

Christian Maturity

Moving a Church's Members Toward Full Discipleship

Content from Move, What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth

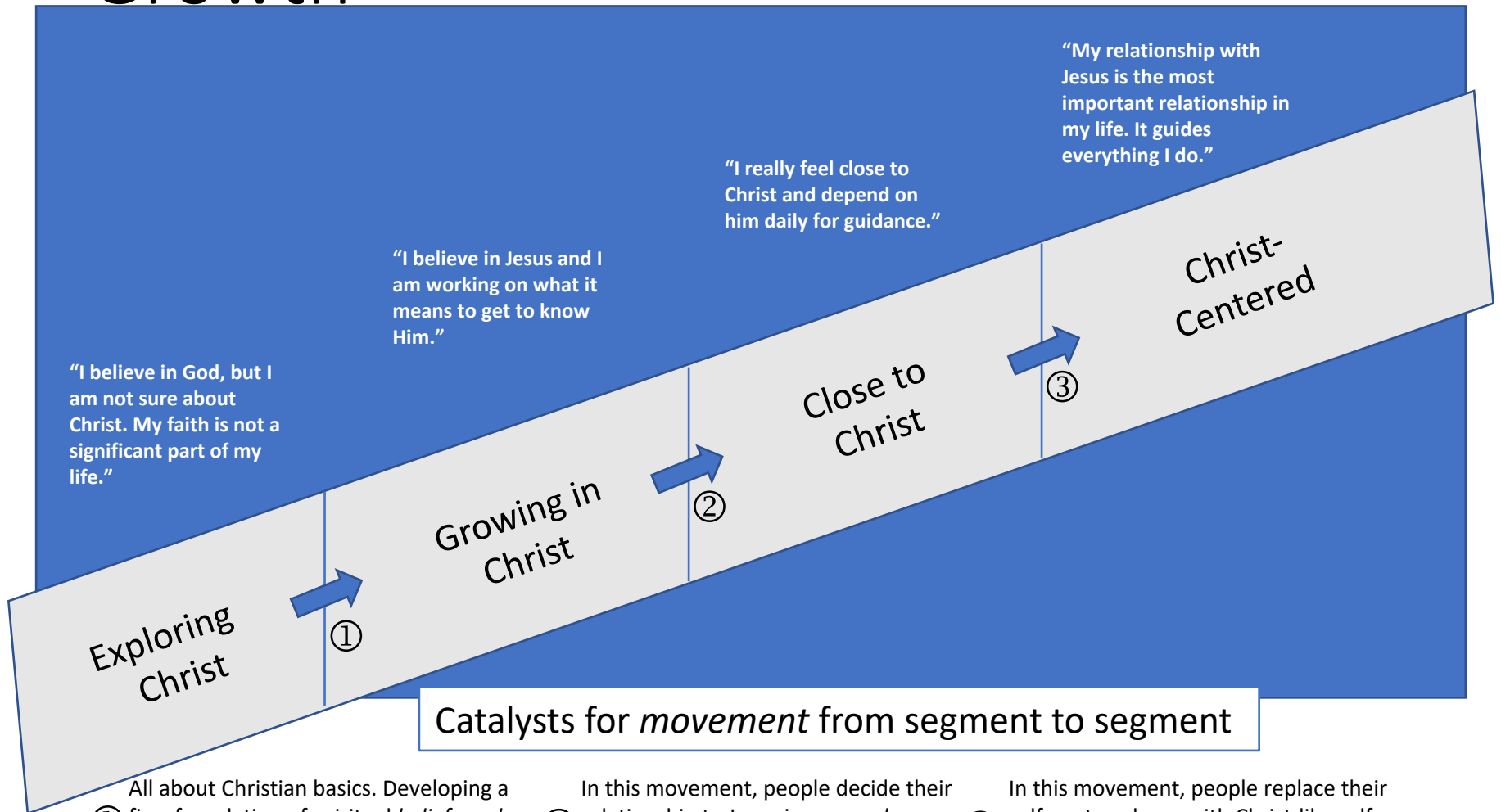
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Based on Willow-Creed-led survey of 1,000 churches

Fact-Based Surveys

- Authors surveyed Willow Creek; results were very surprising
- Led to a survey over the next 8 years of 1,000 churches
- Findings are from these surveys – *fact-based*
- Authors discovered a Spiritual Continuum, with four relatively distinct segments
- They studied what most contributed to movement from segment to segment; the catalysts surprised them and challenged them.
- They and other churches are *reorganizing their church programs and efforts around these proven catalysts.*
- *Willowdale Chapel seems to be right in line with these surveys.*

Spiritual Continuum and Catalysts for Growth

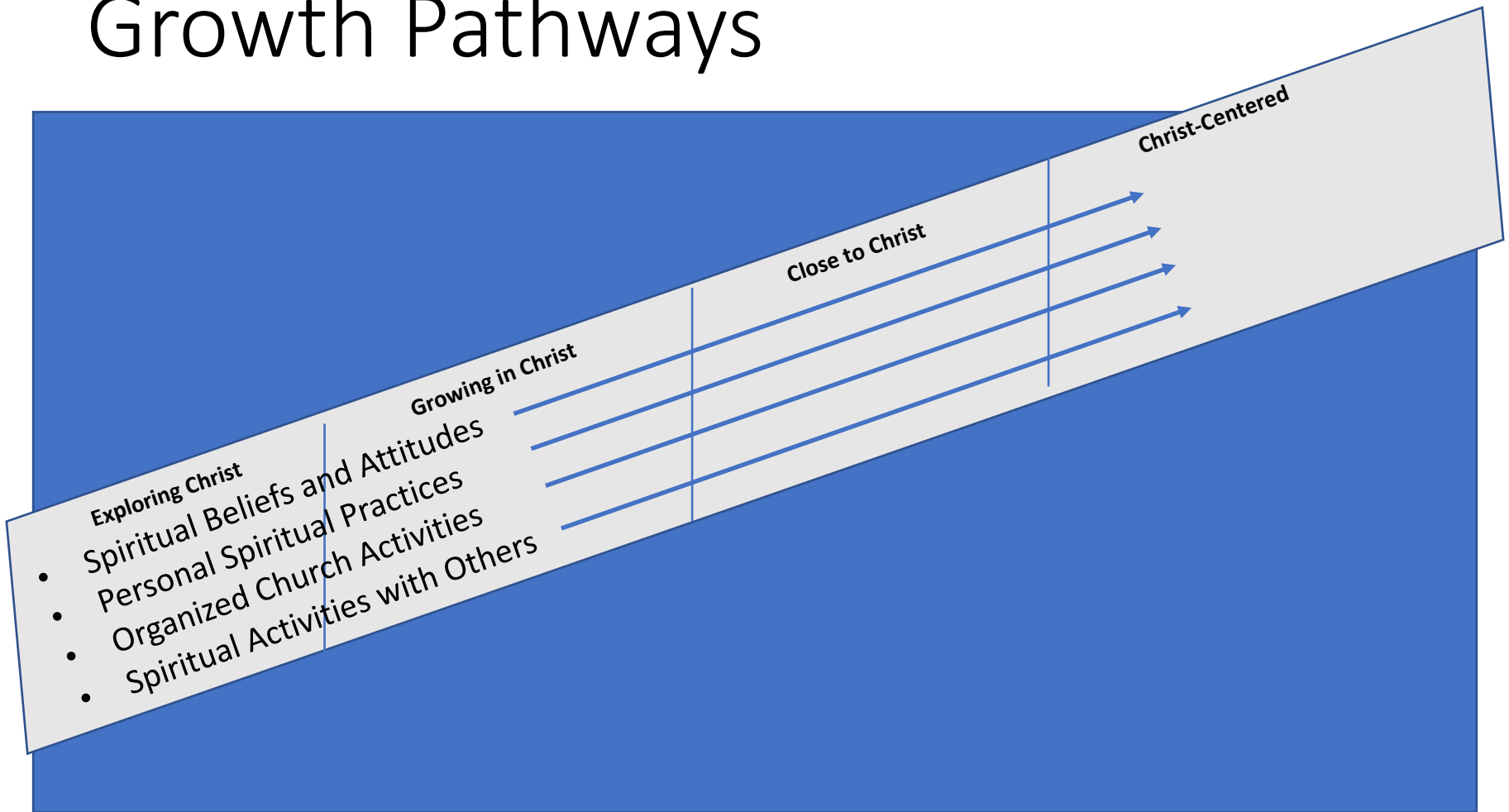


① All about Christian basics. Developing a firm foundation of spiritual *beliefs and attitudes*. The impact of church activities on growth is highest in this segment.

② In this movement, people decide their relationship to Jesus is *personal*. Hinges most on developing *spiritual practices*.

③ In this movement, people replace their self-centeredness with Christ-like self-sacrifice. They show love for Jesus through spiritual outreach, especially sharing Christ with others.

Growth Pathways



Individual Spiritual Growth is not linear or predictable, but the general pattern for growth IS. There are four pathways that affect this growth.

The Exploring Christ Segment

- The Top Five Things the Exploring Christ Segments wants from Church
 - Help in developing a personal relationship with Christ
 - Compelling worship experiences
 - A feeling of belonging
 - Help in understanding the Bible in greater depth
 - Church leaders who model and consistently reinforce how to grow spiritually
- About them:
 - They often believe in God, but do not understand the role that Jesus plays.
 - They may not see Jesus as God, but they say they are Christians.
 - Their pace of spiritual growth is sluggish
 - The longer they attend church, the less likely they are to become Christ-followers!
 - They struggle with basic Christian beliefs, especially that Jesus is the *only* way to God. “I’ve looked into the eyes of a million people who have to be wrong for you to be right.”
 - They do not see that there is a deadline for belief in and acceptance of Christ.
 - They do not view the Scriptures as the voice of God.
 - They do not view membership in a church as important.
 - They have a relatively low interest in loving others.

Exploring Christ Segment:

Helping them Move to a Decision to Follow Christ

- These people are giving us permission to influence them. They want something they cannot find in the world.
- Do not allow them to passively sit by and just attend church.
- Challenge them to be active participants in their search. Assure them that the Lord says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jer. 29:13)
- Don’t back off from discussing heaven and hell.
- Help them understand that a relationship with Christ is about more than their eternity – it benefits us now with hope and guidance.
- They are fearful – it’s scary to give up control; trust is not understood; they struggle with risk of ridicule and loss of respect from family members, friends, and colleagues.
- They need places to explore their faith and ask the thorny questions.
- Let them know they are on your radar screen.
- Point them to specific scriptures. Read the Bible with them.
- Our personal interest in them is the most high-impact factor to influence their decision for Christ.

Growing in Christ Segment

- The Top Five things this segment wants from church:
 - Help in developing a personal relationship with Christ
 - Help in understanding the Bible in greater depth
 - Church leaders who model and consistently reinforce how to grow spiritually
 - Compelling worship experiences
 - Challenge to grow and take the next steps
- About them:
 - They represent the largest segment on the continuum (more than 30%, often up to 50%)
 - They are the most active participants in church activities and make up the most volunteers (!)
 - Their spiritual growth remains slow but steady; they are on board with core beliefs and becoming more comfortable with spiritual practices.
 - Hesitant to take their faith outside the walls of the church.

Growing in Christ Segment

- They grow in their love of God as they learn scripture.
- They need to be strongly encouraged in personal spiritual practices (scripture reading, prayer, reflection).
- They have the largest potential for significant growth.
- They are growing in faith, but still fall short of having the attitude and lifestyle of a mature believer.
- Significant findings from the survey:
 - One of the most significant findings is that ***participation in church activities does not necessarily drive spiritual growth.***
 - Those who are growing in Christ not only desire, but *expect* to be challenged to grow.
 - They expect we will teach them the Bible, learn to examine their lives, and make changes to conform to Christ's model.

Implications for our Church

- May be our largest population... do we know?
- These people are the hungriest to learn more from the Bible.
- Leadership considerations and survey learnings:
 - These people, who not yet well developed as believers, may be teaching others. This is a risk.
 - Never let the passion to serve eclipse a commitment to personal spiritual disciplines. Ensure our invitations to serve are balanced with invitations to spend time with Jesus.
 - Don't confuse high levels of service with qualifications for Christian leadership. This is especially important when selecting small group leaders.

Close to Christ Segment

- Represent believers who have reached one of the most critical stages of spiritual growth – integrating their faith into their lives in a *holistic* way.
- Faith in Christ is no longer defined mostly by participation in church events.
- They are characterized by an increasing spiritual certainty – confidence in the existence, dependability, and power of God’s presence in their lives.
- Love for others shows up most markedly through increased interest and practice in sharing their faith with those outside the church.
 - They “go public” with their personal faith.
 - They don’t flaunt it, but they don’t hide it, either.
 - Interestingly, this breakthrough seems to take place *with or without* the support of the church.
- They are firm in their beliefs. Weak beliefs lead to weak growth. (If you don’t believe Scripture is the Word of God to men, why read it?)
- Almost half of those who are Close to Christ say God’s work is their number one financial priority, and a slightly higher percentage tithe.

Close to Christ Segment

- The most significant characteristic of this group – the *high degree of ownership* they take for their own spiritual journey.
 - They ‘walk the talk’ and use multiple channels to discern God’s voice and will for their lives.
 - Still look to the church for support, but increasingly develop their own relationship with God.
 - They read the Bible, reflect on Scripture, pray for guidance, and pray to confess their sins. Half listen to God during quiet times of solitude.
 - Prayer for guidance for their lives is the most common spiritual practice in this group.
 - Move from “prayer time” to praying without ceasing.
 - This segment’s frequency of daily engagement in those spiritual practices is more than twice that of the Growing in Christ segment.
 - Key Finding: personal time devoted to reflecting on Scripture is far and away the most powerful catalyst of spiritual growth. Almost half of those in this segment indicated that their pace of growth had increased as well, to a moderate or rapid pace, nearly double the percentage of growth in the prior segments.
- Could be considered as reaching the final stage of growth, but the survey reveals that there is another stage – Christ-centered. The difference seems to be the degree to which the believer deals with *control*:
 - The Close to Christ group’s survey responses indicate they are still largely in the driver’s seat for their lives. They are in the driver’s seat, and Jesus is their “co-pilot.” They see Jesus as helping them navigate their lives.
 - Jesus influences their decisions and actions, but other priorities and values still vie for their consideration.

The Christ-Centered Segment

- Have surrendered to Christ, not in defeat, but in giving over control to Him.
- These believers emerge from a battle between two sets of values – the secular values that define personal identity, happiness, security, and success in the world vs. the spiritual values of selfless love and dedication to others.
- They see Christ in the driver’s seat and themselves as in the passenger seat.
- They are looking for their role in the Lord’s plan, not looking at what Jesus can do for them.
- They say they fight a *daily battle* with this pull of the world (and need to “take up their cross daily”). They do not find a point of “having arrived free of the battle.”
- They acknowledge their weaknesses and battle to keep Christ’s influence in their lives.
- They are atypically humble in a proud world.

The Christ-Centered Segment

- They are Christ's workforce. They do everything:
 - Serve the church
 - Care for the poor
 - Tithe
 - Share their faith in their own words
 - Demonstrate all the spiritual disciplines, not only some of them
- Their love of God exceeds that in every other segment.
- However, there remain two big gaps between their attitudes and actions:
 - Between the attitudes they express about financial stewardship and the behavior of tithing.
 - Between the attitudes they express about serving and the actual level of serving, either inside and outside the church

Other Key Findings

- Study revealed that most churches are operating with an infrastructure that is primarily geared to challenge and support the earlier stages of growth.
- Love of Others trails love of God in all segments, but its widest gap between attitude and practice is in the Christ-Centered segment.
- There are eight core beliefs and attitudes that advance spiritual growth. They are listed in order of importance. Note that:
 - Weak beliefs inhibit spiritual growth.
 - People do not buy into all the beliefs at once

Eight Core Beliefs and Attitudes (out of 25) Most Advance Spiritual Growth

1. Salvation by grace
2. The Trinity
3. Personal God
4. Christ is First
5. Authority of the Bible
6. Identify in Christ
7. Giving away my life
8. Stewardship

Listed in order, though they vary in their impact for growth from segment to segment. P. 123-124

Top 5 Catalysts for Movement 1: From Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ

Exploring
Christ



Growing in
Christ

Close to
Christ

Christ-
Centered

Spiritual Belief: *Salvation by Grace: "Nothing I do or have done can earn my salvation."*

Spiritual Belief: *The Trinity: "I believe the God of the Bible is the one True God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."*

Church Activity: *Serve the Church: "I serve in a church activity once a month or more."*

Spiritual Practice: *Prayer to Seek Guidance: "I pray to seek God's guidance for my life."
(occasional to frequent)*

Spiritual Practice: *Reading and Reflecting on Scripture: "I reflect on Scripture for meaning in my life."
(rare to frequent)*

The church's most important job is to build knowledge of and trust in Christ.

Top 5 Catalysts for Movement 2: From Growing in Christ to Close to Christ

Exploring
Christ

Growing in
Christ



Close to
Christ

Christ-
Centered

Spiritual Belief: A Personal God: *"I believe God is active in my life."*

Spiritual Practice: Prayer to Seek Guidance: *"I pray to seek God's guidance for my life."
(frequent to daily)*

Spiritual Practice: Reading and Reflecting on Scripture: *"I reflect on Scripture for meaning
in my life." (frequent)*

Spiritual Activity with Others: Evangelism: *"I have frequent meaningful spiritual conversations
with others."*

Spiritual Practice: Tithing: *"I currently give 10% of my income to my church."*

Three insights: Confidence is crucial; personal spiritual practices are key; and "going public" is catalytic.

Top 5 Catalysts for Movement 3: From Close to Christ to Christ-Centered

Exploring
Christ

Growing in
Christ

Close to
Christ



Christ-
Centered

Spiritual Belief/Attitude: Giving Away My Life: *"I am willing to risk everything important in my life for Christ."*

Spiritual Belief/Attitude: Christ is First: *"I desire Jesus to be First in my life."*

Spiritual Belief/Attitude: Identity in Christ: *"I exist to know, love, and serve God."*

Spiritual Belief: Authority of the Bible: *"I believe the Bible has decisive authority over what I say and do."*

Spiritual Practice: Reflection on Scripture: *"I reflect on Scripture for meaning in my life."
(very frequent to daily)*

Insights: It's all about movement of the heart; it takes place largely outside the church.

Churches that Rated Highest in Spiritual Growth

- Were of all sizes, locations, and ‘cultures’
- Did not discuss church growth
- Did not discuss strategies
- Had excellent leaders
- Had similar ideas for addressing spiritual growth:
 - “It’s not so much about the church. It’s about the people who attend the church.”
 - They don’t focus on people’s relationship with the church, but rather with Christ.

Survey Observations

- Weak beliefs inhibit spiritual growth. The lowest segments need Christian fundamentals taught and explained to them.
- People do not buy into spiritual beliefs all at once.
- Weekend services *most* benefit those in the *earlier segments of growth*.
- Other church activities serve distinct purposes. Examples:
 - adult education is significant to movement 2, and
 - *additional* (in-depth) teaching and worship is significant for movement 3
- Serving is the most catalytic experience offered by the church
- **Reflection on Scripture** is the most powerful spiritual practice for every segment. ***It is the only one on the Top 5 for every movement.***
- Every congregation needs consistent, intentional encouragement and guidance to communicate with God on a daily basis.
- Spiritual community (friendships, working side by side, etc.) is a critical catalyst for all movements.
- “Being stalled” and “being dissatisfied” are the two biggest inhibitors of individual growth, and the members who listed these two overlapped.

Best Practices

Churches that experience the highest levels of, and fastest acceleration to, full discipleship have similar practices:

- **They get people moving.** Instead of offering up a wide-ranging menu of ministry opportunities to newcomers, they promote a high-impact, non-negotiable pathway of focused *First Steps* for each movement.
- **They embed the Bible in everything.** At best-practice churches, the Bible goes beyond its role as the foundation for teaching and life instruction. These churches *breathe* Scripture. They say to every question or concern: “What does the Bible say about this?”
- **Their leaders *model living life according to the scriptures*.** They focus all their energies on showing Christ’s love and helping people become fully devoted to Christ.
- **They create ownership.** Best practice congregants don’t just belong to their church. They believe they *are* the church. Their churches *inspire and hold people accountable* for their behavior – for becoming more Christ-like in their everyday lives.
- **They pastor their local community.** They don’t just serve their community; they act as its shepherd, becoming deeply involved in influential positions and involved in community issues. They often partner with nonprofit and other church organizations to secure resources to address local concerns.