

The first article in this document makes clear what is important for growing disciples. For the remaining articles, I have taken snippets to get us thinking about what we want to measure.

Christianity Today, October 2007, "**Willow Creek Repents**"

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2007/october-online-only/willow-creek-repents.html>

Few would disagree that Willow Creek Community Church has been one of the most influential churches in America over the last thirty years. Willow, through its association, has promoted a vision of church that is big, programmatic, and comprehensive. This vision has been heavily influenced by the methods of secular business. James Twitchell, in his new book *Shopping for God*, reports that outside Bill Hybels' office hangs a poster that says: "What is our business? Who is our customer? What does the customer consider value?" Directly or indirectly, this philosophy of ministry - church should be a big box with programs for people at every level of spiritual maturity to consume and engage - has impacted every evangelical church in the country.

So what happens when leaders of Willow Creek stand up and say, "We made a mistake"? Not long ago Willow released its findings from a multiple year qualitative study of its ministry. Basically, they wanted to know what programs and activities of the church were actually helping people mature spiritually and which were not. The results were published in a book, *Reveal: Where Are You?*, co-authored by Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Willow Creek. Hybels called the findings "earth shaking," "ground breaking," and "mind blowing." ... below are few highlights.

In the Hawkins' video he says, "Participation is a big deal. We believe the more people participating in these sets of activities, with higher levels of frequency, it will produce disciples of Christ." This has been Willow's philosophy of ministry in a nutshell. The church creates programs/activities. People participate in these activities. The outcome is spiritual maturity. In a moment of stinging honesty Hawkins says, "I know it might sound crazy but that's how we do it in churches. We measure levels of participation."

Having put so many of their eggs into the program-driven church basket, you can understand their shock when the research revealed that "Increasing levels of participation in these sets of activities does NOT predict whether someone's becoming more of a disciple of Christ. It does NOT predict whether they love God more or they love people more." Speaking at the Leadership Summit, Hybels summarized the findings this way:

Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back, it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.

Having spent thirty years creating and promoting a multi-million dollar organization driven by programs and measuring participation, and convincing other church leaders to do the same, you can see why Hybels called this research "the wake-up call" of his adult life. Hybels confesses:

We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become self-feeders. We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.

In other words, spiritual growth doesn't happen best by becoming dependent on elaborate church programs but through the age old spiritual practices of [prayer](#), [bible reading](#), and [relationships](#). And, ironically, these basic disciplines do not require multi-million dollar facilities and hundreds of staff to manage. Does this mark the end of Willow's thirty years of influence over the American church? Not according to Hawkins:

Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet.

Christianity Today, July 13, 2010, Dallas Willard, "[How do we assess spiritual growth?](https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/spirituallife/spiritualgrowth.html)"

Many churches are measuring the wrong things. We measure things like attendance and giving, but we should be looking at more fundamental things like anger, contempt, honesty, and the degree to which people are under the thumb of their lusts. Those things can be counted, but not as easily as offerings. Why don't more churches gauge these qualities among their people? First of all, many leaders don't want to measure these qualities because what they usually discover is not worth bragging about. ... we must have people who are willing to be assessed ... we need the right tools to measure spiritual formation. Assessment tools that work best are a combination of self-assessment and the assessment of a significant other who knows you well. They don't work with people who don't want to be assessed, and they should not be administered like individual personality tests that some employers use.

When pastors don't have rich spiritual lives with Christ, they become victimized by other models of success—models conveyed to them by their training, by their experience in the church, or just by our culture. [They begin to think their job is managing a set of ministry activities and success is about getting more people to engage those activities.](#) Pastors, and those they lead, need to be set free from that belief.

Christianity Today, August 26, 2013, Ed Stetzer, "[Creating an Assessment Culture](https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/august/creating-assessment-culture.html)"

... So while I often say "facts are our friends," they aren't always friendly. For example, in 2009, LifeWay Research found that 55% of church attendees believed they had grown spiritually over the last year, while only 3.5% of those displayed any measurable growth. That's not a very warm and fuzzy stat, but it's an honest one.

Christianity Today, December 8, 2014, Ed Stetzer, "[Counting Correctly: Create the Right Scorecard for Churches](https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/december/counting-correctly-create-right-scorecard-for-churches.html)"

My contention is that we need to keep a scorecard. The challenge is in deciding what we are going to measure and how are we going to measure it. I'm convinced that the things we've been counting for years on those church attendance boards are helpful to count – but they're not all we should count. The

two I believe we must count include those core ones that most churches are already counting: conversions and baptisms. But there are other areas that matter as well. They matter deeply to me, too. Namely, we need to find out how to count transformation. Are people being transformed and becoming agents of God's mission? Are they sharing Christ with their neighbors? Getting converts is great, but are they learning to live and grow as believers and are they sharing Christ with others? We must begin tracking discipleship and missional living. Are people being transformed and becoming agents of God's mission? ... We have to consider things like:

- What percentage of people in the church are serving?
- How many are serving inside and outside the church?
- How many are in small groups?
- How many are being trained into leadership in groups and in the church?

Christianity Today, January 5, 2015, Ed Stetzer, "**Do Small Churches Need Self-Assessment?**"
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/january/do-small-churches-need-self-assessment.html>

... This is one of the reasons why we, at LifeWay Research, have sought to move the scorecard for measuring healthy churches away from merely looking at bodies, buildings and budgets. In Transformational Church and the Transformational Church Assessment Tool, we evaluate and measure how a church is making disciples. Since that's the task Jesus left for us, we should know whether we are doing a good job at it. Now, we are not the only ones with assessments, so my point here is not that you use ours, but that you use some. Regardless of which assessment tool your church chooses to use, you need to know if your church is engaged in true disciple-making.

Christianity Today, January 6, 2015, Ed Stetzer, "**Scriptural Discipleship Principle No. 1: Maturity Is The Goal**"
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/january/scriptural-discipleship-principle-1-maturity-is-goal.html>

We have to recognize that maturity is the goal of discipleship. ... Being spiritually mature does not mean you have graduated out of the daily grind of faith, grace, and mercy in a fallen world. **True spiritual depth is about understanding the Word of God and living out its truths.** That should be the goal for all of us. ... We can't be too deep in the faith, but we can be too shallow. ... As a person grows spiritually, they will be more active in the ministry of God, not less. If you find a person who is not interested in being part of the mission of God, you have likely found a stalled disciple. ... How can we make sure we are going deeper? It starts with culture. Be a church that wants to go deep with God. Provide ever-increasing opportunities for people who want to go deeper in spiritual formation.

The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool Workbook: Discovering the Quality of Your Relationships with God and Others in 30 Key Areas

by Randy Frazee, Paperback— March 14, 2005

<https://www.amazon.com/Christian-Life-Profile-Assessment-Workbook/dp/0310251613/>

This comprehensive discipleship tool kit enables churches to assess the Christian beliefs, practices, and virtues of each member to help everyone grow. The training kit is based on the "Thirty Core Competencies" as outlined in the book *The Connecting Church*, also by Pastor Randy Frazee. These thirty core competencies help churches know when they are making progress in guiding their members

toward Christ-likeness. Each of the four sessions contains components such as video, lecture, leader-led discussion, large group discussion, and small group discussion. Individuals answer 120 questions about their Christian beliefs, practices, and virtues. Three friends also assess them in the virtues area. Using the results, individuals identify areas in which they would like to grow during the upcoming year. The resource guide provides plans to help realize the growth such as reading books, memorizing Scripture, attending a seminar, being mentored by a spiritual director, or engaging in a new spiritual discipline. The Christian Life Profile journey is experienced in a small group community that seeks to encourage, pray, and hold each other accountable for progress. The goal is to take the profile again, one year later, to monitor the journey. The complete kit includes a four-session Training Guide, a copy of The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool, and a DVD to assist in training. The Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool and Training Guide are also available separately.