

Speaking at a recent pastors' association meeting, I asked those who feel overloaded by the work of ministry to put their hand up. The great majority of the pastors put their hand up.

Why is it that so many pastors feel overloaded? Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Why is it then that pastors feel so overloaded that they are almost disillusioned with the church? Reports indicate that:

- 90% of the pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- In the United States more than 1,500 pastors leave the church every month. Why?

A pastor in Argentina told me that in Argentina pastors cannot get life insurance because their profession is considered high risk.

Could it be because in most churches 10% of the congregation carry 90% of the workload? Why is it that so few do so much while the majority do so little? How can we solve this problem and still fulfill the Great Commission Christ gave to the church? The answer may be found in "**Growing an Engaged Church.**"

In this short paper I would like to share some thoughts based on the book, *Growing an Engaged Church: Stop Doing Church and Start Being the Church Again*, by Senior Pastor and church consultant, Dr. Al Winseman. Dr. Winseman builds on extensive research by Gallup. Gallup, a world renowned research company, consults to churches on congregational life and member engagement.

According to Gallup, in the church we find three different groups of people. We find what Gallup calls engaged parishioners or members. These people are emotionally and spiritually engaged in the life of the Church. Then there is a much larger group of not-engaged members. Then there are those that Gallup calls actively disengaged members. The actively disengaged tend to be critical, argumentative, and even psychologically hostile.

Where do pastors spend their limited time and energy? Gallup suggests that the negative impact of one actively disengaged member ruins the positive impact of four engaged members.

The critical question we must ask is how do we grow or build an engaged church?

I suggest there are two models that we can use in building a church. One model we will call the **needs or the demands-based model**. The other model we will call the **talents-based model**. Let me illustrate.

- If you are building a products based business. Like a business whose purpose is to make footwear, sandals or snow boots, you use the demands- or **needs-based model**. You start by examining the market or community needs. Based on that, you build an organization and



hire the talents needed to make the sandals or the snow boots in response to the market need.

- On the other hand, if you are a business whose purpose is to **offer services** like dental or auto repair, you start with the available talents.

Which model should the church use? Which model would Jesus choose?



In Matthew 9:37 Jesus said to the disciples, “Look at the fields; they are white ready for harvest.” At first glance this passage suggests that Jesus would advocate for the needs model. But **verse 38 highlights that Christ’s priority** focused on the available talents. He said, “Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send the labourers.” He said this because the Lord of the harvest has already provided those needed for each harvest and all we have to do is ask Him to reveal them.

Another illustration of how Jesus used the talents model is found in Matthew 14:15. The disciples were challenged by Jesus to feed more than 5000 men plus women and children. When they were overwhelmed by that demand, Jesus makes it very clear that they should start with the talents God has already provided. Start with one little boy who has two fish and five loaves. This lesson was so critical that Jesus felt the need to emphasize the same experience one more time in Matthew 15:32.

In Matthew 20:1-8 Jesus gave a very strong parable about a landowner who is constantly searching for talented workers. Near the end of the day he found people standing idle. When he asked them, “Why are you standing here doing nothing?” they answered, “**Because no one has hired us.**”

Based on my 50 years of experience in church life, may I suggest that in every church there are many disengaged parishioners or congregants who would say “**No one has hired us.**” Why? Why is it that in most churches a small percentage of members are engaged and carry most of the workload while the majority stand idle or remain disengaged?

Based on the book, *Growing an Engaged Church*, I suggest that engagement is a process. Engagement does not automatically happen when a person comes to faith in Christ. Engagement does not happen by signing a membership agreement. Engagement is an intentional process that answers some key questions.

1. The first step in that process is “**receiving.**” Does the church meet my spiritual needs and clearly communicate what it expects me to be and do?

While people may come to church for a variety of needs, most people stay in the church because they have spiritual needs that cannot be met anywhere else. Yes, most people come to church with a consumer mind-set.



According to Gallup, along with providing for these foundational spiritual needs, the church must articulate and communicate very clear expectations it has of its members. Spiritual vitality does not happen in a passive setting. Realistic expectations of spiritual commitments and disciplines must be clearly communicated. Pastor Dhati Lewis says, **“The church is a family not an orphanage.”** A thriving healthy family must communicate clear expectations of its members.

Allow me to suggest that in our churches, even when seeking to provide for the spiritual needs of our members, we often fall short in setting clear expectations that lead to commitment, growth, and engagement.

2. The second step to engagement is **“giving.”** Does the church offer me opportunities to use and exercise my God-given talents?

Developing any healthy relationship requires both receiving and giving. We will deal with this in more detail a bit later.

3. The third step is **“belonging.”** Does the church provide me with a purpose that ignites my passion and requires my wholehearted commitment?

Jack Welsh, General Electric’s former chairman, said, “People will work for money but will give you their life for a purpose.” Belonging embodies elements of accountability, support, encouragement, and friendship.

4. The fourth step is **“growth.”** Am I growing because of being in the church?

We all have a desire to grow. If we do not grow spiritually we are likely to regress and/or weaken. We value what we measure and we measure what we value. Does the church provide expectations of measurable spiritual growth?

As we examine these engagement steps my mind goes to **Matthew 25** where we find the parable of the talents. According to this parable, as stewards of God-given talents each of us is accountable for two clear responsibilities. We are each accountable to know the talents we are given and we are accountable to invest these talents where they bring the greatest return.

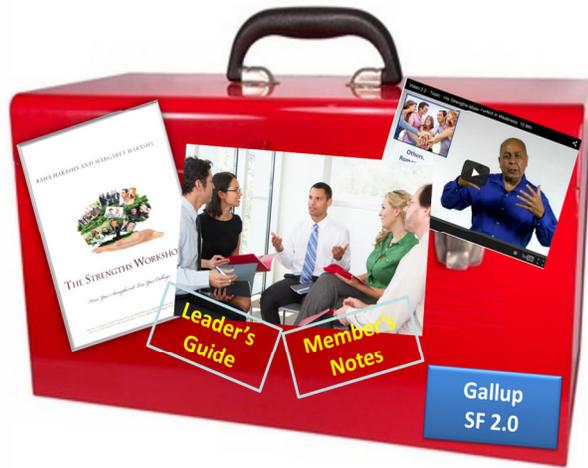
In the **Matthew 20** parable we referenced earlier, workers standing in the marketplace had a responsibility to know their talents and communicate their availability. This is why they were out in the market place. Regretfully, according to research by Gallup less than 20% of people surveyed know their talents or what Gallup calls “strengths.” Fewer still use their strengths in their work life and ministry.

Allow me to go back to the **second step of the engagement process, “giving.”** In work, life, and ministry using our God-given talents is fulfilling and energizing. Nothing is as rewarding and engaging as having an opportunity to do what we love to do. Regretfully, according to Gallup only 17% of those surveyed have an opportunity to consistently use their strengths at work. The church is the best place where people can discover their God-given talents and strengths. The loving, supporting culture of the church should be the best place where people are free to exercise their strengths to enrich their lives and bring glory to God. This will greatly enhance congregational engagement.

Growing an Engaged Church Seminar

For this reason we are glad to offer you a totally free, web based, talent stewardship toolbox. This biblically based leadership training toolbox takes advantage of the world renowned Gallup **StrengthsFinder2.0** talent assessment tool. It is designed to provide individuals with:

- A formula to discover, articulate, and communicate their God-given strengths
- A process to prioritize life roles and responsibilities in order to fulfill their life callings.



This free, web based toolbox includes 13 instructional videos along with a 50,000 word resource book and other training tools. This toolbox is available for free in both English and Spanish.

More importantly, we invite pastors and church leaders to engage with us in leadership discussions on some of the key issues presented here. Here are some discussion questions:

- What are the risks and symptoms of overloaded pastors and labourers in your church?
- What role does talent stewardship play in defining the roles of pastors and leaders in the church?
- As leaders, how do we exercise our stewardship of the talents God has provided in our churches?
- It was said, "We value what we measure and we measure what we value." How do you measure and evaluate engagement in the church?

As you engage in these discussions we would be pleased to support you or join you. We will be glad to discuss with you other tools and resources that may be helpful as you seek to assess and enhance the level of engagement in your church. **Our services are totally free.**

Contact:

- **Email:** Info@StrengthsWorkshop.ca
- **Phone:** 905.294.0380