



Episode 4: What People Want—And Need—From Their Church

In this episode, we answer a question that haunts many church leaders—what do people really want from the church? And is what they want the same as what they need? At the heart of this question—want vs. need—is the idea that people don’t want much from the church; that all they want is something “light;” something that doesn’t shake the status quo. Thanks to our dataset of responses to the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey, we know that what people want IS what they need.

Five Big Expectations People Bring to Church

Based on survey input from almost 2,000 churches and more than 500,000 congregants, we found that people expect five things from a church:

- 1) Spiritual Guidance—they expect a church to help them understand the Bible; to challenge them to develop a personal relationship with Christ and to give them next steps. They expect the church to be their spiritual guide, pointing them in the right direction and motivating them to move along that path.
- 2) Belonging—this means fitting in. People expect a church to be a place where they can worship and experience community in a setting that helps them feel like they belong.
- 3) Accountability—this means people expect the church to hold them accountable for making spiritual progress; to help them develop relationships with others who will help keep them on track.
- 4) Ownership—this is about identity and allegiance. People expect a church to be a place where they can be part of a bigger purpose--a place with a mission that inspires them and aligns with their values.
- 5) Serving—people expect serving to be central to a church’s core values. In fact, serving is probably the most widely recognized activity and tangible expression of the church beyond weekend and holiday services.

Two Things People Want from Their Church

We looked at which of the five things people expect from the church had the strong relationship with congregant satisfaction with the church’s role in *helping them grow spiritually*. In addition to their overall satisfaction, we ask congregants to rate their satisfaction with each

of the five expectations of church life. Then we looked at the relationship between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with the expectations to determine what people want from the church. Two stand out as what people want the most:

- 1) Spiritual Guidance. When we look at the drivers of people's satisfaction with the church, Spiritual Guidance leads the way. In fact, if you think of all the things that relate to satisfaction with the church as a big pie chart, Spiritual Guidance accounts for more than half of the pie (54%).
- 2) Belonging. A sense of fitting in and having community in the church is second at almost one-third (31%) of the pie.

Ownership and Accountability trail far behind...and Serving isn't a factor at all in what people want from their church.

What People Need From Their Church

To determine what people need, we looked at the same five expectations that people have for the church and we determined which ones are most catalytic to growth across the three movements along the spiritual continuum. Our findings indicate that, not surprisingly, people need Spiritual Guidance. It's the most influential category for all three spiritual growth movements. Belonging—a very important want—has a fraction of the impact on spiritual growth compared with Spiritual Guidance and every other expectation. Accountability, Ownership, and Serving are much more influential to spiritual growth than Belonging.

Belonging is often what gets people in the game when it comes to attending church, which is why it's such a strong driver of church satisfaction. But Belonging doesn't become increasingly important as people grow spiritually, so its impact on spiritual growth is minimal.

Accountability jumps up as a significant factor in spiritual growth—increasingly so as people mature into the later stages of the Spiritual Continuum.

Based on the facts we've discovered in REVEAL, we advise pastors to focus their attention on the one thing people do want *and* need to grow into a disciple of Christ—and that's Spiritual Guidance. We can break that down into the five statements that clustered together to form Spiritual Guidance (statistically, "clustered" is a technical term and an analytical process).

- 1) Helps me develop a personal relationship with Christ.
- 2) Challenges me to grow and take next steps.
- 3) Provides a clear pathway that helps guide my spiritual growth.
- 4) Church leaders model and consistently reinforce how to grow spiritually.
- 5) Helps me understand the Bible in depth. (Based on everything we know, this is the number one thing every church *must* do.)

If you use these five statements as a lens for all church decisions, people's satisfaction will rise *and* they will grow spiritually.