

# HOW TO KEEP WHAT YOU REAP



## REAPING The HARVEST

**Preparing the Church to Reap  
The maximum yield from the field**

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*The whole gospel, to the whole world, by the whole church*

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## THE BIBLICAL PROSPECTIVE

The most basic and fundamental reason why people come in through the front door and leave through the back door of the church is found in 1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” This was true in John’s day and it is true even today.

Jesus further amplifies the reason for the front door entrance and back exit in a parable that He told about the sower (Mark 4:14-20). According to Jesus verse 14: “the sower went forth to sow” And the seed of the Word is sown into four kinds of soil into the human heart.

**THE HARD HEART:** Verse 15 says, “and these are they by the wayside where the word is sown.” The wayside is the *hard* place – the path through the garden that has been trampled upon and made *hard*. Consequently, the seed could not penetrate. It would just be there on the surface and the birds would come along and snatch it away. And the Word does the **hard heart** no good because in the **hard heart** there is no RECEPTION.

**THE SHALLOW HEART:** Verse 16 continues, “...these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground.” The word stony means *shallow* ground with a rock lodged underneath. The soil is about a half inch deep and the seed springs up immediately. But it only grows upwards and never downwards because there is no ROOT. This represents people who give their hearts to the Lord but don’t mean business with Him because they are all emotion and no root. And the Word does the **shallow heart** no good because in the **shallow heart** there is no ROOT.

**THE DIVIDED HEART:** Verse 18 says, “these are those sown among the thorns ... and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things, enter in, chokes the word and it becomes unfruitful. In this instance, the word gets in and down and springs up. But there is a rival crop that chokes out the word. Here is the picture of man trying to hold on to God with one hand and the world with the other hand. And the Word does the **divided heart** no good for in the **divided heart** there is no ROOM.

**THE RESPONSIVE HEART:** Verse 20 continues, “And these are they which are sown on good ground, such as heard the Word and received it, and bring forth fruit some thirty, some sixty and some an hundred. The Word gets in and down and springs up and since there is no rival crop the Word brings forth fruit because in the **responsive heart** there is no RESISTANCE.

According to Jesus the seed is sown into four types of soil into the human heart. In the **hard heart** there is no RECEPTION. In the **shallow heart** there is no ROOT. In the **divided heart** there is no ROOM. In the **responsive heart** there is no RESISTANCE. Those remain in the church that join the church with **responsive hearts** in which there is no RESISTANCE.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to social historians since the 1960s Americans have become increasingly anti-institutional. Organized religion is viewed with contempt by the vast majority of the unchurched. Yet most of these people are longing for a sense of family, fellowship and community. And when they become Christians they expect the church to fulfill this “longing” for belonging. Thus, to fully integrate and assimilate them as new believers the church must position itself as a family rather than an institution.

Lyle Schaller has done extensive research that shows that new converts have at least six unspoken questions that must be answered before they can move from casual observers to committed members. The answers to the questions must govern the design of any plan or program to care for converts and build them into stable, stout, and strong members. Before new converts fully commit they want to know the answers to these six critical and crucial questions.

**Do I Fit Here?** This is the question of *acceptance*. It expresses the longing for belonging. Do I belong here? Am I in the right place? Do I really feel at home? Do I have a niche? Am I welcomed and embraced unconditionally? Can I make the lifestyle adjustments necessary to gain immediate approval? What do I have in common with these people? What do these people have in common with me? What is the atmosphere like? Is this a social club? Is this a family run church? Or is it a family of friends and a friend of the family?

The question of *acceptance* is most effectively addressed by the formation of *small affinity groups* within the church so that people of similar purpose, ages, interests, culture, background, careers, problems and geography can relate to each other. These small affinity groups provide personal touch and support that every new believer needs during the crucial period of adjustment and in times of crisis. The strategy and structure of small groups is one of the most efficient means of closing the back door of your church.

**Does Anybody Want To Know Me?** This is the question of *friendship*. People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. They are not looking for a friendly church as much as they are looking for friends. Relationships are the glue that holds a church together and friendship is the key to retaining members. The more friendships a person has in a congregation the less likely he or she is to become inactive or to leave the church.

The question of friendship can most effectively be addressed by establishing a New Member Sponsorship Program. Here a spiritual guardian or sponsor is assigned to the new believer with the responsibility of being a friend and then creating unlimited opportunities for the new believer to grow spiritually and develop new friendships and relationships within the congregation. The friendship factor recognizes that the new believer desires and deserves individual attention and is the most important factor in assimilation.

**Am I Needed?** This is the question. Do I really matter? Will I sit and soak? Is there room for creative expression of my gifts, talents, and abilities? Will I be allowed to become involved? Do I have to earn the right to participate? What areas of service are available to me? For membership to have meaning and purpose the new believer must be actively engaged in the life and ministry of the church. Without meaningful engagement boredom sets in and gives rise to a lack of fulfillment, dissatisfaction and disaffection with the church.

The question of value is effectively addressed through The Spiritual Gifts Inventory. As soon as possible after baptism the new believer should complete the spiritual gifts study guide,

workbook and inventory. Based upon his inventory profile he should then be assigned a place of service in the life and ministry of the church. When the church demonstrates to new believers that their contributions are valued and that they can make a difference with their gifts, talents and abilities, it deepens their commitment and strengthens their loyalty to the church.

**Am I Ministered to in Worship?** That is the question of *relevance*. Is worship the spontaneous expression of the heart? Does the service meet my spiritual, social and emotional needs? Is there a sharing and caring spirit? Is the preaching nurturing and dynamic? Are the members warm and caring or cold and aloof? Is the music triumphant, joyous and contemporary? Is the congregation alive, happy, vibrant and responsive? Numerous studies have shown that boomers and the more youthful new believers are turned off significantly by dull, dead, dry, formal lifeless services of the more traditional churches.

The question of relevance can be most effectively addressed by churches adapting a more *contemporary worship service*. Where churches are steeped in tradition pastors may opt to alternate between contemporary elements into the traditional service. Although this is usually a very controversial issue it is a critical element that cannot be ignored. Churches that care about their converts will be committed to the kind of worship about which their converts care.

**What is the Advantage of Joining?** This is the question of *benefit*. One-way people are motivated to maintain membership is by being shown the “value for value” benefit they will receive in return for their commitment. What else does the church have to offer? Are children, youth, educational and recreational programs readily available? Is there access to a school, daycare center, family life center, or senior citizens home? In addition to the biblical, what are the practical and personal reasons for sustaining membership?

The question of benefit can be most effectively addressed in the Pastor’s *New Believers Class*. Here the pastor is able to clearly explain the biblical, practical and personal reasons and benefits of membership. The content of the class should be church doctrine and spiritual nurture. The class also provides the new believer an excellent opportunity to see the pastor’s vision for the church, feel his love for the members and bear his personal commitment to lead, feed and care for their souls. A weak class will build a weak congregation but a strong class will build a strong congregation.

**What is Required of Members?** This is the question of *expectations*. What does the church expect from me? The Christian life isn’t just a matter of creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and character. Belief must be backed up with behavior. Deeds must be consistent with creeds. But what are the deeds and what are the creeds that the church expects of me? Numerous non-resident members have pointed to the frustration of their unfulfilled expectations as new believers as the reason for their discouragement, disillusionment, and disenchantment with the church.

The question of *expectations* can be most effectively addressed through the *Membership Covenant*. The membership covenant, which contains all of the expectations inclusive of the baptismal vows, is similar in purpose to the marriage covenant. The most important part of the marriage ceremony is when a man and a woman exchange vows, making certain promises to each other before God and witnesses. This covenant between them is the essence of their marriage. Likewise, the essence of church membership is contained in the commitment of the new believer to a covenant, which inspires him to greater loyalty and devotion to Christ and His church.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

*Graph 1*

QUESTION	ISSUE	ANSWER
Do I Fit Here?	Acceptance	Small Affinity Group
Does Anybody Want To Know Me?	Friendship	New Member Sponsorship Program
Am I Needed?	Value	Spiritual Gifts Inventory
Am I Ministered to in Worship?	Relevance	Contemporary Worship Service
What is the Advantage of Joining?	Benefit	Pastor's New Believers Class
What is Required of Members?	Expectations	Membership Covenant