

**NO  
PERFECT  
PEOPLE  
ALLOWED**

creating a **COME AS YOU ARE** culture in the  
**CHURCH**

**JOHN  
BURKE**

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# INTRODUCTION: GOD'S STORY IN OUR STORIES

People ask me how long it took to write this book. The truth is—about fifteen years.

I left the business world for campus ministry fifteen years ago because I wanted to help my generation find authentic faith like I was beginning to experience. The first seven years of ministry to America's first postmodern\* generation were discouraging—I almost lost hope. Since then, God has turned my philosophy of church and ministry upside down. I now believe that only a church full of imperfect people, acting as his Body, can bring the hope and healing needed to change our postmodern world for the better—one life at a time. That's why I've written this book, because I see God powerfully at work in our generation.

A year ago I attended a conference about ministry in a postmodern context. I found myself terribly discouraged and bothered—and tired of modern-church deconstruction! For the past six years, I've read numerous books, attended conferences, and surfed the blogs about the emerging trends of new generations and their new ways of thinking. We have deconstructed everything, identified all the problems with the current church, and proclaimed what we knew would *not work*. We've read statisticians like Barna, Gallup, and Regele warn of the impending doom for our generation and the church in America.

What disturbs me is the absence of a path forward. We don't need more deconstruction, more theories, and more statistics; rather, we need tangible evidence that God is still doing what God has always done in every

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\* The term *postmodern* refers to a worldview that generally assumes there is no absolute truth or morality—truth and morality are only relative terms in the community in which we participate.

generation, constructing his church out of the most hopeless situation. It's not tearing-down time anymore—it's construction time!

*All the practical principles of ministry you will encounter in these pages are illustrated by God's amazing work in the lives of the formerly unchurched of Gateway Community Church. You have to experience the feel of a culture to understand it, so I've included these stories to take you on an experiential journey—spanning from our postmodern culture to our church's culture. My goal is to let you see and feel the struggles of nearly a hundred real people who come out of our postmodern context. Most were not Christ-followers when they came to Gateway. Many were indifferent or even hostile to Christianity and had tough questions from a postmodern perspective, yet they found a safe culture within church where they could question, struggle, find faith, and grow.*

At the conference that day, I ran into Jack Kuhatschek from Zondervan, whom I had met years earlier. He listened as I shared stories of the amazing things we've seen God doing in a cynical, skeptical, broken generation. I explained the hope I see for our generation in our church and in other churches around the country. Intrigued, Jack flew to Austin later that month and heard many powerful stories from the people themselves. Jack encouraged me to share this with others who desire to see God reaching our broken post-Christian, postmodern culture. *No Perfect People Allowed* gives tangible evidence that God *can and does* reach our generation through his church.

Austin is a window into the future because it attracts so many young adults. A *Forbes* survey called it America's "coolest" city, ranking it the best place for singles in America—singles who move here from all over the country, seeking employment in our high-tech, recreational, artsy capital city.<sup>1</sup>

The stories in this book represent the diversity of our generation across the nation. You'll read about people who grew up on the East Coast and the West and in between, from the wealthy to the poor, from Anglo, Black, Hispanic, and Asian backgrounds, singles and marrieds. This is truly the most diverse generation in American history, and, as you'll see, it's a generation not easily reached by a one-size-fits-all approach. But the people of this generation form the context in which the church must function, and they live all around you right now.

Though I've changed some names and details where necessary to protect the privacy of my friends at Gateway, the stories in this book are about real people dear to my heart. (Those who requested I use their real names are noted with a double dagger—††.) They have willingly shared their struggles, barriers, and brokenness in hopes of helping others find God's goodness.

Some have not arrived at faith but have allowed me to present their stories in process. The hardest part was selecting a few stories to include, since there are hundreds more to be told of God's amazing works in reclaiming our generation as his family.

I've written this book primarily for leaders—church leaders, small group leaders, and ministry leaders—to help them create a come-as-you-are culture to bridge the chasm between the church and our postmodern world.

Yet I believe *No Perfect People Allowed* gives a unique insight into the struggle for faith that will benefit everyone—skeptics and believers alike. You will see in vivid detail how God meets seeking people in mysterious, unique ways, and you will see how no one is too far away or too far gone for God's loving reach.

Whoever you are, I pray this book inspires in you a confidence that God is still at work in our generation. I pray you are motivated to action so that we may see *his-story* continue to unfold through his church for generations to come. My desire in writing is to tell God's story about his work in one church for our generation. I'm amazed at God's great work and what he's showing us. This is simply a gift we've received that we share, and so we pass on what we received in the hope that others might receive the same gift from God. My prayer for this book is that God might use it to give his greatest gift to our generation—and the next and the next—through his church.