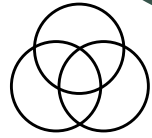




EIGHT QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS



FOR CHURCH



THE FUTURE OF YOUR CHURCH



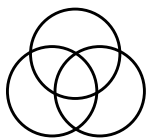
Does God want your church to grow? Not just to see a few new faces from time to time, but to the point where you could say, *"the Lord is adding to our number day by day those who are being saved"* (Acts 2:47). Even if you feel the "right" answer is yes, you can certainly be forgiven if, in darker moments, you have your doubts.

The world has been changing at a remarkable pace, and it's natural to wonder where your church fits into it. Grand statements are often made about the church's role in the world, but those may not offer much clarity when you're just trying to figure out what your church should be doing on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... to make a genuine difference in your community.

So, what is the church? The church is people. And a church that is truly growing is a church of growing people. So, instead of wondering whether God wants to grow your church or what its future might look like, a simpler question might be: does Jesus still want each person in your church, starting with the leadership, to be a genuine disciple—a student of His way of true life?

If the answer is "Yes," then things become clearer. Where we grow, our church will go. If we grow in love, our church will love into the future. If we grow in empowerment, our church will empower into the future. If we grow in wholeness, our church will bring wholeness to all who connect with it. If most people in your church are still alive, and even just a handful of them are open to being better disciples of the master, your church has a future.

To bring people into that future, they'll need confidence that what you're pursuing isn't just a passing trend. People are weary of that. They will need to know, deep down, that what they're doing truly matters to God.



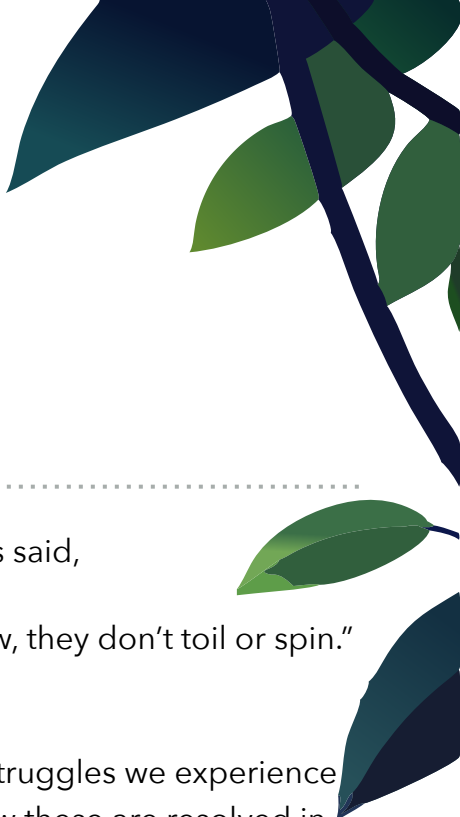
NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

“See how the lilies of the field grow, they don’t toil or spin.”
Matthew 6:28

In this passage, He speaks to the struggles we experience in life, drawing our attention to how these are resolved in His Kingdom. What’s often missed in translation is that His word for “see” actually means to examine intensely, to discover *how* the lilies grow.

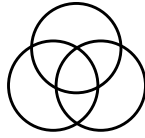
There’s so much we can learn about the Kingdom by studying creation, just as Jesus encourages us to do. One of the most profound lessons comes from observing a simple potted plant: we cannot make a plant grow, but we can certainly hinder it. Like God’s Kingdom, a plant grows “all by itself” when the conditions are right (Mark 4:26-28). Our role is to prepare the soil, but only God brings the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6).*



In the context of church growth, some say, “We must wait for the Holy Spirit to come.” While this sounds deeply spiritual, it often places the struggles of church life solely on God, letting us off the hook. Others might say, “We need better programs and stronger branding.” But this approach often leaves little room for asking what God is doing right now and how we can better partner with Him.

Instead of toiling and spinning—or passively waiting for God to do everything—we need to look closely at what God has already provided. Our role is to remove the barriers preventing growth in ourselves and in our church. Then we can step back and see what God will do.





THE EIGHT QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS

More than 30 years ago, Christian A. Schwarz noticed the overwhelming number of books, sermons, and conferences each claiming to offer the principles any church should follow to be successful. Yet, there was little evidence that these ideas were truly foundational Kingdom principles that could benefit every church universally; in fact, many concepts seemed to help some churches while proving unhelpful in others.

This led Christian to embark on what became—and remains—the largest global research project into the principles behind healthy, sustainably growing churches. This research, revalidated over time, has spanned nearly 100,000 churches worldwide, including Orthodox, Catholic, and almost every branch of Protestantism.

The key finding? Eight core quality characteristics are foundational for all types of Christian churches:



Empowering Leadership

Gift-based Ministry

Passionate Spirituality

Effective Structures

Inspiring Worship Service

Holistic Small Groups

Need-oriented Evangelism

Loving Relationships

At first glance, this list may seem unremarkable. After all, these qualities are visible in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. However, three things are vital to understand about them:

- None of these qualities can be missing if your church aims for lasting fruitfulness.
- The adjectives are essential; for example, it's not just "leadership," but empowering leadership that makes a difference.
- These aren't just "good ideas" to enhance church life—they are fundamental Kingdom principles. If you partner with God in cultivating these areas, "all else will be given to you." But if you disregard them, things will not go well.

Before exploring the NCD Church Survey, which can guide you in prioritizing these principles, here's a brief look at what each one is about.





EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

...to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Ephesians 4:12

The Kingdom principle of empowering leadership requires each person in your church—especially those in leadership—to wrestle with the question,

“Where is my power going?”

God has given each of us a measure of power, a level of influence that cannot be switched off. The question is whether that power will be used to empower others or, even in subtle ways, to oppress them. The power we have will end up doing something. We must use it carefully.

Throughout history, many have tried to gather power for themselves, only to eventually reveal just how weak and fragile they truly are. True power grows when it is shared and passed on to others, while teaching them to do the same. In this way, whole communities are strengthened for the benefit of everyone, from those at the centre, right out to the fringe.

One of the greatest challenges of empowering leadership is that you can often “get by” in day-to-day church life without actively developing those around you. If you keep your head down and focus on the immediate tasks, you can kind of make it look like everything is running smoothly. However, neglecting to empower others each day is essentially a vote against the future of your church—and against the next generation.

In the end, empowering leadership isn’t some advanced leadership technique; it’s simply obedience to the call to make true disciples of Jesus—people who learn to receive His power and pass it on to others.

When you do empower others—coming alongside them, collaborating, and helping them grow to the next level—you may not see much change this week, or even in the next few months. But a little further down the road, you’ll begin to witness exponential growth and fruitfulness in your church that will be beyond what you could have imagined.

WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE
REMOVED TO ALLOW
EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP TO
BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?



GIFT-BASED MINISTRY

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10

The Kingdom principle of gift-based ministry requires each person in your church to ask,

“What could be my greatest contribution?”

Purposeful contribution comes from doing what we do best, which directly aligns with how God has gifted each of us.

Gift-based ministry challenges the leadership of the church to consider what matters most: the programs that have been developed or dreamed up over time, or the giftedness of the people you have in the church right now. Since it is the Spirit of God who uniquely gifts each person, anyone insisting on the supremacy of church programs over people's giftedness will ultimately lose that battle—and maybe a lot of weary soldiers along the way.

Church activities must align with and harness the gifts of your people; otherwise, you are trying to lead an imaginary church that doesn't exist in reality. The parable of the talents makes it clear that God is very, very, unhappy when his enabling gifts are disregarded.

When you invest time in open conversations, assessments, and experimentation to discover what God has placed in each person's life, and then bring those gifts together in teams where everyone has a unique role, it should come as no surprise that service—both within and beyond your church family—will be changing lives and deeply touching the heart of God. This faithfulness will, in turn, invite even greater gifts and blessings upon your growing community.



WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED
TO ALLOW GIFT-BASED MINISTRY TO
BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?

PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Romans 12:11-12

The Kingdom principle of passionate spirituality requires each person in your church to consider,

“What is fuelling my fire?”

Genuine passion is a measure of what you can endure. Tapping into what will keep you going in a healthy way is essential for life—and ultimately, it's about being deeply connected to God and the things of His Kingdom. Though this is often easier said than done, asking regular questions like, “When did you feel closest to God this week?” or “When did you feel most alive?” can begin to ignite contagious spiritual passion in fresh and often surprising ways.

Passionate spirituality challenges your church leadership to observe how they, and their people, most naturally connect with God. Rather than promoting a single spiritual style that puts God's connection with his beloveds in a box, it opens the door for discovering God in diverse aspects of life across the breadth of His Kingdom.

Alongside practices like prayer and Bible reflection, will be added connection with God in nature, silence, solitude, and ceremony; encounters with God while celebrating with his other children or sharing His love with those who don't yet know Him; moments of awe while exploring profound questions or while respecting life's order, and even discovering God's presence when all else has been taken away. Each of these moments offer rich renewal, opportunities to reclaim what may have been lost, and a pathway toward becoming a new and fully alive creation in the image of Christ?

WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED TO ALLOW
PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY TO BECOME MORE NATURAL
IN YOUR CHURCH?



EFFECTIVE STRUCTURES

The Sabbath was made for the needs of human beings,
and not the other way around. Mark 2:27

One simple way to understand effective structures is to picture a stake placed beside a young tree. This stake supports the tree's growth until it develops its own internal strength. Over time, the stake should either be adjusted or removed for one of two reasons: because it's worked, or because it hasn't. Whether supporting a tree, or the growth of a disciple, or your whole church, structures must be regularly reviewed, adjusted, added or removed to ensure they truly support growth.

The Kingdom principle of effective structures requires each person in your church to wrestle with the question,

“How well am I using all I have?”

The only reason to maintain any structure in life is that it helps make better use of the time, treasure, and talent available. Any structure that wastes time, squanders resources, or suppresses talent, must be addressed.

Equally, if structures that would help to make better use of what God has given are missing, they must be put in place. God is neither a god of lifeless order (ineffective structures) nor unstructured chaos (no structure at all). God equips us to bring fruitful order from chaos—first in our own lives, then in our church, and ultimately in the world around us.

In the verse above, we see Jesus affirming a longstanding structure, emphasizing that its purpose is to support life. In many other instances, he challenged existing structures that harmed rather than helped people, and he also introduced new structures as needed. In light of all of that, what would Jesus say about the structures in your church?

WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE
REMOVED TO ALLOW
EFFECTIVE STRUCTURES TO
BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?



INSPIRING WORSHIP SERVICE

Be joyful, always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19

The Kingdom principle of inspiring worship service requires each person in your church to consider,

“What happens when I enter the room?”

The elements of your worship gatherings should be an honest and authentic reflection of your congregation's walk with God, with all its blessings and challenges. True inspiring worship isn't about replicating what other groups do; it must flow naturally from what is happening in the lives of your people throughout the week.

For worship to be truly inspiring, the most essential ingredient is inspired and inspiring worshippers. Without them, a gathering risks becoming little more than a staged show. Every person who comes has a role in “worth-ship”—declaring, from the moment they arrive to when they leave, the *value* they see in God and His Kingdom. Even someone who humbly brings only a broken heart offers a beautiful act of worship by showing their need for God and His people.

Everyone who enters your gatherings either breathes life into the room or drains some away. Imagine if more people became disciples of inspiring worth-ship in their everyday lives, placing everyone and everything in its proper place of value in the eyes of God. The overflow of this inspiration into each gathering would be truly breathtaking.

WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED TO ALLOW
INSPIRING WORSHIP TO BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?



HOLISTIC SMALL GROUPS

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another... Hebrews 10:24-25

In Natural Church Development, a small group is simply a group that's small—any gathering of two or more people, whether formal or informal, that could allow for the deepening of relationships with each other and God. This means that many small group gatherings happen each week in connection to your church, even if the church itself is small. So the question isn't whether you have small groups, but whether people in those mini gatherings are taking the opportunity to build each other up.

The Kingdom principle of holistic small groups requires each person in your church to consider,

“How well do I engage with others?”

When you're with others, do you notice them? Do you give them your full attention? Are you aware of their unique needs and what they could contribute? Do you see them as whole people—or simply as a mind, an extra sets of hands, or a heart to lean on?

It's common for members of even well-organized small groups to collectively report spending time on things that don't feel relevant. In such gatherings, it's clear that there is not much attention being paid to the people who are in the room. Something else—perhaps someone's personal agenda or pet topic—is consistently more important than those gathered.

Imagine if your people were to become disciples with the growing ability to ask conversation-opening questions, truly seeing those they are gathered with. The number of life-changing moments arising naturally would multiply before your eyes.



WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED
TO ALLOW HOLISTIC SMALL GROUPS TO
BECOME MORE NATURAL IN YOUR
CHURCH?

NEED-ORIENTED EVANGELISM

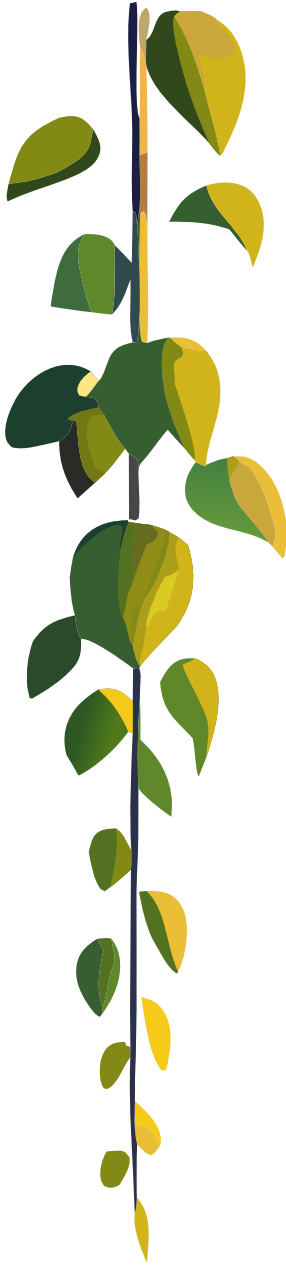
Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible...I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

The Kingdom principle of need-oriented evangelism requires each person in your church to ask of themselves and those in their care,

“How fulfilling is your life?”

Jesus made it clear that he came to offer life in all its fullness, doing everything possible to make this available to the world—without forcing it on anyone. The question, “How fulfilling is your life?” is almost like the subtext of every encounter he has ever had with people, whether through gentle or challenging words. It’s a question that implies an open invitation to a deeper relationship with him and a more satisfying, fruitful life—a chance to be whole.

One of the challenges in fostering need-oriented evangelism is helping people understand that no Christian



has been fully “evangelized” yet. Everyone has further to go in realizing the difference between their current life and what it could be if fully under the Kingship of Jesus. Recognizing this can encourage Christians to approach non-Christians naturally and humbly—as fellow travellers on the journey toward true life.

Imagine if your people learned to see and respond to the their own deepest needs and the needs of those around them—whether material, practical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, or otherwise. Such compassion would unquestionably bring life on Earth closer to how it is in Heaven, giving many more people the chance to meet Jesus along the way as they experience his Kingdom more and more.

WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED
TO ALLOW NEED-ORIENTED EVANGELISM
TO BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?

LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.
John 13:35

The Kingdom principle of loving relationships requires each person in your church to wrestle with the question,

“What love do you have to give?”

This question has two parts: what form of love does the person in front of you need most to feel truly loved right now, and what forms of love have you, so far, allowed God’s Spirit to grow within you so they are available when someone needs them? For example, if someone needs patience in this moment but you haven’t developed that fruit of the Spirit, you may leave them feeling, at best, unloved or, at worst, damaged by your impatience.

Loving relationships are the net that holds church life together. Without them, new people can flow into your community, but then drift straight out the back door. Building strong relationships is like mending a fishing net—connecting or reconnecting each part to the others so that everyone is bound together in colourful unity. This linking

together can start with something as simple as greeting someone you don't usually speak to.

Imagine if your church members became genuine disciples of Jesus, allowing every form of love to be developed in them so that each moment shared with one another provided exactly what the other person needed—peace, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness... The warmth and light emanating from their relationships would be a light on the hill, drawing everyone around to taste and see the love of God.



WHAT BARRIER NEEDS TO BE REMOVED
TO ALLOW LOVING RELATIONSHIPS TO
BECOME MORE NATURAL IN
YOUR CHURCH?



THE NCD CHURCH SURVEY

While all eight quality characteristics are essential for a healthy, growing church, our research shows that you don't have to focus on all of them at once. Some of these principles already come a bit more naturally to your church, and those parts of your partnership with God are worth celebrating!

At any given time, just one of the eight characteristics needs to be prioritized above the others. We call this the "minimum factor"—the area that currently comes less naturally and is holding you back the most. Working on your minimum factor not only strengthens that area but also supports the growth of the other eight characteristics, since they are interconnected. It's like improving the health of your heart, which benefits every other system in your body.

We use the image of a barrel to illustrate why the minimum factor matters. God may want to pour abundant blessings into your church, but if one area (the lowest stave on the barrel) hasn't been given enough attention, it limits how much of that blessing can flow in. As you work on the minimum factor—as many churches worldwide can testify—you see new blessings in people, resources, and opportunities flow "all by itself," just as God intended.



The NCD Church Survey provides an efficient way to identify both your church's strengths and its minimum factor. With complete anonymity and questions designed to target what has been proven to matter most, the survey offers an accurate snapshot of your church's health. It only takes about 20 minutes and can be completed online or on paper. To begin your NCD journey, reach out to your NCD national partner who can guide you every step of the way.

On the journey to life in all its fullness, Jesus invites us to take on His easy, light yoke. This shows that all He ever asks of us is to take the next step in the right direction, drawing on all that He is and all that He has already given us.

Let's clarify that next step for your church.



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