

3-1-2018

Review of The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health, by Tony Morgan

Jason Worf

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Worf, Jason (2018) "Review of The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health, by Tony Morgan," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 12: No. 1, 107-108.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol12/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH: EQUIPPING CHURCHES TO EXPERIENCE SUSTAINED HEALTH

By Tony Morgan
Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson (2017)
Hardcover, 225 pages

Reviewed by JASON WORF

Tony Morgan has laid out his strategies for relating to a church that is “stuck” in maintenance or decline. His valuable experience in coaching churches through transition shows in the rich and practical stories that pepper the entire book. Morgan’s premise that all churches are at some stage of a life cycle and that, although there is a tendency to move towards maintenance and decline, any church can move toward and return to growth. *The Unstuck Church* takes this premise and develops it through the Launch, Momentum Growth, Strategic Growth, Sustained Health, Maintenance, Preservation, and Life Support stages of a church’s life cycle. Each chapter follows a predictable pattern of describing the context of one of the stages of a church’s life cycle, describing characteristics of churches in that stage, and outlining strategies to leverage the benefits of that stage or to coordinate a concerted effort back towards sustained health and strategic growth.

Morgan proves his skill at strategy while underscoring the need to have a team-based transformation approach. While one leader might be a great strategist, that doesn’t mean they’re a good visionary leader. A broad skill set comes from a team, not an individual. It’s frank and self-effacing advice like this that sets *The Unstuck Church* apart from other

church growth volumes. The real value of this book is as a manual for conversations with your leadership team. It’s the kind of book that you can take to an elder’s meeting, read a section of, and then talk it through. The way the chapters are laid out with such consistency and predictability in content will help a team take bite-size portions of the book and find valuable launching points for conversations and action steps.

Morgan takes a strong stand on the side of vision, strategy, and systems while recognizing the need for reliance on God’s power and leadership. His way of thinking about this is nicely summed up in the conclusion of the book:

When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there. (Josh. 3:7–8) We know the rest of the story. Though the river was overflowing, the priests took that first step into the water and God moved. The raging waters stopped flowing and the riverbed became dry. The Israelites crossed on dry land. God’s plan was for Joshua and the Israelites to take the first step into the river. Once they put their faith in action and took that next step, God moved (p. 195-196).

His foundation is clearly reliance on God’s leading, but he gets intensely practical as he talks about vision, strategy, and systems. To Morgan, vision is not a brief mission statement, but rather a clear description of what the future should look like. Strategy is the mechanism whereby we will reach that hoped-for future. Systems, on the other hand, are the day-to-day, organizational steps that make the strategy possible.

While Morgan flirts with promot-

ing his business as a church growth consultant with the Unstuck Group, it is tasteful and appropriately connected to stories of the various churches and leadership teams he has helped. I didn't get the feeling that Morgan was self-promoting, but rather that he uses his experience and skill to help you develop self-evaluative mechanisms for moving forward or back to health and growth. The book is written from the context of the Congregationalist Church and requires that the reader apply the principles to whatever system of governance their church employs.

I wholeheartedly recommend *The Unstuck Church* to any pastor or church leadership team who wants to understand their current stage in the life cycle of a church and wants to move their church towards growth.

JASON WORF has served as Director for Literature Ministries and Outreach Leadership Training at the North Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and is currently an associate pastor at the Village Church in College Place, Washington, USA.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS SERVING GOD'S MISSION

By Douglas McConnell
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic
(2018)
Paperback, 200 pages

Reviewed by DAVID K. PENNO

“What are we learning about culture that will help shape, catalyze, and propel our organizations missionally” (p. xiv)? This is the focus of Douglas McConnell in his book *Cultural Insights for Christian Leaders*. Taking ideas from leadership and organizational studies, psychology,

anthropology, and the Bible, the author states that Christian leaders in the globalized church must learn about and be able to address the “effects of culture on organizations and leadership, particularly on the organizational mission in relation to God’s mission” (p. xiv).

Douglas McConnell is a professor of Leadership and Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he has also served in the past as the Dean of the School of Intercultural Studies and the Provost.

The first seven chapters each describe a primary concept that “relate[s] to the role of leaders of organizations serving God’s mission” (p. xviii), while the last chapters provide a useful summary. These seven chapters each provide a case study that effectively illustrates the concept being discussed.

A brief description of each of these primary concepts is given below. Organizations must think missionally, relating their mission to the *Missio Dei* “To think missiologically about organizations is to consider their significant contribution, in all that they are and do, in relation to the mission of God” (p. 22). But our understanding of the mission, and the best ways to pursue that mission, are affected by culture. Leaders must understand the cultures that are impacting the organization. Therefore, “a careful review of the cultural context should be an integral part of every decision” (p. 186).

Leaders must also understand the interdependence of human nature and culture, and that culture is constantly evolving. McConnell describes how culture is learned, how it interacts with human nature, and how organizations can use this knowledge to bring people of various backgrounds into a common organization-