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Book Review: The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will Change Our World by David Wraight

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Pace: Book Review: *The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will C* and humility like the Psalmist, “Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” (Ps. 85:6)

Wraight, David. *The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will Change Our World*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007, 212 pp., \$12.99.

Reviewed by R. Scott Pace, Ph.D., Huitt Professor of Religious Education, Chair of Applied Ministry Department, Oklahoma Baptist University

As International President and CEO of Youth for Christ International, David Wraight is exceptionally qualified to write a book focused on maximizing the potential of the next generation. His first-hand ministry experience includes considerable time as a pastor, youth counselor, and organizational leader. These credentials, along with his passion to invest in young people, serve as the foundation in constructing a strategy to empower “the generation who will change the world” (101). In his work, Wraight, a native of Australia and an international leader, provides some much-needed balance to Western ideas of how to engage the youth culture with informed insights and a global perspective.

153

The title, *The Next Wave*, capitalizes on a surfing metaphor that perfectly translates into Wraight’s stated purpose. Careful study of the wave trends with an acute gaze toward the horizon helps surfers position themselves to combine their observations with their abilities into a successful ride. Wraight draws a parallel for believers desiring to advance the cause of Christ with a particular focus on the next generation. He summarizes his initial goal and the first five chapters of the book by contending, “It is about reading the signs, trends, and cultural, social, and spiritual shifts that are converging around the world and in the church” (xv). However, his stated thesis does not end with an evaluation of these factors. The practical challenge portion of his book, chapters six through ten, involves “preparing, empowering, and releasing a generation of young people into mission and ministry throughout the world, as well as the associated challenge before us to serve, nurture, encourage, and resource these young people” (xv).

In the first two chapters, Wraight outlines the enormous potential of this generation by describing their instrumental role in the tragic genocide in Rwanda and its subsequent restoration. The author also uses biblical examples such as David, Esther, and Mary along with historical examples such as James Hudson Taylor and pioneer missionary movements to demonstrate God’s desire to use young people.

Chapters three, four, and five discuss some of the important characteristics and tendencies of this generation that can help them fulfill their enormous potential. The third chapter focuses on the powerful combination of the titled components, “Technology, Globalization, and Mission.” The author weaves these three elements together by using personal story, multiple testimonies, and telling statistics to explain the perfect positioning of this generation to fulfill the world-wide mission of Christ.

The fourth and fifth chapters discuss more of the relational attributes of young people that provide the platform for their maximum impact. “Peer to Peer Evangelism” in chapter four and “Loving People into the Kingdom” in chapter five both spotlight how their personal dynamics align with the biblical model of loving, relational evangelism. More real-life examples illustrate scriptural principles that challenge the reader to consider the possibilities of this generation to make a difference for Christ based on these character traits. As he does throughout his book, Wraight challenges his audience with these stated values to examine their own suitability to be used by God in these ways.

154

Chapters six through nine each discuss a different practical component of capitalizing on the potential of young people that Wraight so clearly establishes in the first half of his book. By “Investing in,” “Mentoring,” “Praying for (and with),” and “Making Apprentices Among” the Next Wave, Wraight offers his readers a strategy based on biblical support and historical success. Each of these chapters blends the author’s familiar ingredients of scriptural truth, personal testimonies, and practical suggestions in order to supply the reader with the proper inspiration and specific application necessary to respond. The final chapter serves as a fitting conclusion for the book and is primarily motivational in nature.

The Next Wave makes some significant contributions for the church to embrace. The theme itself—identifying the strengths of the next generation and challenging readers to invest in them—is a notable distinction. While many books address how to organize, develop, and run a student ministry, few works, if any, are devoted to tapping into the potential of young people, identifying their unique characteristics, or providing specific ways to empower them. Wraight’s book accomplishes all three at once.

Each of these three aspects of *The Next Wave* provides specific benefits for the reader. Wraight does a terrific job outlining the first aspect—the potential of young people—by offering compelling testimonies about their accomplishments as well as biblical and historical support for their ability to be used by God. The author’s personal experience with Youth for Christ, along with this sustaining evidence, leads Wraight to draw this conclusion concerning their unlimited

Pace: Book Review: The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will C
leadership potential: “It is essential that we empower young people by allowing them to truly lead. . . . I have come to realize that empowering young people . . . is the key to effective mission in any context” (22).

The second beneficial aspect of Wraight’s book—identifying the unique characteristics of this generation—is perhaps his greatest contribution. Wraight draws significant parallels between the global nature of this generation and the world-wide mission of Christ. The author highlights their seemingly innate ability to master technological advances for the cause of Christ. He also demonstrates how their mindset is naturally more global, based on their lifelong exposure to international culture through technology and national integration. Wraight also identifies some of the more challenging traits of this generation, such as their entitlement mentality (100) and a deep desire for meaning and purpose (198), and explains how they can be leveraged to advance the kingdom. These traits and others are summarized by Wraight’s definitive statement concerning the unique characteristics of young people:

155

Their healthy naiveté constantly generates courageous and creative initiatives, and their connectedness to the cutting edge of societal change allows them to be relevant and effective in their mission strategies. They have boundless energy and an unshakeable faith in God. Because of these unique attributes, involving young people at the most strategic levels of mission and ministry is essential for the church to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society. (23)

The third significant contribution of this book is the practical guidelines offered by Wraight to empower this generation. The author is refreshingly spiritual in his approach, emphasizing the importance of prayer and other formative disciplines in order to equip them. In addition, Wraight provides strong rationale for his exhortations with sound interpretation and practical application of various scriptural passages throughout his book. He also focuses on mentoring young people and making apprentices of Christ. Of particular note is the “Profile of a Disciple” provided in the lone appendix that offers a biblical rubric for developing and measuring spiritual growth. All of these factors combine with the other noted attributes to provide significant and unique contributions to Wraight’s readers.

However, Wraight’s book, while compelling, biblical, and unique, is not without its flaws. The first shortfall comes in the form of his initial contention. Throughout his work, the author primarily takes a positive approach in challenging his readers to maximize the potential of young people. In the first chapter, though, Wraight parallels their enormous capabilities to the genocide carried out by teens in Rwanda. This potentially may be interpreted by some readers as insensitive. He states, “By empowering young people and harnessing all

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 [2021], Art. 16
of their energy, creativity, naiveté, and unwavering commitment to a cause . . .

leaders were able to orchestrate one of the most brutal and horrific acts of ethnic cleansing the world has ever experienced” (7). While Wraight is careful to point out that “God is now using the youth of Rwanda to rebuild the nation and to bring about enormous change for good,” he draws other potentially offensive parallels to the conquests of Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong that do not share such a positive resolution. He states, “Along with Hitler’s Youth and Mao’s Red Guards, the story of Rwanda provides us with convincing evidence that empowering young people and allowing them to lead can bring about enormous change in the world” (15).

Undoubtedly Wraight is attempting to make an emotional impact by placing this analogous contrast in the first chapter. However, the arguments he makes in his second chapter, which derive from biblical and church history, are much more effective and leave no room for misunderstanding. He may have been better served to begin his book with these contentions and use the arguments in the first chapter as supporting propositions.

156

Another potential limitation for readers is Wraight’s failure to tether his exhortations effectively to his thesis. By not consistently specifying how his assertions relate to teens, Wraight reduces his work in some places to a set of generic spiritual or missional principles. For example, Wraight acknowledges in his fourth chapter on “Peer to Peer Evangelism” that “these principles of listening and sharing naturally about our relationship with Jesus apply to all who follow Him, not only young people” (64). In less explicit fashion, the sixth chapter challenges readers to invest their time, talents, and treasure for the purpose of God’s kingdom. Apart from one example of a transformed youth, he fails to mention young people until the final paragraph of the twenty-three page chapter. Other periods of silence regarding youth throughout the book can cause the less-focused reader to lose sight of Wraight’s intended purpose of impacting the next generation.

One final critique that may be observed by readers relates to one of the noted strengths. The testimonies Wraight uses are inspiring, but at times the author may move beyond effective illustrations to distracting interruptions. The number of examples Wraight uses sometimes make his arguments seem anecdotal and thereby less convincing.

Wraight’s book comes with high expectations as a result of the glowing endorsements from notable evangelical leaders like Warren Weirsbe. While such high remarks are difficult to live up to, ultimately, Wraight accomplishes his stated purpose by providing an insightful perspective into the unparalleled potential of the next generation. Based on the unlimited possibility of young people’s impact,

Pace: Book Review: *The Next Wave: Empowering the Generation That Will C* the author issues some necessary challenges and appeals to his readers for their intentional effort to engage and empower the younger generation for the cause of Christ.

Wraight certainly makes his case and leaves his audience with no alternative but to respond in support. A collaborative effort to ride “the next wave” will be enhanced by the recommendation of this book for anyone who works with students, has a passion to reach them, or simply wants to fulfill our Lord’s Great Commission in making disciples of all nations!

Gary L. McIntosh. *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009, 224 pp., \$16.99.

Reviewed by Jeff Reynolds, Associate Pastor of Adult Faith Development, Hillvue Heights Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky

157

Gary McIntosh has long been regarded as an authority in the field of Church Growth. Throughout the course of his nearly three decades as a professor and church consultant, McIntosh has published eighteen books, six manuals, and over one hundred articles in which he contributes to the fields of evangelism, church growth, and church leadership. He is a prolific speaker and has consulted over 1,000 churches across 87 denominations. McIntosh currently serves as president of the Church Growth Network and professor of Church Ministry and Leadership of the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California.

In *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*, McIntosh employs his years of experience and research in helping churches both to recognize their current ministry paradigm and to determine what reaching the next level of ministry will require. He contends that three factors of ministry challenge all church leaders: first, local churches grow and decline along a predictable life cycle; second, church size plays a crucial role in a church’s health and vitality; and third, what brought a local church to its current level of ministry impact will not take it to where it wants to be in the future (11). Writing primarily for church leaders and students, McIntosh asserts that church age and size are key factors that dictate the measures required to take any church to the next level of ministry impact. In *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, he delineates those measures and coaches church leaders in implementing them.

McIntosh structures his argument in two parts and therefore presents his book in two major sections. He deals first with his proposed church life cycle and contends that a church’s age plays a significant role in its health. Basing his life