern-day contractor, janitor, butcher, and line cook than a current

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religious professional. And the work had to be done: Every. Single. Day.

After retirement, they were encouraged to return to give advice or to assist the younger Levites, though the strenuous work was no longer their daily responsibility.

I've talked to pastors who were contemplating retirement at 50, pointing to this Old Testament priestly instruction. The problem is that the *High Priest* had no cutoff age. The High Priest's job involved praying, teaching, and leading—more like a pastor's job today. They didn't stop working at age 50 but continued until death (so much for my dream of an early retirement!). However, the High Priest actively partnered with his sons in this priestly duty. They were to do the work together. This ensured the job was done, but it *also* helped the younger leaders learn what was necessary for the assignment, as someday one of them would take over.

So, whether you were a Levite inviting the counsel and contribution of older generations in your Tabernacle duties or a High Priest partnering with your sons to teach them sacred responsibilities, inter-generational partnership was built into how God mandated the service of worship and ministry leadership.

Then, when God clothed Himself with humanity in the person of Jesus, He partnered with His younger disciples in ministry, too. He didn't just call them to follow, watch, and learn until they were ready to be sent; from the beginning, He invited them to be with Him (relationship) and to prepare them (discipleship) to preach, heal people, and cast

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out demons (partnership).² All three took place concurrently as Jesus did ministry *with* His disciples. All three should happen concurrently at TCOTW, too. Partnership isn't the final step in a continuum before ownership, but it's part of the ingredient mix that creates a world-class meal.

Paul understood the power of partnership as well. Throughout his life, he forged friendships and co-labored with young and old leaders alike. He served alongside people like Barnabas, Silas, and Luke, but one of his most famous and enduring partnerships was with Timothy, who was generations younger than he was.³

In a relay race, partnership is vital for a few seconds during the transition—once the handoff is secure, the partnership is successful. But on a soccer team, partnership is constantly necessary because teamwork, in this case, IS what makes the dream work. If each player isn't a fully empowered partner, they'll be unable to make decisions that help score goals when the ball comes to them.

Teamwork, especially *intergenerational* teamwork, is critical in God's economy.

Proverbs tells us, "The glory of the young is their strength, the grey hair of experience is the splendor of the old" (Proverbs 20:29, NLT). This proverb was written by King Solomon, who was instructing his sons, one of whom would someday become king. He seems to be telling them (and us) that older people bring experience, often accompanied by wisdom, to the table, and younger people contribute energy, stamina,

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and strength.

In my twenties, thirties, and forties, I read nearly every book and tried almost every trick available to improve my time management. These days, in my mid-fifties, I'm becoming more concerned with *energy management*.

Without the wisdom that comes from experience, our ship may be fast, but it will sink. Without the strength and energy of youth, our ship may be stable, but it won't get far. A church with only younger leaders will have passion, but may lack the necessary wisdom. A church full of only older leaders might have a mature perspective, but will often not be able to take new ground or move forward courageously. True intergenerational partnerships embrace different contributions that are essential for accomplishing God's work.

As the old African proverb says: *If you want to run fast, run alone; if you want to run far, run together*; I contend that this especially applies to intergenerational teams.

Partnerships Are Necessary to Grow Ministry Leaders

One of the Bible's most effective and successful intergenerational partnerships was between Moses and Joshua. I could write all day about this dynamic duo⁴ because there's extensive and remarkable leadership emergence through teamwork expressed here. But let's just review the CliffsNotes⁵: In Numbers 11, Joshua is described as Moses' personal assistant from his youth. Maybe that was his first job, a minimum-wage

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position. More than likely, he was a volunteer.

Later, we find him on Mt. Sinai, waiting forty days while Moses receives the law. Then, he's at the tent of meeting, where Moses speaks with God. We also see him leading the battle against the Amalekites and spying out the Promised Land.

He keeps popping up throughout Moses' story, foreshadowing his rise as the eventual leader of Israel. But if you read between the lines, you notice that Joshua was a servant to Moses as a young aide in the beginning. Over time, however, Moses increased Joshua's responsibility as part of the *training program* that shaped him to lead God's people.

I don't know how long it took Moses to realize he was training Joshua to be the next leader of God's people, but I don't believe he knew it from the beginning. My assumption is based on my experience working with emerging leaders; I've found that I can never quite determine what their future holds. Some who I think are wired for greatness turn out to have solid but quiet ministries, while others who seem to be two-talent leaders go on to make a significant impact.

Though Moses may not have known from the beginning that he was shaping the next leader of Israel, a major key to Joshua's development was his partnership with Moses, who increasingly empowered Joshua to lead under his authority. In ministry, the best way to grow in leadership skills is through on-the-job experience, and partnering with a more experienced leader is key to that growth. As a college pastor, a dean at a Bible college, a denominational supervisor, and a lead pas-

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tor with a heart for young adults, I've had ample opportunity to engage hopeful leaders preparing for ministry. I've regularly talked with Bible college or seminary students who want a church job, or who would like to be recommended for one.

In such cases, I *always* ask two questions: First, "Where did you serve while you were in school?" and second, "Who did you serve under while you were in training?" Often, their answer is something like this: "Well, I was learning about ministry and theology in class, but I didn't have time to serve at (or often even go to) a church."

Now, I'm not looking for a resume full of "important" leadership positions or for them to have been mentored by a lead pastor or paid staff member.⁶ I'm asking whether they helped clean the church, hold babies, park cars, assist in a small group, or help run an outreach. I'm also questioning whether they experienced any intergenerational mentorship or partnership along the way.

Because effective ministry leadership development and growth often happen *just in time*, not always *just in case*. *Just-in-time* learning happens when you must understand it right then. *Just-in-case* learning focuses on understanding as much as possible in case a situation arises.

I took high school French *just in case* I ever wanted to go to Paris. The funny thing is, I've been to Paris three times and I've never used any of what I learned, except to ask where the bathroom is and to tell people, in French, that I don't speak French (oh, and I can ask what time it is, too, but strangely, that's never come up).

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However, as a newly appointed youth pastor, I learned to play the guitar *just in time* to lead worship. I quickly learned three chords, which enabled me to lead most worship songs at the time. That was enough until I wanted to lead a song with an F# chord, and then I had to ask someone else how to play that one.

I'm *not* arguing against just-in-case learning. It's an unquestionable and necessary developmental step for ministry leadership. My point is that until a person has engaged in practical ministry, all learning *about* ministry is at best theoretical. If you spend years in school studying soccer *just in case* you ever get to play, but you've never played the game with others, no team will ever recruit you. Though you know everything there is to know about the beautiful game, you don't *really* know it until you've played it with a team.

What's Required from Older Leaders?

You don't need to be a Moses-level leader, a pastor, or even a paid staff member to help raise emerging leaders through partnership. In fact, I'm 100% convinced that if you're a healthy leader at *any level* at TCOTW, even if you've never had any formal training, your partnership with an emerging leader can often teach them more about spiritual leadership and ministry than Bible college or seminary ever would.

And I know that's a loaded statement, so let me unpack it.

Let's say you oversee the first service nursery.⁷ And let's also imagine you're a young adult working with some high school or middle

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school students who will eventually serve the church as leaders; only they—or you—don't know it yet. In fact, maybe one of them will someday be the senior pastor. There are things you're doing with them now that will establish foundations they will always use in ministry. For instance, how you model and release them to care for babies and interact with parents. Or how you help them understand the importance of showing up when they're scheduled. Or your gentle reminder for them to pray about the challenges they face. Or the questions you ask about what they're learning in the Bible. Or your interest and curiosity in their lives. Or your ability to listen to their ideas and dreams about ministry, and your willingness to sponsor those dreams or put them into practice. Or your rock-solid belief in God's purposes in their lives, even when they mess up. Or the hospitality that exists when you take them to coffee or invite them to a gathering at your home.

Those are just a few examples.

I hope you get the point!

Those kinds of things aren't always included in a leadership lesson, and if they are, they may not be remembered. Much (maybe most?) of what's essential in ministry leadership is taught *while* it's happening—*just in time*.

Or, as someone once said, much more about ministry leadership is caught than taught. And those things that *are* caught will often influence a rising leader's life and future ministry more than what they can learn in school.

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Besides, *most* lay church leaders won't experience formal biblical or ministry education anyway. Those few volunteer leaders who *are* called to vocational ministry will go to Bible college, seminary, or another form of "basic training" to learn necessary information and skills. Still, even then, formal training itself *never* produces a spiritual leader.

Like I said earlier, a person can learn everything there is to know about soccer, but until they've learned the game through the actual interplay of teamwork, they don't truly understand the sport. But sometimes, formal training and leadership lessons are *easier* than teamwork. Because teamwork contains the word "work" for a reason.

Partnership with emerging leaders requires *the work of a relationship*, where we truly hear and consider a rising leader's perspective.

Partnership with a rising generation also involves *the work of discipleship*, where we always lead them back to the basics of being with Jesus.

Partnership, especially intergenerational partnership, is *just hard work*. It requires sacrifice and sharing. It provides space and grace to try and fail. And it has the other person's back, trusting their heart and assuming the best, even when you don't always understand or agree with their actions.

Intergenerational partnerships based on relationships and discipleship can be challenging. However, these partnerships are essential for inviting emerging generations to take ownership. In his book on intergenerational workplaces, Tim Elmore claims that "the younger the generation, the more important relationship building becomes. [They are]

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swimming in information but longing for relationships with leaders and teammates. They've experienced plenty of programs, products, promotions, and pop-ups. What they want is something personal.”⁸

Let me add another P-word: They are craving *partnerships*.

A ministry team is a great place to provide a context for relationship, discipleship, and partnership. If leaders can cultivate a less hierarchical, more collaborative approach for their teams and small groups, rising generations may feel more welcome to step into leadership. However, while the older partner might have more responsibility, a partnership isn't a one-way street. The dictionary defines a partner as “either of a pair of people engaged together in the same activity,” which indicates that both parties are working to contribute something to the task or relationship. In Chapter Four, we considered the relational responsibilities an older generation has to a younger one. Now, let's explore what to look for in a rising generation when we open the door for partnership.

What's Required from Younger Leaders?

Three primary requirements for rising leaders who desire to be empowered in partnership are *hunger for the Lord, humility in leadership, and honesty with themselves and with others*.

1. Hunger

Exodus 33 tells us how Moses often spent time speaking face-to-face with the Lord at the tent of meeting. The whole community would

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watch in awe from a distance as the cloud of God's presence descended on the tent, but nobody wanted to draw near themselves.

Except for one person.

Exodus 33:11 says that after meeting God, "Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent." Joshua stuck around *longer* than Moses. Though he wasn't allowed *in* the tent to experience God's glory face-to-face, he wanted to be as close as possible, for as long as possible, to pick up any residual impact from the Lord's presence.

I think *that's* where the anointing for his future leadership of Israel happened. Like David, who would receive the call to be king after he'd privately established himself as a man after God's heart,⁹ Joshua showed himself hungry for God while he was still Moses' "young aide."¹⁰

Hunger is evident when an emerging leader presses in, and when...

- ◆ It's clear she desperately wants to know God.
- ◆ He embraces prayer, Bible reading, and the life of the Spirit.
- ◆ She is hungry to hang out where the Lord's presence is.
- ◆ He is drawn to where the people of the Lord are.

There's an old metaphor for emerging leaders: "You can tame a wild horse, but you can't resurrect a dead one." While this metaphor is usually applied to the energy and passion of a young leader, it also works well for an emerging leader's spiritual life. Spiritual fervor and focus

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are internal to a person who will grow to be a leader. While you can introduce them to God's presence, you can't create a passion in them. To use another equine analogy, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink. Talk to any anointed leader about their early years, and I think you'll find a pattern of pressing in and a personal hunger for Jesus, and the people, and things of the Lord.

2. Humility

I also believe all church leaders must be humble. We addressed the humility needed from older leaders, but if emerging leaders are prideful and unteachable, they will disqualify themselves from ministry before it even starts.

Leaders without humility can fall into the pattern of Satan, who pridefully sought to take for himself what was only God's.¹¹ Paul warns Timothy to make sure new leaders don't fall into this prideful trap.¹² I believe humility is the most crucial character quality for someone who wants to be in leadership. It doesn't mean they're doormats or unwilling to stand up for what they know is right, but it does mean they have a basic grasp of the fear of God and will never consider themselves more important than anyone else, regardless of their gifting, their role, or their resources.

I'm not suggesting that a person who still needs to grow in humility is morally disqualified from leadership, because then, none of us could lead. That's something that *can be* developed. However, a produc-

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tive partnership will be limited until there is a correctable spirit, a curious posture, and a repentant heart.

3. Honesty

The third responsibility of a rising leader who wants to be available for partnership is integrity. I'm using the word honesty in the place of integrity because it fits, and because I needed another alliterative H-word.

How's *that* for honesty?

Integrity is essentially honesty before the Lord, with other people, and within yourself. It doesn't mean a person is perfect—again, if so, none of us would be leaders. However, it does indicate that someone isn't living a maliciously divided life, but operates with a repentant attitude that always wants to please the Lord and serve His people.

Honesty in a leader includes a regular self-assessment before the Word. Daily devotions should never be simply about mining Scripture so one can teach someone else, but about looking for the “you are here” dot and gazing in the mirror of the Word that helps a person grow in freedom and effectiveness (as we see in James 1:22-25).

Integrity also includes accountability to others. While a leader doesn't need to air their dirty laundry in front of everyone, *nothing* should be hidden from *someone* in a leader's life. Rising leaders must have some people they are transparent to; a policy of “no hidden secrets” should be a principle in a leader's life.

To be trusted, a rising leader needs to embody the basic character

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traits of hunger, humility, and honesty. But we can't wait until they've fully perfected their leadership skills or even their character before inviting them to start to partner with us, because it's often in partnerships that the most growth happens.

What Do We Do Together?

When we talk about intergenerational partnerships, we aren't referring to the more specific definition of a business partnership, in which co-owners share equal access and authority, risk and reward, resources, and recognition. (Though we'll discuss that a bit in the next chapter.)

However, as we partner, engaging in tasks, activities, and leadership together, we should also work towards an equality that invites rising generations into increasingly higher levels of ownership. So, how *do* we take a brand-new leader or potential leader and help them grow toward full partnership and, eventually, ownership? There's a leadership development trope that suggests the steps of shaping someone in ministry. They include:

First, *I do, you watch*: This is an observation season in which a potential leader observes how something is done.

Second, *I do, you help*: Here, a rising leader assists the established leader in a ministry or a particular task.

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Third, *you do, I help*: The emerging leader is given a ministry or task that an established leader assists with.

Fourth, *you do, I watch*: The new leader is empowered to do the task, and the former leader is there to observe, but not help.

Fifth, *you do, someone else watches*: Full ownership of the task is released, and a new observation cycle begins.

While I think this is a good pattern, it's missing something important. Somewhere in the middle of that list, maybe third, or even possibly throughout the process, I would add in big, bold letters, "WE DO IT TOGETHER!"

I can't stress it enough: Collaborative partnerships that empower rising leaders toward ministry authority are critical to a leader's emergence. With that in mind, I want to suggest that at TCOTW, we should actively seek every opportunity to create collaborative partnerships between established and emerging leaders and to extend shared authority *as early as possible*. Ministry was never intended to be a solo sport. We want to see collaboration and co-leadership throughout the church. And healthy ministry partnerships are beautiful. When people with diverse gifts and lives work together to serve a common purpose, we amplify the impact of God's love and mission in the world.

Often, the leadership partnerships happen within a specific gener-

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ation. It's natural for groups of peers to want to serve and lead together; it helps them share the load, it deepens relational connections, and it creates a synergy of different contributions. And it's biblical! We should encourage and release collaborative team ministry *among* peers.

Because partnerships are *always* powerful.

But I also want us to press in further. I'm convinced that the best position we can put ourselves in for the fourth generation will be to feel ownership at TCOTW by ensuring that every area in our church is working towards *intergenerational* partnership.

And when I say every area, I mean it. Though we shouldn't artificially require every ministry team and/or small group to have intergenerational leadership partnerships, we should always ask whether they do, and how they can do so. Wouldn't it be fantastic if intergenerational leadership partnership and even full co-leadership were evident not only in youth and children's ministry, as they are now, but also in our small groups, guest services, the worship arts team, security, local outreaches, global missions, finance, media, community life, the church council, and more?

The question you *should be* asking at this point is, "What exactly does leadership partnership look like in the ministry I lead?"

I can think of a couple of things to start with.

First, we must address one of the roadblocks that younger leaders suggested exists at TCOTW: Excellence over experimentation. Established leaders must resist the urge to invite only "done" people into

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leadership partnerships. They must also be willing to loosely define programs, processes, and even priorities while remaining open to exploring new ways of leading and doing ministry that better suit rising generations.

Second, we must assess how to make our teams and leadership styles more attractive to younger leaders. You may have been leading your team or small group the same way for years and feel it's working, but it might be helpful to gather a group of younger people to get their honest input about roadblocks from your group or team that might keep them from wanting to lead.

There is much more I could say about what it will take to increase partnerships in the specific ministries you lead. Since this book is written for *all* the leaders at TCOTW, and I can't discuss every unique scenario, I'll leave the answers to be discovered through conversation.

So, if you're reading this and you're not part of a small group discussing it, I urge you to reach out to one of your leaders and use the questions below as a launching point to discuss how to activate productive partnerships in your ministry context. When you do, you'll set the table to invite rising generation leaders into shared ownership at The Church On The Way—which we'll address in the final chapter.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

What are some roles you have served in, and leaders you have served under, that helped prepare you for leadership?

Engagement:

When was a time when you were given space to try and fail, or when you were given space to try, and you succeeded?

If ministry is often more “caught” than “taught,” what are some specific things you’re currently doing with people younger than you that will help establish foundations they can always use in ministry?

Are you currently engaged in any collaborative leadership relationships in your teams? Describe them and how you got to this point.

Are there places where you are hesitant to engage in the mess of training new leaders and helping them grow?

What attitudes or beliefs might prevent you from inviting others to partner with you?

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Activation:

What task or responsibility at TCOTW are you currently carrying alone?

Who from a younger generation can you invite to partner with you?

Can you do it this week?

7 | Shared ownership

A New Thing

Shortly after Jesus invited His first disciples to follow Him, they were at a party with a bunch of tax collectors and other sinners.¹ The teachers of the law were, of course, offended, and they confronted the disciples.

“Why do you guys and your teacher act so worldly?”

Jesus overheard the complaint and answered that He didn’t come to heal those who thought they were healthy, but to heal those who knew they were sick.

His response led these established religious leaders to a follow-up question; essentially, they asked: “The future religious leaders who are learning under John the Baptist and the Pharisees are known for their pious actions, like fasting. Why don’t the leaders *you’re* developing act like that?”

Jesus’ full answer doesn’t diminish fasting, but it does recognize something about how God raises new leaders for new seasons. Part of His response includes a parable: “No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new

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garment, and the patch from the new one will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better'" (Luke 5:36-39).

A parable is a picture or story that helps us understand something about the Kingdom of God. John's disciples, the Pharisees' disciples, and Jesus' disciples (the subject of the conversation) were all potential or emerging religious leaders. As Jesus discusses how God will use emerging leaders in His Kingdom, He paints the picture of new and old wine, and new and old wineskins. Those who understand and appreciate wine say that old wine is better than new wine. But for there to be mature wine in the future, there needs to be fresh wine today. Jesus wasn't criticizing the old, established ways (at least the ones that aligned with God's intentions); He *was* saying that new ways were necessary to reach sick and broken people.

Most churches *say* they want to reach their world and thrive in the future, but many get stuck in the comfortable ways of life and ministry they've been engaging in for decades. They are like mature wineskins that contain great wine. And although Jesus doesn't judge them for being seasoned, He does say that old structures, systems, and strategies can't contain the new things He's planning to do.

There are two solutions to this: The first is to be a "new wine-

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skin” kind of church made to contain new wine. I believe this is like new churches and ministries led by rising generations who are freshly embracing God’s new work. The Church On The Way will always launch and support new works that will reach new people with the gospel.

However, there’s a second solution, and though it’s more difficult than creating a new wineskin, it has a beautiful redemptive aspect.

An old wineskin can be renewed to contain new wine.

Renewing a wineskin is like reconditioning a baseball glove. If you’ve ever owned a nice leather glove but have kept it in storage too long, you’ve seen what also happens to an old, empty wineskin. In the same way that a glove gets cracked and dry and isn’t flexible enough to catch or hold a ball right, an old, cracked wineskin isn’t soft or flexible enough to contain the new wine that’s still fermenting and expanding.

Both a glove *and* a wineskin are renewed the same way; it requires a period of uncomfortable agitation. The glove needs to be folded and bent, worked over repeatedly to make it pliable again and restore its flexibility. And all that takes plenty of conditioning oil; a person must “anoint” their baseball glove or wineskin for it to become renewed.

The parallels to church life are evident. For an established congregation to become ready for the “new wine” of the Spirit and to be prepared to reach and heal broken people who are far from God, the church must embrace a period of agitation and even pain that comes with change, it needs to work to become flexible again, and it has to allow the oil of the Spirit to soften it up.

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The Church On The Way is grateful for what the Lord has done in the past, and nobody would look at the new things God is doing now and declare it “better” than what God did here in the final decades of the 20th Century. But we must constantly seek to renew our structure to receive the fresh wine that will mature with time. And we need to do this before the life God gave us in the past runs out. Otherwise, we’ll become a dry, cracked vessel, unsuitable for God’s future work.

A few years ago, a strong prophetic word was given to TCOTW from Isaiah 43:18-19: “Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

When Israel was given that prophetic word nearly 3,000 years ago, God was referencing their deliverance from Egypt as the former thing. But that event is still the defining moment of Jewish history. God *couldn’t have* been literally commanding them to forget it.

He was urging them not to get stuck there!

We’ll always remember, celebrate, and be grateful for the amazing things God has done at TCOTW in the past, but we also need to move forward, because He still has more awesome things planned.

The new thing will include reaching broken and hurting people in a rapidly changing culture.

The new thing positions the church to reach the fourth generation yet to come.

The new thing requires equipping and empowering rising leaders

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to reach *their* generation now.

And if we genuinely believe this is a word to our church, that He's doing something new, we will partner with Him to prepare for it.

I'll repeat it: Old structures, strategies, and systems *cannot* contain the new thing God is preparing to do. One of the roadblocks current younger leaders at TCOTW indicated kept other young people from wanting to be leaders was inflexible ministry models and styles, or "The Church On The Way, Way." Sometimes, we get too stuck hanging onto practices, methods, approaches, and philosophies that may have served us well in the past, but don't welcome rising leaders or make space for their voices.

Imagine a soccer team that's won many championships. Banners all over its stadium indicate the years it was at the top. But after decades of using the same playbook, the team's management develops a new strategy. This doesn't mean the old one didn't work well at one time, but it does mean there are fresh realities to consider in a new era with younger players. Though the adjustment might be difficult for those who were used to an old approach to the game, if the team can come together to make the changes, they'll have a fresh direction that will help them win games.

If we expect God to lead us into a new season of fruitfulness to the fourth generation, we must be ready to do things differently.

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Setting The Table for Rising Leaders

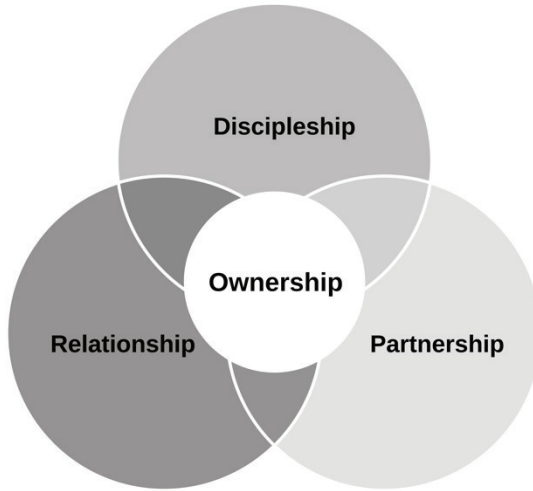
Throughout this book, I've presented the three overlapping circles of a Venn Diagram that build towards intergenerational ownership.

- ◆ Relationships are foundational because healthy leadership rises and falls on authentic relationships.
- ◆ Discipleship is essential because leaders in the church must have an abiding connection with Jesus.
- ◆ Partnership is consequential because, to cultivate young leaders, we need to work alongside them as they practice leadership.

There aren't boundaries between these tasks. You don't master relationships before you can move on to discipleship and then graduate from discipleship before you can engage in partnership. Each stage overlaps and blends with the others at the same time, and when all three are combined, we open the door to true shared **ownership**.

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Qualities of Intergenerational Leadership Emergence



But the word “ownership” needs to be explained. The Church On The Way does not belong to any person or group; it’s God’s church. When we talk about ownership, we aren’t referring to possession. The term *our church* doesn’t indicate that we think we own it, but that it’s the church we’re a part of. If I joined a soccer club, I’d refer to the group of people I play with as “my” team, even though I don’t own it. Calling it *our church* indicates I feel buy-in, I belong to it, and it’s not somebody else’s thing I connect with, but that I’m an integral part of it.

Jesus regularly talks about those who are good stewards of God’s property. Those who lead a church are simply servants and stewards of Jesus’ purposes in and through His body. That’s what I mean by ownership. Far too often, a rising generation sees the church they attend as

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belonging to their parents or grandparents. I think God is calling us to something more generationally integrated. I believe God wants a rising generation to feel that TCOTW is *their* church and *their* stewardship responsibility, too. But for that to happen, older leaders will need to create space and invite rising leaders to the adult table.

When I was growing up, my immediate family traveled to large extended family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas. There were way too many people at the main meal to fit around one table, so there was usually an adult table and a kids' table. I remember one year, as the oldest grandchild, I was invited to sit at the adult table because one of the grown-ups couldn't make it. But at the next gathering, I got demoted. And I stayed at that kids' table for way longer than I should have because there was no room at the big one. Then, when I was finally invited to move "back up," I didn't want to go. I'd been having far too much fun with my cousins for years to want to "graduate" to what I had discovered was the boring side of the room.

In Acts 15, the established elders and apostles had to decide: Would they stay in their religious comfort zone and insist that an emerging church follow their traditions and preferences? Or would they empower a new generation of believers from different cultures to find fresh, new ways of following Jesus?

Key to that decision were Paul and Barnabas. These Jewish men had worked closely with the Gentiles, who represented a radically different but vibrant approach to faith. They were the relational bridge

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between emerging Gentile leaders and established Jewish leaders. But ironically, many of those established Jewish leaders in the church were the same disciples who, at the beginning of the chapter you are reading now, represented the new wine, contradicting the traditions of the Pharisees and teachers of the law by eating and drinking with sinners.

The new wine had become old wine, and the old wineskins of Jewish tradition from which the church emerged couldn't contain the fresh work of the Spirit now taking place among the Gentiles. Fortunately, the elders and apostles in Jerusalem realized that their comfort zones were no match for what God was doing on the earth, and they joyfully opened the doors for the new work of the Spirit.

It can be challenging to set aside our preferences and principles, but to encourage a rising generation to carry the work of the church into a new culture and emerging future, we must be culturally flexible in our approach. However, notice that there *were* a handful of things the established leaders *weren't* flexible about. It's important to have clarity on what the few non-negotiables are, so we can be adaptable about everything else.

To put all this another way, we're called to release emerging leaders to pursue a prophetic vision for their generation. To do that, church leaders at TCOTW must cultivate an environment that invites them to lead in the church. But to *truly* lead, they'll need the freedom to express faith, life, and leadership with biblically sound approaches that *may* rattle our cages.

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Acts 15 is a story about the Church agreeing that new leaders can lead in new ways, but we should recognize that the decision to release emerging leaders with the freedom to lead was made *without* emerging leaders at the table. It was great that Paul and Barnabas represented the hearts and desires of the Gentile believers, and this is instructive for us. We who support and sponsor rising leaders *will* need to advocate for them at decision-making tables throughout the church. But wouldn't it have been better if some of the Gentiles had a seat at that table?²

We can represent a rising generation with our passion and vision, but we should also invite them to the decision-making table to help them feel like owners. Because if we wait until *we're* finished leading the church for them to embrace ownership, it will be too late. By then, many will not *want* to sit at the big table because they will see it as boring and irrelevant.

They'll start their own "new wineskin" thing with their peers.

And eventually, *our* wine will run out, and our wineskin won't be fit for the new thing God is doing.

But if we find space to welcome them to the church's most important tables, their contribution will be helpful to us, and it will also encourage them to remember that this is their church, too.

Intergenerational Ownership Requires Equality

We recognized in the previous chapter that a partnership is when two people participate in an activity together. With a partnership, there can

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still be, and often needs to be, a difference in authority. Ownership is a different story. When multiple owners exist, there may be diverse roles and functions, but there is common access and authority.

During the times of the kings in the Old Testament, there was a unique leadership structure. The cultures around Israel had an absolute monarch who was considered a god. But God's people were not to have *that* kind of leader. The king did have great power, but he was part of a three-part structure that included a prophet and a high priest.

The prophet, priest, and king each carried part of the weight of leadership for the community. Each had a unique role that the other was not allowed to carry. And often, each was from a different generation.

There were times when the king was young, the high priest was middle-aged, and the prophet was old. Or, if you changed the titles and ages, there were multiple possibilities of combinations of age and role. The point is that each of these empowered leaders held a part of the "ownership" of Israel's destiny and they were rarely all from the same generation.

Similar realities exist in the New Testament. In Acts 2, at the birth of the Church, it was declared that young and old would be integrated into its prophetic fabric. So, when Paul writes that each member of the Body of Christ carries an important function and that no member or function is more important than another, he is implicitly saying that every generation is invited to the kind of ownership we're talking about.

More explicitly, when he writes to Timothy, who's been assigned

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as pastor and bishop over the church in Ephesus, Paul instructs him to appoint, correct, and remove elders in the church. He also gives him this instruction: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers...” (1 Timothy 4:12).

How young *was* Timothy? We don’t know. What we do know is that he was so young that some of the church would have dismissed him because of his age, and we also know he was young enough to be leading people much older than he was.³

Age isn’t a precondition for God to appoint a person to important work and anoint them with significant leadership authority.⁴ In the Old Testament, some examples include:

Joseph, who was the Prime Minister of Egypt by the time he was 30.

David, who was in his teens when He fought Goliath and 30 when he was anointed King of Judah.

Kings like Solomon (installed at 20), Uzziah (installed at 16), and Josiah (installed at 8).

The prophet Jeremiah, who was called from birth and appointed as a prophet when he was “only a youth”⁵—probably 17.

And Daniel, who was in his early 20s when he interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and was subsequently appointed as “ruler over the entire province of Babylon.”⁶

But although many young leaders embraced ownership in the Old Testament, the office of elder was reserved for men who were at least

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old enough to have a full beard—the word for *elder* is closely connected to the word for *beard*. That was generally understood to have been about 30 years old.⁷ This is probably one reason Jesus’ ministry started at age 30: He wouldn’t have been respected as a teacher before then.

This dynamic changed in the Early Church, however, and the requirement for an eldership role was no longer limited to age, but to character and calling. For instance, age is not listed among the eldership qualifications in 1 Timothy 3, but Paul *could have* made it a requirement for elders since later, in Chapter 5, he clearly considered a minimum age (60) as a condition for the “position” of church widow.

At TCOTW, we should have many leaders (team leaders, deacons, elders, and pastors) who have a Jeremiah 1 calling while they are “only a child” and whom we must constantly be reminding, “not to let anyone look down on you because you are young.” This doesn’t mean we appoint young people as elders (or pastors, deacons, or team leaders) without deep consideration. 1 Timothy 5 may not give an age qualification about elders, but it does warn us not to “appoint people to church leadership positions too hastily.”⁸ There are minimum character qualifications required for eldership or any other kind of church leadership, but we should always be looking for a David who had already displayed the required character, reflected in “a heart after God” and the experience of protecting his sheep when he was anointed as a teenager to be king over Israel. This reality is a *key* to elevating any leader, young or old.

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The Keys To the TCOTW Car

Speaking of keys, that's one of the metaphors people often use when discussing generational ownership in church. I've heard these exact words: "We need to give a rising generation the keys to the TCOTW "car" and let them drive it."

I agree with the sentiment, but there is one huge caveat. We shouldn't be talking about just throwing the keys to those not ready to drive. It would have been foolish to hand my keys to my 13-year-old son when he asked me one day if he could drive. (I *think* he was kidding.) I wanted to make sure he was ready to drive at the right time. All my kids got their permits at 16 or 17, but, unfortunately, didn't get their licenses until well after their 18th birthday; there were years of languishing in the in-between (their choice, not mine).

Sometimes, church leaders hand over the keys too early, but most often they hold onto them for too long. Instead of seeing generational leadership emergence as adding a driver to the household as soon as possible, they treat it like putting their car in the will to be handed over after they are gone.

We want to work with emerging leaders, give them the keys to TCOTW, and let them drive *as soon* as it's possible and appropriate. But part of getting them ready is driving *with* them. When my daughter was 13, we let her drive down the half-mile-long gravel road to her grandparents' house in Oregon. There's rarely anyone on that road, and you must drive very slowly. So, when we visited my wife's parents every

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summer, our daughter looked forward to driving with us in the minivan.

The partnership (us driving with her) that was dependent on discipleship (our presence and instructions) and based on a healthy relationship has given way to ownership, as she now has her license and is driving on her own.

Living In the Future Today

I've been a huge Pixar animation fan since *Toy Story 1*. I've seen every Pixar movie, I've toured Pixar's studio, and I've even met some of the writers and directors.

Cars is one of my favorite Pixar intellectual properties. In the movie *Cars 3*, the middle-aged racecar Lightning McQueen trains the young Cruz Ramirez, but he also struggles with self-doubt as he competes against younger, faster cars like Jackson Storm. At one point, while feeling the sting of his aging and loss of speed, Lightning realizes that although he has trained Cruz well technically, she lacks the confidence to race independently. So, Lightning helps her unlock her unique racing style, embracing her strengths rather than trying to make her a carbon copy of him.

Ultimately, Lightning sees that mentoring Cruz isn't just about teaching her how to race—it's about sharing the wisdom he's gained over his career and finding new purpose in his journey, even if it's no longer about winning races himself. This moment marks his transformation from a self-centered racecar to a wise mentor, realizing his legacy

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can live into the future through the success of Cruz and other young racecars.

Everything we do must be with an eye to the future, because God's promises aren't always received in our lifetimes.

In Jeremiah 29:11, most of those listening would never see the prophetic promise fulfilled; only those in the third and fourth generations would.

When God delivered His people from Egypt, the Promised Land wouldn't be accessed until the next generation.

David had a vision to build a glorious temple for God, but he had to prepare his son to complete it. And then hand it off.

Hebrews 11 tells us that people with faith make plans for a future they won't see, and then it goes on to give example after example of faithful men and women of God who never got to taste the fruit of their faith.⁹

I want to be a person and a church that's full of Hebrews 11 kind of faith!

The Church On The Way raised young adults in the 1980s and 1990s who are now elders and leaders at the church today. Opening the door to ownership of emerging generations will extend the church's ministry into the future. Sometimes, those leaders won't stay at TCOTW but will be sent out to lead other churches and ministries into *their* futures. Either way, God's Kingdom, Church, and mission are served.

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Conclusion

After spending three years in deep relationships, constant discipleship, and significant partnerships with His disciples, Jesus told them He was going away. But He also promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide and empower them.

A few weeks later, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, the Spirit of God fell on them all. Twelve young leaders, freshly empowered for ministry, started shepherding a church that instantly grew past 3,000 and quickly multiplied to many times that number. In their teens and twenties, those who had recently emerged as leaders now “owned” the leadership of the global Church.

And this ownership was extended beyond borders and cultures to men and women, slave and free, married and single, Jew and Gentile...

Young and old!

The Church On The Way *needs* older leaders. We’re eager for the wisdom and maturity that comes through life experience. The *splendor of a church* is found in its grey hair.

But we need younger leaders, too. Not just *younger than old*, but truly young leaders from every generation, filled with the Spirit and called to influence others to make a difference.

Because the *glory* of a *church* is found in its young people’s strength.

We’re not an old person’s church or a young person’s church. Every generation is called to embrace ownership at The Church On The Way. So, every generation should have leaders or those who are developing as

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leaders, finding significant places of influence and authority as soon as possible here.

And when the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials are gone—when the fourth yet-to-be-named generation from now is in leadership, I hope we will have modeled intergenerational ownership so well that they will continue to practice it.

In a relay race, you “own” the baton only while running with it. Before and after, you cheer on the person carrying it. There is only one “generation” of owner at a time.

But in a soccer game, we’re all playing together, and the whole team owns the win or loss that happens on the field. In that case, we either celebrate together or we learn as a team how to do better next time.

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Questions For Reflection, Discussion, and Action:

Icebreaker:

If you're a younger leader, are there areas where you have been welcomed to the table?

Are there places where you feel your voice may be restricted or unwelcome?

If you are an older leader, can you remember a time when you were younger, and your voice was not welcomed? How did that impact you?

Engagement:

Are there tables at our church still reserved for the older generations?

If so, what are they, and how could they be adjusted to welcome all generations?

Which generational voices are missing from your current team?

List some practical ways in your team or ministry to make space for younger leaders "at the table."

What traditions or practices currently exist at TCOTW that could inhibit intergenerational partnerships and prevent younger generations from experiencing ownership?

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What aspects of “cultural flexibility” embraced by generations younger than yours make you uncomfortable?

Activation:

After reading this book, what one or two action steps do you feel inspired to take?

What actions can you take this week to inspire potential young leaders to join in the leadership journey at TCOTW?

Epilogue: A hope and a future

WE MAY LOOK AROUND AT A BROKEN CULTURE today and question how God can redeem it. It's possible that when we picture the future, all we see is darkness. But God wants to give us a vision full of His light.

He hasn't given up on people.

He never has.

He always has a strategy to redeem them.

In the middle of the most broken situation and darkest culture they had ever encountered, God's people heard these words: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

That's *still* God's heart for His people today. And like those who originally heard those words, the full manifestation of that hope will be in the future, as God uses rising generations to fulfill His vision for restoration.

When Jack Hayford was the pastor at The Church On The Way, he wrote that a church experiences revival when "teenagers and colle-

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gians [are] stirred to high and lofty ideals and lifelong commitments with deep and noble purpose.”¹

When I first read those words, I agreed with Pastor Jack. I still do. I continue to contend for revival at and through TCOTW. And like Pastor Jack, I believe revival requires a rising generation that fully surrenders to God’s purposes for their lives.

The Church On The Way will experience revival when we effectively call rising generations to a lifelong, deep, and noble purpose of leading the church into its future promise. And I’m convinced we don’t have to wait to engage that calling; we can begin activating that process today.

I have great hope for the future of the Global Church. As I write, there’s a growing hunger for Jesus among Millennials, Gen Z, and the Alpha Generation². They’re finding and following Jesus in significant numbers, and they want to change the world in His Name. Tens of thousands of rising leaders will need to be cultivated to shepherd this great move of God.

I also have great hope for the future of our church, The Church On The Way. While I’m unsure of what kind of leadership programs may come and go, I’m also confident that our reality will change as we get a passionate vision for intergenerational partnerships. Because while it’s true that rising generations need to be welcomed into leadership, it’s also true that every generation shares the privilege of welcoming them.

Perhaps you’re from the Silent Generation, a Baby Boomer, a Gen

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Xer, a Millennial, Gen Z, or an Alpha. Or maybe you're reading this down the road and are from one of the "future" generations we're considering as I write this.

Regardless, we *all* have a sacred responsibility to the *next* generations as we embrace them through relationships, shape them through discipleship, and begin to release them through partnership. And if we do that, we will set the table to invite them into shared ownership.

The observer effect is a scientific principle that states that an experiment can be altered just by watching it. During my research over the last couple of years, I've noticed and communicated the need for intergenerational leadership. And just by observing and articulating the need, we've already opened the door to welcoming that kind of leadership. And we'll see an even larger impact as we get even more intentional about addressing the need.

The great hockey player Wayne Gretzky once said, "*A good hockey player plays where the puck is; a great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.*" We are a people of hope and confident expectation for our church's future, so we will do our best to skate to where the puck will be.

Or, to align with this book's metaphor, we'll run to be where the ball will be kicked.

Or, better yet, to kick the ball to where a rising generation will be.

We will live and pray and plan in faith for rising and future generations because we're not just carrying a baton for a few yards until it's

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passed, but we live alongside those younger and older than us in a game where everybody plays.

THANKS!

Every book has a story behind the story, and this one wouldn't exist without the outstanding people who supported and cheered me on.

First, my wife, **Deborah Clark**—the real MVP. You didn't just review every word; you refined, strengthened, and improved them. Your sharp eye and loving support have shaped both this book and my life. Your partnership in ministry, marriage, and raising the next generation of leaders (including our kids) makes everything meaningful.

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Aaron Friesen was my doctoral advisor. This book was the project that resulted from my degree, and Aaron made sure the train ran on time, encouraged me, and helped me believe I could do this. Thanks a million, Aaron; this book wouldn't have happened without you.

Dennis, Yvonne, Mike, Sandy, Brandon, Karen, Jordan, Kristin, Brandt, Abbi, EZ, Emma, Mario, Whitney, Kesley, Carmen, and anyone else I may be missing—your willingness to sit through work-

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shops, assist with prototypes, read early drafts, offer feedback, and/or help shape the discussion questions at the end of each chapter made this book stronger and more practical. I'm grateful for your input and wisdom.

To **my kids**—you've watched me sit in that same leather chair, surrounded by books and staring at my screen for far too many hours. Thanks for your patience and encouragement, and for reminding me to take breaks and enjoy life. I wrote this book to help shape the kind of church your generation (and beyond) could attend, serve, and lead. You truly inspire me every day.

To **Jim Krieg** and **Rob Weldon**, great writers and friends who encouraged me to develop my craft.

I also want to express my *deepest* gratitude to those who personally invested in me when I was young in ministry: **Jack Hayford, Roger Whitlow, and Tom Ferguson** invited me to lead and pastor throughout my twenties; they gave me room to grow by learning “just in time.” **Doug and Christa Andersen** (who are partners and best friends to this day), **Brad and Cathy Davis**, and **Dan and Connie Stewart**, you gave me more than wisdom, encouragement, and ministry opportunities; you offered your lives. Time in your cars, conversations in your living rooms, meals in your kitchens, and sleep in your spare bedrooms shaped me in ways I'm still discovering. You modeled intergenerational relationships in a way that formed how I see ministry, family, and friendship. Thank you for opening your lives and homes to me—I carry those moments

THANKS!

with me, always.

Finally, to everyone else who has encouraged me, challenged me, and walked with me on this journey, thank you. This book exists because of your investment. It's a team effort, and I'm grateful to be surrounded by such an awesome team.

If you want to go further down this rabbit hole...

I *LOVE* a good list of suggested further reading. It helps give me a starting point for the treasure hunt of discovery.

Throughout this book, I've referenced books and materials that have informed my concern for intergenerational leadership. I've also read or reviewed many other resources that didn't make the final cut but helped me better understand this need and opportunity.

Below is a complete list of resources referenced in this book and other material I found helpful in my research. If you want to continue this journey and better understand how to do intergenerational ministry and leadership, I recommend some of these as a starting point.

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Recommended reading

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Endnotes

Chapter 1

1. Ted Engstrom, and Robert C. Larson. *Seizing the Torch: Leadership for a New Generation*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988.
2. Some handed the baton off and then TOOK IT BACK. This isn't uncommon in churches, but we also saw it in entertainment when Baby Boomer Jay Leno handed off The Tonight Show to the Gen X comedian Conan O'Brian, then led a revolt to reverse the decision and take the show back!
3. Harry Enten. "The US May Have Lost in the World Cup, but Soccer Is More Popular Than Ever in America." *CNN.com*. December 12, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/12/football/soccer-popularity-us-world-cup-spt-intl/index.html>.
4. Hannah Loewentheil, BuzzFeed Staff, "Subtle Signs That Often Signal That A Restaurant Is, In Fact, Very Good", Posted December 1, 2024. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/hannahloewentheil/people-are-sharing-green-flags-in-restaurants-that-signal-fs>
5. Donald McGavran and Peter C. Wagner. *Understanding Church Growth, Third edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
6. Generational cut-off dates are fuzzy and can differ by a year or two, depending on the researcher or organization addressing it. In this book, I'm using the generational years that Pew Research suggests at https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ft_19-01-17_generations_2019-png/. You can find these specific generational date-ranges unpacked in Chapter Three.

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7. J. Robert Clinton. *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988. Page 14.
8. <https://www.maxwellleadership.com/podcast/your-influence-inventory/>

Chapter 2

1. Erwin McManus. *MindShift: It Doesn't Take a Genius to Think Like One*. New York, Convergent Books, 2023. Page 40.
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3. See, for instance, David Kinnaman. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011. Page 12.
4. Jean M. Twenge. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood, and What This Means for the Rest of Us*. New York: Atria Books, 2017. Page 122.
5. Twenge. *iGen*. Page 130.
6. Sheri Finnell. “As More Pastors Age and Retire, Churches Appear to Be Facing a Succession Crisis, a Study Says.” *Faith and Leadership*. January 9, 2024. <https://faithandleadership.com/more-pastors-age-and-retire-churches-appear-be-facing-succession-crisis-study>.
7. Grace Snelling. *Fast Company*. October 6, 2023. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90963252/eddie-bauer-new-logo-ditches-script-and-adopts-a-goose>.
8. Carey Nieuwhof. “Why Nobody Wants to Work at a Church Anymore: Toxic Culture, Low Pay, and the Next Generation of Church Leaders.” *Careynieuwhof.com*. <https://careynieuwhof.com/why-nobody-wants-to-work-at-a-church-anymore/>.

Endnotes

9. This is a reference to *The Lord of the Rings*. If you don't immediately understand the reference, I urge you to start reading the books, *or at least watch the movies*, as soon as possible because there is no room to unpack it here!

Chapter 3

1. Deuteronomy 14:21.
2. For a fascinating analysis of massive longitudinal studies of Generational responses at the same ages across a century, see Gene Twenge's book *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future*, New York: Atria Books, 2023.
3. Kimberly Lanier. "Motivating The Multigenerational Workforce of 2030". Protiviti Global Business Consulting. <https://www.protiviti.com/sites/default/files/2024-05/protiviti-wp-motivating-multigenerational-workforce-global.pdf>
4. Chad Aldeman. "At What Age Do Teachers Start Teaching?" *Teacher Pension Blog*. May 29, 2019. <https://www.teacherpensions.org/blog/what-age-do-teachers-start-teaching>.
5. Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott. *The 100-Year Life: Living and Working in an Age of Longevity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
6. You can find this information in many places, but a great resource is the book I reference numerous times: *Generations*, by Gene Twenge (for publishing information see endnote 2 above).

Chapter 4

1. One example comes from David Stillman, and Jonah Stillman's book, *Gen Z @ Work: How the Next Generation Is Transforming the Workplace*. New York: Harper Business, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2017.
2. Stillman, *Gen Z @ Work*, Page 82.

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3. World Health Organization. “WHO Launches Commission to Foster Social Connection.” Press release, November 15, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-11-2023-who-launches-commission-to-foster-social-connection>.
4. Robert Waldinger, MD, and Marc Shulz, Ph.D. *The Good Life: Lessons from the World’s Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2023.
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Chapter 5

1. Laurence J. Cox. “How Old Were Jesus and His Disciples?” Theology dissertation., King’s College, London, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/30309277/How_old_were_Jesus_and_his_disciples.
2. Acts 4:13.
3. Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton. *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*. Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1992.
4. Read Acts 13:22 considering David as an unknown young shepherd.
5. These stages are found in Robert (Bobby) J. Clinton’s book, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988.
6. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, page 46.

Endnotes

7. Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory framework in *The Making of a Leader* includes the following phases:
 1. *Sovereign Foundations*: The potential leader is not yet making their own choices to grow into leadership. God sovereignly works through family, geography, and other conditions—including challenging ones—to shape their inner life and perspective, depending on how they respond.
 2. *Inner Life Growth*: The potential leader learns to hear God and respond to Him obediently, and they are tested in integrity. The rising leader usually gets involved in ministry, but God's primary goal in this phase is developing character, not skills.
 3. *Ministry Maturing*: This stage focuses on learning ministry skills, developing giftedness, and growing in relational competencies.
 4. *Life Maturing*: In this phase, a leader is using their spiritual gifts effectively and is leaning into a deeper dependency and relationship with God, learning to trust Him, being drawn deeper in prayer and faith, and growing in ministry competencies through challenges and crises as well as successes.
 5. *Convergence*: All the previous phases build to this stage where "God moves the leader into a role that matches their gift mix and experience so that ministry is maximized. The leader... is [often] freed from ministry from which he [or she] is not gifted or suited." God's goal in this season of a leader's life is moving into maximum effectiveness.
 6. *Afterglow*: Few leaders reach this stage, but those who do celebrate the fruit of healthy and effective ministry. Influence continues, but there isn't a developmental task.
8. "First, how to put on your socks" as told to Devin Gordon. *Newsweek*, June 5, 2010. <https://www.newsweek.com/john-wooden-first-how-put-your-socks-167942>
9. Eugene Peterson. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1987.

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10. King Saul is an example of this: He made what looked like ‘great’ leadership decisions that were terrible spiritual ones, and he lost the kingdom because he was a strategic leader not a spiritual one (1 Samuel 13-15).
11. Deuteronomy 17:19.

Chapter 6

1. You can find this in Numbers 8 and 1 Chronicles 23:24-27..
2. See Mark 3:14-15 and Luke 9:1.
3. Paul also partnered with, and was burned by, young John Mark (though they eventually reconciled). Intergenerational partnerships don’t always work out effectively, but that doesn’t mean we don’t look for the Timothys coming behind the Marks.
4. Come to think of it, Batman and Robin are one of the most famous modern intergenerational partnerships.
5. Yes, it’s CliffsNotes, with an “s”, just in case it didn’t sound right to you, either (you’re welcome).
6. I’m more interested in whether they served under someone other than a pastor or leader with some organizational authority. The true humility I look for in ministry leadership manifests in serving under “unimportant” people and in unrecognized places.
7. If you are overseeing first service nursery, you have one of the most important jobs at TCOTW and are literally my hero.
8. Tim Elmore. *A New Kind of Diversity: Making the Different Generations On Your Team A Competitive Advantage*. Duluth, GA: Maxwell Leadership, 2022. Page 189.
9. Acts 13:22.
10. Exodus 33:11.
11. Ezekiel 28.

Endnotes

12. 1 Timothy 3:6.

Chapter 7

1. Luke 5 contains this whole exchange.
2. I first read this idea in Willie James Jennings commentary on Acts: *Acts A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. Page 113.
3. See 1 Timothy 5:1.
4. Amos Young. "Sons and Daughters, Young and Old: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Family." *PentecoStudies: Online Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* 10, no. 2 (2011): 156.
5. Jeremiah 1:7.
6. Daniel 2:48.
7. David Mathis. "How Old Should Elders Be? The Hebrew Roots of Church Leadership." *Desiring God*. May 14, 2021. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-old-should-elders-be>.
8. 1 Timothy 5:22 *The Message*.
9. See particularly Hebrews 11:13.

Chapter 8

1. Jack Hayford. *The Church On The Way*, New Jersey: Chosen Books, 1983, page 146. This book, which is out of print, was revised and republished as "Glory On Your House" published by Chosen Books in 1994; it tells the story of the history of TCOTW. If you are a leader at TCOTW, it's a great book to read to understand God's history here. If you don't have it and can't find it, ask me and we'll try to find you a copy.
2. Kyle Richter. "How to Feed Gen Z's Hunger for Jesus." *The Gospel Coalition*. November 4, 2023. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gen-zs-hunger/>.

