

## Engage360 | Episode 13: The Kaleo Project and Ministering to Millennials

Introduction: Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Hi, I'm Don Payne. I'm glad to be your host for Engage360. I'm going to date myself or at least date my musical taste with the following comment. It was in 1988 that BA Robertson and Mike Rutherford, Mike Rutherford, of the band Mike in the Mechanics, released the lyrics to a fairly well known song called The Living Years. And Rutherford, and his band in that song portray how every generation struggles with so much that they inherit like values and commitments from the previous generation, while at the same time still needing those. Here are a couple of stanzas from that song. The Living Years. Every generation blames the one before and all of their frustrations come beating on your door. I know that I'm a prisoner to all my father held so dear. I know that I'm a hostage to all his hopes and fears. All right. So the, the syndrome portrayed in The Living Years has been played out culturally, especially, or at least since the 1960's with relentless diagnosis of generational characteristics, relentless diagnosis of the social forces that have contributed to those characteristics, and that resulting cultural and relational impact of those characteristics. I know of scholars in a variety of sectors, politics, economics, psychology, for example, who continue to try to understand what's going on with generations or with the generations. And for Christians, the unique challenges, the unique issues, the unique opportunities that all of this presents. That is generational distinctives. What all this presents for the church. All of that runs very deep. A couple of, or three significant volumes that have been released least in recent years, James Emery White's book, The Rise of the Nones, David Kinnaman his books, You Lost Me and UnChristian, reflect how pervasive and influential these concerns are. And these generational concerns have been so significant that the Lilly Endowment, a major funder of faith-based research, has launched what they call the Young Adult Initiative. Well, Denver Seminary is honored to participate in this funding initiative with what we called the Kaleo Project and our guest this week is the director of that grant project, Dr. Halee Gray Scott. Halee, welcome to the Podcast.

Dr. Halee Scott: Thank you for having me.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm glad you could be here. I'll tell you a little bit more about Halee in a moment, but anyone paying attention to cultural shifts and how they impact our engagement of the world will want to pay close attention to this interview with Halee Scott, who as Director of the Kaleo Project is right on the front lines with a lot of this research about generational distinctives, generational characteristics, generational shifts and how they're impacting ministry. Dr. Halee Scott has a PhD from the Talbot School of Theology and is a noted author, social researcher.

She focuses a lot on issues related to leadership and spiritual formation. Her 2014 book, *Dare Mighty Things: Mapping the Challenges of Leadership for Christian Women*, explores the challenges facing female Christian leaders in ministry. And she is currently at work on a book exploring ways in which men and women can work effectively together in ministry. Now, Hallee describes herself as a former nun, not N. U. N., but N. O. N. E., is that correct?

Dr. Hallee Scott: That's right.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. She's passionate about learning how to teach people, who like she once was when was in spiritual darkness. So, Hallee, tell us first a little bit about your own journey and what 'none' means in this context.

Dr. Hallee Scott: Well, like what are, what we're finding among many of the people who are increasingly unchurched is, I grew up in a deeply religious context. I grew up in a town of 1500 people, run by the Southern Baptist church in our town. In fact, there was one point where the school dance was shut down by the Southern Baptist preacher in our town.

Dr. Don Payne: That's a lot of power.

Dr. Hallee Scott: It is a lot of power. And I started to see, you know, even very young, around 15, some of inconsistencies between what I saw the preachers preaching from the pulpit and how they actually live their own lives. And I saw a lot of inconsistency there. And so I thought if these are the people that God ordained to lead the church than I don't know how much I buy that anymore. And you know, after a period of searching, I first became atheist and then I became agnostic, which in my opinion, I think agnosticism is a bit further away from God from atheism. Because even with atheism you have a little degree of emotion tied up into, it's almost like you're in a love hate relationship with God. But when I moved to agnosticism, I just simply didn't know. And I often say that, you know, that went on for not a great deal of time before I say God haunted me in my sin and I, rededicated my life on my 21st birthday. And I thought, if I'm going to create people, if I'm going to be part of this church, I want to be part of it in a way that makes it better, so that God forbid, no one walks in darkness like I did. And so that's really the path that I followed until this day.

Dr. Don Payne: So what's the word, how does the word 'none' fit into all of that?

Dr. Hallee Scott: Well, if you look at the data coming out of PEW, they will ask, they have just a standard question saying, you know, what religion do you affiliate with? Catholic, Muslim, Judaism. And then they have a selection called None. And for the last few years, the more and more people, especially those 23 to 29 year olds having increasingly been selecting None. So we are none of the above.

Dr. Don Payne: The religiously unaffiliated.

- Dr. Halee Scott: The religiously unaffiliated. Now, they may be spiritual, but they do not want to label themselves as religious.
- Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Alright. Now I mentioned to the listeners that you are the Director of the Kaleo Project here at Denver Seminary, which is funded by the Lilly Endowment. Tell us first a little bit about that. Well before, before you do, I might mention that if anybody wants more information about that, just go to the Denver Seminary website, [denverseminary.edu](http://denverseminary.edu). Look on the top for the resources tab. And then under the resources tab you'll find another tab that says initiatives, which will lead you to the Kaleo project. So if you want more information about it, you can get it on our website there. But tell us a bit about the Kaleo project and what got this launched and what you do.
- Dr. Halee Scott: Well, the Kaleo project is what I call the Denver Seminary's branch of the Young Adult Initiative. The Lilly Foundation started seeing research coming out of, like you mentioned, Barna, Lifeway Research, PEW research council, and started showing that uptake in the more and more people describing themselves as not religious. And so what they wanted to do is they wanted to figure out, okay, how can we help equip churches to reach this generation? How can we equip congregations, equip churches to train these congregations on how to best reach this generation? Because what we're facing, it's not just the 'nones' that are the issue. We're dealing with the conflicts of different factors that are all kind of melding together to be the perfect storm. So for example, you have the increase in technology. You have the rapidity of lifestyle, you have access to 24 hour news cycle, have so many different things that are vying for people's attention. And it's creating a type of environment that's just a hot pot, you know, for these young adults who are struggling to find an answer and thinking they know Jesus, but they really don't know the Jesus of the scriptures. They know that Jesus, who they think they know from what they may have been raised in when they were young, like I was.
- Dr. Don Payne: Now, when you talk about this generation, are you speaking about what are conventionally called the millennial generation or something else?
- Dr. Halee Scott: That would be 23 to 29 year old is what the grant funds. But as we have gone into the research, we're starting to see a lot of that happened with generation Z as well. And generation Z, the oldest generation Z, maybe 18 to 20 right now. So even among those generations as well. But the younger generations for sure, 23 to 29 year olds and younger.
- Dr. Don Payne: How did they pick those numbers?
- Dr. Halee Scott: 23 to 29 year olds were selected because those were the group of people that were most likely to not affiliate with any type of religion at all. And so when Lilly was allocating funds to distribute to 12 different schools, they said we will focus on ages 23 to 29 year olds to see, okay, we're going to make a targeted effort to look at this group of people and how churches can engage this group of people

in particular. Rather than trying to cast a wide net and say, okay, generation Z and maybe older millennials, we're just going to look at 23 to 29 year olds.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. So tell us a little bit about within the Kaleo project, what are some of the things that you're doing in the project to gain some traction on all of this?

Dr. Halee Scott: What we're, the biggest, you know, I really feel like my job is pastoral care and helping come alongside pastors that are part of the project. We selected in the beginning, we selected 17 different churches in the Denver Metro area and now we are continuing with 15 who, two had to drop out for their own reasons. But, just coming alongside them in the very first year was teaching pastors how to be innovative because for so long churches have been strapped by time and money, money and time, and they do not have the budget to try for something new. They don't, innovation is expensive. And so what this grant does is it enables churches to flex that innovative muscle. And so for the whole first year, I would talk to pastors and say, you know what? It's okay to try something and fail. And a full year passed by, and at one meeting they finally said, wow, you meant it when you said that we could fail. As long as you're learning.

Dr. Don Payne: Much to be learned from that much.

Dr. Halee Scott: Much to learn. And you know, as long as they're learning from their process, they're succeeding and maybe they don't have events that, you know, hundreds of young adults show up for. You know, Denver is a unique market in the fact that, you know, used to, in usual, maybe South, Midwest, if you go to church three out of four times a month, you are a regular attendee here in Denver. If you go one or two times a month, you're considered a regular attender because the draw the mountains is pretty compelling. And so a lot of people want to, they spend a lot of money to live here, and so they want to go spend their weekends up in the mountains. And so getting pastors to understand that's where we are with this particular demographic in the Denver Metro area.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. So you have groups at these now 15, you said 15 churches and these groups are in house groups that are running ministry experiments to see what's going to be effective in reaching the 'nones'.

Dr. Halee Scott: Right.

Dr. Don Payne: What are some of the things that they've done that have been you think, particularly innovative or creative and maybe effective?

Dr. Halee Scott: I think, one of the biggest draws that kind of goes against the stereotype is that millennials who are, who happened to be the most steady generation in history have a reputation of saying we don't want any advice from anyone. We don't want to be mentored, we want to do things our own way. But what we have found to be particularly effective is if we have intergenerational events. So for example, Platt Park Church and Wellspring Church Littleton have held events

where they will take topics that are relevant for young adults such as grief and trauma or relationships or God and money. And they will have a panel of experts come in that maybe older Baby Boomers and they will sit up and they will have a discussion about that particular topic, over the course of their lives. And then at the end of that event, the Millennials are able to ask questions from these Baby Boomers to get their input and advice.

Dr. Don Payne: Have those been particularly well attended or well received?

Dr. Halee Scott: Absolutely, absolutely well received. In fact, I've had some pastors say that, Oh my gosh, you know, we had one schedule for relationships and I know it was a blizzard one night and I knew that no one was going to show up and a hundred young adults showed up, which is a large group of people.

Dr. Don Payne: Crazy. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Now I think you also have some groups of Denver Seminary students who do, are doing research. Tell us about the research component of this.

Dr. Halee Scott: So, I have a team of liaisons, and these liaisons have a unique role. Now if you look at strictly qualitative research, you have a certain type where you go in and you say, okay, I'm going to observe this group. Well, this is a church. We have a very relationship-oriented faith. And so what ends up happening is not only do they end up going in and are embedded in, I think each liaison has three different churches that they're embedded within. And their job is to build relationships with the young adults, build relationships with the embedded Kaleo team of their church and then build relationships with the Pastors, get to know the neighborhood and also have a sort of symbiotic relationship, since the liaisons have much greater access to what's happening in what we're learning in the project as a whole, they're able to help Pastors support Pastors. And so what's kind of fun to watch is how these students who are being trained to be Pastors or counselors or New Testament scholars, how they're starting to step into a Pastoral role and Pastor the Pastors.

Dr. Don Payne: Interesting. What from this liaison work and the research that they've done, what are some of the things you've learned that have been significant or maybe even surprising?

Dr. Halee Scott: I would say that, some of the big surprising things has been just the ability for Millennials to be receptive to the gospel. We often think of Millennials as being hostile to the Christian faith and that there may be some of that to a degree, but they are not as hostile as we think they are. And in fact, the more that Pastors are exposed to the PEW data saying, Millennials don't want anything to do with religion, they don't want, they're describing themselves as none. They've heard it all before. The more and more they read that the less and less likely they are to actually try to engage Millennials into an evangelistic conversation, whenever that might be something that the young adult needs most desperately. Because if you look at some of the other research that's happening, Millennials, this is the most lonely generation in human history. 25%

of Millennials described themselves as not having a single friend. The rates of homicide have gone down, but the rates of suicide have gone up. And so it's, it's a desperate need that the church can desperately fill. And yet the more and more Pastors read about how Millennials don't want anything to do with the Christian faith, the less likely they are actually to engage. That generation is.

Dr. Don Payne: We're almost working against ourselves then.

Dr. Halee Scott: We are, we are absolutely, I mean we still have the lifeboat. We still have Jesus Christ who is able and to be the living and active presence in each of these people's lives and make a difference.

Dr. Don Payne: Your comment about loneliness really captures my attention because I recall, a book recommended to me years ago by one of my mentors and the book came either came out of Yale University press or one of the scholars at Yale, the book was called *The Lonely Crowd* and it was published in 1955. And I'm curious, what has really changed? Has that really changed or is it simply getting repackaged in different sociological forms that sense of loneliness? Is that really a new thing?

Dr. Halee Scott: Well, I think that you can see different reasons for that that have happened over time. I mean, you had the nuclear family coming out of World War II and where, and then you had the white flight out of downtown urban areas where people aren't living as close to one another. And then you have on top of that today you have, I think there was bowling, *Bowling Alone* was Putnam was also another book that was a sociological debate or discussion of loneliness in suburbia. And now I think you have on top of that where you have technology, as the impetus for loneliness.

Dr. Don Payne: So is it fair to say we, we just have more and more factors sort of exacerbating the loneliness? Loneliness itself maybe is not new but there, but it's getting intensified with each generation.

Dr. Halee Scott: Absolutely.

Dr. Don Payne: Is that fair?

Dr. Halee Scott: That would be fair to say. In fact, if you even look in Great Britain, that loneliness is considered a public health crisis and they're starting to develop ministries of, you know, ministry in Britain is different than ministry here, but so certain ministries developed to alleviating the scourge of loneliness within Great Britain. And but technology is an important facet because, you know, I'm a really big believer in the importance of bodily presence. Jesus could have saved us theoretically, just by divine via far and away, but he chose to take on a human form and somewhere he still lives within that human form and he dwelt among us, and he was physically present with us. And I think it is important for people to alleviate that loneliness to be physically present, with people in order

to counteract that loneliness. It's not loneliness that can be counteracted just by social media. And so in fact, social media can undermine it.

Dr. Don Payne: Can work against it. Let me ask you to put your theologians hat on for a moment and reflect a bit more about how this generation you're studying, whether we call it Millennial or just denote it with the numbers 23 to 29, this cultural generational set of phenomenon that you're looking at, how, how are people hearing the gospel differently than perhaps they did in the past?

Dr. Halee Scott: One book that my husband has told me to read that I have not gotten to because I have a whole bookshelf. He suggested that I read something called The Celtic Wave Evangelism, and he argues that most of what I've been talking about that works for Millennials today is the Celtic way of evangelism. Now, in a certain period of time, the Romans would come in and they would force belief and then they would force belonging. And the Celtic way of evangelism was they would give you belonging. And then after that would come belief. And so what the author is arguing is that we need to move towards a more Celtic way of evangelism to where we welcome people into that community versus making them believe and then walking them into community. Because I did a focus group when I first started on this project, I took a group of atheists and agnostics in downtown Denver and I asked them, we had gone on for two hours long, much too long for a focus group. But I, I asked them, I said, I want you to think about the Christians that you actually know in your life. They had said a lot of negative things about Christians, but I said, I want you to think about the Christians that you know in your life. How do you feel about them? And to the person. They said, we're jealous of them. And I said, jealous? What do you mean by jealous? And they said, they have so much community. They have a place they can go to every week where they're loved and accepted and wanted, and united by common belief and a common purpose. And that's something that we don't have here. There is no community for unbelief.

Dr. Don Payne: That is very curious that they would, that they would say that. Yeah. But that will surprise many people to know that focus group agnostics and atheists observed that consistently about Christians. What other physiological questions or challenges do you think all this raises for us?

Dr. Halee Scott: I think that one of my biggest concerns has been, I mentioned earlier that I view myself as focusing on the Pastor. And one of the things that, you know, I too like I, I remember this song from that my mother used to play, and my mom was this hippie love sixties, seventies music and there was this.

Dr. Don Payne: You just may need to slow down and be careful here.

Dr. Halee Scott: I'll, I'll slow down. Okay, I'll reel that back in. But there was this one phrase that I would hear over and over again, and I don't even know who sings it, but it says, I'd like to change the world, but I don't know what to do. And so I'll leave it all up to you. And you know, if there was any bit of encouragement that I could offer Pastors is, you know, in those lyrics, there's a sense of apathy. There's a

sense of overwhelmingness at the task ahead of them. They're standing at the bottom of a 14er thinking, I have no gas in my tank. There is no way I'm making it up this mountain. And when I work with Pastors, that's what I sense in them, is just a sincere desire to do ministry. And yet they're empty, you know, and they're not empty spiritually, but they're tired and it's easy to be apathetic whenever you get so much information telling you how hopeless the task is. And so if there's any bit of information or constellation that I could offer, it would be to tell Pastors, you know, Jesus Christ is our advocate and he has the final say and he will work through you and for you and on behalf of you, and he will go before you and behind you and help your ministry thrive. Just don't give up. Don't give in, and don't sit back and say, I'd love to change the world. I don't know what to do. So I'll leave it up to you.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm glad you brought that up because that theme of hope surfaces in this type of conversation quite regularly, particularly with the sort of generational slice that you and the Lilly Endowment and the Kaleo Project are studying and trying to make headway with, that sense of hopelessness and some of that, at least I've heard it, observed that some of that sense of hopelessness comes from information overload. Going back to some of our technological advantages and resources that at the same time exposes a person to so much and so many options, and so many problems that it becomes literally overwhelming, and hope fades very, very quickly. And, if that is true as well, for those who are serving those who are leading in Pastoral and other forms of ministry, then anything we can do legitimately to inject hope, not a sort of Pollyanna superficial sense of, oh, everything's going to work out okay, but genuinely dense and rich theological hope sounds like what would be serving them very well. And that reminds me of, I mean, I had not planned this, but our theme for the year at Denver Seminary this year is the third part of the historic gospel proclamation that Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And that third note of Christ will come again. Is, is a way of reminding ourselves of the hope that undergirds our faith from beginning to end. Christ will come again. That what we do, you know, as Paul said in his Corinthian Correspondence, what we, our labors are not in vain.

Dr. Halee Scott: Our labors are not in vain.

Dr. Don Payne: Even if we do not have the metrics to see with any immediacy exactly what comes with those efforts. So where do you, where do you think all of this is headed with the Kaleo Project, the Lilly Endowment, what are some of the, maybe the big takeaways that you have that are really encouraging you for the future with the church?

Dr. Halee Scott: My encouragement has been just the receptivity of young adults to the Christian faith and we would not have known about that just with pure quantitative data that comes out of PEW, comes out of Lifeway, comes out of Barna, and it's only through qualitative data do you get the richness of story and the richness of individual story. And you know, I should know better than anyone that I was ransomed, and I was pulled back from the brink and here I am today.



Dr. Don Payne: That is encouraging.

Dr. Halee Scott: It is.

Dr. Don Payne: Halee Gray Scott, thank you.

Dr. Halee Scott: Thank you so much.

Dr. Don Payne: Thanks for being here. Before we end, I have to do what I'm going to start calling the SSPQ, which is my acronym for the stereotypically stupid podcast question. Okay. I just made that up. I mean I have lots of friends who've been on the military and in other organizations where they speak in acronyms and I've always been so jealous of them and felt like an outsider, to all those acronyms. So, I'm going to start creating my own, the stereotypically stupid podcast question. Alright, well now, but before I give it to, I have, I have to preempt some things because I'm sure that the grammar police, many of whom are my colleagues are going to wonder whether that adjunct title phrase stereotypically stupid applies to the podcast, the stereotypically stupid podcast question or applies to the question the stereotypically stupid podcast question. So I'll leave everybody to decide that for themselves. But here is the SSPQ for you. Dr. Halee Scott, what is one thing about you, this could be something that you do or something that you like or whatever. What is one thing about you that would make lots of the people in the age group you're studying, roll their eyes.

Dr. Halee Scott: I can pick a really good watermelon by putting it on my shoulder and tapping it.

Dr. Don Payne: I think that would work, but I think that would do it.

Dr. Halee Scott: I embarrass my kids doing that.

Dr. Don Payne: You can pick a really good watermelon by putting it on your shoulder-

Dr. Halee Scott: And tapping it.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. What's with the shoulder?

Dr. Halee Scott: Because you can hear the water moving through it.

Dr. Don Payne: I never knew this.

Dr. Halee Scott: You're from Texas. You should know that.

Dr. Don Payne: But they never taught me that. I missed that one. Okay, I've got to remember that and I'll have to share that with my wife because she loves watermelon. I'm not as much of a fan.

Dr. Halee Scott: Well, you know what's funny is that whenever I go and I'll pick out watermelons and I'll tap it and this people will gather around and stare at me. And then when I walk off, my kids are like, Oh my gosh, mom, people are staring. But when I walk off, people are picking up the watermelons.

Dr. Don Payne: And they're doing it.

Dr. Halee Scott: And they're doing it.

Dr. Don Payne: Social influence. What an influencer you are.

Dr. Halee Scott: I am.

Dr. Don Payne: Of course if you did that when I was around, I would disavow ever having met you. We've been visiting with Dr. Halee Gary Scott, Director of the Kaleo Project at Denver Seminary. This is Engage360 from Denver Seminary. I'm Don Payne. Thanks for listening. I hope you'll check in again for another conversation next week.