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The Church with Ten Windows

Kent R. Hunter

It was a bright sunny day as I sat in the Doctor of Ministry Church Growth course at Fuller Seminary. The last thing I expected was that my professor, Peter Wagner, would begin by sharing an overhead transparency of a pretty girl that, depending on how you looked at it, could also reveal an old hag. It was at that point that Wagner, and God, started messing with my mind about the church. I experienced a paradigm shift. I would never look at the church the same again.

As I began to teach others what I learned, I developed my own story around an x-ray. It was a medical snapshot of someone's stomach. I would ask people to identify the location of the problem. Then we would talk about how people with a trained eye can look at the same information, yet see it differently.

Wagner called it "church growth eyes." It is looking at the church through a different lens. As we in the Church Growth Movement share the paradigm shift, those we impact report that they will never look at the church the same again. They are different people and their congregations are different churches. Their lives are changed forever.

In my book *Foundations for Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church*¹, I wrote that, from my theological point of view, Church Growth is a reformation of biblical ecclesiology. For many pastors trained in traditional Bible colleges and seminaries, there was a vacuum about key issues that make the church more effective. Church Growth eyes changes your perspective forever. When you see things differently, you do things differently. This paradigm shift has impacted thousands of churches.

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They have become more effective for the Great Commission.

Biblical Worldview

While operating a Church Growth oriented parachurch ministry during the last 27 years, it has become clear to me that there are two levels on which to approach and affect change in the local church for the Great Commission. The *behavioral level* is the easiest. In the consultation ministry, we recommend signs for guest parking, the addition of a worship service for the millennial generation, a rotation style of interactive Sunday school, etc. We do this on the basis of our church growth eyes, a paradigm shift that has happened within us. When churches implement those behavioral changes, some of the members understand and celebrate the added growth potential of their congregation. Others just watch curiously. Some are threatened by the changes that rock their comfort.

On a second level, real transformation happens as people are not only disciplined in their behavior, but in their *worldview*. Jesus was constantly encouraging people to *do* certain things. But most often, He was teaching them to *be* different people. His greatest clash was with the religious leaders who saw the Judeo-Christian movement from a different worldview.

Worldview is about ideas. Darrow Miller, in the videotape series *Transforming Cultures Through Kingdom Thinking* makes it clear that “ideas have consequences.”² Miller defines worldview in his book *Disciplining Nations* as how you see the world and understand how the world works. Miller says, “All of us wear a set of lenses in our minds, but few of us are aware of their presence.”³

A worldview is a set of assumptions, which are often subconscious. A common perspective is that every Christian operates from the same worldview. Nothing could be farther from reality. Our research shows that Christians in the same church have a wide variety of worldviews—even though they read from the same Bible. I understand. I completed college, seminary, and a PhD program, without a biblical worldview about the church. For that piece I thank Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner, and the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena California.

Worldviews shape actions. Ideas have consequences. Chuck Colson said, “Our choices are shaped by what we believe is real and true, right and wrong, good and beautiful. Our choices are

shaped by our worldview.”⁴

In our second decade of consulting churches, Church Doctor Ministries began a massive research study that would help us intervene in the lives of congregation members. We focused on those who are at the core of church life: the influencers and the power brokers—those who make decisions that affect change—or, vote against them.

Research Model

The research provided interviews and questionnaires distributed among active church members between 1985 and 2000. These churches were congregations that could be described at the top end of openness towards innovation and change. They are somewhat pre-qualified because they are churches that approached Church Doctor Ministries for a church consultation.

Prior to the consultation, questionnaires were distributed to a random sampling of members in approximately 219 congregations.⁵ During the research period, 18,000 members completed questionnaires. After the results were tabulated the Church Doctor field consultant visited each congregation, and among other activities, interviewed individuals one on one, in pairs, and in small groups. During the research period 15,000 one half hour to one-hour interviews were conducted.

The research universe included a variety of congregations from 25 different denominations and traditions throughout the United States and Canada. Congregations included churches of all sizes, located in a variety of environments. They represented churches that were already growing rapidly, some that were experiencing moderate growth, others that were plateaued and some that were declining. There were a few in the crisis mode near closure.

Neither the size of the church, denominational origin/tradition, or environmental location (urban, rural, suburban, etc) were identified as independent variables of significant impact on the results obtained from this research. In other words, statistical response in various categories reflected similar returns to the unified database.

Responses from the questionnaires provided the framework for the refinement of data through the interviews. While the questionnaires provide hints of worldview issues, the interviews “flushed out” those worldview issues that drive behavior in the church.

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We discovered that there are ten key worldview issues for church health, vitality and growth. We also discovered that significant percentages of those who influence the church operate from *unbiblical worldviews* in these ten areas. The issues have direct impact on the effectiveness of the congregation, related to the implementation of the Great Commission.

Challenges in Church Life

Bob had been a member of the church for ten years. Under the leadership of the new pastor, Bob had been ignited with a passion to be more sensitive to the young families that had begun attending Community Church. Pastor had lifted Bob's awareness of the many young families moving in and around the church, many of whom had no church home. Bob realized for the first time that these young families were receptive to settling into a church home.

In this process of Bob's growth, he came to the conclusion that the old and somewhat worn out restrooms did not leave a good impression with young families in this contemporary world. He gathered a few other like minded people and through the leadership system of the congregation, led the charge to raise some money to renovate the restrooms. But Bob was surprised and somewhat shocked by the reaction of approximately 40 percent of the members who attended the congregational meeting where the idea was proposed. He was not prepared for the comments made by some, who felt that the restrooms had been "good enough" for the members all these years and, their "research" among their friends indicated that no one had any complaints. Others protested on the basis that the congregation had been lagging slightly behind the operating budget and wondered why anyone would approach members for finances for any reason other than meeting the budget needs. Others seemed offended by the fact that visitors might not find the restrooms up to their standards and openly wondered whether these "new-comers" had the right motives for coming to church in the first place.

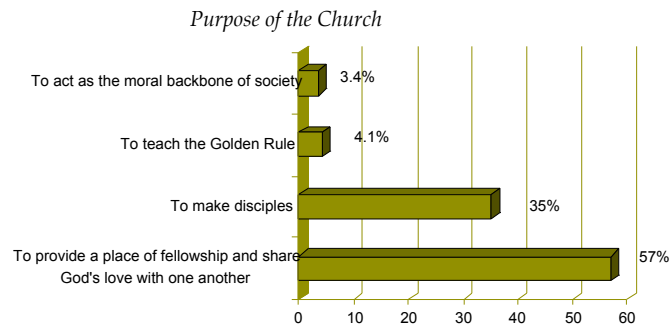
Bob never considered the issue behind the issues: the worldviews of those in the church. It was not only Bob who missed this important dimension. So did the pastor who inspired him. So do many who work on the inside of the church—and some from the outside who work as consultants, denominational leaders or judicatory influencers.

Windows

The ten worldviews are what we have come to describe as key windows through which people look to understand the church and how the church works. These are biblical worldviews about the congregation. As mentioned above, some of those who are leaders and influencers have unbiblical worldviews. These assumptions are, most often, subconscious, but they drive their actions. Those actions often provide roadblocks to what God wants to do in and through a church to make disciples and bring lost people to Himself.

1. *The Window of Purpose: Your Purpose Determines Your Mission.*

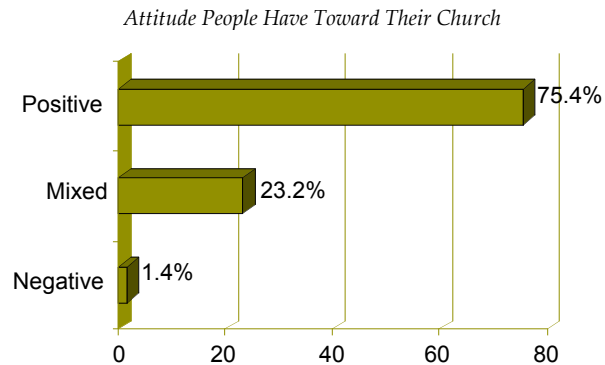
Our research asks people to identify, among four choices, what they perceive to be the primary purpose of the church.



Note that 35 percent of the people chose the reflection of the Great Commission. Our research shows that in 95 percent of the congregations, the Great Commission is a clear and dominant factor of the purpose statement in their constitutions. Consequently, we, as church growth analysts and consultants are not predisposing our own theological biases on the churches, but only representing that purpose for which their own forefathers and mothers constituted their congregations in the first place. The majority of the people chose the answer that says that the church's primary purpose is to provide a place of fellowship, to share God's love *with each other*. This is what we have come to call, "the country club" answer. It represents perhaps the most detrimental worldview issue facing Christians on the North American continent today. It is a consumer mentality that reflects what we call Wal-Mart Christianity.

2. *The Window of Comfort: Your Comfort Determines Your Sacrifice.*

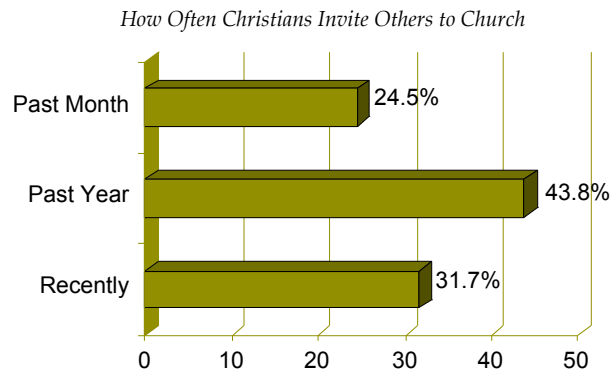
When we asked people about their attitude toward the church, the questionnaires reflected the following data:



At first, we saw the 75.4 percent as positive. However, through the follow-up interviews, the refinement of data reflected that the large percentage of positive attitudes was a reflection that people are comfortable in their church. They see comfort as a top priority at all costs. In fact, as a biblical worldview, many Christians, we discovered, believe "God wants me to be comfortable" as biblical truth. Of course, the biblical record shows that God is much more interested in His peoples' character than their comfort. There are many times when discomfort brings about spiritual growth, and Great Commission effort. Jesus' death on the cross would be the greatest example.

3. *The Window of Image: Your Image Determines Your Impact.*

We asked people if they had invited someone to church recently. Twenty-four point five percent said that they invited someone in the last month, while 43.8 percent said that it would be more appropriate to say that they had invited someone in the last year. An additional almost one third of the respondents, 31.7 percent, said that they had not invited anyone recently, not in the last month or the last year.

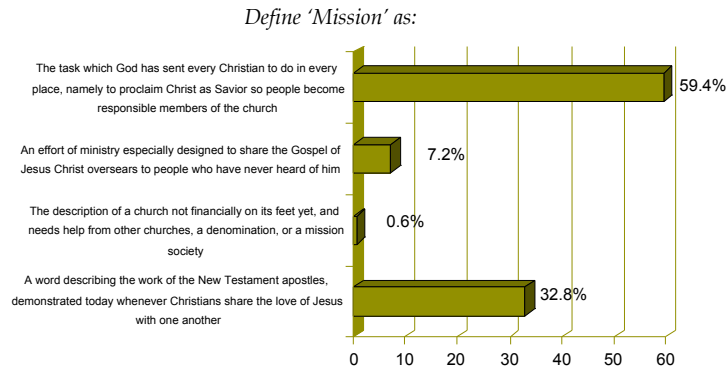


On further research, through the interviews, we discovered behind this behavior the worldview that many had the concept that lost people should find their own way into the Kingdom. In their worldview, it is not the Christian's responsibility to go after them. In spite of the fact that Jesus called His followers "Fishers of men" (the biblical worldview) their perception was that biblical fishing was sitting in the boat and waiting for the fish to jump in the boat. This is substantiated by research reflected below.

4. *The Window of Priorities: Your Desire Determines Your Priorities.*

This is the issue of mission or maintenance. It is reflected by the person who is not concerned much about outreach activity. They can be heard saying, "I wish our church would do more for our members."

In this particular item, we asked church members to define the word "mission."

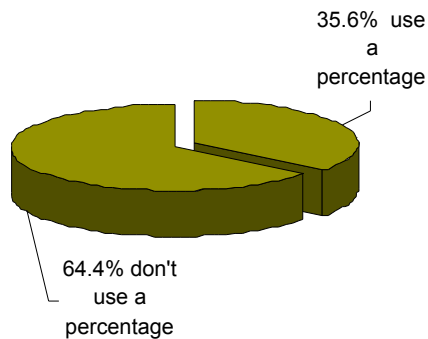


Notice that 59.4 percent of the respondents chose correctly what church growth leaders have learned as the “Archbishop’s Definition of Evangelism.” This definition, developed in 1918 by the Anglican Archbishop’s committee, has become a standard for missiological understanding and church growth teaching. Another 7.2 percent saw the concept of mission being the work of the church when it sends missionaries overseas. Only .6 percent said that they understood a church as a “mission” when it was subsidized (common terminology used by some denominations). However, 32.8 percent, almost a third of the respondents, identify mission as the work that Christians do when they share God’s love *with each other*. Our interviews reflected that the key issue is the word “sent”, which originates from the Latin, *missio*. Many, consequently, reflect a maintenance orientation rather than a mission image.

5. *The Window of Stewardship: Your Blessings Determine Your Giving.*

Finances to conduct ministry are a huge issue in the church. Loren Meade of the Alban Institute says that finances are the Achilles’ Heel of the 21st century for Christian ministry.

So we asked people if they approach their financial offerings from the biblical perspective of proportionate giving.

Percentage Giving Among Those we Surveyed

Among the people we surveyed, 64.4 percent indicate that they do not. This is almost two thirds of the active and involved people in the church.

Our interviews indicated that many had no clue of proportionate giving. Most of them had been highly influenced by un-biblical church communication that invites them to give to a pledge, a budget, some program or need.

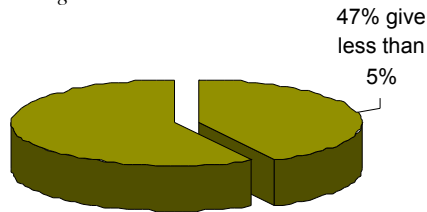
Our clinical observation from churches is that proportionate giving is a stronger determinate toward the financial stability of a congregation than the socioeconomic level of the people. Especially in an inflationary environment, over time, proportionate giving is a key to financing future ministry of the local congregation.

6. *The Window of Financing: Your Abundance Determines Your Possibilities.*

In our research questionnaire, after we asked people to respond about proportionate giving, we asked them to do the math and calculate what percent of their income they do give to the work of the Lord through the church.

Our database, compared to the national average of other studies is actually higher on this issue of the tithe. Almost 25% indicated that they give a tithe (10%) or more. The explanation for this is that our research is among the active, core influencers of the local congregation.

Almost Half Give Less than 5% of Their Gross Income to the Work of the Lord Through Their Church



Nevertheless, note that 47 percent, almost half, give less than 5 percent of their income in the offering plate.

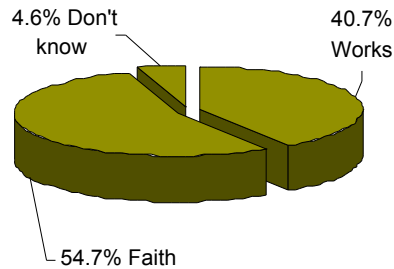
Our interviews reflected a deeper worldview, however. It is the same unbiblical approach that generates the frequent question raised when there is a challenge for new ministry: "How much will it cost?" Followed by the comment, "We cannot afford that." Many church members have an unbiblical worldview that God is a God of scarcity rather than a God of abundance. Nor do they focus on challenges in ministry on the level of "Is it God's will?"

The biblical worldview is, if it is God's will, and God is the Lord of all, including finances, it will be accomplished. God pays for what He orders. When many of the core leaders and active members of a church have an unbiblical worldview about the limits of God's finances for His work, many key ministries are squelched. Unfortunately churches often argue about the values of the ministry activity, without realizing that the underlying scarcity worldview is the culprit.

7. *The Window of Change: Your Past Determines Your Future.*

In our Spiritual Health Questionnaire we began asking people a question borrowed from Dr. D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion* program, popular in the 1960's-80's. In Kennedy's outline for presenting the Gospel, he formulated the diagnostic question, "Suppose you were to die tonight and stand before God and He were to ask, 'Why should I let you in to heaven?' What would you say?"

Suppose you were to die tonight and stand before God and He were to ask, "Why should I let you in to heaven?"



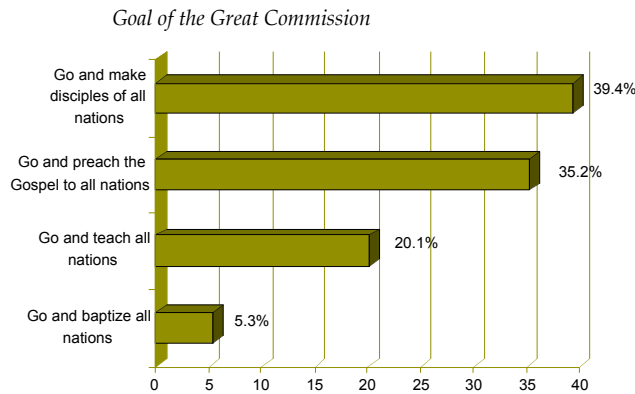
Notice that while slightly over half of the respondents trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, approximately four out of ten trust in their own good works. While this, on a theological level is challenging enough, our interviews discovered that there is also a further tie to the value of *works* as they relate to one's approach to tradition. This in turn has a huge impact on the potential for change within a church. We discovered that many of those who are works righteousness oriented do not understand tradition, which is *the living faith of the dead*. The focus is on what *God does*. It is the subject of *Hebrews 11*. It is the testimony of those who have gone before us, who are like a crowd of spectators cheering us on from the grandstands, to reach the goal of the Great Commission. However, many of those caught in a works oriented approach to salvation, tend to be caught in traditionalism. Traditionalism is *the dead faith of the living*. The focus is on what *we do*. They cling to customs and outdated programs. They elevate the style above the content of the Christian faith.

People who see life through this unbiblical window resist change. Their roots, self-esteem and stability are focused in the works of the past. They are challenged by the introduction of change. While many churches struggle to bring about needed change, they frequently fail to identify this underlying worldview assumption. Change as a behavioral issue will never be accomplished unless the internal worldview issue is dealt with first.

8. *The Window of Leadership: How You See Your Pastor Determines Your Potential.*

In order to identify member's understanding of the role of the pastor, we asked people to identify the goal of the Great

Commission.

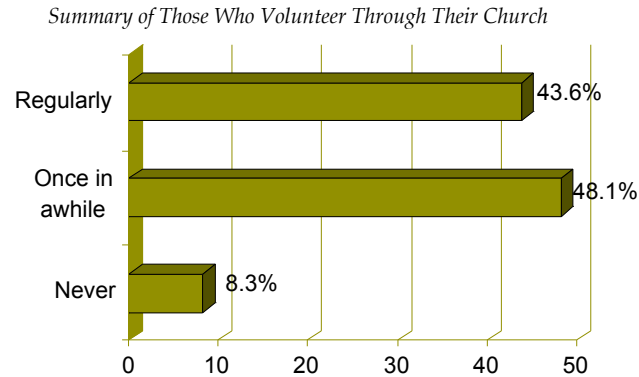


Notice that while almost four in ten of the respondents identified the goal “to go and make disciples,” there are a large number of people, six in ten, who identify the goal as preaching, teaching, or baptizing. Through interviews, we discovered that the Great Commission goal is subconsciously identified in the minds of large numbers of people as being the work of the pastor. This reflects upon Peter Wagner’s excellent book, *Leading Your Church to Growth*.⁶ It is the classic worldview issue of whether people see the pastor as minister or understand that the pastor as leader and the people as ministers. This is the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It is reflective of Wagner’s paradigm in which he shows that, as the pastor increases as leader and decreases as minister, the potential for church growth in the congregation increases.

While many churches approach this issue through job descriptions and ministry boards and committees, the real issue behind the issue is an “inside job.” It is the worldview about roles of ministry. Large numbers of people carry an unbiblical worldview contrary to *Ephesians 4*, which identifies pastors and teachers, apostles, prophets, and evangelists as being those who equip God’s people for the work of ministry.

9. *The Window of Teamwork: How You See Your Giftedness Determines Your Involvement.*

Our research questionnaire began by asking people if they volunteer to work in the church.



Notice that slightly under half of those completing the questionnaire said that they volunteer regularly. However, closer to half, 48.1 percent, said that they only volunteer once in a while. Another 8.3 percent never volunteer.

Our interviews, however, revealed that this behavior is reflective of a worldview issue. Part of it is connected to the previous issue (worldview #8, the role of the pastor) but most of it is identified by an unbiblical worldview of their place in the body of Christ. Remember the classic book by Ray Stedman, called *Body Life?* This, and numerous other books, focus on the church as the body of Christ and emphasize the importance of spiritual gifts. It is a biblical worldview that still has eluded many in respect to their own personal spiritual growth. Many who are involved in the life of congregations hold an unbiblical worldview concerning their role and activity. There is significant ignorance about the whole concept of spiritual gifts.⁷

10. The Window of Attitude: The Power of God Determines Your Attitude.

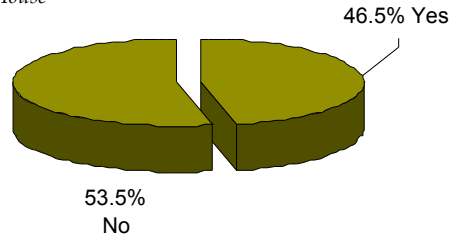
In *Philippians 2*, Paul identifies the attitude of Jesus Christ. He says that it is an attitude that focuses on the needs of others, subordinates to God's will and provides the platform for God to fulfill the Great Commission.

An attitude is a posture. Pilots speak of the attitude of an airplane. It is the angle of the nose of the airplane. The attitude affects all the other systems of the airplane. Likewise, the attitude of Christians in a church impact all the other "systems" that are in place for effective ministry.

In our research, we asked people if they attended a regularly

scheduled Bible study at church or in a home.

Percentage of Those Who Regularly Attend a Scheduled Bible Class at Church or in a House



Notice that over half of those who represent the core group of active Christians are not involved in any Bible study. We included this as the final of the ten windows because the posture of a Christian toward God, the attitude of a biblical Christian, is shaped by the truths of Scripture. Consequently, a foundational issue is the involvement of people in the study of the Bible. Our interviews reflected great levels of biblical illiteracy among those who attend church regularly, and who hear sermons almost every Sunday.

Empowering the Church

It is our perception, in summary, based on this research, that unless church leaders and interventionists focus on issues of biblical worldview, the behavioral changes made in congregations will be temporary and minimal at best. For those of us who have been part of the Church Growth Movement, perhaps this is a challenge to rediscover our roots and recognize the powerful impact of helping people discover “church growth eyes.” Perhaps the most valuable result of this research has been the discovery of ten clear areas where we can focus to help people gain biblical worldviews that will remove roadblocks and allow God to use His transformed people to make disciples of all peoples.

Writer

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don, 2002). He may be contacted at:
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NOTES

1. Kent R. Hunter, *Foundations For Church Growth: Biblical Basics for the Local Church*, Corunna, IN, Church Growth Center, 1994.

2. Darrow Miller, *Transforming Cultures Through Kingdom Thinking*, Colorado Springs: Crown Ministries International, 2001, Volume 1, n.d.

3. Darrow Miller, *Discipling Nations*, Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 1998, p. 37.

4. Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999, p. 20.

5. The sampling surveys used in this research are tools developed by the consultation division of Church Doctor Ministries. They include the Mission Awareness Survey and Spiritual Health Questionnaire.

6. C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church To Growth: The Secret of Pastor/People Partnership in Dynamic Church Growth*, Glendale, CA: Regal, 1984.

7. Contrary to Paul's injunction that we should not be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1).