

# WORD WATCH MINISTRY<sup>®</sup>

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST ✦ TRANSFORMING HEARTS

Change the atmosphere and direction of your community to one of vibrant, growing passion for Christ and His purposes. Thirty-two percent (32%) of church-going believers are either stalled in their spiritual growth or dissatisfied with their church experience and only 3.3% of Christian believers find spending time with God to be a satisfying experience. Many pastors, in an attempt to remedy the lack of growth and relationship with Christ, have reasoned that if they could just get believers involved in church activities, then they would grow to spiritual maturity; **but Church activity and spiritual growth are simply not the same thing.** The key to a spiritual growth process is to increase relational intimacy with Christ. We grow in love with God as we spend time with Him - especially time in His word where we meditate or reflect on who He really is or how He really feels about us. Personal spiritual practices will advance spiritual growth.

## INTRODUCTION

I'm Tom Grossman, Director of Word Watch Ministry. As a prayer leader and equipper, I have invested the last decade establishing believers in a deeper and satisfying relationship with Christ through *Bible centered devotional prayer*. I have watched life after life be transformed and lasting fruit grow. If you are hungry to see genuine and lasting change in the hearts of your people then you will find the rest of this report informative.

This report will show you some of the latest research results which reveal both the reason for the current trend of spiritual stagnation and the most powerful tools available for change. It will also outline a surprisingly simple biblical solution. Finally, we will provide you with a tested and proven way to bring about spiritual growth and growing discipleship in your church.

Every church leader knows that prayer is an essential ingredient to having a relationship with Christ. Most leaders work hard at leading Bible studies and prayer groups which are supposed to help foster that close relationship – isn't that right?

So, why then do so many people seem disconnected spiritually? Why aren't these diligent, good-intentioned efforts producing as much good fruit as one would expect? Why haven't we become "*His house of prayer*"? Mark 11:17

The purpose of this Report is to show that there is a better way to pray, a better way to make true disciples and perhaps even a better way to "do" church. You can take ordinary believers and help turn them into passionate Christ followers. This report will explain a model of prayer in which God delights. Through this process, believers can be led to that place of deep intimacy with Christ where their hearts are transformed.

## THE PROBLEM

In our experience, there are several indications that the **spiritual life** of a congregation is in decline. Typical behaviors that may be a sign are:

- 1) Lack of hunger for God
- 2) People unresponsive during worship or sermons
- 3) Not much passion for prayer, private or corporate (when we do pray we focus on issues or lists)
- 4) Lack of generosity in giving and serving others
- 5) People are easily offended and have difficulty resolving conflict

If your congregation exhibits any of these signs or there is a lack of membership increase within your church, chances are that members are not growing spiritually as much as they could be.

In John 15:5 Jesus says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."*

This passage makes it clear that Christians who are disconnected from Christ are unable to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Without being connected to Christ there is no spiritual power to fulfill the divine plan that God has prepared for them.

In addition Jesus declared that "His house would be a house of prayer" – how are we doing?

A nationally known research group, REVEAL of Willow Creek Church<sup>1</sup>, is dedicated to discovering what moves people from stagnation in their spiritual life to one that is growing and Christ-centered. Through extensive survey input from over 157,000 congregants in more than 500 churches, REVEAL has unveiled the hidden reasons of why so many people don't have an intimate relationship with Christ and are not growing spiritually.

According to REVEAL, 32% of church going believers are either stalled in their spiritual growth or dissatisfied with their church experience; that statistic increases to 49% for newer believers. In addition, Zondervan did an extensive web-based survey and found that only 3.3% of Christian believers find spending time with God to be a satisfying experience.

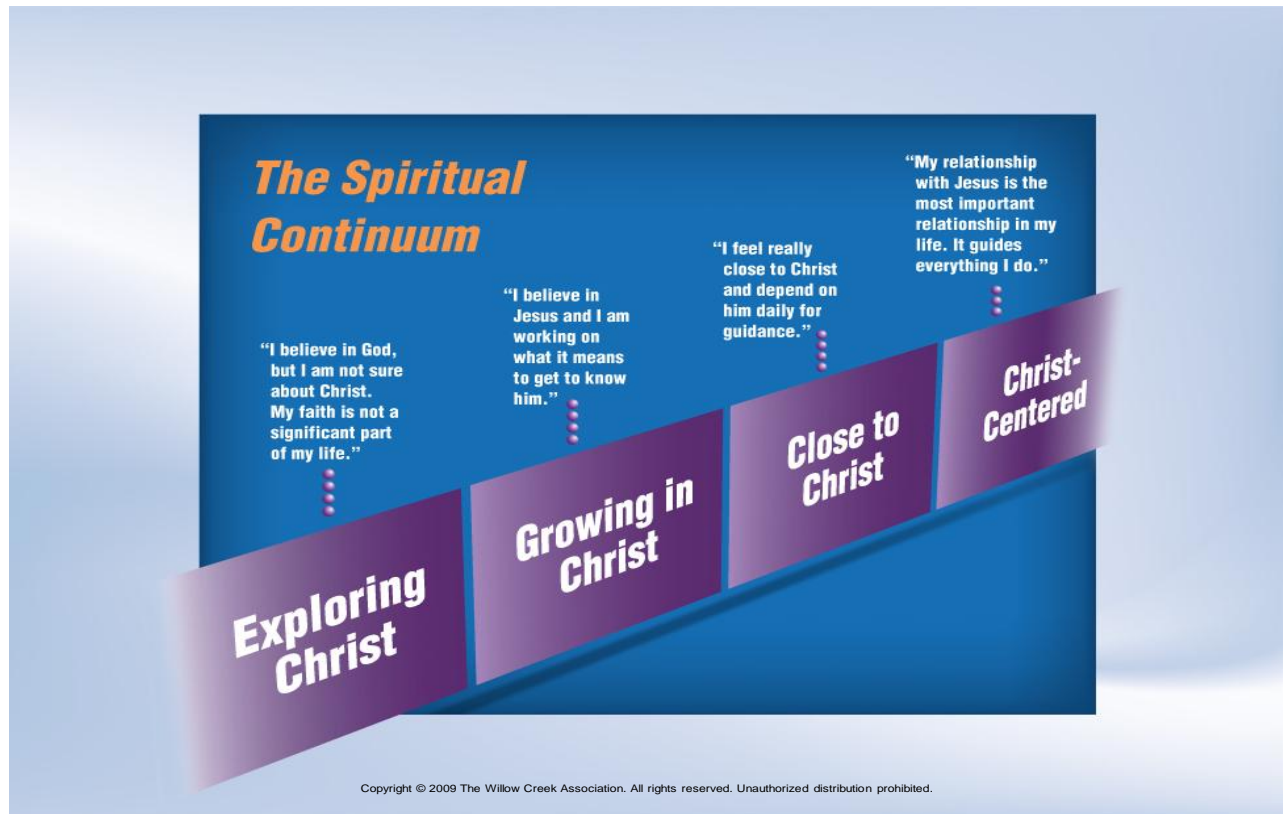
This means that as many as 96.7% of believers are not enjoying the satisfying relationship with God that the Bible describes. Those statistics probably make a lot of church leaders wonder if what they are doing is making a difference.

Much of the Church today has adopted what REVEAL refers to as the **Church Activity Model** (this includes Sunday services, Bible study classes, small groups or serving). Many pastors, in an attempt to remedy the lack of growth and relationship with Christ, have reasoned that if they could just get believers involved in church activities or have a special speaker or event, then they would grow to spiritual maturity. But since the statistics show that today so many people are dissatisfied with their prayer life or stalled in their faith, then this model can't be working. This calls into question the effectiveness of the church activity model. Church activity and spiritual growth are simply *not* the same thing.

## **THE SOLUTION**

So, how does a church take a community of believers from where they are now to growing spiritually and experiencing deep intimacy with Christ?

In order to answer this question, REVEAL needed to know what was really happening in the lives of church-going people and if they were really growing in love for God and love for people. In other words, were those who participated in church activities actually fulfilling the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37. If not, what needed to change? The result of their in-depth research pointed to **a spiritual growth continuum** where seekers first become saved Christians who then actively explore their faith, growing close to Christ, and finally become Christ-centered.



(Used with permission from Reveal)

We know from experience that spiritual growth is not an easy, straight-line process. Pastor and author, Charles Swindoll, described the journey as "three steps forward, two steps back" in his book by that title. The key to this spiritual growth process is to increase relational intimacy with Christ. It is only through this relationship that people will move forward on the continuum. After analyzing the results of REVEAL, Pastor Bill Hybels of Willowcreek Church declared, "we must train the people to become *self-feeders*".

So, the answer lies in personal spiritual practices, not church activities. It also is not based on the *amount* of prayer, but rather the *type* of prayer that people are doing. You will soon see how the answer to this dilemma in our churches is *Devotional Prayer*, especially in a group setting. **Devotional prayer is a heart to heart connection with God using the Bible as a lens for looking into His heart, thoughts and purposes.**

The best model we have that exemplifies sustainable, transforming prayer is given to us by David and his teaching in the Psalms. The Psalms were considered the church prayer book for centuries.

David, the man after God's own heart, the great king of His people and the worshipping warrior, modeled a life of prayer that we can embrace with joy. In the midst of Old Testament law, he found God to be very near, very interested and very active in his life, especially during his greatest trials and weakness. He found and modeled a life of genuine grace.

A comparison of David's teaching and New Testament teaching can be seen in the chart below:

David's Teaching	New Testament Teaching
Ps 1:2-3 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.	John 15:7-8 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.
Ps 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.	John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
Ps 17:8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings,	John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.
Ps 36:8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.	John 7:37-38 ... Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"
Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.	Matt 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
Ps 73:23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.  Ps 139:7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?	Rom 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Ps 103:11-13 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.	Eph 3:17-19 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

David's teaching and experience in prayer was focused on drinking deeply from the Spirit of God about the truth of who God is. David knew that when he sought God that God would always

respond with His presence and encouragement. David delighted in the Person of God and made God's Word his greatest treasure. More than that; David knew that God delighted in him as well. This understanding of God's love is the key to growing in prayer. The early followers of Jesus embraced David's lifestyle of prayer. "And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." (Luke 24:52-53)

There is a vast difference between David's attitude about prayer and the attitude that is most prevalent among believers now. Part of this problem is directly related to how we pray when we attempt to spend time with God. Specifically, we tend to focus on what I call "**issue based prayer**." This form of prayer has two main expressions:

*Supplication* – praying for personal needs such as health, job, provisions, or relationships.

*Intercession* – praying for others or about issues, i.e. for revival for a church, nation, or praying against abortion.

When we do make time to pray, if the majority of our prayer time is focused on supplication and intercession, then our prayer tends to be focused on "issues" and not on Christ. This kind of prayer is biblical and it has its place, but if believers are not first thoroughly "rooted and established in Christ's love" then issue based prayer can actually cause a disengagement from God. It will lack the personal intimacy involved in communication with the One we love above all others.

For example: if you had the habit to only contact your family or your best friend when you needed something, that relationship would very quickly become strained and suffer. It is important to spend time with the one you want to know, just for the sake of getting to know that person. The same is even more true with our relationship with Christ.

David understood this and declared, "*One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple*" (Ps 27:4).

Paul, after years as the great apostle, also understood that knowing God was more important than anything else in his life. He declared, "*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*" (Phil 3:8).

And Jesus said as part of his final prayers, "*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*" (John 17:24).

In addition, the amazing truth that God takes the initiative with us has the power to encourage and transform our hearts. This direct action of God toward us makes prayer exciting and sustainable. When we know and believe that God actually seeks us out, then we can respond to him in confidence and with expectation.

*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*  
(John 4:24)

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* (Rev 3:20)

God does not just love us, He is in love with us – we are called the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:32). Intercession is an important and necessary part of prayer, but our first priority in prayer must be to grow in relational intimacy with God. As we grow in our love for Him, He transforms us into the likeness of His Son Jesus (Rom 8:29). He wants to meet our needs but desires a love relationship above all else. We can trust God to provide what we need as we give ourselves to obeying the Greatest Commandment. The Bible actually declares that our needs would be met if we simply seek Him first.

Here are four examples of how God meets our needs (takes care of issues) when we are focused on Him.

- 1) Abide in or stay connected to Jesus and His word – John 15:7 says, *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*
- 2) Seek His Kingdom and righteousness – Matthew 6:33 instructs, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*
- 3) Learn to enjoy Him in your prayer experience – *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* (Psalm 37:4)
- 4) Seek His face in true humility – *“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* (2 Chronicles 7:14)

If through intimate prayer we learn to love Christ, then we will learn to truly love others as God would have us love. It is in loving this way that we fulfill the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37.

## **WE WERE MADE FOR GOD**

One hindrance to spiritual growth is the reality that the “accuser of the brothers” attacks immature believers with shame, guilt and powerful feelings of unworthiness. These lies that tell us that we are not worthy have thwarted the prayer lives of countless millions. This accusation can be overcome in two very practical ways: praying in groups and growing in understanding of why we were made.

When devotional prayer is pursued in a group setting, there is the added bonus of accountability, encouragement and corporate spiritual power that breaks the lies of the accuser. *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* (Matt 18:20)

Plus we were created by God for God. This truth is crucial to growing in spiritual maturity. We must know deep within our hearts that we are loved by God and that He takes delight in us.

*"The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love."*  
(Ps 147:11)

*"But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord."* (Jeremiah 9:24)

The Westminster confession asks: What is the chief end of man? Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever".

The well known quote by Augustine declares, "Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you".

## **STRATEGY RATHER THAN TACTICS**

A *strategy* involves the development of a carefully devised plan of action to achieve a long term goal. A *tactic* has to do with implementing the means to achieve immediate or limited goals.

It is important to have a Biblical strategy for helping your people grow into spiritually mature disciples rather than using the tactics of the past by praying only when we have emergencies, special requests or events. The best strategy for making disciples is to teach people how to fulfill the Great Commandment. (And he said to him, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment"* Matt 22:37-38.)

We grow in love with God as we spend time with Him, especially time in His word where we meditate or reflect on who He really is or how He really feels about us. *"On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"* (Ps 145:5-8).

The most powerful insight discovered by REVEAL was that *"personal spiritual practices advance spiritual growth."* The study showed that spending time in the Bible is "hands down the highest impact personal spiritual practice" (Follow Me p. 114). Reflection on the Scripture, not just reading or skimming through a text can lead to a powerful experience of personal encounter with Christ that catalyzes spiritual growth.

Therefore, the most fruitful kind of prayer life we can have is one where the majority of our prayer time focuses on two things:

- 1) Spending time with Jesus, the living Word of God and meditating on and praying the Scriptures. This is very different than reading or studying Scripture.
- 2) Letting God respond to us by teaching and transforming us at the deepest level. This is the type of prayer that brings us closer to God's heart.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

We have discovered **four essential pillars** needed to begin and sustain this journey of leading people into deeper more enjoyable prayer and spiritual growth in a congregation.

1. **Hunger and thirst for God** – A genuine hunger for God is contagious in a group setting. Hunger and thirst for natural food and water causes us to seek those resources. In the same way, spiritual hunger and thirst cause us to seek the Person of God. This hunger, combined with the three pillars listed below, can help propel us into dynamic spiritual growth.
2. **Leadership** – The good news is that, although the pastor will be an encourager of this ministry, he does not have to be the primary leader. It is best to have **a core group** of leaders with a **key** leader that oversees this ministry. Why? This ministry is so important that you will want a group of people who are envisioned and can focus on seeing prayer grow.
3. **On-going training** – You need initial training for you and your core team. Once this initial training is complete, there should be regular on-going training. This training whether weekly or monthly will further encourage everyone involved in the ministry.
4. **Support** - This is the key role for the senior pastor. He can articulate the biblical premise for devotional prayer to his various leadership teams and to the congregation from the pulpit. He can also support a budget for training, workshops, guest speakers and any other needs the prayer leaders have including printing, promotion and locations to pray.

## A HOUSE OF PRAYER

**"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'**

(Mark 11:17)

We cannot take the Bible seriously and continue to do our ministry without the presence and power of God. Likewise, we cannot tap into the presence and power of God without a genuine and growing connection with God through prayer. Another way to express the concept of "a house of prayer" would be a "prayer community." Why? The word "house" is translated from oikos which can mean household or extended family. In Acts, both Cornelius and the Philippian jailer were saved along with their "oikos"- their household. God wants to bring your family and your church community into the experience of "joy in the house of prayer" (Isaiah 56).

More good news - there are many expressions of what your prayer community can look like. Your community has a personality that will determine the best expression. By training a minimum of five core leaders and giving them support, almost any church can (within a few months) establish morning and evening prayer several days per week. This will change the atmosphere and direction of your community to one of vibrant, growing passion for Christ and His purposes.

## WHAT DOES A PRAYING COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

**Library** – Imagine... a quiet atmosphere for Scripture meditation. Tables are set up around the room for people to lay out their Bibles, journals, laptops or other study tools. Their focus is on

finding Christ within the pages of Scripture so that they might know Him better. Individuals can also gather together to pray for special needs or intercede.

**Devotional** – Use the same set up as above in a comfortable room. Add instrumental or quiet worship music with a CD and your people will have a wonderful place to cultivate intimacy with Christ.

**Word Watch** – Is led by a prayer leader who helps the group meditate and pray over one key verse for 20-40 minutes. Participants then share what the Lord showed them and then spend time praying for each other's needs, or interceding for church or national issues.

**Prayer Furnace** – A small room with a sign-up schedule (could be as small as 10' by 10') dedicated to prayer. One, two or three gather here to seek the Lord and pray over personal or global issues. Many of these rooms will have a map of the world on the wall and other prayer prompts. Make sure your people are trained in devotional prayer or the intercession will burn them out.

**Chapel Time** – A chapel time can last for as little as 30-45 minutes. The worship leader must have a tender heart for Jesus and lead songs that are focused on the Person of God. In this way the participants will receive a regular touch from God. Morning, noon or evening prayer can be led by a single worship leader or a simple team. The music must be enjoyable and on key; there is no need for a full band or rehearsals.

**Worship & Prayer** – Having trained musicians with a devotional heart, can be a very rich blessing indeed. By scheduling specific times for worship (not a concert or performance), the church can be invited to enjoy a time of seeking God together. Scripture praying can be added for additional intensity. This type of prayer is special but keep in mind, very few churches will have the resources to make this happen at the beginning of their journey.

**Adoration** – The idea of an adoration room originated centuries ago and is powerful in its simplicity. People sign up for an hour or just drop in to come and "adore Jesus." They can read their Bibles, write in their journals, read a devotional book or just rest in the shadow of His wings. This happens best in a room that is quiet, yet open – your Sunday sanctuary could be just the place.

Of course there can be a mixture of various expressions but these should be decided by the pastor and his core leaders. Also, keep in mind the scheduling and security needs in your situation. For more help go to [www.word-watch.org](http://www.word-watch.org)

## **WORD WATCH MINISTRY**

Through our School of Prayer, **Word Watch Ministry** trains pastors and their core team how to establish a lasting expression of devotional prayer within their congregation. This is accomplished through a series of life-giving workshops that utilize the Word Watch process. This process includes evaluating current efforts, envisioning possibilities, and equipping and encouraging those teams to implement customized goals and strategies for devotional prayer in various group settings.

## **The Word Watch Promise:**

By participating in our training and implementing our strategies you will have a core team fully equipped to successfully lead and sustain enjoyable, corporate, devotional prayer throughout your congregation.

To watch video of pastors sharing testimonies [http://word-watch.org/?page\\_id=150](http://word-watch.org/?page_id=150)

Contact: Tom Grossman  
Email : tomgrossman1@gmail.com  
Phone: 214-680-6478

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<sup>1</sup> References to the REVEAL study are taken from the book, *Follow Me* by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, 2008, published by Willowcreek Church.bbb