

Review: Reveal: Where are you?



Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson's *Reveal: Where are you?* is a useful book – in the sense of having a person come in and tidy your house is “useful” – you know what needs to be done, you could do it yourself if you had the time and energy, but you are immensely grateful that someone has done it.

In the same way I am grateful that these authors from Willow Creek have put this book together and have come up with a result that is *useful* – obvious, relevant, useful.

The book revolves around analysis of surveys done in and around the Willow Creek congregations in America and shows how some of Willow's assumptions about church growth were challenged by the results. The conclusions that are drawn are what make this book useful.

For instance, we see their conclusion that church activities do not necessarily produce spiritual growth, rather “spiritual growth is all about increasing relational closeness to Christ” (p38). This is obvious, but useful because it reminds us of the prevalent tendency of churches to fit people to activities and to fill “holes in the program” rather than concentrate on things that would foster spiritual growth.

There is a useful identification of a “spiritual continuum” that seeks to place people on stages in a journey of spiritual growth – from “Exploring Christianity” and “Growing in Christ” in the early stages, through to “Close to Christ,” and “Christ-Centered” at the end. If the aim is to help people progress along this continuum, then how does the church do it? By promoting (“coaching” is a term used at one point) the “drivers” of personal spiritual practices, and helping individuals overcome the “barriers” of things such as

addictions, inappropriate relationships, emotional issues, gossip/judgementalism, and “not prioritizing my spiritual growth.” The authors reflect:

“The church is most important in the early stages of spiritual growth. Its role then shifts from being the primary influence to a secondary influence.” (p41)

“So if the church isn’t the driving force behind the later stages of spiritual growth, what is? That’s where the second external element of spiritual growth comes into play: personal spiritual practices... prayer, journaling, solitude, studying Scripture – things that individuals do on their own to grow in their relationship with Christ.” (p43)

“We want to move people from dependence on the church to a growing interdependent partnership with the church... Our people need to learn to feed themselves through personal spiritual practices that allow them to deepen their relationship with Christ... We want to transition the role of the church from spiritual parent to spiritual coach.” (p65)

The most insightful consideration is the recognition of key groups along the spectrum that, while having journeyed in spiritual growth somewhat, have “stalled” or are “dissatisfied.” The “stalled” person is at an early stage of the spectrum and is usually caught up with difficulties overcoming the personal barriers to spiritual growth. The “dissatisfied” person tends to be well developed in personal spirituality but is dissatisfied with the (in)ability to participate, serve, or be mentored in some way. The key part of this analysis, and something that I want to take on board in my own context is this:

“At the heart of the unhappiness may be the fact that neither segment seems to realize that much of the responsibility for their spiritual growth belongs to them. This is the big “aha.”” (p54)

And so the conclusions of this book are, once again, useful – church needs to help people to spiritually grow by helping them to take on the responsibility for that growth. A good conclusion – obvious, useful.

This book was worth the read. I don't know if it's worth the money – \$20 for 75 pages (the rest is appendices) seems a bit on the steep side for what is a self-confessedly incomplete book that's more in the category of a report that would be useful to share by pdf than a book worthy of investment for later reference on your library bookshelf.

At times it was a bit *too* obvious – For instance – “In the end nothing was more *predictive* of a person's spiritual growth – love of God and love for others – than his or her personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” In other words, spiritual growth and relationship with Jesus correlate – my response was an out-loud “well, duh.” Obvious, but useful.

And at other times it's usefulness is outweighed by other resources – For instance the tool given in Appendix 4 and outlined on page 72 pales into comparison next to a tool such as Peter Bolt's *Mission-Minded*, which is basically the same thing (and a lot cheaper).

This book will factor into my own thoughts and machinations about the purpose, place and practice of church. It usefully points out the obvious. If you see it, pick it up and read. It won't take long.

