

The Review

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Author Biography

Gary L. McIntosh is president of the Church Growth Network and a professor of Christian ministry and leadership at Talbot School of Theology. He equips pastors and church leaders through consulting, seminars, and practical resources focused on healthy, mission-driven congregations.

Reviewer's Biography

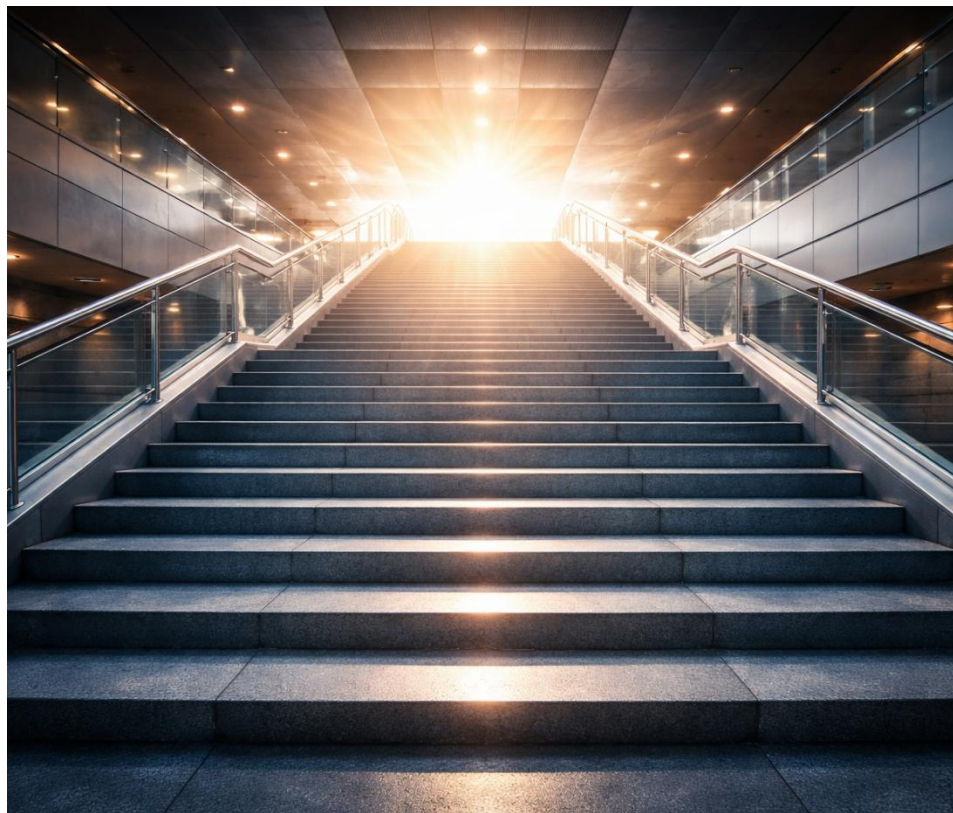
Randy Stone is Lead Consultant and Coach with Strategic Church Solutions, helping churches clarify mission, strengthen teams, and build repeatable systems for disciple-making, leadership development, and ministry effectiveness.



Produced for

**STRATEGIC
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An Executive Summary of **Taking Your Church to the Next Level**, written by *Gary McIntosh*.

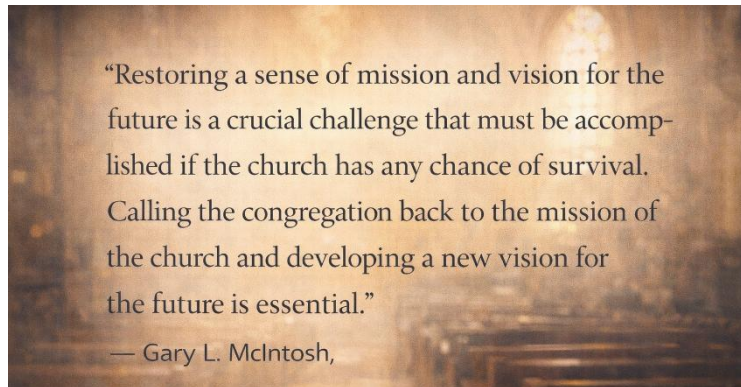


Basic Summary

Gary L. McIntosh argues that most churches move through predictable life cycles—periods of fruitfulness followed by plateaus and, if unaddressed, decline. The problem is rarely one dramatic crisis. More often, leaders keep using yesterday's approaches in a new season: what worked to get a church "here" won't automatically get it "there." As a church ages and shifts in size, its structures, leadership habits, communication patterns, and ministry priorities must be intentionally upgraded so the congregation stays fruitful and faithful.

The book unfolds in three arcs. First, it explains congregational life cycles and how to recognize where your church is on the curve before decline hardens into resignation. Second, it explores church size stages, showing that each size level brings new organizational demands—decision-making, staffing, volunteer mobilization, governance, and ministry coordination all need to mature as complexity increases. Third, McIntosh highlights choice points: moments when leaders must decide whether to redesign systems, clarify roles, and realign ministries with mission—or to preserve familiar patterns that slowly erode effectiveness.

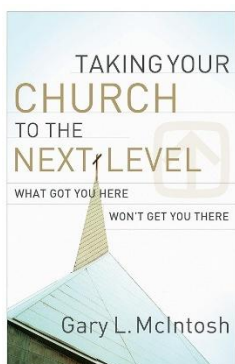
"Next level" isn't a gimmick or a growth-at-any-cost strategy; it's a call to lead change proactively so the church remains aligned with its mission for the next season God entrusts to it.



Ministry Application

For an Evangelical church, the "next level" conversation should begin with theology, not technique: the mission is making disciples, and methods are servants, not masters. Use McIntosh's life-cycle lens to ask: **Are we still oriented outward in evangelism, prayer, and gospel presence, or have we become maintenance-driven?** Then align your systems to your doctrine—clear pathways for membership and maturity, ministry role clarity, leader multiplication, and a communication rhythm that keeps the Great Commission in front of the congregation.

At key choice points, lead with Scripture and shepherding: explain the "why," invite honest feedback, and move at a pace that protects unity without rewarding inertia. Treat continual improvement as stewardship—evaluate ministries regularly, retire what no longer serves disciple-making, and invest intentionally in the next generation of leaders, small groups, and community engagement.



Final Thoughts

Taking your church to the next level isn't about chasing trends; it's about refusing to confuse familiarity with faithfulness. McIntosh reminds us that God's mission doesn't change, but our stewardship must adapt as contexts, capacity, and complexity shift. Read this book with your leadership team, not just on your own. Identify where you are in the life cycle, name the next "upgrade" you've been postponing, and choose a handful of changes you can execute well over the next 90 days.

Most importantly, keep the change anchored in spiritual health—prayer, unity, clarity of the gospel, and disciple-making priorities. When a church combines theological conviction with disciplined improvement, "next level" becomes less a slogan and more a faithful pathway into the future.

Favorable Critique

This is a steady, pastor-friendly guide for leaders who feel the tension between honoring a church's history and preparing for its future. McIntosh gives language for what many teams sense but can't diagnose: churches don't just "get stuck"—they often outgrow (or out-age) their current ways of organizing ministry. The life-cycle and size-stage framework is especially helpful because it normalizes change and reduces shame; it shows that new challenges are often signs of transition, not failure.

I also appreciate the emphasis on incremental, continual improvement rather than flashy overhauls. The book pushes leaders toward real bottlenecks—decision-making, volunteer systems, role clarity, and mission drift—so adjustments are purposeful. If you want practical guidance that respects biblical faithfulness while promoting organizational wisdom, this is a valuable tool.