

“You may be a COMMON CHURCH if ...”

(SELF-SCORING - Check all that apply)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Our church has experienced significant growth because of Christians moving into the area<input type="checkbox"/> Many of the young people who attend our church are relatives of existing church attendees<input type="checkbox"/> Many of our newcomers have transferred their attendance from another church<input type="checkbox"/> My church is known as the church that appreciates new styles of worship | <p>My church is primarily known for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Its social programs to help the needy<input type="checkbox"/> Its small group program<input type="checkbox"/> Its teaching/preaching<input type="checkbox"/> Its building and/or facility<input type="checkbox"/> Its good Sunday School program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Many of our newcomers have been previously connected with our denomination<input type="checkbox"/> My church is known as a church that is willing to try new ideas |
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WHAT KIND OF *NEW* ?

When people first pick up this book, most are looking for a cure for the lack of enthusiasm and decline that has beset their congregation. And, as we saw in the *Quick-start Guide* it is common for churches to suffer from this.

So what is wrong with wanting to create a *new* church with vibrancy, life and energy in hopes that your it will grow and survive? Well, there is nothing wrong with this aim. But, if the aim to become a *new* organization is your primary focus, then you will never become uncommonly new. Let me explain why.

Newness – 4 Types

Church Newness

Often church leaders think that creating a new church organizational structure will revitalize their church. Sometimes they do this by streamlining their hierarchy, simplifying their programs, firing/hiring staff or merging a church with another congregation. The hope is that some organizational newness will foster a freshness that can revive the church. But, if this is your strategy you will fail at becoming an uncommon church.

Often church leaders think that creating a new church organizational structure will revitalize a church.... The hope is that some organizational newness will foster a freshness that can revive the church.

Attempting to restructure the organization will not cultivate the supernatural community that God designed his church to be. New programs, new staff and new structures will only survive until the next new thing emerges and then the church will be antiquated (and common) again. Restructuring the church into something new, while laudable, cannot create a long-term uncommon church. This is because God desires that his church's newness emerge from people, not from structures.

Newcomer Newness & Transfer Growth

Still other congregations hope that improving their hospitality and assimilation of *newcomers* will create a new church. And, many helpful books can assist a church in better connecting newcomers to a congregation.¹

But, while connecting newcomers with a community of faith is an important task, it will not create the all-encompassing sense of newness that is needed to revive a common church. Newcomers certainly bring a sense of expectation, innovation and camaraderie. But the fact is that in many churches the newcomers are refugees from other churches, visiting your church in hopes of something they are not getting at their previous congregation. In fact, there is a name for church growth that results from Christians church-shopping: *transfer growth*.²

While transfer growth is important, for it helps ensure that Christians are getting plugged into a congregation, it does not create the kind of newness that an uncommon church needs. Donald McGavran said, "By transfer growth is meant the increase of

certain congregations at the expense of others... But transfer growth will never extend the church, for unavoidably many are lost along the way.”³

For true newness to spread through a congregation, the supernatural newness that God intended is needed. This a sense of newness arises comes from people in spiritual need being spiritually and physically transformed. Such newness pervades a congregation with a hope and a passion that no other newness can match.

Churchgoer Newness

Sometimes leaders pick up this book because deep down inside they want to see their church attendees changed. Leaders are often tired of the wrangling, petty grudges, and poor attitudes that many churchgoers exhibit. Thus, they say to themselves, “if I could only change the people in the church and make them new, that would then change the organization.”

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Changing people’s attitudes is important. But churchgoer newness is not the vital type of newness that God intends to characterize the uncommon church. Another, more never-ending newness is at the heart of God’s purpose for His Church. There is an eternal newness that springs forth when humans receive supernatural power to change their lives for the good and begin afresh.

Newness for Those in Spiritual Need

This is the true newness that will permeate the uncommon church. It is an expectation and invitation for people to be transformed physically and spiritually by a reunification with their loving heavenly Father (and among a community that embraces such newness). *Figure 7.1* gives an overview of why and where supernatural newness comes.

Figure 7.1 An Overview of Newness for Those in Need

God cares about those in need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I know that the LORD will take up the case of the poor and will do what is right for the needy.” <i>Psalm 140:12</i> • “You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress,” <i>Isaiah 25:4</i>
God wants to bestow upon those in need a spiritual and physical newness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus declared, “I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest” (<i>John 10:10</i>) • “So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!” (<i>2 Cor. 5:17</i>)

Christians are to provide a fellowship that fosters and anticipates this newness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “True devotion, the kind that is pure and faultless before God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficulties and to keep the world from contaminating us.” <i>James 1:27</i> • “Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.” <i>Luke 14:13-14</i>
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In the previous chapters we saw that the term *missio Dei* describes God’s quest to be reunited with his wayward offspring. Once this reunion is made, a *real* newness in personal lives emerges, a newness toward which the uncommon church will be orientated. Though growing O.U.T., S.M.A.L.L. and L.E.A.R.N.ers are part of the process, a church will not become uncommonly supernatural unless it welcomes and expects spiritual and physical transformation.

People today (but probably no more than in any other period) are in search of newness. They want to alleviate bad habits, overcome harmful enticements, curb destructive behavior, be more loving, kind and generous. But something deep inside of each one of us seems to pull us back toward bad actions. The cure, the *real, long-term* cure for uncommonness is a church where supernatural encounter and expectation is woven into the fabric of the congregation. And so, an uncommon church will exhibit many of the characteristics of *Figure 7.2*.

Figure 7.2 Church Patterns That Welcome Transformation

The uncommon church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expects miracles to happen • Expects people to be changed in positive ways that no human effort could accomplish • Expects people to show signs of growing in their dependence upon God rather than dependence upon humans • Does not put its trust in programs, pastors, the past or trends; but daily increases in their dependence upon God’s supernatural assistance to meet physical and spiritual needs
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WHY *NEW* IS NEEDED

Humans Are in a Pickle.

As we just noted, humans want to do the right thing, but we find ourselves constantly and repeatedly failing to do what we know is right. God knows we are prone to this (after all he’s a long time observer of our behavior). And, God has made a way for us to be changed. The *Message Bible* is a good translation for putting such principles in modern idiom, and *Figure 7.3* explains this fracture.

Figure 7.3 Our Wrong Actions Fracture Our Fellowship With God

<p>We have an inner pull that makes us do the wrong thing, even when we know better</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It wasn't so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back..” <i>Titus 3:3</i> (MSG)
<p>These wrong actions separate us from our loving heavenly Father</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There's nothing wrong with God; the wrong is in you. Your wrongheaded lives caused the split between you and God. Your sins got between you so that he doesn't hear.” <i>Isaiah 59:2</i> (MSG)
<p>If we accept God’s plan to have Christ bear our punishment, then God will restore our fellowship with Him, help us change and give us eternal life too!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “But when God, our kind and loving Savior God, stepped in, he saved us from all that. It was all his doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this.” <i>Titus 3:4-7</i> (MSG)

How Did God Create a Route Back?

Once humans see that we are prone to do what is bad for ourselves and that we are incapable of changing by ourselves; we then notice that God has created a route, a bridge so to speak, back to fellowship with God. *Figure 7.4* is how the *Message Bible* explains it.

Figure 7.4 God’s Plan for a Route Back

<p>Jesus took the punishment for our wrong actions (so we could be restored to a close relationship with our loving heavenly Father):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death ... <i>Romans 5:8</i> (MSG). • “Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.” <i>Romans 3:23-24</i> (MSG)
<p>Trusting in Jesus’ actions will acquit us from the punishment due for our wrong doings <i>and</i> give us a “whole and lasting life:”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted...” <i>John 3:16-17</i> (MSG)
<p>This route back is only available through Jesus Christ.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me.” <i>John 14:6</i> (MSG)

How Do We Take That “Route” Back to God?

Now that we understand that God has created a route back to fellowship with himself, we begin to grasp that the all-powerful Creator of the universe wants to have personal friendship with each of us who will return. So, what is involved in returning to him? The answer can be summed up in the statement of *Figure 7.5*. let’s look at this figure and then examine three important words in it.

Figure 7.5 How We Take the Route Back to God⁴

Repentance must be combined with ***faith*** in order to bring about ***spiritual transformation***.

Repentance

Repentance is a decision to “break with the past” which also carries the idea of turning and going in a new direction.⁵ This is what it means when *1 John 1:8-9* says “... if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing” (MSG).

People come to this stage when they realize they are dissatisfied with the way their life is going and know they need help beyond what humanity can provide. They may be frustrated that their life is full of animosities, pride, biases, deceptions, conflicts and a host of other maladies. And so, they seek inner change.

The good news is that God wants that change for you too! He even promises to give you supernatural power to help you make those changes. It is this trust (or faith) in God’s ability to help you that takes you to the next step.

Faith

“Faith” is a reliance and inner sense of knowing that God has the power to transform you.⁶ The author of *Hebrews* offers a classic statement about faith:

It's impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him. *Heb. 11:6* (MSG, italics mine)

Author and lay theologian C. S. Lewis reminds us that faith also carries the idea of growing in unwavering faith, stating, “Faith... is the art of holding on to things your reason once accepted, despite your changing moods.”⁷

New People (Spiritual Transformation)

Spiritual transformation in biblical terms means divine empowerment to reverse direction and go in an opposite direction with your life.⁸ The author of *Titus* describes it this way:

He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this.” *Titus 3:4-7* (MSG, italics mine)

Therefore ...

- When *repentance* (for our wrong doings)
- combines with *faith* (in Jesus Christ's sacrifice on your behalf)
- then *spiritual transformation* (into a new person) occurs.

This spiritual transformation into a new person has been called many things: conversion, salvation, being born-again, etc. And, though these are important terms they also have been mischaracterized. Unfortunately to many people today they do not bring to mind the original meaning of being transformed from our old way of life.

This is not a transformation that we can muster up ourselves. This is a change that goes deeply to the purpose of the One who created us.

Today *spiritual transformation* may be the best term to sum up what God is doing. When he creates a new person our old desires for self-satisfaction, preferring oneself over others, etc. will still be there, but *spiritual transformation* reminds us there is divine power to increasingly overcome these self-serving lures. And, we experience an emerging confidence and power as we see God daily helping us come closer to him and as we participate in his mission. And so, *spiritual transformation* is a remarkable intersection of human will, Jesus' sacrifice, God's forgiveness and a rekindled heavenward relationship. This is not a transformation that we can muster up ourselves. This is a change that goes deeply to the purpose of the One who created us. It goes to the core of our relationship with a heavenly Father who loves us and can help us.

And so, the Church is primarily a community that is collectively and constantly welcoming and experiencing this spiritual transformation where new people emerge. Yet, the gloomy fact is that most commonly today, congregations are not experiencing this. And, it does several things to a church, including robbing a church of its supernatural expectation and making a church more familiar with churchgoers than non-churchgoers.

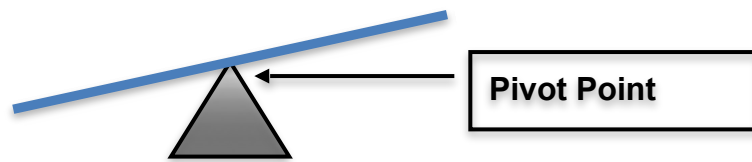
Thus, the “HOW” of *Growing N.E.W.* is critical for nurturing an uncommon church, But, before we look at *Chapter 8: Grow N.E.W. HOW* let us look briefly at why spiritual formation is at the pivot point of the uncommon church.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IS A PIVOT POINT

What is a Pivot Point?

Greek mathematician Archimedes emphasized the unlimited power of a “lever” when he stated: “Give me a place to stand, and I shall move the earth with a lever.”⁹ The key to the lever is the pivot point or *fulcrum point* on which everything balances. Think of a teeter-totter with a balance point in the middle. *Figure 7.6* illustrates such a teeter-totter with a triangle in the middle. The place where this triangle touches the teeter-totter board would be the *fulcrum point* or “pivot point.”

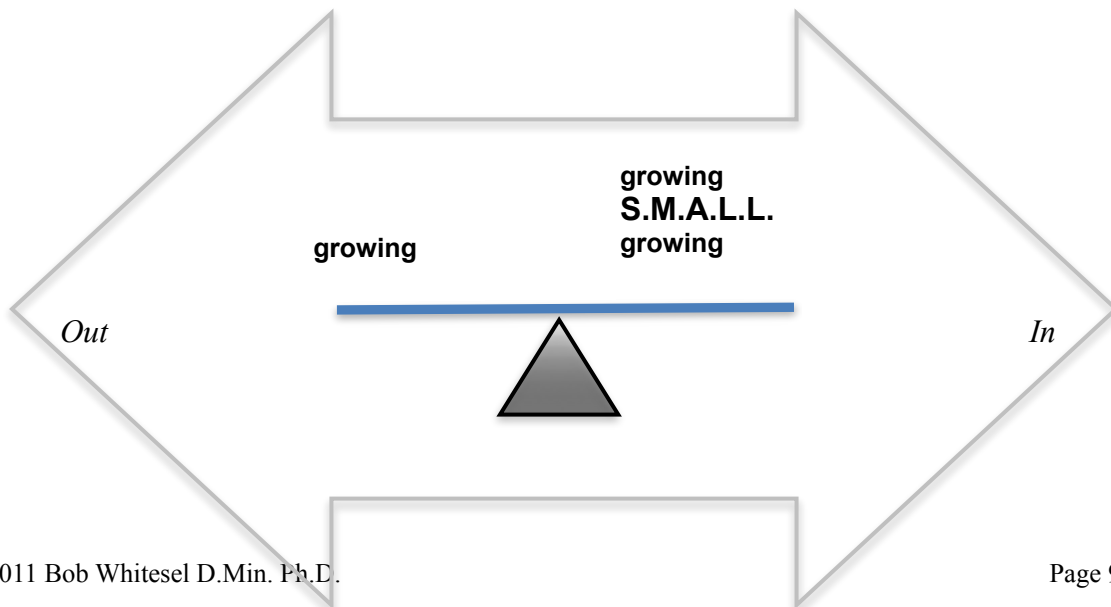
Figure 7.6 A Teeter-Totter with a Pivot Point (triangle)



Transformation as Pivot Point

The pivot point is the place where balance can be created between the two sides of the teeter-totter. And, the transformation of the person via faith and repentance is so critical that it is helpful to picture it as a fulcrum point that holds up and balances the methods of growing O.U.T. and S.M.A.L.L. and L.E.A.R.N.ers. *Figure 7.7* illustrates this balance.

Figure 7.7 N.E.W. as a Pivot Point for the Uncommon Church



Spiritual Transformation As a Waypoint

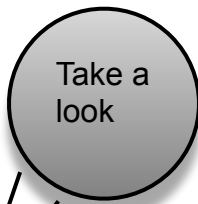
Spiritual transformation is a pivot point because it also lies at a critical waypoint between O.U.T. and S.M.A.L.L./L.E.A.R.N.ers. When a person is *outside*, not yet reunited in her or his relationship with God, and headed *into* a small environment of learning, somewhere along this way the person should encounter a transformative and pivotal experience with God.

Transformation is not optional for an uncommon church. Any church that focuses on growing O.U.T., S.M.A.L.L. or L.E.A.R.N. and neglects growing N.E.W. will not fulfill God's ultimate aim and also be balanced. God's mission is to reunite and transform his wayward children, and no amount of good deeds through going out (no matter how helpful) will replace his yearning to intimately reconnect to his children.

When a person is *outside*, not yet reunited in her or his relationship with God, and headed *into* a small environment of learning, somewhere along this way the person should encounter a transformative and pivotal experience with God

Balance in the Uncommon Church

And so, the uncommon church does not have a lop-sided ministry toward O.U.T., S.M.A.L.L. or L.E.A.R.N., but rather balances all three upon the foundational pivot point of N.E.W. In the next chapter we will learn the three "HOWS" of N.E.W. (signified by the letters N.E.W.). But before we leave this chapter, go back to *Figure 7.7* to visualize that N.E.W. is not an optional prescription, but the pivotal Rx upon which God intends the other prescriptions to be built and balanced. Without a church that embraces newness to balance the other cures, no holistic and uncommon church can ever emerge.



Take a
look

For More Information Read:

- *Appendix 7.A: Three Things That Are not Newness ... But Can Lead to Newness*
- *Appendix 7.B: Why N.E.W. Creates Balance Among the Four Cures*

Endnotes:

¹ Charles Arn, *Heartbeat: How to Turn Passion Into Ministry in Your Church* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Publishing, 2010); Gary McIntosh, *Beyond the First visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), Nelson Sercy and Jennifer Henson, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully –Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008).

² See Donald McGavran’s explanation of why transfer growth is misleading for it does not reconnecting people back to God, but only to a new Christian fellowship in *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 72.

³ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 72.

⁴ This statement is adapted with updated terminology from Richard Peace’s terms in “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 8.

⁵ *Metanoia* (the Greek word for *repentance*), William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 513-514; see also Peace, “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 8.

⁶ *Pistis* (the Greek word for *faith*), William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 668-670.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), p. 140.

⁸ *Epistrophe* (the Greek word for *spiritual transformation* or *conversion*), William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 301; and Richard Peace, “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 8.

⁹ E.J. Dijksterhuis, trans C. Dikshoorn, *Archimedes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 15.