

# HOW TO HELP PEOPLE TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

(A summary of main insights from the 2008 book 'Follow Me' which released the survey results of 80000 Christians in churches across America in the quest to see what makes them grow spiritually)

If we simplify a spiritual continuum, we see that people who make up our churches consists of four kinds:

- 1) Almost-Christians: those who believe in God but are not sure about Christ. Their faith is not that significant to their lives. In 'Follow Me' they're called 'Those Exploring Christ'
- 2) New Christians: those who believe in Jesus and are working on what it means to get to know him. In 'Follow Me' they are called 'Those Growing in Christ'.
- 3) Those Closer to Christ: those who feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance. In 'Follow Me' they are called 'Those Close to Christ'
- 4) Full-Throttle Disciples: those whose relationship to Jesus is the most important relationship in their live - everything revolves around it. In 'Follow Me' they are called 'Those who are Christ-centred'.

If we simplify what we are trying to do as a church it can be broken up into three movements:

*Movement 1: help almost-Christians become new Christians*  
*Movement 2: help new Christians become those Closer to Christ*  
*Movement 3: help those Closer to Christ become Full-throttle Disciples*

But HOW do we do this? We sometimes naively think that if we just get everyone 1) in Sunday meetings 2) in small groups 3) and serving that we will effectively do all three things. But this is not true. Rather, as we will see, each movement requires different catalyts of growth.

Amazingly the REVEAL survey by Willow Creek has sought to find what exactly helps people make these three movements. They surveyed 80000 Christians in 2007 across USA, and from the survey sought to establish whether each person was an almost-Christian, a new Christians, Closer to Christ, or a Full-throttle Disciples. Then - based on fifty possible growth catalyts - they found out what is most often needed to help each movement happen.

Assuming that the average data of the 80000 is anywhere close to reflect your own congregation, this data is very useful in helping us think strategically about helping people of all spiritual stages to keep on growing.

This is what they discovered from this massive survey ...

## OUTLINE OF THIS DOCUMENT ...

- *how we as a church can help almost-christians become new christians*
- *how we as a church can help new christians become those closer to Christ*
- *how we as a church can help those closer to Christ become full-throttle disciples*
- *overall, what main spiritual beliefs and attitudes help a person to grow?*
- *overall, what main church activities help a person to grow?*
- *overall, what main personal spiritual practices help a person to grow?*
- *overall, what main types of spiritual relationships help a person to grow?*
- *what people say they need from a church*
- *what are the two main obstacles to spiritual growth?*
- *what are the top eight expectations of a Sunday meeting?*
- *what were the top three discoveries of the surveys*

## HOW WE AS A CHURCH CAN HELP ALMOST-CHRISTIANS BECOME NEW CHRISTIANS

- The convictions that need to take root in the person:
  - ‘Salvation is not earned by good deeds or religion, but is received by grace’
  - ‘There is One True God - Father, Son and Holy Sprit - the God of the Bible’
  - ‘God is interested and involved in my life’
  - ‘The Bible is God’s Word and therefore has the right to tell me what to believe, and how to live’
- The church activities that will be most helpful:
  - We need to create opportunities for them to practically serve in the church.
  - We need to encourage them to come to Sunday meetings.
  - We need to encourage them to join / visit a small group.
- The personal spiritual practices to be encouraged:
  - We need to encourage them to start reading bits of the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives.
  - We need to encourage them to start praying, asking God for guidance, and being quick to confess their sins to him.
- Some relational spiritual activities
  - We need to give them opportunity to develop spiritually edifying friendships with Christians.

- ***Of all these, the top four things we as a church can do are:***
  - We need to communicate the gospel until it is understood:
    - ‘Salvation is not earned by good deeds or religion, but is received by grace’
    - ‘There is One True God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the God of the Bible’
  - We need to create opportunities for people to practically serve in the church.
  - We need to encourage them to start reading bits of the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives.
  - We need to encourage them to start praying, asking God for guidance, and being quick to confess their sins to him.

## **HOW WE AS A CHURCH CAN HELP NEW CHRISTIANS BECOME CLOSER TO CHRIST**

- The convictions that need to take root:
  - ‘God is interested and involved in my life’
  - ‘Salvation is not earned by good deeds or religion, but is received by grace’
  - ‘The Bible is God’s Word and therefore has the right to tell me what to believe, and how to live’
  - ‘I desire Jesus to be first in my life’
  - ‘I exist to know, love and serve Jesus’
- The church activities that will be most helpful:
  - We need to create opportunities for people to practically serve in the church.
  - We need to create opportunities for people to practically serve those in need.
  - We need to give them slightly more advanced teaching - such as special adult education classes on topics.
  - We need to encourage them to join / visit a small group.
- The personal spiritual practices to be encouraged:
  - We need to encourage them to daily read the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives.
  - We need to encourage them to pray, asking God for guidance.
  - We need to encourage them to give to the church.
  - We need to encourage them to grab chunks of time to be alone with Christ.
- Some relational spiritual activities
  - We need to encourage them to pray for non-Christians and seek out opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them.
  - We need to give them opportunity to develop spiritually edifying friendships with other Christians.
  - We need to encourage people to be ready to serve those in need on their own - not just through the church.

- ***Of all these, the top five things we as a church can do are:***
  - We need to affirm that 'God is interested and involved in their lives' - calling them to get closer to Christ.
  - We need to encourage them to daily read the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives.
  - We need to encourage them to pray, asking God for guidance and for forgiveness.
  - We need to encourage them to grab chunks of time to be alone with Christ.
  - We need to encourage them to pray for non-Christians to be saved and seek out opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them.

## **HOW WE AS A CHURCH CAN HELP THOSE CLOSER TO CHRIST BECOME FULL-THROTTLE DISCIPLES**

- The convictions that need to take root:
  - 'I am willing to risk everything that is important in my life for Jesus Christ'
  - 'I desire Jesus to be first in my life'
  - 'I exist to know, love and serve Christ'
  - 'The Bible is God's Word and therefore has the right to tell me what to believe, and how to live'
  - 'My first priority in spending is to support God's work'
- The church activities that will be most helpful:
  - We need to create opportunities for people to practically serve those in need.
  - We need to create opportunities for them to practically serve in the church.
  - We need to give them opportunities for more advanced teaching.
- The personal spiritual practices to be encouraged:
  - We need to encourage them to daily read the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives.
  - We need to encourage them to grab chunks of time to be alone with Christ.
  - We need to encourage them to pray, asking God for guidance, and for forgiveness.
  - We need to encourage them to give to God's work through the church.
- Some relational spiritual activities
  - We need to encourage them to pray for non-Christians and seek out opportunities to have spiritual conversations with them.
  - We need to encourage people to be ready to serve those in need on their own - not just through the church.
  - We need to encourage them to find a spiritual mentor.

- ***Of all these, the top things we can do as a church are:***
  - to keep affirming that the following convictions are worthy and true ones:
    - ‘I am willing to risk everything that is important in my life for Jesus Christ’
    - ‘I desire Jesus to be first in my life’
    - ‘I exist to know, love and serve Christ’
    - ‘The Bible is God’s Word and therefore has the right to tell me what to believe, and how to live’
  - to encourage them to daily read the Bible with a view to pondering its meaning for their lives

### **OVERALL, WHAT MAIN SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES HELP A PERSON TO GROW?**

- In movement 1, it is that the gospel is true.
- In movement 2, it is that God is interested and involved in my life.
- In movement 3, it is that Jesus deserves my all and no sacrifice is too much.
- The two beliefs that help all three movements simultaneously are:
  - ‘I desire Jesus to be first in my life’ and
  - ‘The Bible is God’s word and therefore it has the right to determine what I believe and how I live’.

### **OVERALL, WHAT MAIN CHURCH ACTIVITIES HELP A PERSON TO GROW?**

- Sunday meetings generally become less and less catalytic to growth the more a person matures spiritually.
- Serving opportunities are the main catalyst for growth - for movement 1 and 2 it is serving the church and for movement 2 and 3 it is serving those in need.
- Small group meetings become less important as a person matures.

### **OVERALL, WHAT MAIN PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES HELP A PERSON TO GROW?**

- Reading and reflecting on the meaning of the Bible for our life is the number one factor regardless of the spiritual maturity level of a person.
- Followed closely by the practice of prayer for guidance.
- Spending time alone with Christ in order to listen to him grows more important as a person grows spiritually.

## **OVERALL, WHAT MAIN TYPES OF SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS HELP A PERSON TO GROW?**

- Spiritual friendships (meeting or talking with a close friend who helps me grow spiritually) is the main way, but becomes less important as a person matures.
- Experiences of having spiritual conversations with non-Christians grow increasingly important as a person matures.
- Small Groups are important (but less so than spiritual friendships) - they also become less important as a person matures
- Being spiritually mentored by someone is far less important, but becomes more important as a person matures.

## **WHAT PEOPLE SAY THEY NEED FROM A CHURCH**

They were given a list of 11 items and this is the order of importance the 80000 people came back with ...

- 1) Help me understand the Bible in depth - 87%
- 2) Help me develop my relationship with Christ - 86%
- 3) Provide strong programs for children - 85%
- 4) Challenge me to grow and take next steps - 85%
- 5) Provide compelling worship services - 80%
- 6) Help me in my time of emotional need - 75%
- 7) Help me feel like I belong - 73%
- 8) Provide opportunities to serve those in need - 68%
- 9) Provide opportunities to serve in ministry - 67%
- 10) Help me to develop accountable relationships - 67%
- 11) Help me find a spiritual mentor - 50%

The three areas of greatest dissatisfaction were ... (these are the areas that generally most churches need to work on)

- 1) Help me understand the Bible in depth
- 2) Help me to develop accountable relationships
- 3) Help me in my time of emotional need

Regardless of whether a person was an almost-Christian, new Christian, Closer to Christ Christian or Full Throttle Disciple the top five desires from a church were all the same:

- 1) Help me understand the Bible in depth
- 2) Help me develop my relationship with Christ
- 3) Provide strong programs for children
- 4) Challenge me to grow and take next steps
- 5) Provide compelling worship services

## WHAT ARE THE TWO MAIN OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

### **FIRST OBSTACLE: 'I HAVE STALLED SPIRITUALLY'**

- The 80000 could tick one of four options: 'I'm growing fast', 'I'm growing reasonably', 'I'm content with my growth' or 'I have stalled spiritually'.
  - 41% of almost-Christians said they're stalled spiritually.
  - 32% of new Christians say they're stalled spiritually.
  - 15% of those Closer to Christ say they're stalled.
  - 10% of the Full-Throttle Disciples say they're stalled.
- A full 22% of our church is stalled - consisting largely of the almost-Christians and the newer Christians. Wonderfully, 78% are not stalled.
- But what is the difference between those who stalled and those who are not?
  - 1) The stalled are 25% more likely to say that distractions like TV, the internet, shopping etc have held them back than the non-stalled. Stalled: 75%. Non-stalled: 50%.
  - 2) The stalled are 10% more likely to say that life's responsibilities and demands have held them back from growing than the non-stalled. Stalled: 58%. Non-stalled: 48%.
  - 3) The stalled are 15% more likely to say that emotional issues (depression, stuffing of emotions etc) have held them back than the non-stalled. Stalled: 57%. Non-stalled: 42%.
  - 4) The stalled are 20% less likely to strongly believe that God is interested and involved in their lives than the non-stalled. Stalled: 50%. Non-stalled: 70%.
  - 5) The stalled are 12% less likely to strongly believe that the Bible is the authoritative word of God than the non-stalled. Stalled: 53%. Non-stalled: 58%.
- **BUT BY FAR THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE** between the stalled and the non-stalled is whether they have embraced personal spiritual practices:
  - Those who pray to seek God's guidance: Stalled: 30%. Non-stalled: 58%.
  - Those who pray to confess their sins: Stalled: 22%. Non-stalled: 38%.
  - Those who read their Bibles. Stalled: 8%. Non-stalled: 28%.
  - Those who reflect on the meaning of Scripture for their lives: Stalled: 7%. Non-stalled: 27%.
  - Those who set aside time for solitude and listen to God. Stalled: 4%. Non-stalled: 18%.
- They even surveyed people who had once stalled, and had somehow un-stalled. They asked them. 'What helped you un-stall'? Here are the main answers given:
  - 1) I re-engaged in personal spiritual practices (62%!).
  - 2) I hit a personal crisis (32%).
  - 3) I met someone who inspired me (28%).
  - 4) I had a change in life circumstances (28%).

## **SECOND OBSTACLE: 'I AM DISSATISFIED WITH MY CHURCH'**

- On average 17% of all four stages of growth - Almost-Christians (24%), New Christians (17%), Those Closer to Christ (15%), Full-throttle disciples (18%) are currently dissatisfied with their church.
- They found that the number one source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction had to do with whether people felt the Sunday Meetings were up-to-their-expectations.
- The five greatest points of dissatisfaction were:
  - 1) Only 32% of the dissatisfied felt the Sunday Meeting 'incorporates relevant Bible teaching to help me in everyday life'.
  - 2) Only 30% of the dissatisfied felt the Sunday Meeting is challenging and thought-provoking enough.
  - 3) Only 41% of the dissatisfied felt the Sunday Meeting incorporated enough use of Scripture.
  - 4) Only 19% of the dissatisfied felt the Sunday Meeting provided enough in-depth study of the Bible.
  - 5) Only 20% of the dissatisfied felt the Sunday Meeting clearly provided next steps - things I can do in response.
- Interestingly, of the dissatisfied, 41% were thinking of leaving, whereas a full 59% of them are not thinking about leaving. They're committed, but frustrated.
- What is the relationship between the STALLED and the DISSATISFIED?
  - 15% of the church is satisfied but stalled.
  - 10% of the church is dissatisfied but not stalled.
  - 7% is both stalled and dissatisfied.
  - Hectically, one third of the church is either stalled, or dissatisfied, or both.

## **WHAT ARE THE TOP EIGHT EXPECTATIONS OF A SUNDAY MEETING?**

- 87% say it must incorporate relevant Bible teaching that helps me with everyday life.
- 84% say it must be challenging and thought-provoking.
- 81% say it must incorporate frequent use of Scripture.
- 72% say it must provide in-depth insight into the Bible.
- 68% say it must incorporate worship music and congregational singing effectively.
- 60% say it must provide next steps - things to do in response.
- 55% say it must provide opportunities for reflection and guided prayer.
- 45% say it must incorporate stories and testimonies of real people.

## WHAT WERE THE TOP THREE DISCOVERIES OF THE SURVEYS?

**TOP DISCOVERY ONE:** *Although the right heart is generally there, even the Full-Throttle Disciples have space to grow much more.*

- Almost all the most committed people in the church (i.e. those in the category of Full-throttle Disciples) miss the 100% devotion standard by a considerable margin:

### HEART CONDITION:

- Only 35% of them say 'I have a tremendous love for people I know and don't know'.
- Only 80% of them say 'I love God more than anything else'.
- Hectically, a full 50% of them did not tick 'I very strongly agree that I am willing to give up all that is important in my life for Jesus Christ'.

### SERVING:

- Only 62% of them say 'I serve in a ministry in my church at least one to two times per month'
- Only 50% of them say 'I serve those in need on my own at least one or two times per month'.
- Only 35% of them say 'I serve those in need through my church at least one or two times per month'.
- Almost 20% of them don't serve in any way at all!

### PERSONAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES:

- Only 76% of them pray for guidance daily.
- Only 55% of them pray for forgiveness daily.
- Only 47% of them reflect on the Bible daily.
- Only 29% of them set aside alone time daily to listen to God.
- Only 58% of them currently give 10% or more to the church.
- Only 40% of them had 6 or more meaningful spiritual conversations with non-Christians in the last year.

- The people that give, serve and evangelistically outreach the most in the church are the Full-Throttle disciples. But the more committed they become, the more they give, the more they serve, the more they reach out. *We must do all it can to catalyze and coach and support and encourage the Full-Throttle group to higher levels of devotion. Nothing will have a greater impact on the city, and on the advance of the kingdom of God, and on the growth of the church than this!*

**TOP DISCOVERY TWO:** *Nothing so consistently catalyzes spiritual growth than a person's personal use of the Bible.*

- We need to mobilize everyone to get into the Bible on their own!
  - The number one spiritual practice across all three movements is reflection on Scripture.
  - The only factor that comes up in ALL the top five factors in each of the three movements is reflection on Scripture.

- The main cause for a person stalling spiritually is to stop reflecting on Scripture. The number one thing that can cause a person to un-stall in reflecting on Scripture.
- We must do all we can to motivate people to daily reflect on the Bible - and we need to 'spare no creative juices when it comes to resources that unlock the mystery and power of God's Word for his people' (pg 117).

***TOP DISCOVERY THREE: As a person grows spiritually they become less dependent on church activities to grow.***

- The assumption that the more a person gets involved in all the church activities, the more they will grow is a wrong one. It is simply not true!
- Our main role is to help people progress spiritually from almost-Christians to new Christians to those closer to Christ to full-throttle disciples to growing full-throttle disciples.
- Although church programs and meetings are absolutely essential in the early stages, our main role increasingly becomes that of 'spiritual coach'.
- 'The church can hold up a mirror to our souls that helps us see what we can't see for ourselves - all those big and small shifts that have the greatest potential to change our spiritual momentum. Like a coach, the church can help us create a spiritual work-out plan. It can nudge us to run a little faster, or lift a few more weights. But mostly, the church's greatest job - and deepest joy - is to step back and cheer us on as the Holy Spirit captivates our hearts and uses us to do his mighty work' (pg 118).