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Finding Them, Keeping Them – Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation

A Review of the Books Written by Gary L.
McIntosh

Gordon E. Penfold

Fresh Start Ministries

Abstract

A short review of each of the twenty-seven books by Gary L. McIntosh traces the development of the author's thought up to his latest release in January 2023. This review demonstrates that McIntosh's passion is to see churches and Christian leaders apply classical biblical church growth principles in their ministry contexts. His passion for reaching and assimilating new people, and for developing Christian leaders to carry out Christ's Great Commission with a Great Commandment passion permeates each book. The breadth and depth of his knowledge are demonstrated in his many volumes with little overlap in their subject matter. His works demonstrate clarity, preciseness, and practicality for those in ministry. All are well-researched and documented for accuracy. To my knowledge, no one alive possesses as much experience working with multiple Christian ministries (over eighty denominations and over twelve hundred local churches) as Gary McIntosh. He shares this knowledge freely in his books.

Among those familiar with biblical church growth, the name of Gary L. McIntosh is legendary. His books, nearly 500,000 of them in print, grace the bookshelves of libraries, pastors, lay persons, and academics. The imprint of God's handiwork marks his spiritual journey from his humble beginnings in a broken home to his high-ranking status as a husband, father, educator, church consultant, mentor, and friend. Before reading this article, I suggest you read his biography "My Pilgrimage in Church Growth" (pages 123-139 in this issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal*) before reading this article. That will give you a greater sense of McIntosh's writing and passion.

In high school, a teacher planted a dream in his mind to write a book. While at Biola, that dream blossomed into an extensive writing ministry. Not only are his books published in English, but a number of them are translated into other languages. In this article, I present these books in the order of their publication date.

Talbot Magazine, a publication of Biola University's Talbot School of Theology, said this about Gary McIntosh.

He is widely recognized as one of the most prolific writers in the fields of church growth and pastoral ministry, and he has taught church growth longer than any other professor in the history of the field...Five of his books have become best-sellers, with one receiving the book of the year award in the category of leadership from *Outreach* magazine. (Spring 2022)

It is a great honor to write about my friend and mentor. His passion for winning, keeping, and building people in the faith permeates his writing and life. He practices what he writes. His genuine and affable character makes association with him all the more pleasant. My recommendation: Pick books from this survey that pique your interest and read them. I recommend every single one without hesitation.

#1. McIntosh, Gary L., and Glen S. Martin. *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation* (Broadman Press, 1992).

When McIntosh assumed the reins of the Doctor of Ministry program at the Talbot School of Theology, one of his desires was to help his students become authors. *Finding Them, Keeping Them* was the first of many books published in partnership with his students. Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin collaborated on this book as an outworking of Martin's D.Min research. The pain of McIntosh's early life shows up on these pages as he

and Dr. Martin address the need for “finding” people (evangelism) and “keeping” them (assimilation).

The stated purpose of the book revolves around two questions:

Question #1: How can we develop strategies that will bring more people in our front door?

Question #2: How can we develop strategies that will keep people from leaving through our back door? (p. 13)

This volume focuses on ten strategies - five that answer the first question and five on the second. A practical “how to” question follows each stated purpose.

The Great Commission and the Great Commandment drive the processes outlined in the book. McIntosh and Martin make this volume practical and easy to use (a McIntosh trademark) as illustrations and self-assessment diagrams fill the pages. The book’s organization is genius as it gives helpful, step-by-step instructions for becoming more effective at evangelism and assimilation. McIntosh and Martin hit their first offering out of the ballpark!

#2. McIntosh, Gary L., and Glen S. Martin. *The Issachar Factor: Understanding the Trends Confronting Your Church and Designing a Strategy for Success* (Broadman/Holman Publishers, 1994).

Change is inevitable. Wise individuals understand this and seek to comprehend the times in which they live. The text begins with a quote from 1 Chronicles 12:32, “[The] Men of Issachar...understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” The authors argue that the changing landscape in which people live demands a change in approaches to life and ministry. McIntosh and Martin trace the developmental history of cultural transitions from the Agricultural Age, through the Industrial Revolution, to the Information Age. Each age produced significant seismic societal shifts that impacted ministry.

Just as the men of Issachar understood the times, so should people in today’s church. “Let’s face it: Most church models of ministry developed in an entirely different age. The models of ministry developed in the agricultural and industrial ages are colliding head-on with the Information Age. That’s what this book is all about. Our nation has changed; people have changed; and we must develop new models of ministry relevant for today’s society if we are to fulfill Christ’s commission to ‘make disciples’” (p. 12).

The book examines twelve areas of ministry that require a significant

makeover in this changing world. Some areas covered include prayer, worship, church staffing, children's, and youth ministry. The authors spend the balance of the book illustrating how churches must adapt to change that continues to impact our society with regard to the gospel.

Each chapter sounds the refrain, "That was then, this is now." Each list demonstrates how ministry needs and expectations made colossal shifts in the past. People like "the men of Issachar" will understand the times and make the necessary adjustments for effective ministry during these changing times.

As they typically do, the authors load each chapter with practical steps for implementing change in the local church. The final chapter, Good News-Bad News, concludes with ten insights for designing change in your church (206-9).

On a personal note, I read this book some years ago. The text challenged my thinking, and I adopted many of the shifts recommended in the book in the churches I served. These shifts produced positive changes in my life and ministry. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, we must be like the men of Issachar and understand the times!

#3. McIntosh, Gary L. *Three Generations. Riding the Waves of Change in Your Church* (Fleming H. Revell, 1995).

Volume #3 examines the challenges of local churches attempting to minister to three generations in the same church body: the Builders, Boomers, and Busters. McIntosh unpacks this generational theory and the implications of ministering to multiple generations in greater detail in his books, *Make Room for the Boom or Bust* (#5) and *One Church, Four Generations* (#12).

#4. McIntosh, Gary L. *The Exodus Principle: A 5-Part Strategy to Free Your People for Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995).

This volume is not about the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. The primary focus of this book is the need to develop a culture of "service" in a local church. Creating a culture of service frees people to serve the Lord and others with the joy and fervor lacking in many churches.

The book is divided into five main sections and supporting chapters. The five sections are listed below.

- Part One: Designing a Culture of Service
- Part Two: Preparing for a Culture of Service

- Part Three: Communicating a Culture of Service
- Part Four: Practicing a Culture of Service
- Part Five: Empower Your Strategy

Here is a quote to ponder.

A friend of mine says there are three kinds of leaders in the church: risk-takers, caretakers, and undertakers. The undertakers belong to churches that show great fear of serving others. The caretakers risk enough to serve each other but won't go beyond the people of their own church. The risk-takers courageously lead their people and serve each other and those in the community. (p. 45)

The pages contain clear illustrations and applications. Each chapter concludes with a self-assessment for those serious about developing a culture of serving in their congregations. The process is not for the faint of heart, as it takes “five to seven years to engineer a new church culture” (p. 20).

#5. McIntosh, Gary L. *Make Room for the Boom or Bust: Six New Models for Reaching Three Generations* (Fleming H. Revell, 1997).

New church ministry models began to take center stage in the late 20th Century. Ministry leaders designed each approach to reach unchurched people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The author discovered six new paradigms of “doing” church that effectively reached Boomers and Busters. The design of *Make Room for the Boom or Bust* “is to introduce all six models so that church leaders may wisely choose the best model for their church” (p. 17).

McIntosh lays the ministry foundation for churches interested in reaching multiple generations in the first four chapters. These chapters build on his work outlined in Book #3, *Three Generations. Riding the Waves of Change in Your Church*, as he describes the likes, dislikes, and penchants of Boomers and Busters in the 1990s. (He further develops these insights in Book #12, *One Church, Four Generations*).

He follows his introductory chapters with twelve hard-hitting chapters describing each of the six ministry paradigms, with a chapter dedicated to a church that models each paradigm. Each church leader shares lessons learned and challenges they overcame.

These paradigm shifts that move away from traditional ministry

models include the following.

- The Seeker-Centered Model. These churches “target their Sunday ministries almost exclusively to the unchurched” (p. 60).
- The Seeker-Sensitive Model. “Seeker-sensitive churches may be defined as churches that target their ministries primarily to Christians while maintaining a sensitivity to unchurched guests” (p. 80).
- The Blended Model. “The strategy to combine the elements from traditional and contemporary styles into one worship service is what distinguishes the blended model” (p. 101). These churches attempt to blend traditional and contemporary music styles, new ministries, and terminology with the old. Significant challenges persist with this ministry model: many church members are not satisfied with change or the speed of change.
- Multiple-Track Model. “Multiple-track churches determine to offer two or more different worship services to meet the needs of the Margies (older members) and the Christys (younger members)” (p. 118). This model seems to work better than the blended model for attracting multiple generations and is used successfully by many congregations.
- The Satellite Model. “...satellite churches are those that have one or more worship services in locations other than the primary facility” (p. 138). Many multi-site churches now populate the church world following this paradigm.
- The Rebirthed Model. “Rebirthed churches are those that are restored to new life and vitality by ceasing to use one form of ministry and replacing it with an alternate form of more effective ministry” (p. 159). These churches typically close for a season as they retool and then reopen as brand-new entities far different from the decline and decadence of the old order.

Make Room for Boom or Bust remains a worthy read for those seeking new ways to reach their communities for Christ.

#6. McIntosh, Gary L., and Glen S. Martin. *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship Through Small Group Ministry* (Broadman & Holman, 1997).

As the tagline describes, this book focuses on developing deeper fellowship through thriving small-group ministries. The authors state, “As we’ve

traveled, consulting with churches and leading small group seminars, we've noticed that not all churches have the *will* and the *skill* to begin an effective small group ministry" (12). The writers develop a simple but effective survey that enables churches to see where they lie in the *will* and *skill* departments (48-50).

McIntosh and Martin describe small groups in the following fashion. "A small group is a face-to-face gathering of three to twelve people on a regular time schedule during which a sense of accountability to each other and Jesus Christ is present" (37).

The authors describe churches on a small-group spectrum as Dormant, Dedicated, Developing, or Dynamic (51). For example, The Dormant Church "lacks both the will and skill to launch a fully developed small group ministry." On the other end of the spectrum, "The Dynamic Church is one that has reviewed the basics, understands the basics, and puts the basics into practice" (87).

The writers spend most of the time describing how churches can move their small group ministries to the next level. This attention is vital for churches desiring to improve their small-group ministry, regardless of where they fall on the small-group spectrum.

Determining the best approach for any church is key to the success or failure of implementing small group ministry. Chapters 6-9 examine these four types of churches and unpack the necessary steps to raise the small group ministry to the next level of excellence. In chapters 10 and 11, the writers describe two models to help churches navigate the development of their small group ministry using either the "Slow Track Model" or the "Fast Track Model."

Times have changed due to Covid-19, but the principles outlined in this book remain timeless. This volume aids anyone contemplating starting a small group ministry in their church or any church that desires to strengthen its small group ministry.

#7. McIntosh, Gary L., and Samuel Rima. *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Baker Books, 1997).

- Dutch translation of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Arrowz, 2017)
- Korean translation of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Tyrannus Press, 2002).
- Spanish translation of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Casa Creacion, 2005)
- Chinese translation of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Taosheng Publishing House, 2007).
- 2nd North American Edition of *Overcoming the Dark Side of*

***Leadership* (Baker Books, 2007).**

- **South Asian edition of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Good Times Books, 2010).**
- **Indonesian edition of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Literatur Satt, 2015).**

The rising number of pastors and Christian leaders who experienced moral and other types of failures alarmed McIntosh and Rima.

It was during this research that it became clear that a paradox of sorts existed in the lives of most of the leaders who had experienced significant failures: the personal insecurities, feelings of inferiority and need for parental approval (among other dysfunctions) that compelled these people to become successful leaders were very often the same issues that precipitated their failure.” (p. 13)

The authors list six basic assumptions that can lead to success or promote a colossal collapse of a ministry leader.

1. Every leader suffers from some degree of personal dysfunction varying from extremely mild to extremely acute.
2. Personal dysfunction...can often serve as the driving force behind an individual's desire to achieve success as a leader.
3. Many leaders are not aware of the dark side of their personalities and the personal dysfunctions that drive them.
4. The personal characteristics that drive individuals to succeed and lead often have a shadow side that can cripple them once they become leaders and very often causes significant failure. This dynamic is...labeled...the “paradox of personal dysfunction in leadership.”
5. Learning about their own dark side...can enable leaders to address those areas and prevent, or at least mitigate, the potential negative effects to their exercise of leadership.
6. Scripture has much to say about the dark side of human personality and the motivations that drive us to achieve. (pp. 14-15).

The authors especially focus on the dysfunctions that characterize baby boomers. “Whether it is the dysfunction of co-dependence, addictive behaviors, obsessive-compulsive disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, adult children of alcoholics (ACOA), or any one of a host of others, personal dysfunctions have become the badges of the boomer generation and a focal points of church ministries” (p. 15).

Sam Rima describes his own meltdown and the implications of it as he came face to face with his personal dark side.

Two days after my outburst in the car with my wife...I took my first tenuous steps in the lifelong process of exploring my dark side. I slowly began to realize that paradoxically the personality traits and inner drives that brought me success as a leader were also what had ultimately caused my desperation. (32)

The book systematically unpacks the challenges of the dark side of our personalities in three sections.

Part 1 Understanding Our Dark Side (7 chapters)

Part 2 Discovering Our Dark Side (5 chapters)

Part 3 Redeeming Our Dark Side (7 chapters)

Each chapter concludes with “targeting insights” and “applying insights.” This volume provides excellent insight for anyone in leadership who desires to understand their leadership strengths and corresponding dark sides.

#8. McIntosh, Gary L., and Robert Edmondson. *It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It* (ChurchSmart Press, 1998).

“Why do pastors leave churches? What causes many to leave the ministry completely? Perhaps more important, what can we do about it? These are the main questions we address” (p.7). Thus begins the discussion in this important book as it delves deeply into the diabolical issues plaguing pastors in our era. Here are a few chapter titles with this author’s annotations in *italics*.

When the Lights Won’t Turn On. *Burnout*

They Taught Us Everything But How to Run a Church. *Inadequate pastoral training*

What Do You Expect? *Overcoming both internal and external expectations for pastors*

Stampeding the Sacred Cows. *Transformational leadership essential for stagnant churches*

Lord, You Keep Him Humble and We’ll Keep Him Poor. *Substandard pastoral compensation packages*

A central thesis of the book is:

When people understand the biblical nature of the church and the role of the pastor in leading it, both the church and the pastor are set free to minister as Christ intended. Such understanding is the goal of this

book; for ourselves, for others called by God to lead the church, and for those who call such men “pastor.” (157)

The book doesn’t just focus on the problems besetting pastors. Each chapter also offers positive ways “You Can Help” your pastor combat these debilitating challenges to ministry. In addition, the authors conclude the book with 40 Ways to Help Your Pastor, practical ways churches can aid the challenges pastors face.

This book is a must-read for pastors navigating ministry’s often challenging and troubled waters.

#9. McIntosh, Gary L. *One Size Doesn’t Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* (Fleming H. Revell, 1999).

- Chinese translation of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (China Evangelical Seminary Press, 2001).
- Japanese translation of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (Masahira Matsumoto, 2009).
- Korean translation of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (Christian Publishing House, 2010)
- German edition of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* (Pulsmedien, 2013).
- Burmese edition of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (Myanmar, 2018).
- Indonesian edition of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (Gandum Mas, 2019).
- German edition of *One Size Doesn’t Fit All* (Jota-Publikationen GmbH, 2019).

McIntosh introduces us to the differences and leadership needs of small, medium, and large churches. He uses a highly readable conversational style between a frustrated pastor who has run out of ideas and his older, wiser, and willing mentor (p. 11).

The book is packed full of advice for leading and managing all three sizes of churches. The author masterfully helps pastors understand their size, structure, direction, setting, the pastor’s role, and the impact of staff on church growth. The book offers classical church growth wisdom on leading a church through change (stuck churches need change, but few pastors dare venture into that territory), how churches grow, and obstacles to church growth. The crowning chapter asks and answers the question, “What are the strategies for growth?” The final section urges the readers to develop a plan for their church.

This volume helped this author years ago as he navigated the whitewater of taking a church from small to medium. McIntosh offers great wisdom to “frustrated pastors.” Pastors will fare better in pastoral

ministry if they recognize that *One Size Doesn't Fit All!*

#10. McIntosh, Gary L. *Staff Your Church for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century* (Baker Books, 1999).

One of the best ways to grow a church is to add staff. Dr. McIntosh helps pastors understand that pastors can no longer serve as Lone Rangers. He details how to add staff, recruit staff, and help all staff members appreciate one another and work together. After all, adding staff does not help when staff competes for attention and resources.

The author also develops a ministry philosophy that nurtures and motivates staff members. Chapter 9 unpacks the idea of “discipling up,” the art of junior staff helping senior staff strengthen their blind spots and weak areas of senior leadership.

The chapter on managing staff conflicts is gold. When people work together, conflict is inevitable. Leaders must deal proactively with these dysfunctions, or the staff will self-destruct. Leading elite teams requires care, forethought, and wisdom for staff to maximize their effectiveness.

The final chapter, “Defining the Future,” looks at the essentials for the operation of quality staff in local churches. McIntosh reveals essential workplace needs for effective ministry. “Questions concerning church ministry are ultimately social questions—they involve how people work together and interact” (p. 192). This section alone makes reading this book worthwhile.

#11. McIntosh, Gary L. *Look Back, Leap Forward: Building Your Church on the Values of the Past* (Baker Books, 2001).

This volume is a delightful read that is available in a Kindle Version. It features “Wendy,” a young teacher who seeks wisdom as to whether or not she should lead her church’s vision planning team. The conversational style leads the reader through the steps necessary to develop an exciting future for her church as she “looks back” at foundational values while preparing to “leap forward” into a new and brighter future. *Here Today, There Tomorrow* (see #19 below) expands the revitalization principles in *Look Back, Leap Forward*. Both books help the readers understand the needed steps for revitalizing a plateaued church ministry.

#12. McIntosh, Gary L. *One Church, Four Generations* (Baker Books, 2002).

“There was a time not long ago when church leaders tried to minister to people as a single mass. No longer. Today’s church leaders understand that ministry must take place among a mosaic of groups and subgroups—most notably generational cohorts” (p. 9). Thus begins McIntosh’s exposition on ministry to multiple generations.

Scripture uses the word generation in three different ways. It can be an age group in a family, a period of time, or a group of people connected by their place in time...However, the third definition is what I am thinking of in *One Church Four Generations*. (p. 11)

In this signature work, the author addresses the needs and expectations of the Builders (born 1928-45), Boomers (1946-64), Busters (1965-83), and Bridgers (1984-2002). He dedicates three chapters to each age category. Each section dives deeply into the formative events, needs, expectations, and strengths of each generational group. His goal is to help church leaders understand these generational characteristics so that churches can effectively minister to all four generations simultaneously. Here are two examples of the challenges churches face when discussing the “feel of the service.”

Participation in the service. Builders tend to watch and enjoy, while Boomers and older Busters who grew up in the church like to participate with clapping and similar forms of involvement. Bridgers like a highly interactive worship service that allows for multiple forms of involvement. Unchurched Boomers, Busters and Bridgers want to be entertained to some extent.

Type of music. Builders love the hymnal and the familiar songs of the faith. They like their music to be slowly paced and reverent. Boomers appreciate the praise music of the ‘70s and ‘80s, while Busters and Bridgers like to “sing a new song” to the Lord using a variety of music styles. (pp. 203-4)

This book points out a few of the challenges that multigenerational churches face. Since this book was published, Millennials and Gen Z have developed distinct identities, further complicating the challenges facing churches that desire to serve multiple generations.

Typical of all the books by this author, his driving desire is to see these multiple generations come to know Christ and become fruitful, reproducing

church members. This volume is a great place to begin as pastors and churches wrestle with serving multiple generations in a significant way.

#13. McIntosh, Gary L. *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Baker Books, 2003).

- Korean translation of *Biblical Church Growth* (Christian Publishing House, 2004).
- Indonesian edition of *Biblical Church Growth* (Penerbit Gandum Mas, 2012).

Over the years, biblical church growth moved from a powerfully accepted method of ministry and became a misunderstood whipping boy. Why? Because many perceived church growth as an attempt to manipulate people into the church, not as a biblically driven method of reaching, assimilating, and developing lost people into the Body of Christ. To address these misconceptions, Dr. McIntosh used *Biblical Church Growth* to describe the foundational tenets of the church growth movement.

What most pastors and church leaders know of church growth comes from popular authors who sometimes derive their ideas from sources other than the Bible. [Donald] McGavran, on the other hand, was a biblical missiologist. He coined the term church growth as a synonym for effective evangelism, which he believed included winning converts to Christ and helping them become responsible members of local congregations. (p. 9)

He continues,

By using the word biblical, I do not mean to imply that previous books written on this topic are not biblically based. I use the word biblical to make the point that, contrary to popular opinion, church growth is not based on sociology, marketing, or demographics. Church growth is a biblical concept, exploding from the life-giving nature of God. (p. 9)

The primary question is this: “How can we work with God to build a faithful church” (15)?

McIntosh outlines the process by recognizing the following: God is a life-giving God. Church growth is rooted in the Word of God that prioritizes the glory of God while producing disciples in the power of the Spirit of God. Pastors must be faithful shepherds who develop effective lay

members (ministers). These churches are target focused while exhibiting a simple structure.

Once again, Dr. McIntosh provides church growth tools for pastors and churches. These congregations and leaders can evaluate their own ministry by comparing it to the descriptions outlined in this book.

#14. McIntosh, Gary L. *Church That Works: Your One-Stop Resource for Effective Ministry* (Baker Books, 2004).

Here is another hands-on volume that helps pastors and leaders navigate a plethora of challenges and problems in ministry. The author divides this volume into seventeen parts, with three chapters each, followed by a final chapter that coaches pastors on how to handle criticism. The “Part” titles cover a broad range of topics that include the following: Changing Times, People Flow (assimilation), Pastoral Compensation, Small Groups, Personal Development, and Change.

Chapter 32 (in Personal Development) provides tips for personal time management. Included are:

- #6. Use time in large blocks. Working on a project in one chunk of sixty minutes is better than working on it in twelve chunks of five minutes each.
- #9. Learn how to terminate unproductive phone calls.
- #16. Handle correspondence only once. Use it, file it, or throw it away.
- #20. Hold meetings thirty minutes before quitting time (pp. 177-178).

Once again, Dr. McIntosh has provided practical and helpful tools for reaching, assimilating, and developing believers to become fruitful, responsible members of the body of Christ.

#15. McIntosh, Gary L., editor, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

- Korean translation of *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Revival and Reformation Press, 2009).

Evaluating the Church Growth Movement is the most academic of McIntosh’s works. In this volume, Elmer Towns, Craig Van Gelder, Charles Van Engen, Gailyn Van Rheen, and Howard Snider each present their personal view of the Church Growth movement, one chapter per author. Responses from the other four authors follow each main chapter.

The volume concludes with “Pastoral Reflections” from three leaders involved in local church ministry.

McIntosh summarizes The Church Growth movement in the following way. “Church Growth thought can be summarized in seven foundational principles: people movements, pragmatic research, scientific research, social networks, receptivity, priority of evangelism, and the central purpose of disciple-making” (p. 27).

Each contributor writes from their understanding of Church Growth.

- Towns—The Effective Evangelism view holds that the Church Growth movement effectively confronts and penetrates the culture with the gospel.
- Craig Van Gelder—The Gospel and Our Culture view holds that the Church Growth movement lacks a sufficient ecclesiology, which hinders it from being able to effectively engage the culture.
- Charles Van Engen—The Centrist view holds that the Church Growth movement is based on an evangelistically focused and a missiologically applied theory.
- Gailyn Van Rheen—The Reformist view holds that the Church Growth movement assumes theology but ineffectively employs it to analyze culture, determine strategy, and perceive history.
- Howard Snyder—The Renewal view holds that the Church Growth movement must be based on a biblical vision of the church as the vital community of the kingdom of God in order to be effective. (pp24-25)

This volume is a deep dive into the strengths, criticisms, and value of the Church Growth movement. *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* is an excellent read for those who want to develop a thoughtful understanding of the movement.

#16. McIntosh, Gary L., and R. Daniel Reeves, *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-first Century* (Kregel, 2006).

Church systems often evoke thoughts related to developing vision, discipling, finances, facilities, and so forth. This volume by McIntosh and Reeves also deals with systems, but systems that are less mechanically driven and more spiritually motivated. The authors “identify ten life-giving systems that comprise the essentials for revitalizing a church—ten critical points of ministry on which growing and healthy churches should

focus” (p. 20). The chapter titles point to the deep spiritual issues involved in these systems.

The book divisions include four sections:

- Critical Point A: Generating Spiritual Energy
 - The Pastor’s Spiritual Life
 - Corporate Intercession
 - Spiritual Disciplines.
- Critical Point B: Developing Effective Leaders
 - Mentoring Relationships
 - Team Ministry
- Critical Point C: Increasing People Flow
 - People Flow Strategy
 - Lifestyle Evangelism
- Critical Point D: Charting Amid Change
 - Charting the Future
 - Streamlining the Organization
 - Thriving on Change

While this book is not about traditional systems theory, it certainly incorporates much of this theory in its pages. The strength of this volume is the emphasis on a deep abiding relationship with the Lord through His Word that impacts church leaders and members to their very core.

#17. McIntosh, Gary L. *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Baker Books, 2006).

This book focuses again on the absolute necessity of assimilating new people into our churches. “Getting ready for company is more than a sociological process for welcoming newcomers. It is a theological demonstration of God’s grace. As God’s people, *we are to be welcoming just as God is a welcomer*” (p. 12). Thus begins the adventure of preparing our churches to welcome guests into their fellowships. The fourteen chapters unpack step-by-step details churches must consider if they desire to grow and help fulfill the Great Commission—a recurring theme throughout McIntosh’s writings.

In Chapter 3, Gary describes eleven “Moments of Truth” (MOTs) that impact a guest’s determination to return for a second visit. He states that “...on average, people make eleven decisions about us in the first seven

seconds of contact” (p. 30). He further describes the following about repeat visitors to a church.

Church growth studies have found that the average growing church in the United States keeps 16 percent of all first-time guests. In contrast, the average church keeps 85 percent of its second-time guests! Thus, a follow-up plan must focus on helping first-time guests return for a second visit. (p. 121)

The point is clear. If churches desire to impact people for eternity, they best prepare for company!

Several years ago, I purchased ten copies of *Beyond the First Visit* and circulated them among our church members. One of our leaders came to me and said, “Pastor, we’ve always had lots of visitors. We just didn’t pay any attention to them!” Wow! We began preparing for company, and the church began to grow significantly.

#18. McIntosh, Gary L. *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won’t Get You There* (Baker Books, 2009).

With historical Church Growth principles in the background, McIntosh offers superior wisdom in helping churches of all sizes to move to the next level of effectiveness. This volume contains three sections.

- Part One—Congregational Life Cycles. “Churches experience a predictable life cycle of growth and decline” (p. 11).
- Part Two—Church Size Stages. “Church size impacts its health and vitality. Larger churches are not just bigger versions of smaller ones but entirely different types of organisms” (p. 11).
- Part Three—Choice Points. “The growth point is that place in the life cycle of a congregation where maximum ministry occurs both inside (spiritual growth) and outside (spiritual birth). Whenever a church finds itself in the balanced position of seeing a significant number of new people coming to faith in Christ and believers already in the church growing in their spiritual lives, it is at its growth point” (pp. 196-197).

The chapters deftly unpack the challenges of growth, decline, and the possibility of the renewal of a life cycle. Second, the book outlines a path forward for churches desiring to grow into the next level of ministry. In

other words, “What got you here won’t get you there.”

#19. McIntosh, Gary L. *Here Today, There Tomorrow: Unleashing Your Church’s Potential* (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010).

Do not let the title fool you. I assumed this was another volume on visitor assimilation. Nothing is further from the truth! This book greatly expands the process of developing a ministry plan in a local church initially outlined in *Look Back, Leap Forward* (#11). The book provides step-by-step strategies for accomplishing this task. “Each chapter of *Here Today, There Tomorrow* is organized to address a major question or aspect about the planning process” (p. 17). The text moves adroitly from answering objections to the planning process to chapters that include the following:

- The challenges of planning
- The wisdom of planning
- An overview of the planning process
- Recognizing the reality of church lifecycles and the need to plan for change
- Developing biblically based Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals
- The final chapter urges the reader to “develop your dream house.” This chapter provides an excellent primer on viewing the ministry from God’s perspective. Here pastors and Christian leaders are urged to rise above the daily grind and to catch a glimpse of God’s design for their ministry.

True to form, the author writes another practical, solid work to aid floundering pastors and churches to help them understand the steps toward health and vitality.

#20. McIntosh, Gary L. *There’s Hope for Your Church* (Baker Books, 2012).

With most churches in America either experiencing a plateau or decline in vibrancy, vitality, and worship attendance, *There’s Hope for Your Church* offers prescriptions for restoring health and growth to congregations. McIntosh begins with three reasons for hope.

- There’s hope for your church! Do you believe that? I do. Why am I so hopeful: Let me give you three reasons. ... The first mention of church in the Bible contains God’s promise that his church will

grow (Matthew 16:18). ... God wants your church to be fruitful and multiply. Acts 12:24 reports that “the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied.”

- Second, God revitalizes and restores people, nations, and churches that have lost spiritual energy.
- Third, God is revitalizing churches right now. For the last three decades, I’ve observed churches throughout the United States and Canada being renewed and revitalized. (pp. 21-23)

With the majority of churches in America facing the challenge of declining worship attendance, *There’s Hope for Your Church* offers Twelve Steps for restoring health and growth to congregations. In each chapter, the author uses pithy statements and illustrations that communicate hope to the readers.

This tool is an excellent resource for those pursuing church revitalization. Check out these twelve steps as they may impact your ministry. The instructions are priceless. There is hope for your church!

#21. McIntosh, Gary L., and Alan R. McMahan. *Being the Church in a Multi-ethnic Community* (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012).

How much has the makeup of the United States changed? People are often unaware of the dramatic demographic shifts that shape modern America.

Have you taken the Walmart test? If not, it might be time to do so. One day this week, drive to the Walmarts within a twenty-mile radius of your church and see who is shopping there. What you find may surprise you. The United States is dramatically more diverse than it was ten years ago. (p. 13)

“How diverse is this world? Today, missiologists calculate the world’s population to be roughly composed of 17,500 distinct ethnic groups” (p. 25).

This volume examines the need for multi-ethnic churches in response to these dramatic demographic shifts in the US. The authors discuss four different terms to describe churches comprised of differing ethnic, generational, and cultural groups: 1) multiracial, 2) multinational, 3) multi-ethnic, and 4) multigenerational (23-24). The authors settle on “multi-ethnic” following Ralph Winter’s definition.

...a multi-ethnic church is a church in which there is (1) an attitude and

practice of accepting people of all ethnic, class, and national origins as equal and fully participating members and ministers in the fellowship of the church; and (2) the manifestation of this attitude and practice by the involvement of people from different ethnic, social and national communities as members in the church. (p. 27)

The authors do a tremendous job of pointing out the need for churches to embrace others who are different while recognizing the validity of the Homogeneous Unit Principle that “most people in the United States continue to be attracted to homogeneous churches that feature their language and cultural norms” (77). They also carefully explain the need for multi-ethnic churches.

While we agree that exclusive mono-ethnic churches are not biblical (see chapter 3), we believe that inclusive mono-ethnic churches are biblical. What is the difference? Exclusive mono-ethnic churches shut out all those unlike themselves, and that type of mono-ethnic church is not biblical. On the other hand, inclusive mono-ethnic churches who welcome the stranger, the alien, and the foreigner into their fellowship are biblical even though they are centered around a single dominant people group. (p. 89)

This fine work offers a great starting point for discussing mono and multi-ethnic churches. The multi-ethnic issues will continue to provide opportunities and challenges in the coming decades.

#22. McIntosh, Gary L., and Charles Arn. *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Baker Books, 2013).

This book received the book of the year award from “Outreach” magazine. A brief passage from this volume explains the heart of Dr. Gary McIntosh and Dr. Charles Arn’s ministry. “Helping local churches fulfill the Great Commission is our passion. We hope this book proves to be a practical resource as you seek to make disciples in response to the call and example of Jesus Christ” (p. 12). Each of the fifteen sections of this work begins with the phrase “Ministry Rules for ____.” Each Ministry Rule is followed by five to ten subsections related to the main heading. Each subsection has an Introduction, Explanation, and a section entitled “What Can You Do About It?” This format lends itself readily to application.

This book is like having an encyclopedia ready for quick references related to evangelism, outreach, worship, assimilation, small groups,

demographics, and so forth. This brief description only includes a partial sample of the fifteen sections in the book.

#23. McIntosh, Gary L. *Donald A. McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century's Premier Missiologist* (Church Leader Insights, 2015).

Nelson Searcy writes in the Foreword, “Donald McGavran is the single most influential thinker on how we do ministry today. His life’s work is the foundation of what you and I know about growing healthy, impactful churches” (p. 7). This reviewer heartily agrees.

Gary McIntosh weaves an engaging account of Donald A. McGavran’s life and ministry in a warm, compelling description of a missiological giant. The volume traces his life from his birth to missionary parents in India, to his service in India as a missionary himself, to his impact on mission fields around the world and in the United States. The book concludes with Donald’s passing into heaven. Dr. McIntosh outlines the life and developments that imprinted McGavran profoundly and made him the man he was.

McGavran asked a lot of questions and searched for their answers. He concluded that missionaries who would see one or two conversions in a calendar year used obsolete and ineffective methods of evangelism. He desired to know how “people movements” worked and to uncover the barriers and hindrances Christians place wittingly or unwittingly before lost people, making it difficult for these individuals to come to Christ. “He eventually identified four major questions that came to define the Church Growth Movement: What are the *causes* of church growth? What are the *barriers* to church growth? What are the factors that can make the Christian faith a movement among some populations? What *principles* of church growth are reproducible?” (pp. 93-94).

The Great Commission marked McGavran’s life. Even on his headstone, one can read a transliteration of Matthew 28:19, MATHETUESATE PANTA TA ETHNE, “Make disciples of all the nations” (p. 223). This book is a tremendous contribution to Christian literature. The text should be required reading for every missionary candidate and every student considering pastoral ministry.

#24. McIntosh, Gary L. *Growing God’s Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today* (Baker Books, 2016).

The reason McIntosh wrote this book is apparent.

While it is important in today's postmodern society for Christians to let their light shine through missional acts of service, it is equally important, perhaps more so, to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ...Thus it is the central premise of this book that for churches and Christians to be truly missional, evangelism must be restored to a primary place in life and ministry. While there is certainly resistance to the gospel message in our current culture, the resistance to evangelism is more often in the church than in the world. Hurting people are still looking for direction and hope, which only the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ can provide.

Closely related to this purpose—that we need to proclaim the Good News of salvation—is the reality that few leaders understand how men and women are finding faith or connecting with a church in today's world. (pp. 20-21)

To answer the second question, Dr. McIntosh followed up on the earlier research of Wyn Arn (undertaken in 1979-80) to discover how people are actually coming to faith today. He surveyed 1093 people (24) to ask how they came to faith in Christ.

“The book's organization revolves around ten crucial questions—five biblical and five practical” (p. 25). The biblical questions center on evangelism and mission. Chapters 6-11 unpack the fruit of the research. What becomes crystal clear in reading this book is that effective evangelistic practices have shifted somewhat. The most effective way to reach people is still through personal relationships (75-95% by Arn, 58.9% by McIntosh), followed by Pastor/Staff (5-6% by Arn, 17.3% by McIntosh; p. 111). These figures represent but a small sample of this highly significant research.

This volume is a must-read for anyone concerned with reaching people with the good news of the gospel.

#25. McIntosh, Gary L., and Phil Stevenson. *Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church* (Baker Books, 2017.)

Many churches, like many individuals, may have the basics of health but are not fit. This volume explores the differences between a “healthy church” and a “fit church.” McIntosh and Stevenson use the parallels between physical fitness and church fitness to develop a model that helps churches analyze their fitness or lack thereof.

The volume is divided into four sections that relate physical fitness to church fitness.

Part 1: Cardiovascular Endurance. This section examines church fitness from three perspectives—Outreach, Effective Evangelism, and Community Engagement.

Part 2: Muscular Strength—Personal Ministry, God-Honoring Stewardship, and Leadership Development.

Part 3: Muscular Endurance—Christ-Exalting Worship, Disciple-Making Strategies, Pastoral Leadership

Part 4: Flexibility—Loving Community, Vision-Directed Systems, Divine Empowerment.

Part 5: Track Progress. This section provides a way for churches to examine their level of fitness, whether they are a Beginner, Novice, Intermediate, Advanced or Elite churches. The book concludes with an invitation to develop a plan of action that will lead a church toward greater fitness.

#26. McIntosh, Gary L. *The Ten Key Roles of a Pastor: Proven Practices for Balancing the Demands of Leading Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing, 2021).

When I began full-time pastoral ministry over forty years ago, the opportunity to preach on my first Sunday thrilled me. However, on Monday morning, I wondered, “What’s next?” I knew I needed to prepare to preach again, but I did not know much about a pastor’s day-to-day ministry responsibilities. In this pivotal work, Dr. McIntosh answers those questions about what pastors should do and how they might most effectively spend their time. He unpacks the ten primary roles (described as hats) pastors must fill for effective ministry. McIntosh compares how many hours pastors of growing, plateaued, and declining churches spend each week in these ten areas in this research-driven book.

Using this book is like having a mentor sitting beside the pastor who wrestles with their schedule. The ten roles (hats) are:

- Speaker’s Hat (Preaching)
- The Captain’s Hat (Leading)
- The Coach’s Hat (Inspiring others)
- The Executive’s Hat (Managing)
- The Director’s Hat (Enrolling new disciples)
- The Counselor’s Hat (Helping with problems)
- The Student’s Hat (Developing knowledge)
- The Pioneer’s Hat (Evangelizing new territory)

The Conductor's Hat (Directing the church)

The Reporter's Hat (Representing the church to the community)

Accounts and pithy illustrations pepper the pages of each chapter. The "Dr. Mc Sez" insights unfold the wisdom accumulated over his years of teaching and interacting with churches and pastors. Proverbs 25:11 aptly speaks to this treasure: "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances." Enjoy these "apples of gold!"

#27. McIntosh, Gary L. *Flying Solo* (Baker Publishing, 2023).

McIntosh addresses solo pastors, pastors without additional staff, in this latest offering. Some 60-77 percent of all pastors are solo pastors. He states the following.

Like soloing in an airplane, leading a church alone has its exciting moments, but numbers of solo pastors end up crashing like my friend. Some are not as fortunate as he was to do so without injury, which is why I've written this book.

Flying Solo is written specifically for the solo pastor serving a single-staff church. It articulates the major challenges of pastoring a church alone, and provides practical help so solo pastors can lead their churches fruitfully. Each chapter begins with an imaginary story and conversation between Pastors Bill Collie and Jim Hunter. (Introduction — no page numbers were available when writing this review)

As I read this book, my mind swept back over years of ministry. I started as a solo pastor in three out of my four pastorates. This book caused many emotions to surface from those days, bringing to mind both the joy of ministry and the uncovering of real pain—pain that often resides just below the surface. I believe solo pastors will identify with the portrait of solo pastoring described in each portion of the book.

The book consists of four sections.

- The Solo Pastor Learns to Fly
- The Solo Pastor Meets the People
- The Solo Pastor Takes Charge
- The Solo Pastor Stays Healthy

Each section contains three chapters where McIntosh expertly unpacks the challenges of solo ministry. Chapter titles include "Understand Solo

Churches,” “Abandon Fetch,” “Conquer Fear,” and “Overcome Loneliness.” The author presents the challenges, and each chapter contains wise prescriptions to help solo pastors thrive. Each chapter ends with pointed questions and ideas that apply the realities revealed in the preceding pages.

Once again, Dr. McIntosh desires pastors to thrive and churches to grow, a theme that permeates all twenty-seven volumes in print. Solo pastors and pastors who work with a small staff will find this book a rich addition to their library.

Summary

Reading, rereading, and commenting on all twenty-seven volumes written by my friend and mentor Dr. Gary L. McIntosh has enriched my life and challenged me to greater ministry effectiveness. I thank the Lord for Gary McIntosh. He is one-of-a-kind whose life experiences shaped him to become one of God’s choice servants. Walk his journey with him as you read his works. May you discover the same joy and appreciation of this dear brother in Christ that I enjoy.

About the Author

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