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The True Measure of Success

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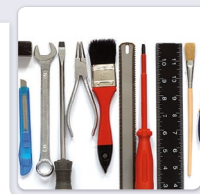
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The true measure of success

Church leaders love to create ministry events: small groups, programs, and other activities. Many of these programs do not get high attendance. Pastors feel a sense of failure because they often measure success by numbers, especially in attendance, baptisms, and giving.

Jesus invested most of His ministry in helping people grow spiritually. He called a small group to be with Him and enjoy His presence, and He equipped them for Spirit-led ministry (Mark 3:13–15). He taught them how to pray and have meaningful communion with the Father (Luke 11:1–13). He invested His life training them to preach, heal, and impact lives (Luke 9:1–27). He also shared many of His significant teachings one-on-one (John 3, 4) and His most precious spiritual moments in small group settings with His disciples (John 13–17, Mark 14:17–26) or in the company of Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1–13, 26:36–46).

Yet, at the climax of Jesus' ministry, when He died on the cross, He had been deserted by all. His church congregation was at its smallest, but under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the time He had spent with His close followers was not wasted. Later, these men and women transformed the world. The essential lesson is that Jesus was more concerned about a character than a crowd, a person than a program, a man than a multitude.

God has, at various stages of our ministries, struck us with the realization that spiritual growth prevails as the most important focus for the pastor.

I, Jonny, realized this when I worked with a summer camp. The church had been running the camp for


years, but I was tempted to shut down the program. Attendance was low and finances were tight, but we stuck it out one more summer, and I decided to approach it from a different angle. I would focus on the people. Each day, I met with a different staff member for 30 minutes to listen to and disciple them. The staff opened up about their failures, vulnerabilities, and needs. At the end of the summer, all of us reflected on the experience of how the staff had gone on a spiritual journey as individuals, and as a community, and been changed. A program I once thought a failure had transformed into a success because the emphasis was moved from the attendance to the growth of those attending.

One of the churches I, Joseph, pastored had dwindled from 100 to 40 people in attendance. I came to this church wanting to help the church grow. Over a period of three and half years, I worked 70 or more hours each week, implementing a myriad of strategies, techniques, plans, and programs to foster church growth. The amazing result was that the church attendance went from 40 to 30. I became a church *decline* expert. I was disappointed.

Then my wife challenged me to pray and attend to the spiritual needs of people. At first, I struggled to earnestly pray and care for the needs of others, but when I made this change, it altered the trajectory of the church. I grew. The members grew spiritually. And the membership grew numerically. Our church was transformed from a place of discord and dissonance to one of peace and harmony.

We discovered eight biblical practices that help church members grow spiritually:

- 1. Affirm God's love for them.** Explore what Jesus teaches about how God loves them and how they can love Him back.
- 2. Inspire them to live a life of worship.** Model and teach about the worthiness of God to be honored in every life circumstance.
- 3. Teach them how to discern God's voice.** Show them how prayer can be a two-way dialogue.
- 4. Show them how to study the Bible on their own.** Teach them how to read the Bible and where to find answers for their pressing life questions.
- 5. Demonstrate the value of Christian fellowship.** Help them discover the benefits, challenges, and responsibilities of belonging to a Christian community.
- 6. Encourage them to join God's mission.** Challenge them to find their part in God's purpose to save His children.
- 7. Discuss how to confidently talk about Jesus with others.** Help them figure out why and how to share their transformation stories in an appealing and sincere way.
- 8. Call them to make Holy Spirit-led changes in their lives.** Give examples of God working amazing changes in people's lives to remove harmful habits, mindsets, and behaviors, and process how God wants to transform them.

So what about you? If Jesus is our model, what changes do you need to make in your approach to ministry? God invites you to partner with Him to reorient your priorities in ministry and start focusing on the spiritual growth of those in your sphere of influence. 

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