

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL THEME SERIES *from*

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CHOSEN IN CHRIST
CALLED TO INFLUENCE

A Mature Faith

How to lead a
community toward
spiritual maturity



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A Mature Faith

How to lead a community toward spiritual maturity

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Introduction

Maturing

By Caryn Rivadeneira



As I walked back from my kids' bus stop with a neighbor's nanny, she lamented the five years it had been since she graduated from high school. She told me about fighting with her then-boyfriend at senior prom and said looking back it was hard to believe she was that same person.

"But you know," she told me. "Some of the girls haven't changed at all."

The vain side of me laughed a little. Since I'm just weeks away from my own 20-year-high-school reunion, I'm sort of hoping that my former classmates see me as one of the girls who "haven't changed at all." But that wasn't what she meant. She wasn't talking about body shapes or hairstyles. She was talking about maturity.





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What this woman didn't recognize about herself was the kind of person who'd fight over inconsequential things at prom. Looking back, it seemed so silly.

After we parted ways, I kept thinking about maturity—and the ways I've grown in the couple of decades I've been out of high school. While I've matured in all the regular ways—I now hold down a job and a mortgage; I'm raising three kids and trying to find time to nurture my marriage; I stay up late to meet deadlines, not to meet friends—the most pronounced of my maturity is in my life with God.

While I've been a Christian since I was five or six, I was what Gordon MacDonald calls in an article you'll read in this package an "infant" of a Christian. Honestly, I had all those other forms of maturity down pat before I really started growing up in God. And these spiritual growing-up years have been a lot harder than the physical ones. I don't remember fighting with my parents as much as I've fought with God!

But the growing pains of this season have been sweet—and I'd never trade them in. Because it's what's taken me from being a baby Christian to a grown-up one, who really believes what this life of following God is supposed to be about.

This season has done something else for me: it's opened my eyes to my fellow baby Christians. While it's tricky (not to mention judgmental) to "assess" someone





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else's spiritual state, I can't believe that I was the only Christian sitting in those pews who needed some serious maturing.

In fact, the more people I've talked to about this, the more certain of it I've become. Our churches are filled with baby Christians. As leaders, we can do something about that.

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL recently devoted an entire issue to Christian maturity. And we've put together this packet based on that for the Gifted for Leadership community. Included are articles on assessing your church's spiritual maturity and growth, as well as how to help those in it grow. But we've also slipped in a couple that speak to those of us who need some personal growth as well.

I hope you enjoy this.

Many blessings,

Caryn Rivadeneira

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads
Christianity Today International



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The Heart of the Matter

Raising Christians

How can we guide a church toward spiritual maturity?

By Skye Jethani



Bringing our first child home from the hospital was a joyous event. But after a few days of sleep deprivation, my wife and I were teetering on the edge of insanity. After a particularly difficult night, I called my mother to apologize for my selfish teenage years. "Now I understand why you were so angry with me," I told her. "I'm finally beginning to understand how much you invested in me. Until a few days ago, I had no idea." I could tell her laughter was tinged with a deep satisfaction.



My daughter turned eight this spring, and watching her mature, along with her two younger siblings, has been bittersweet. Soon we will be leaving the joyful baby phase of our life, but it also means we'll be leaving the midnight-feedings-and-exploding-diapers phase as well. As one author put it, "It kills you to see them grow up. But I guess it would kill you quicker if they didn't."

Spiritual infants present a similar paradox. New believers and young congregations are a source of great joy, and churches experiencing numerical growth are right to celebrate. But immaturity has a downside. Churches filled with juvenile believers are prone to shallowness, conflict, stagnation, and sin. (They can also be the source of sleepless nights for their spiritual mothers and fathers.) We love churches filled with baby Christians, but we don't want them to stay babies forever.

A few years ago, LEADERSHIP editor at large Gordon MacDonald wrote a column questioning our collective ability to nurture mature believers (See "So Many Christian Infants" below). He admitted that we are "pretty good at wooing people across the line of faith in Jesus." And he gave evangelicals a passing grade for communicating the rudimentary elements of the Christian life. "But," MacDonald added, "what our tradition lacks of late is knowing how to prod and poke people past 'infancy' and into Christian maturity . . . What's been going wrong?"

He's not the only one asking that question.





A Mature Faith Raising Christians

Earlier this year I visited a group of pastors at a retreat and listened to their stories. One shared how his perception of his congregation—a community he'd served for 15 years—had been shaken by an internal crisis. Before the controversy erupted, he believed the church was comprised of healthy, biblically-rooted disciples. But the heat of the conflict revealed far more impurity than he expected among those he considered most mature. "Was I really that unaware of their true condition?" he asked.

Another young man entered his first pastorate longing to be mentored by an older, wiser leader in the church. But after a few months, he concluded that there was not a leader among the elders who exemplified the values he desired for his life. Instead he turned to a denominational figure outside his congregation.

To be fair, there are mature, godly disciples to be found in many congregations and not just among the recognized leadership. But the apostle Paul's desire was to "present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28), not just a few exemplary individuals.

What does it mean to nurture our whole church toward maturity; to spiritually form a community of disciples? That is the challenge.

Skye Jethani is managing editor of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL. This article originally appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.



Reflect

- *Skye asks what it means to nurture a church toward maturity. How would you answer that? Do you think this automatically results in a community of disciples? Why or why not?*
- *What sorts of things does your church do to lead toward maturity?*



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The Body of Christ

So Many Christian Infants



Why are we so good at leading people to faith and so bad at prodding them to maturity?

By Gordon MacDonald

I have been musing on the words of Martin Thornton: "A walloping great congregation," he wrote, "is fine and fun, but what most communities really need are a couple of saints."

The tragedy is that they may well be there in embryo, waiting to be discovered, waiting for sound training, waiting to be emancipated from the cult of the mediocre."





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"Saints," he says. Mature Christians: people who are "grown-up" in their faith, to whom one assigns descriptors such as holy, Christ-like, godly, or men or women of God.

Now mature, in my book does not mean the "churchly," those who have mastered the vocabulary and the litany of church life, who come alive only when the church doors open. Rather, I have in mind those who walk through all the corridors of the larger life—the marketplace, the home and community, the playing fields—and do it in such a way that, sooner or later, it is concluded that Jesus' fingerprints are all over them.

I have concluded that our branch of the Christian movement (sometimes called Evangelical) is pretty good at wooing people across the line into faith in Jesus. And we're also not bad at helping new believers become acquainted with the rudiments of a life of faith: devotional exercise, church involvement, and basic Bible information—something you could call Christian infancy.

But what our tradition lacks of late—my opinion anyway—is knowing how to prod and poke people past "infancy" and into Christian maturity.

A definition of a mature Christian is lacking. Best to say that you know a mature Christian when you see one. They're in the New Testament. Barnabas is one. Aquila and Priscilla are others. Onesiphorous impresses me. And so does the mother of Rufus of whom Paul said, "she has been a mother to me." That's a short list.





A Mature Faith So Many Christian Infants

The marks of maturity? Self-sustaining in spiritual devotions. Wise in human relationships. Humble and serving. Comfortable and functional in the everyday world where people of faith can be in short supply. Substantial in conversation; prudent in acquisition; respectful in conflict; faithful in commitments.

Take a few minutes and ask how many people you know who would fit such a description. How many? Apparently, Paul, pondered the question when he thought about Corinthian Christians and said, "I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ."

As usual, I'm long on questions and short on answers. Right now I'm wondering—assuming that Martin Thornton is right—if we church people have forgotten how to raise saints. And if the question is worthy, then what's been going wrong? Bad preaching? Shallow books? Too much emphasis on a problem-solving, self-help kind of faith?

Maybe the answer is deeper or more profound than that.

Pastor and author Gordon MacDonald is chair of World Relief and editor-at-large of LEADERSHIP. This article first appeared at LeaderhipJournal.net.



Reflect

- *Gordon says that definitions of mature Christians are lacking. Instead, we recognize them when we see them. By what traits do you recognize mature Christians? How might these traits help you form a working definition?*
- *How would you answer Gordon's ending paragraph: "Right now I'm wondering—assuming that Martin Thornton is right—if we church people have forgotten how to raise saints. And if the question is worthy, then what's been going wrong? Bad preaching? Shallow books? Too much emphasis on a problem-solving, self-help kind of faith?"*



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Practically Speaking

How Do We Assess Spiritual Growth?



It is possible, but often not very encouraging.

An interview with Dallas Willard

LEADERSHIP JOURNAL: *How can churches know if they are being effective at making disciples?*

Dallas Willard: 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.





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How Do We Assess Spiritual Growth?

LJ: *Why don't more churches gauge these qualities among their people?*

DW: First of all, many leaders don't want to measure these qualities because what they usually discover is not worth bragging about. We'd rather focus on institutional measures of success. Secondly, we must have people who are willing to be assessed in these ways. And finally, we need the right tools to measure spiritual formation. There are some good tools available like Randy Frazee's Christian Life Profile and Monvee.com, which John Ortberg likes.

LJ: *In the past people grew through relationships with spiritual mentors and by engaging the church community. Is there a danger that these individual assessment tools will remove the role of community in formation?*

DW: Any of these devices must be used in a community setting. 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.

If you have a group of people come together around a vision for real discipleship, people who are committed to grow, committed to change, committed to learn, then a spiritual assessment tool can work. But there must be a deep fellowship of trust to support that work. I don't think any group should go into an assessment without that. I wouldn't advise a pastor to use one of these tools on his or





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her congregation without first establishing a clear commitment to discipleship. You can't take your average congregation and just lay one of these assessments on them.

LJ: *Are you ever discouraged by how few churches have that kind of clear commitment to discipleship?*

DW: I am not discouraged because I believe that Christ is in charge of his church, with all of its warts, and moles, and hairs. He knows what he is doing and he is marching on.

But I do grieve for the people within the church who are suffering—especially the pastors and their families. They are suffering because much of North America and Europe has bought into a version of Christianity that does not include life in the kingdom of God as a disciple of Jesus Christ. They are trying to work a system that doesn't work. Without transformation within the church, pastors are the ones who get beat up. That is why there is a constant flood of them out of the pastorate. But they are not the only ones. New people are entering the church, but a lot are also leaving. Disappointed Christians fill the landscape because we've not taken discipleship seriously.

LJ: *What can pastors do to change this dynamic?*

DW: Change their definition of success. They need to have a vision of success rooted in spiritual terms, determined by the vitality of a pastor's own spiritual life and his capacity to pass that on to others.

When pastors don't have rich spiritual lives with Christ, they become victimized by other models of success—models





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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.

*Dallas Willard is a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California and the author of The Great Omission: **Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship**. This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.*

Reflect

- *Dallas says pastors need to change their definition of success when it comes to discipling people. How would you say your church defines success? What about that definition might need to change?*
- *Dallas writes that he grieves for those suffering in the church "because much of North America and Europe has bought into a version of Christianity that does not include life in the kingdom of God as a disciple of Jesus Christ." What do you think he means by this? Have you seen evidence of this as well?*



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Personal Growth

Me . . . and Mother Teresa?



If spiritual discouragement is common among believers, why do we avoid talking about it?

By Kelli B. Trujillo

I remember hearing a note of smug satisfaction in the voice of the secular radio reporter who was doing a piece on Mother Teresa's book, **Come Be My Light**, that features some of Mother Teresa's private letters to her spiritual advisors. In her letters, we see that for many years Mother Teresa experienced times of intense spiritual darkness. Though she prayed fervently, served mightily, and meditated intensely on Scripture, this darkness persisted. She longed to experience the joy and delight of her first intense encounters with God, but instead she often felt spiritual loneliness and a sense of God's absence. The radio commentator implied that these honest expressions of intense struggle in some way proved that Christian spirituality was in fact empty and unsatisfying.





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As I listened to the piece, at first I felt somewhat shocked and discouraged. *Mother Teresa so obviously loved Jesus and dedicated her entire life to serving him*, I thought. *If she felt that way, then . . . is the radio commentator right?*

But in time I've found great comfort in Mother Teresa's period of darkness because in some ways it legitimizes the times of spiritual dryness and struggle that have peppered my own walk with Christ off and on throughout the years. Like Mother Teresa, many other devoted Jesus-followers throughout history have journeyed through painful periods of soul darkness, from John of the Cross to C. S. Lewis. In fact, for many mature believers, periods of doubt and dryness have served as inevitable byways along the pathway of spiritual maturity.

So if periods of spiritual discouragement or times of doubt are a common experience, why do we so often avoid talking about them? Is it because we see discouragement as a sign of weak faith? Do we fear that doubt is somehow contagious? Do we keep our own lips sealed when we're struggling because we fear damaging our Christian image? How can we better help each other journey through spiritual darkness into a place of even greater intimacy with Christ?





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What about you? Have you faced doubts and dark times recently in your walk with Jesus? If you've made it through a time of doubt, what got you through? What did you learn from the experience?

*Kelli Trujillo is managing editor of Kyria downloads and author of **Faith-Filled Moments: Helping Kids See God in Everyday Life**. This post first appeared at the Kyria.com blog.*

Reflect

- *How good of a job would you say your church or faith community does of sharing stories of dark places and personal growth? What's the result of that?*
- *Kelli asks, "How can we better help each other journey through spiritual darkness into a place of greater intimacy with Christ?" As a leader in the church, how would you answer that? What can you do to hasten that process?*



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Personal Growth

The Growing Season



40 days to a new you!

By *Marian V. Liautaud*

In Kyria's Encouraging Words daily online devotional, author Diane Eble recently wrote about the need to create the right conditions for spiritual fruitfulness. Citing Galatians 5:22—"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"—Eble reminds readers: "Fruit is the result of right conditions, including enough light, the right amount of water at the right time, pulling weeds regularly, and enriching the soil."





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The Growing Season

For me, Lent has always been the best growing season. From Ash Wednesday to Easter, the 40-day period mirrors a planting, cultivating, and harvesting cycle. On Ash Wednesday, we confess our sins—till the ground, turning it over to inspect the quality of the soil and prepare it for new growth. During the 40 days following this ground breaking, we engage in practices, such as daily Bible reading, prayer, personal sacrifice, and service, that are the equivalent of shining light, watering, pulling weeds, and fertilizing the soil of our souls.

Of course, Lent isn't the only time we can experience new growth. The Spirit works in each of us throughout our lives. I am, however, grateful that the Church provides for a regular growth cycle, much the same as farmers prepare and plant the soil in spring and harvest their crops in late summer.

As Eble reminds us, Galatians 5:22 provides a spiritual check-up: Are we seeing any evidence in our lives of fruitfulness—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? I've been thinking more and more about what "plants" I need to grow this year. Last year during Lent I focused on self-control. This year I sense the Spirit calling me to cultivate love.

Marian Liataud is an editor at Christianity Today International and a contributing editor for Kyria.com. This article first appeared in the Kyria.com blog.



Reflect

- *What role—if any—does a specific "season" like Lent play in your church's quest to grow and mature Christians? What other seasons do you use to help the congregation grow?*
- *Marian suggests using evidence of spiritual fruitfulness in our lives as a sign of maturing. What evidence have you seen lately in your own life? In the lives of those you lead?*



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Leadership Tools

Your Church's Apgar

A new way to measure spiritual vitality

By Kevin A Miller



In his masterful book **Better**, surgeon Atul Gawande writes that in the 1950s, newborn babies in the United States faced great danger: "One in thirty still died at birth—odds that were scarcely better than they were a century before—and it wasn't clear how that could be changed."





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An anesthesiologist named Virginia Apgar was appalled: "Babies who were malformed or too small or just blue and not breathing well were listed as stillborn, placed out of sight, and left to die." Apgar believed these infants could be saved, "but she had no authority to challenge the conventions. She was not an obstetrician, and she was a female in a male world. So she took a less direct but ultimately more powerful approach: she devised a score."

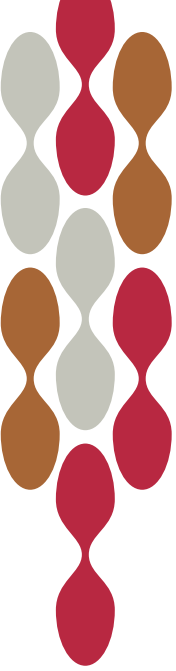
Apgar gave nurses a way to rate the health of babies at delivery: "Ten points meant a child born in perfect condition. Four points or less meant a blue, limp baby."

This simple score, devised by an unlikely person—she had never delivered a baby, as a doctor or even as a mother— "turned an intangible and impressionistic clinical concept—the condition of new babies—into numbers that people could collect and compare."

And doctors, being both compassionate and competitive, wanted to boost Apgar scores for their newborns. So they began giving babies oxygen or warming them. They switched from giving mothers general anesthesia to spinals or epidurals. They began using prenatal ultrasounds and fetal heart monitors. And what a change: instead of one in every thirty babies dying at birth, today it's one in every five hundred. Virginia Apgar's score is saving the lives of over 100,000 American babies every year.

We need an Apgar score for the church.





As pastors, we care deeply about the health and vitality of our congregations. But how can we grasp congregational health? To use Gawande's words, it's "an intangible and impressionistic" concept. We need a measure that's simple, clear, and life-giving.

Problems with the Prevailing Metric

Through most of the 20th century, the prevailing statistic for churches was the number of members. But as younger generations no longer formed their identity in relation to institutions—political party, labor union, fraternal organization, church—membership gradually told less about a congregation's real state. A long-established downtown congregation, for example, might have hundreds on the membership rolls but only a handful in worship.

So beginning in the early 1960s, some denominations began to report on worship attendance, and by about 1975, attendance had become the most widely accepted way to measure a congregation's vitality. Go to any pastors' convention and you'll soon be asked, "How big is your church?" or more crudely, "How many are you running?"

Attendance has hung on now, for almost 50 years, with only minor tweaks. In the 1980s, as well-known congregations added Saturday night services, people began counting "weekend worship attendance." In the 1990s, as churches added video venues and multiple sites, the count expanded like a baby boomer's waistline—"weekend attendance in multiple sites and venues." In the 2000s, with the addition of web campuses, it's not considered cheating to add to your count website viewers of online





services. But we're still hoping attendance will tell us something essential about the health of our congregation.

Why does attendance hang on? First, it's simple. An usher with one bad eye can get the number for you.

Second, attendance, unlike membership, means the same thing everywhere.

Third, it's meaningful: Size determines the size of church staff and correlates with annual giving, which is the most influential factor in a senior pastor's compensation.

Finally, size confers social status, speaking engagements, and book contracts. As C. S. Lewis pointed out, medieval people were fascinated by light, but we moderns (and even avowed postmoderns are building on modern rubble) are fascinated by size.

Size even has scriptural support. Proverbs 14:28 states an immutable law of leading human organizations: "A large population is a king's glory, but without subjects a prince is ruined." So don't expect attendance to easily yield its proud place to budget, baptisms, or blog traffic.

And yet. We can't shake the feeling that measuring a local church by weekly attendance is at best insufficient and at worst misleading. What's wrong with it?

The missionally minded question attendance's very premise: It may measure a church's ability to be attractional, but what does it say about its ability to be missional? Many leaders are calling for a radical shift, from counting how





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Your Church's Apgar

many people are in the church service, to counting how many church people are in service. Why not measure the drop in the local community's teen pregnancy rate or the number of wells dug in sub-Saharan Africa?

Isn't there something malodorous in the fact that church attendance clings closely to what Americans value—bigness and money? The radical message of Jesus flips those on their back and honors the tiny (think pearl), the hidden (think yeast), and the willing-to-decay (think grain of wheat).

Even the pastor with a dog-eared copy of *The Effective Executive* has to admit that attendance focuses on one activity in the Christian life (gathering together, Heb. 10:25) rather than the more-important outcome—conversion or obedience or perseverance or maturity (Matt. 28:20). Peter Drucker pointed out decades ago that "All nonprofits have one essential product: a changed human being." As much as we wish church attendance led inexorably to life change, we know that's not the case.

We need to move beyond measuring churches primarily by attendance. We need a new measure. We need an Apgar score. I'm just crazy enough to propose not just one, but two possibilities.

Virginia Apgar's score measured a baby in five ways. On each, the baby can score either 0 (low), 1 (middle), or 2 (high). To make the five measures easy to remember, some ingenious nurse arranged them so they spell Virginia Apgar's last name:





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Appearance (skin color):

- 0 = blue all over
- 1 = pink body, but blue extremities
- 2 = pink all over

Pulse (heart rate):

- 0 = less than 60
- 1 = 60 to 100
- 2 = over 100

Grimace (reflex irritability):

- 0 = no response to stimulation
- 1 = grimace or feeble cry when stimulated
- 2 = sneeze, cough, or pulling away when stimulated

Activity (muscle tone):

- 0 = none
- 1 = some flexion (pulling in of limbs)
- 2 = active movement

Respiration:

- 0 = absent
- 1 = weak or irregular
- 2 = strong

Total the five scores (none of which is size related), and you have a clear indicator of a baby's health: 10 means a baby born in perfect health, though any score from 7 to 10 is generally normal; 4 means a blue baby needing immediate intervention.





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Your Church's Apgar

What if we created a measure of church vitality that is just as simple? One that is profoundly biblical? One that motivates positive change, independent of size of church or surrounding conditions?

Yes, Virginia, there is a church Apgar score. Actually, here are two.

We might base a "Church Apgar Score" on Acts 2, Luke's proud snapshot of the healthy, bouncing baby church in Jerusalem. I reflected on our congregation and gave it an Acts 2 Apgar Score of 6, maybe 7. Other leaders might rate it higher, which is fine with me. The point is not so much the score as the direction, and I think our leaders would agree that in the past few years, we've moved up, praise God.

Here's the Acts 2 Church Apgar chart:

ACTS 2 CHURCH APGAR

	zero	one	two
A postolic Teaching & Worship ("They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.")	little or no devotion to these practices	moderate devotion to them	strong devotion to them
P ower ("Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.")	few or no "wonders and miraculous signs" of God at work	occasional "wonders and miraculous signs" of God at work	many "wonders and miraculous signs" of God at work
G enerosity ("the believers . . . had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.")	people give, but with little sacrifice involved	people give, with some willingness to sacrifice	sacrificial generosity is frequent and characteristic
A ssociation ("Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts")	little meeting together and sharing of meals beyond "church services"	occasional meeting together and sharing of meals	frequent and regular meeting together and sharing of meals
R eproduction ("... enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.")	rare or no addition of those who are being saved	occasional addition of those who are being saved	regular addition of those who are being saved





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If you don't like those categories, another possibility is found in Revelation 2. This Church Apgar offers a different perspective. Here I credit my pastor friend Lee Eclov, who generally lets me pick up the tab for lunch.

He earned several lunches with his brilliant insight, which we published online ("**Jesus' Surprising Definition,**"). He writes: "In the second and third chapters of John's Revelation, in a uniquely direct way, we have the Lord's assessment of health indicators for local congregations."

For a church Apgar, Revelation offers advantages: a larger sample size—seven congregations rather than one—and descriptions of not just church strengths, but also church weaknesses (which sound curiously like our own).

Here's the Revelation 2 Church Apgar chart:

REVELATION 2 CHURCH APGAR

	zero	one	two
A postolic Faithfulness (Rev. 2:2, 24): "You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not ..."	little discernment and rejection of false teaching	moderate discernment and rejection of false teaching	strong discernment and rejection of false teaching
P atient Endurance (Rev. 2:2-3, 12; 3:10): "I have seen . . . your patient endurance . . . You have patiently suffered for me without quitting . . . You have remained loyal . . . to persevere."	under pressure, tend to give up faith in God	under pressure, faith in God wavers off and on	under pressure, strongly persevere in faith in God
G odliness (Rev. 2:6, 15, 20): "You hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans, just as I do. [The ungodly] lead my servants . . . to worship idols, eat food offered to idols, and commit sexual sin."	little or no pursuit of holiness	moderate devotion to holiness of life	strong pursuit of holiness
A ctive Service (Rev. 2:2, 19): "I have seen your hard work . . . I know all the things you do—your love, your faith, your service."	weak in work and service to others	moderate in work and service to others	strong in work and service to others
R epentance (Rev. 2:5; 3:3, 19): "Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. . . . Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. . . . Be diligent and turn from your indifference."	resistant to admit church sins and to repent	occasionally ready to admit church sins and to repent	eager and willing to recognize church sins and to repent





To take an online assessment, click here. www.buildingchurchleaders.com/assessments/groups/yourchurchapgarscore.html

On this scale, I gave our church an Apgar score of 8 (but admittedly, we're not facing the kind of persecution, including martyrdom, that the early churches in Asia Minor did).

Whatever weaknesses these church Apgars may have, they have one powerful strength. They can be done quickly and readily. Like those done in delivery rooms.

Other recent church assessments, such as Natural Church Development, Church Health Assessment Tool, Transforming Church Index, and REVEAL's Spiritual Life Survey, are very helpful—if your church has the time, money, and motivation to hire a consultant and/or get people to take surveys.

Many pastors, though, need a measure that is free and simple, more complete than weekly attendance but just as easy to determine. When I assessed our congregation using these Apgars, within a minute or two I knew where to thank God and where to pray for his help and go to work.

What to Do with Your Church's Apgar

Start by prayerfully assessing your church. Don't let your score lead you into discouragement, that occupational hazard of ministry. As my friend Dave says, "A marker of spiritual maturity is being able to use metrics without feeling undue anxiety about them." Instead, gather a small group of leaders—a church board or staff team—to discuss questions like these:

1. What Apgar score did you give our church, and why?





A Mature Faith

Your Church's Apgar

2. For which of these five areas should we stop right now and thank God?
3. Which of these five areas do we sense God leading us to develop first? How does our answer align with our overall sense of calling?
4. What could we do, starting now, that could boost that area by one point in the next year or two?

Each church's response will vary, though I don't see how concerted prayer could not be included.

Focusing on church attendance (alone) turns us into marketers; focusing on an Apgar score turns us into intercessors. And suddenly the "size equals value" noise begins to fade away, because raising your Apgar score one point is no easier for a megachurch than for a house church. It might be harder.

I have a dream. My dream is to go to a pastors' conference and not hear anyone say, "How many are you running?" or "How big's your church?" Instead, I overhear someone say, "How's your Apgar?" and the other pastor replies, "Oh, a 6. I'd like it to be a 7, but we've moved up from a 5 in the past two years, so I'm feeling good about that."

Call me an idealist, but the way we measure church has changed before, and it can change again.

Kevin A. Miller is assistant pastor at Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois, and publisher of LEADERSHIP. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2010/summer/yourchurchapgar.html>



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Additional Resources



Preaching Today Sermon Builders, from **PreachingToday.com**. Find inspiration, structure, and stories to help build your sermons.

Leadership journal offers you insight and inspiration from ministry innovators, visionaries, sages, scholars... those who truly know and understand your role as a leader.

What Is Your Church Apgar Score? from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**, by Kevin A. Miller. This downloadable Interactive Assessment tool offers a new way to measure spiritual vitality.



Is Our Church Discipling? from BuildingChurchLeaders.com. This downloadable Assessment Pack helps you understand what a fully trained disciple looks like and helps you evaluate how different aspects of your church's life and ministry might be facilitating or hindering people's growth in Christlikeness.

Spiritual Director: Resources for shepherding, guiding, and providing spiritual care, from BuildingChurchLeaders.com. This downloadable Orientation Guide draws on the collective wisdom of spiritual leaders to equip spiritual directors to shepherd with care and effectiveness.

The Great Omission, by Dallas Willard. Drawing upon previously published articles from magazines such as *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* and *LEADERSHIP JOURNAL* as well as remarks given at various conferences, Willard challenges the thought that we can be Christians without being disciples. He calls on believers to restore what should be the heart of Christianity—being active disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Divine Commodity, by Skye Jethani. A growing number of Christians are disturbed by the consumer culture that has infiltrated the contemporary church. Worship has become entertainment, the church is a shopping mall and God has become a consumable product. In *The Divine Commodity* Skye Jethani wrestles with the tension of following Christ in a consumer culture, and suggests practices which can help free you to experience God in a meaningful way.



Intentional Disciplemaking, by Ron Bennet. Cultivating a community of mature believers is essential to church growth. But how do you go about it? Offering a biblical, step-by-step strategy, Bennett helps you develop solid followers of Christ. Learn to create a climate geared toward disciplemaking, re-evaluate your outreach ministry, overcome barriers to faith, minister beyond your means, and more.

The Trellis and the Vine, by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne. In this book, the authors dig back into the Bible's view of Christian ministry, and argue that a major mind-shift is required if we are to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ, and see the vine flourish again.

A Quest for Godliness, by J.I. Packer. In this book, the author of *Knowing God* and a dozen other books shares with his readers the rich world of Puritanism that has been so influential in his own life. Dr. Packer masterfully uncovers the hidden treasures of Puritan life and thought. With crystalline clarity he reveals the depth and breadth of Puritan spiritual life, contrasting it with the superficiality and deadness of modern Western Christianity.



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