



N E X T G E N

HIGH SCORES

HOW TO WIN AT MINISTRY TO
THE NEXT GENERATION



L E E R O G E R S

What people are saying about **NEXTGEN HIGH SCORES**

How to Win at Ministry to the Next Generation

"The church's greatest resource are NextGen students. They are not the church of tomorrow; they are very much the church of today. But the stakes are high for the heart, soul, and mind of the next generation. I'm so grateful for a resource written by an active NextGen leader who will help all of us win in ministry to the next generation."

—Doug Clay, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.

"*NextGen High Scores* cuts through the splash and fizzle of trend-driven tactics and anchors readers to the truths necessary to be an effective NextGen leader. Lee's words carry the weight of over twenty years of NextGen ministry. When he talks about the significance of longevity, spiritual health, and faithfulness, it's more than theory. It's born out of a conviction that comes from living these values firsthand. Readers will be encouraged to embrace a path of ministry that will produce lasting fruit."

—Scotty Gibbons, author and speaker

"In *NextGen High Scores*, Lee Rogers beautifully illustrates the biblical precedent of NexGen ministry, as well as the powerful results of long-term commitment. With over twenty-five years of NextGen ministry experience, Lee puts language to something that so many leaders have struggled with—the desire to win without the discipline to stay in the game. With its reputable data and practical wisdom, this book can be a powerful tool in the hands of anyone who has a desire to make a long-term impact in the next generation of the church."

**—Austin Westlake, National Discipleship Director
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

“It’s possible that in our lifetime, we could see a generation of students accomplish the Great Commission. However, accidental discipleship doesn’t often occur. Our students deserve an intentional, strategic, and biblical leadership. In *NextGen High Scores*, Lee Rogers presents a clear and effective strategy to propel the impact of NextGen leaders to a new level. It’s a must read for every leader who wants to build a ministry that impacts and influences multiple generations.”

—**Peter Reeves, evangelist and founder of Reeves Initiative**

“This book is gold! Lee Rogers provides vital and valuable wisdom for lead pastors, young adult pastors, youth pastors, and children’s pastors with next generation ministry focus. Woven with Scripture, research, narrative, and experience, this resource sharpens vision, cuts through myth, grows confidence, and clarifies direction in the high call of ministry to the next generation.”

—**Jay Mooney, Chief Ministries and Resources Officer
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

“As a person who is passionate about seeing NextGen leaders win, I can confidently say that *NextGen High Scores* is a vital tool for anyone venturing into NextGen ministry. Its practical insights on the power of relationship-building, the emphasis on continuous personal growth, and a call to maintain integrity in life are second to none. This is a must read for all who aspire to make a lasting impact on the next generation.”

—**Terry Parkman, NextGen Pastor at River Valley Church**

“Lee Rogers delivers a comprehensive treatise delving into the definition, power, and profound impact of long-term ministry within the lives of children and youth. Sharing not only from his rich experience as a NextGen pastor but also from extensive research, he clearly defines similar discipleship outcomes for individuals who remain engaged in a church for five years of ministry or more. Simultaneously, Lee imparts incredible wisdom accumulated over multiple decades of serving in the local church. These insights will greatly enhance the capacity of any NextGen leader to flourish as they put these concepts into practice. Lastly, his Top

Ten Pro Tips Gain Extra Lives lay out a rock-solid format for NextGen leaders to embrace and implement.”

**—Kelly Presson, National KidMin Director
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

“*NextGen High Scores* is an essential read for pastors and leaders committed to influencing the next generation. Drawing on over two decades of experience, the author provides vital insights that are crucial to an effective youth ministry. Having authored *From Survival to Significance* over twenty years ago, I see this book as a powerful continuation that strengthens and updates the principles outlined in my previous work. By seamlessly blending research, personal anecdotes, and biblical wisdom, this book serves as a priceless guide for thriving in ministry to youth and kids.”

—Troy Jones, author and lead pastor of New Life Church

“Lee’s authoritative research on longevity in youth ministry holds the key to effective discipleship of the next generation. He has a unique ability to make complex principles simple, and his burden to invite lost people to put faith in Jesus has challenged me personally. The next generation needs leaders who will keep coming back for more when it gets difficult. *NextGen High Scores* shares the secrets to finding satisfaction and sustainability in next generation ministry.”

**—Josh Wellborn, National Youth Director
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

“If you need a wise and experienced friend to walk you through the essential elements of longevity in NextGen ministry, take the time to read this book. Full of practical and proven knowledge, real-life examples, and strategies for remaining faithful while serving the church, it accurately identifies the pitfalls and the challenges that most ministry leaders encounter and responds with insightful and meaningful reflection questions, and practical, systematic methods to implement. I highly recommend this book to anyone in children’s ministry as a road map to create

a holistic, thriving, healthy ministry approach that brings out the best in your leadership for long-term kingdom impact to the next generation.”

—**Julie Pratt, National Director of Children’s Discipleship
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

“Every leader, whether they’re just beginning their ministry journey or they have longevity in ministry, will gain so many nuggets of wisdom from this book! Lee has shared multiple simple truths that can be applied no matter what stage of ministry the leader is in to help them win in their ministry to the next generation.”

—**David Alexeiff, National BGMC Director
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**

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L E E R O G E R S



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D E D I C A T I O N

This book is dedicated to my wife, Christine, and my son, Judah. Christine, you have made me a better person and I am honored to be your husband. Judah, you challenge me to be better and I am proud to be your dad. Thank you both for your rich participation in the call God has placed on my life, and by extension on our family.

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FOREWORD

If it seems to you that the recent church emphasis on the next generation is new, it's not! Not at all. It has often, perhaps always, been the required focus of God's people. It started with Adam and Eve. God said that her seed would be struck by Satan's fangs and that the Seed would respond by crushing the devil's head beneath His foot. From that day until Jesus came, humanity needed that special someone from the next generation to come to their rescue. Later when God singled out Abraham to carry that promise forward and be the one through whom the promised Victor would come, God covenanted with Abraham that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land and through his seed all the world would be blessed. And so it was . . . but many generations later.

Hope lived among the Israelites with the children of every subsequent generation, waiting for the one to receive the promised land and give birth to the One who would crush the devil's head. The old Law was filled with many symbols and rituals that helped to keep the dream alive from generation to generation. They wore special clothes with symbols sewn on them for the specific purpose of keeping God's promises always before them. Many decorated their houses with statements and symbols, piled up stones in key places, and celebrated Passover every year, all to keep the faith and hope alive in yet one more generation. God has always been a next-generation God. As a matter of fact, many God-size dreams and mandates require more than one generation to fulfill. If we can't pass it forward, we can't complete it!

For that reason, the Church was born with a next-generation mandate and promise. Joel, a prophet from the Old Testament, prophesied that the last days' outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which came at the beginning of the Church era, would be multigenerational. He said it would be poured out on old men and women, and on their children. It's God's way to work through connected generations. For instance, the dream of a grand temple for God was in the mind of King David. David conquered the city and bought the mountain where the temple would be built. He designed it and raised most

of the money to pay for it, but he never saw it, except in his dreams. He passed his dream on to his son to build what he had planned and prepared for. That is often the way of God, His kingdom, and His Church. One generation dreams it and prepares for it, but the next generation builds it and is blessed by it.

Problems come when the dreams don't survive for the next generation. If we don't leave the next generation a dream to fulfill or they don't receive it, they can flounder as the son of Solomon did and as the generation after Joshua did. Both Joshua and Solomon were handed unfinished dreams from leaders who knew the purpose they were pursuing would require the next generation. They made sure the next generation was ready and empowered to continue moving forward. Yet the visions of Joshua and Solomon didn't make it to the next generation. So, rather than continue to advance, the kingdom of Israel split under the leadership of Solomon's son Rehoboam, and the Book of Judges recording the summary of the history of Israel after Joshua says, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25, NASB).

Even Elisha, Elijah's "next generation," experienced a failed transmission. His chosen NextGen, Gehazi, disqualified himself by chasing after earthly riches rather than God's anointing. Hurt and disappointed by the break in the relationship, Elisha never found a replacement. The result was that Elisha's last miracle was done from his dead bones rather than his living, primary student. He lost the one who should have been waiting to pick up his mantle.

Lee has written this book to make sure you have a dream that requires the next generation and a descendant to pick up your mantle and continue this great work of the Kingdom until Jesus declares it is finished. Thank you for beginning to read the pages of Lee's inspired work. My request is that you read every page! My prayer is that it will inspire you to make the next generation your priority.

**—Rick DuBose, Assistant General Superintendent
of the Assemblies of God U.S.A.**



INTRODUCTION

“Every young pastor working with the next generation needs to read this book,” Pastor Bernie said as he placed a book in my hands. Of course, he wasn’t talking about the book you’re holding; he was talking about a different book. Pastor Bernie had been my youth pastor when I was in sixth and seventh grade, and I have great respect for him. I was rounding out my first year of full-time NextGen ministry, and we were at Youth Camp together. It was the year 2000, and I had experienced a lot of firsts that year. It was my first year of marriage, first year in ministry, and this was my first time going to youth camp as a pastor. Pastor Bernie continued, “If you read that book and do what it says, it’ll make a tremendous difference for you.”

The book was *From Survival to Significance*, and Pastor Bernie believed in it so much he had a case of them and was giving them to every young pastor at camp. I took the book and started reading it when I got home. The author, Troy Jones, wrote something in the first paragraph that stuck in my mind and gave me a determination to strive for resilience. He wrote, “The leaders who truly make a difference in youth ministry are willing to have a long-term commitment to one particular church.”¹ I had never heard this before. I had taken numerous ministry classes at Bible college, had read several books about ministering to the next generation, but had never heard anyone suggest I should commit to the same church for the long term. Most people I knew in ministry talked about moving from church to church until they found the perfect situation.

The truth is there are no perfect situations or churches, and there are no perfect kids or youth pastors. To make a long-term commitment to a church, a NextGen pastor must be willing to become the kind of leader who can stay rooted in their call at the church God has called them to. Based on the title of that book, I thought I would read about great ministry strategies or tips and tricks to attract more young people and their families. There was some strategic guidance, but I soon discovered that the things that help a leader achieve significance in ministry have more to do with personal management, character development, and integrity than anything else. This set in motion a personal journey; I would strive for longevity where God called me. It often meant I had to change or adapt to the church and leader God had called me to serve.

I was determined to have significance in ministry through longevity, not just for my sake, but for the sake of the young people and churches God called me to serve. I read a few other books along the way to help me stay committed to my call to NextGen ministry. Many of those books said similar things, and almost all of them were based on the author's opinion or experience. I agreed with most of what I read, but I also felt something was missing. When I'd been in ministry to the next generation for about twelve years, I felt God leading me to conduct a study of Spirit-filled NextGen pastors to discover what helped them stay in the same church long-term. So, I set out to conduct a legitimate, credible, research-based study.

It took time and a lot of work and learning, but in my twenty-second year of ministry to the next generation, I completed the study. This book contains the authoritative results of that study; they are the findings from the life and ministry of seventy-nine Spirit-filled NextGen pastors who've been in their churches for the long term. It's not just about stats and figures, though I do share the highest scoring stats that are important; it's about their stories and experiences. It's about what they have in common that helped them attain longevity. A lot of what I'd read in books early in ministry was confirmed through my research, but I also discovered new factors that keep a kids or youth pastor in place. For the first time, we measured the impact of the Holy Spirit and the call of God on ministry longevity—and the results are what excite me the most about the study.

I also discovered that the Bible is full of examples of long-term NextGen ministry, and that a long-term discipleship relationship between a spiritual leader and a young person is common among high-impact biblical leaders. I'll share some of those stories throughout the book. I think every pastor or leader called to serve the next generation will be inspired by these examples.

In addition to the research and study results, this book is full of my stories. It contains lessons from my own quest for longevity. For me, staying committed to the same church or ministry God called me to came at a price. The cost was my pride, my priorities, my submission to leadership, and sometimes my humiliation. It required my entire surrender to the Holy Spirit, allowing God to shape me toward longevity in each place of ministry. If you're called to serve long-term the next generation, your ability to do so will also come at a price, but the results of NextGen ministry longevity are well worth the cost. Before you continue, would you pray that the Holy Spirit would open your heart and mind to become the kind of leader who can make a long-term impact? Pray for determination and resilience. Know that I'm cheering you on, and that I have prayed for you as I pray for every Spirit-filled NextGen pastor to achieve a high score and win at ministry to the next generation.

Note

1. Troy Jones, *From Survival to Significance* (Renton, WA: Power2Grow Communications, 1998), 13.

1

HOOKED ON THE GAME

I was nervous, and I'm sure it was obvious in my preaching. I kept thinking, *What's going to happen? What if I say something wrong? What if nobody responds?* It was my third week as a brand-new youth pastor and it was one of the first times for me to present the gospel at the conclusion of my message. I was twenty years old, and God had called me to serve the next generation at a church in Philadelphia.

Although the church was medium-sized, the youth group was small—much smaller than normal for this size church. On most nights we had ten to twelve students, but that night we only had five or six, all from the streets. Their parents didn't attend the church and wouldn't even bring them to church. The church van picked up these students or they walked to church. I didn't grow up in the city, but now I had a youth group full of city kids, many of whom lived in poverty. It was a difficult group, to be honest, and they really challenged me during those first few weeks in NextGen ministry.

I knew some of their stories because I'd been helping at the youth group during college, and the former youth pastor had filled me in on some of the rest. It was so different from the youth group I had attended in high school; these students didn't respect me just because I was the youth pastor, and I wasn't sure if they respected any authority. At the time, I wasn't sure why they came to youth group at all, because they didn't seem to care about the preaching or the worship. They often talked during the sermon, none of them participated in worship, and for a while it was even hard to start a conversation with several of them.

I wasn't the first one to deal with their challenging behavior; they had given the former youth pastor a pretty hard time. Several parents of young people within the church had also noticed this behavior. Within two to three weeks of youth pastoring at the church, I realized there were some middle school students in the church who weren't coming to youth group. When I asked their parents if they would let their kids come to youth group, they told me they didn't want their kids to be influenced by the street kids. It was clear that there was a lot of work to do, including earning the trust of the parents.

I had worked hard preparing my message for that night, and I was excited to share it because I was sure God had given me a great word. So, when only half the group showed up, I was disappointed. Turns out it was the last Wednesday night of summer before school started, and several of the regular students opted to stay out in the streets and embrace the fading moments of summer freedom. Some of the students who didn't show up were the exact ones I had in mind when I put the message together, so I was feeling discouraged when I started to preach. I thought, *Did I truly hear from God, or did I just waste a lot of time preparing a message for only half the group?* I had been at it less than a month and felt like I was already losing the game of NextGen ministry.

I preached like the room was full, but since it wasn't, the students seemed to feel even more freedom to interrupt and talk during the message. By the time I got to the end of the message, I felt like a failure and wasn't sure I should present the gospel. *If they aren't listening, what's the point? Can I even be a pastor to this generation? Maybe I didn't hear from God, and I should quit,* I thought to myself. I pushed forward and presented the gospel anyway, then asked the students to bow their heads and close their eyes. I asked if anyone in the room wanted to put their faith in Jesus. I was sure no one would respond, which is probably why I jumped back a little when a hand went up in the back row. I wasn't expecting that, and it stunned me so much that it took a couple of seconds to recover my thoughts and lead the students in prayer.

As surprised as I was that anyone raised a hand, I was even more surprised at the person who responded. It was Emily, a quiet student who lived

with her mom just one block from the church. Emily was different from the other street kids; she was polite, listened carefully, and may have been the only well-behaved student in the room that night. The former youth pastor had told me that she had been faithfully attending for about a year and seemed to enjoy it. Of all the students in the room, she was the last one I expected to respond because I thought she was already a follower of Jesus.

When Emily raised her hand, something powerful happened to me. All the frustration and discouragement of working with this challenging group melted away, and I realized the first big win I would experience in NextGen ministry—a young person putting her faith in Jesus. Talking with Emily after service, I found out my invitation was the first time anyone had asked her to respond to the gospel, and she had been waiting for the opportunity to put her faith in Jesus. That moment changed my whole outlook; I was suddenly hooked on sharing the gospel with young people and discipling the next generation. The next week, I came back determined to share the message with passion no matter how many students were in the room or how well I thought they were listening.

Pro Tip: Synchronize Discipleship



Within weeks of arriving at our first ministry assignment as youth pastors, my husband and I were asked to add the kids ministries to our responsibilities. At the time, I didn't feel a particular pull toward kids, but I wanted to be a team player. I wasn't convinced I was the best choice for this responsibility. However, once I realized the opportunity that was presented to us, I realized this was a game changer. The core values in our youth ministry could also be the core values of our kids ministry. We could all march in the same direction. Ultimately, this became an advantage as we were able to create shared vision, values, culture, and even language. We quickly learned that familiarity is powerful. Kids who got excited about things in our kids ministry—such as bringing their Bibles to church, giving to missions, telling others about Jesus, serving around the church and in the community—carried that over into our youth ministry. As a result of this synchronized discipleship, our impact was multiplied across the entire NextGen community. We didn't come into it with a combined focus, but it became one of the best things that happened to us.

*Julie Pratt, Director of Children's Discipleship
Assemblies of God U.S.A.*

As the weeks turned into months, I came to realize the street kids were coming because the church was a place where they could belong, and despite how they behaved, they really were listening. One by one they began to put their faith in Jesus. They would even bring up things I said in my sermons weeks afterward. As time passed, I got better at working with city kids. I learned to manage their behavior as well as my own expectations, and the group began to grow. Emily became a core part of it, and even played guitar in the worship band when we got it going. It took about a year, but we were able to build trust with parents in the church, and those students who had been forbidden from coming started attending.

The group grew to three times the size it was when we started—not huge, but it became larger than normal for this size church. As months turned into years, many students grew close to us as we helped guide their discipleship. After almost five years, God called my wife and me to a different church in a different location. We were sad to leave, but also grateful to have stayed for as long as we did. Several of the students from that group remain friends and close contacts to this day, and my wife and I have continued to guide their discipleship from time to time. During those first few months, I ran into a lot of challenges. I felt like I was losing the game and wanted to give up. If I had walked away from my call out of frustration, we never would have seen the results that came from staying faithful—the street kids coming to Christ, the healing of mistrust of NextGen ministry, discipleship of young people, and numerical growth of the group.

During my years working in NextGen ministry, I've been honored to present the gospel and be a part of the discipleship process for both kids and youth, and there's nothing like a young person sincerely turning to God. The only thing better is when more and more of them sincerely turn to God and grow as disciples of Jesus. Kids and youth pastors who are called by God to the next generation can experience these wins as long as they stay faithful to the call. However, it's impossible to see these things happen if you walk away from your call to the next generation or from the church God has called you to. High scores in NextGen ministry come from faithful service in submission to God. The Holy Spirit uses our

long-term commitment to young people and our church to accelerate His work in the next generation.

NextGen Ministry—Redefining the Game

What does it mean to be a NextGen pastor or leader? It means you are working with the next generation of the church. Kids, youth, and young adult pastors are NextGen pastors, helping to guide and steward the discipleship of the next generation. If you're a youth pastor, you're a NextGen pastor. If you're a kids pastor, you're a NextGen pastor. If you're a young adults pastor, you're a NextGen pastor. While both kids and youth ministry have age-specific needs and practices, all those who work with the next generation in a church should have common discipleship goals. In other words, the discipleship dimensions of a Spirit-filled follower of Jesus are the same at each stage of life, whether childhood or adolescence. For example, seven dimensions that every member of the next generation can grow in are Bible, Holy Spirit, mission, prayer, worship, service, and generosity.

When kids and youth ministries in a church share the same discipleship dimensions or goals, it has power to shape the next generation with resilience that is otherwise not possible. Imagine a child in your church growing in the same discipleship dimensions all the way through high school and beyond. When this happens, the next generation is more finely sharpened and focused on following Jesus. If you're reading this book, you may feel called to the entire next generation in the church, both kids and youth. However, most leaders working with young people feel called to work with either kids or youth. Whatever your call, I challenge you to redefine the game by seeing yourself as a pastor to the next generation—a NextGen pastor. Kids and youth ministries are more effective in the long-term discipleship of a young person when they work together in this way.

Not only do kids and youth ministries share discipleship dimensions, kids and youth pastors who can faithfully serve long-term at their churches also have much in common with one another. Ministry to the next generation is far superior in every way when kids and youth pastors put down roots and stay planted in the same church for five years or more. This is called longevity, and NextGen pastors who achieve it aren't doing it by

accident. They aren't just blessed, and they don't just happen to land in a perfect ministry situation. On the contrary, most of them have learned, developed, and adapted to the church God called them to. Many of these NextGen leaders share similar personal commitments, relational habits, ministry practices, preparation experiences, and spiritual diligence. That's what this book is about. It's about becoming a kids or youth pastor who can achieve longevity. It's about leveling up, so you can do what it takes to win at ministry to the next generation.

Level Up

When I was nine years old, my brother got a job washing dishes at a truck stop. He took his first paycheck and bought a Nintendo Entertainment System. The NES was the leading video game system of the late 1980s, and it brought video gaming into our home for the first time. He got two games with the system: *Super Mario Brothers* and *Metroid*. Both games are quests, and you have to move toward specific goals or missions to win. You can only win if you stay in the game until you reach the final goal. To stay in the game, you acquire items or powers that enable you to level up. Whether it is the flower power in *Super Mario Brothers* or different kinds of weapons in *Metroid*, it is impossible to stay in the game without growing and obtaining abilities to help you make it further and win.

Pro Tip: Measure Success by Longevity



I spent ten years doing youth ministry in a small town and I was repeatedly amazed at the power of longevity. After three years, then five, then seven, and finally ten years in, I was convinced I had finally cracked the code for being trusted by my church and community. However, at each benchmark it became clear that longevity wasn't just a measurement, but the *only* measurement of success in the eyes of my church and community. If you are at the beginning of the journey, I encourage you to stay at it. If you are in the middle of a difficult season, I encourage you not to quit. The fruit of your ministry efforts is usually one more year out or one more difficult season away or just one more school year of loving your community well. The path toward success in ministry is clear and it is marked by faithful longevity.

*Joe Epley, Student Ministries Director
Montana Ministry Network*

Now, I play *Minecraft* with my son, and while many things have changed in video gaming, you still need to level up. To do well in the game, you need to find things, acquire items, and build capabilities. The more you gather, the more you can do in the game and the better the experience becomes. In fact, almost every game I've played for a significant amount of time required growing in abilities, skills, or gaining items to succeed. It's impossible to win the game without doing what it takes to survive, and it's impossible to enjoy the game without growing in skills and items.

Getting a high score in NextGen ministry also means growing in abilities, skills, and gaining what you need to level up. Your call to pastor the next generation is an epic quest, and whether you're called to kids or youth ministry, it's impossible to win if you don't stay in the game. Most of the time, the longer you stay in the game, the higher your score. The higher your score, the better your experience. Let me be clear—just because you're a kids or youth pastor or you feel led to be in ministry to the next generation, you can't win without leveling up. Almost no one has what they need to get a high score when they start "playing the game" of NextGen ministry, and those who stay in the game make a concentrated effort to grow in skills, mature in relationships, and move deeper in spiritual things.

Stay in the Game

The best way to get a high score and win in ministry to the next generation is to stay in the game. This isn't just about staying in kids or youth ministry; it's about staying in the same church and the same community for as long as possible. The longer you can stay in ministry at the same church, the more enjoyable your ministry experience will be. As Doug Fields wrote, "The longer you work in youth ministry, the easier it becomes, and the better you minister to students."¹ When you stay rooted in your call for several years at one church, the people there begin to trust you and your credibility goes up. You gain more knowledge of how things work at the church, you learn winning strategies for your NextGen ministry, and you tend to gain more control over your schedule.² As you learn the rhythms year after year, everything gets easier. Tasks that took hours in your first year of NextGen ministry may only take a couple of minutes.

In his book *The Youth Ministry Survival Guide*, Len Kageler lists several other benefits of staying in the same church for the long term: longevity pays better, stress is lowered, working with the next generation helps you stay young, you get the joy of watching kids and teenagers grow up and mature in the Lord, and you get to experience what it's like to be good at something meaningful.³ The gold standard for NextGen ministry longevity starts at seven years in a church. In seven years, a kids pastor can help a child grow spiritually from kindergarten to sixth grade, and a youth pastor can help a student grow spiritually from sixth grade through high school. There's something special about the seven-year benchmark, and I've been blessed to achieve it twice during my time in ministry to the next generation. As Mark DeVries wrote, "As I passed the seven-year threshold, something happened. I started to observe movement I didn't initiate; I began to see our ministry carried along by a momentum that had been slowly, imperceptibly building for years."⁴

While staying long-term at a church has many positive effects, staying short-term at a church has many damaging effects. Everyone involved wins at ministry to the next generation when a kids or youth pastor stays in the game, but everyone involved loses when a kids or youth pastor doesn't stick around. When a NextGen pastor has a tenure of less than three years, the results of leaving are particularly devastating. The ministry is stunted until stability is restored. Long-term discipleship goals and initiatives are put on the back burner while everyone involved establishes relationships and trust with a new leader. Students and parents believe they cannot trust a kids or youth pastor to stick around and will often make the next kids or youth pastor work harder to gain credibility. The volunteer team tends to get worn out picking up the slack during times of transition, and many volunteers become discouraged to the point of walking away from NextGen ministry entirely. Short tenures can also give a black eye to the church, as the congregation and community may start to think something is wrong when kids or youth pastors don't stay long.

These are all bad results of short NextGen tenures, but the biggest losers are the kids and teenagers. This is especially true for students in the preteen and teenage years, when emotions are intense and feelings so impactful. When a kids or youth pastor makes a meaningful connection,

young people are quick to trust and give freely of themselves to this person who they see as a spiritual mentor. When that connection is broken, especially when it's broken abruptly, the emotional fallout can be severe. It's almost certain that they'll be more reluctant to trust the next spiritual leader in their lives, and they'll likely need to go through a period of healing to get over the loss.

The worst consequence of all is when a young person transfers this lack of trust for NextGen ministry leaders to God. Young people can often see their kids and youth pastors as representatives of God. While you may think this far-fetched, it's not at all disconnected in the mind of a young person. Kids and youth pastors deliver the Word of God, often as they believe God guided them, and young people receive it as such. Many NextGen pastors are quick to say that God led them into their role at their church as a kids or youth pastor, and so young people also believe that God has sent this spiritual leader to them. What does it say about God to a young person when that leader leaves abruptly after a short time? When young people experience the devastation of short-term spiritual leadership in their lives, they can easily start to believe that God and the church are not reliable. Commit now that you'll strive to win at ministry to the next generation by staying at the church where God called you to minister. Win by staying in the game.

Quests, Respawns, and Resets

I still enjoy playing video games, and the quest remains one of my favorite type of games. I find video games help me rest and recharge. They're a welcome distraction and can be a great avenue to connect with others. At the same time, I recognize that a video game is still just a game and at some point I'll turn it off. However, there's no off switch in ministry to the next generation. In fact, if a church powers down their ministry to kids and youth, it's usually a sign the church is dying. While I use the illustration of video games to talk about NextGen ministry, the consequences of kids and youth work are far more serious than any video game I've ever played. NextGen ministry is about shaping the next generation of the Church, the future of the body of Christ; it's about eternity and life on earth now. NextGen ministry focuses on discipling students as followers of Jesus, who said, "I came so that they would have life, and have

it abundantly” (John 10:10, NASB). Heaven is the destination, but the consequences of kids and youth ministry start now as we guide students to embrace an abundant life.

Not only are the consequences of NextGen ministry more serious than any video game, the challenges and opportunities are also more bounded. If my character in *Minecraft* dies, I can respawn (reenter the existing game) and regather my items and abilities to continue playing the game where I left off. In fact, I can respawn endlessly. However, there’s no such thing as endless respawns in NextGen ministry. When a kids or youth pastor is released from their church abruptly or decides to quit because they’re burned out, a respawn in the same church is almost impossible—it’s highly unlikely they’ll ever be able to do ministry in that church again. When a NextGen pastor fails too many times at too many different churches, they’ll run out of ministry “lives” and will lose the “game” completely. Most mistakes are not the end of the game in NextGen ministry, but repeatedly failing to learn from your mistakes and do better next time can destroy your call. This is a critical point—longevity in your church and NextGen ministry is a quest, and if you want to stay in the game, you’ve got to learn from your mistakes and make the adjustments necessary to grow, develop, and mature.

There were two buttons on that old Nintendo video game console—power and reset. Power, of course, turned the game on. Presumably, you’re reading this book because you’ve pushed the power button and you’re already in the game of kids or youth ministry, or you feel called to the next generation and you’ll push the power button soon. Occasionally, when I was playing a game on the Nintendo I’d get frustrated with my gameplay and hit the reset button. The reset button didn’t kill the power, but it did restart the game. Resetting means you get a chance to play the game again, correct the mistakes you made, and position yourself to have a better chance at winning. If you’re still in the game, you can hit the reset button in NextGen ministry at any time. You can adjust how you do kids or youth ministry, how you treat others, and how you submit to your leadership. You can apologize, you can change how you manage your personal life, and you can be more open to allowing the Holy Spirit to inform your life and ministry. Making those



Pro Tip: Don't Call Yourself a Pro

Mastery is a powerful intrinsic motivator, but finding your purpose and carrying a genuine love for the game will keep you on the court through the slumps and learning curves. If you commit to NextGen ministry, there will always be a next generation with new challenges for growth and and new opportunities to learn. Many will graduate from NextGen ministry prematurely because they get drawn into climbing the corporate ministry ladder. Being a NextGen leader has much less to do about your mastery of the art of ministry and much more about your willingness to serve and pave a way for others to follow.

*Griffin McGrath, Youth & Young Adults Director
Arizona Ministry Network*

adjustments sincerely can even earn you some extra lives at your church or place of ministry.

Jesus and the Next Generation

Jesus played the game better than anyone else. It could even be said that He is the master of the respawn. Through His death and resurrection, He made salvation available to all humanity. It's well known and accepted that Jesus and His disciples changed the course of human history. What isn't known is how young Jesus' disciples likely were when He called them to follow Him. While it is impossible to say for certain how old the disciples were, the customs and traditions of the day indicate that many of them were likely teenagers when they became disciples. The disciples would probably be in your NextGen ministry if they were in your church today. Jesus didn't primarily focus on discipling His peers or His elders to accomplish the Great Commission—He worked with the next generation. He was the disciples' NextGen pastor. If you are working with the next generation in the church, you're in good company.

The Highest Score

Jesus spent intensive time with His disciples, doing ministry, eating together, and walking the dusty roads from place to place. He had a depth of face time with His disciples at a more sustained pace than today's ministry leaders have with their disciples. At best, a NextGen

pastor today may hope to be with students for two to three hours each week on average. Jesus provides the ultimate model of winning in ministry to the next generation. He is everything a kids or youth pastor can and should be. He preached and taught the next generation of disciples, but also helped them put those lessons into practice. He modeled integrity and faithfulness, establishing the pattern for sacrificial spirituality and generous compassion. He challenged His young followers to exceed the expectations the world had placed on them, yet He also called out their foolish thinking and antics when necessary.

He challenged the disciples with the Scriptures and taught them about the Holy Spirit. He sent them out on missions to proclaim the kingdom of God and taught them to pray. Jesus educated the disciples on true worship and taught them how to serve those in need. He was the ultimate model of generosity. Jesus even managed to deal patiently with a parent in the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. He was an amazing NextGen pastor. He demonstrated longevity by faithfully serving the next generation of disciples from the beginning of His ministry until His ascension. His time with them only lasted three and a half years, which is less than how we would define longevity today, but the intensity, quality, and divine nature of His discipleship more than made up for the time. His example of involving the next generation in discipleship is an example every church leader should pay attention to, and it's an inspiration and confirmation for all of us who serve in kids or youth ministry. Jesus got the ultimate NextGen high score—He won the game.

About the High Scores

If you're serving or called to serve in NextGen ministry, you too can get a high score. Winning at ministry to the next generation comes from longevity. Kids and youth pastors who attain longevity share many of the same personal commitments, relational habits, ministry practices, preparation experiences, and spiritual diligence. This isn't just my opinion as a veteran minister to the next generation; it's been proven by research, and this book will share those findings. The research comes from a doctoral study of seventy-nine Assemblies of God NextGen pastors and leaders who pastored full-time at the same church for five

years or more at the time the surveys and interviews were conducted.⁵ All the participants were youth pastors, and many of the participants also worked in kids ministry.

Why five years or more? As I wrote earlier in this chapter, the gold standard for longevity at the same church starts at seven years. At the same time, several other research studies have shown the average tenure, or length of stay, of a full-time NextGen pastor is around four years.⁶ Serving at least five years beats the average and is considered by most to be a healthy tenure for a kids or youth pastor. The average pastor in my study had been doing ministry to the next generation for twelve years and had been at their current church for just over eight years. Participants were from every region of the continental United States.

NextGen pastors who participated in the survey answered over 150 questions in five different categories of life and ministry: personal, relational, logistical, educational, and spiritual. I also interviewed many of the pastors about their life and ministry experience. The research revealed what these NextGen pastors had in common that helped them serve the next generation for the long term. This book will share the high scores from this study—the most shared practices, experiences, habits, and areas of growth—and will dispel some of the myths of what it takes to get a high score and win the game. If you practice the suggestions laid out in this book, you'll have a much better shot at staying committed to your call long-term.

The Next Generation Is the Life of the Church

Just about one hundred years ago something powerful was happening across the United States. The Holy Spirit was breaking out in the next generation and young people were finding their place in the church. It was the start of NextGen ministries in the Assemblies of God. In Los Angeles in 1925, the next generation started meeting together and called their group "Christ's Ambassadors."⁷ Their NextGen pastor was a man named Carl Hatch, and soon the concept of Christ's Ambassadors began to spread throughout the nation. For the next twelve years, Carl Hatch and his family gave their lives to see next-generation ministry start

in churches across the nation. He and his family sacrificed much and received no financial compensation; they did it because God had called them to do it.⁸

When his time leading NextGen ministry was done, Carl Hatch wrote, “While we have given the best part of our life to the cause of Youth, we have never regretted it and we still believe that Youth is the life of a church.”⁹ Many of you reading this book have been called to give the best part of your life to the cause of the next generation. Do you believe that kids and youth ministry are the life of a church? I pray you do because it will help you win at ministry to the next generation. You can do this! You get to do this! And if you follow the wisdom and experience of the NextGen pastors who informed this book, you will.

Questions to Think About

1. What is it about kids or youth ministry that has you hooked?
2. What does it look like to guide discipleship of the next generation in the church? Is there a particular age group in the next generation you are called to serve?
3. In what ways do you need to level up in NextGen ministry?
4. In what ways does staying at the same church benefit you? How does it benefit the young people in the ministry?
5. In what ways does having a short stay at a church hurt you? How does it hurt the young people in the ministry?
6. Is there anything you need to do now to hit the reset button in NextGen ministry?
7. What do you find most appealing about Jesus' work with the disciples as you work with the next generation in the church?

What a Lead Pastor Needs to Know

- NextGen ministry is exponentially better when a youth or kids pastor has been at the church for at least five years. The next generation in your church will be well-served if you can keep your NextGen pastor(s) on staff for as long as possible.
- NextGen ministry struggles when kids or youth pastors don't stay in a church for very long. This isn't just bad for the ministry program; it's bad for the young people—they learn to be distrustful of church leadership and may transfer those feelings to God.
- When you hire a NextGen pastor, they will need your help if they're going to be successful for the long term.
- Kids and youth pastors are as passionate about their call to lead the next generation as you are about your call to lead the church, because it is God who has called them. Part of your role as the lead pastor is to help steward the call of God in their lives.

Notes

1. Doug Fields, *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: A Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Books published by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 274.
2. Len Kageler, *The Youth Ministry Survival Guide: How to Thrive and Last for the Long Haul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 236–310.
3. Kageler, *The Youth Ministry Survival Guide*, 236–310.
4. Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 125.
5. Participants who had left their church or youth within the six months prior to research were also eligible, though only a handful were in this situation. This study was my doctoral dissertation, entitled “Positive Factors of Longevity for Vocational Youth Pastors in the Assemblies of God USA.” Research was conducted through Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.
6. Average years of tenure in other studies:
 - 4.2 years—Gregg A. Makin, “Understanding the Turnover Intentions of Youth Pastors,” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ann Arbor, MI: Regent University, 2005).
 - 3.7 years—Len Kageler, “High School Church Youth Groups: Growth and Decline,” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ann Arbor, MI: Fordham University, 1999).
 - 4 years—Rick Lawrence, “Your Rapid Changing Reality: The 2015 Youth Ministry Salary Survey,” *Group Magazine*, 2015.
7. William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 273.
8. “Greetings to All,” *Christ's Ambassadors Herald* (Springfield, MO: January 1938).
9. Carl Edward Hatch, “My Last Editorial,” *Christ's Ambassadors Herald* (Springfield, MO: December 1937).



It's possible to win big at ministry to the next generation, but only if you're willing to stay in the game!

Grounded in research and illustrated with real-life experience, *NextGen High Scores* explains in practical language the most common behaviors, practices, and strategies of kids and youth pastors who make a lasting impact. Making a lasting impact requires becoming the kind of leader who can stay rooted in God's call to a church and community for the long term. *NextGen High Scores* will provide a boost for any kids or youth pastor on this journey.

This book covers the personal commitments, relational habits, ministry practices, preparation experiences, and spiritual diligence of some of the best kids, youth, and young adult pastors across the United States. In addition, pro tips from high-level leaders in NextGen ministry are found throughout each chapter, as well as valuable information for lead pastors and church boards to better understand how a church can win at kids and youth ministry. *NextGen High Scores* is a must read for anyone directly leading or giving oversight to ministry to the next generation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lee Rogers is a NexGen ministry veteran with over twenty-five years of experience working with young people in the church. A frequent speaker for youth camps, retreats, and conventions, Lee has served the next generation in both urban and rural settings, served as a Youth Alive missionary, and led youth ministry efforts on the state and national levels. He is the author of *Initiate: Powerful Conversations That Lead to Jesus*, and the lead author of *God So Loved: A Student's Guide to Sharing Jesus at School* and *I Dare You: Spread the Gospel One Challenge at a Time*.

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