

STEPS YOUR CHURCH CAN TAKE TO HELP PEOPLE OWN THEIR FAITH

(This resource is a summary of Chapter Eight "The Church And Your "This is it?" Faith" and Appendix 2 "For Church Leaders" in the book *Life & Faith: from "This is it?" to "This is it!"*)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Casey Ross". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

written by Casey Ross ©2022
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I love the church. It's been my full-time job for a lot of years. For decades, I've planned ministries, written curricula, developed new ministries, created and executed strategies, met with consultants and pastors, prayed, and all the things you've done. And I've seen God do many amazing things.

But what I've seen the most is the same-old-same-old: Christians who attend church sometimes. Christians who feel "high" on God after a mission trip or a worship experience eventually return to being like everyone else. Why is there often very little or no difference between someone who is not a Christian and a Christian who has the Spirit of God in them?

I'm tired of people relying on the church for their faith, expecting it to make them feel close to God, jumping from church to church and trend to trend and emotion to emotion, and complaining about the church and what it offers and does not offer.

I'm tired of churches chasing peoples' expectations, acting like they hold the secret to someone's faith, and not changing their strategy to reach the changing world around them.

The answer is not to get mad at people or the church. The answer is not to give up. The answer is to do things differently. That is the only way you will see different results.

DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY TO GET DIFFERENT RESULTS

I bet you and I want the same things. I want Christians to experience what is theirs: being a new creation, freedom, being filled with the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, leading others to start their faith in Jesus, trusting Jesus more and more, etc. And I want people who have not started their faith in Jesus to make this life-changing decision.

I want the church to play a meaningful role in a Christian's life. I want the church to be seen as a light in every community. I want people to use their gifts to build up the church. I want Christians to set aside their preferences and realize they exist for the church, not the other way around.

General George Patton said, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." The church has gotten this wrong. And so have most parents, companies, schools, bosses, etc. But this resource is for churches, so let's talk about churches.

Churches focus more on *how* than *what*. And that contributes to people's faith in Jesus feeling disappointing. Here is the list of some of the *hows* churches focus on:

- small groups
- church membership
- financial giving
- confession

- volunteering
- confirmation classes
- mission trips
- memorized prayers
- baptism
- church retreats
- Sunday school
- accountability groups
- nights of worship
- prayer meetings
- communion
- women's ministries
- Vacation Bible School
- revival services
- infant baptism
- outreach night
- Bible studies
- community groups
- first communion
- membership classes
- men's ministries
- mentoring
- catechism classes

Churches spend most of their time, energy, and resources on *hows*. They tell people *how* to do faith: *how* to grow it, live it, share it, etc. There is a method, book, plan, and formula for every part of a person's faith. People follow a church's *hows* until they bore or disappoint them, then they find a new church with "better" *hows*.

What could happen if the church tweaked Patton's quote to fit faith? Maybe, "Never tell people *how* to have a better faith. Tell them to trust Jesus more and they will surprise you with their creativity."

Can people own their faith? Yes!

Can people figure out how to grow their faith? Yes!

Will people own their faith? I don't know.

Will people figure out how to grow their faith? I don't know.

You will never know until you create the expectation for them to own their faith and help them take steps to trust Jesus more. You will never know until you do things differently. To do things differently, you have to take steps. And these steps are going to cause you to have to trust Jesus more.

STEPS YOUR CHURCH CAN TAKE TO HELP PEOPLE OWN THEIR FAITH

Below are some steps your church can take to see Christians own their faith and grow their faith. Christians can live their lives and live out their faith in ways that influences the people around them toward faith in Jesus. I do think it's possible!

STEP: BREAK PEOPLE OF THE HABIT OF DEPENDING ON YOU AND THE CHURCH FOR THEIR FAITH

The church should play an important role in a Christian's life and faith. But Christians should play a more important role in the church. The church is not for the people. The people are for the church.

Reduce the number of *hows* your church offers. The *hows* keep people depending on your church. Yes, you need to provide some *hows*. Those are the ways you teach and empower people to grow their faith and live it in their community. But keep the number of *hows* you offer to a minimum. Only provide the essential *hows* that lead people to take steps to trust Jesus more.

At Local Church, where I am currently on staff, our *hows* are Sunday worship services, Bible studies, and mentoring. That's it. All three of these things emphasize applying the Bible in ways that cause you to take steps to trust Jesus more.

I just shared this list, but here it is again. Here are some of the *hows* churches offer:

- small groups
- church membership
- financial giving
- confession
- volunteering
- confirmation classes
- mission trips
- memorized prayers
- baptism
- church retreats
- Sunday school
- accountability groups
- nights of worship
- prayer meetings
- communion
- women's ministries
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- revival services
- infant baptism
- outreach night
- Bible studies
- community groups

- first communion
- membership classes
- men's ministries
- mentoring
- catechism classes

Stop doing some of the things you do. How many items should you stop doing? I don't know. Enough to get your people's attention that you are doing things differently because you want different results in their faith. And enough to make a difference and cause people to own their faith in Jesus.

STEP: LEAD PEOPLE NOT TO SEEK THE SHALLOW END

Christians pray for peaceful, uncomplicated lives. Their goal is to have fear-free, challenge-free lives they can manage. I call this the shallow end. It's the desire to have both feet touching the bottom, so there is no need to trust Jesus.

The shallow end, or the illusion of the shallow end, is dangerous for the people in your church. Pastor, author, and speaker Mark Sayers writes, "Christian leadership is leading people into growth so that they may grow in Christlikeness. Growth, however, involves understanding that discomfort and pain are part of life and can be used by God to grow us. As we have learned, unhealthy individuals and systems make comfort and ease their highest value and thus do everything to avoid discomfort and pain. The choice to prioritize comfort, ease, and good feelings above growth is the choice to embrace and accept personal, spiritual, and emotional immaturity."¹

Instead of leading your people to seek something that can stunt their spiritual growth, lead them not to be fearful of the uncomfortable times in life. Disciple your people to know how to grow their faith in the difficult times when their feet do not touch the bottom.

Help your people even create uncomfortable times when they have to trust Jesus. When life is okay or even good, teach them how to take unique next steps that will cause them to trust Jesus more. See the next step.

Check out another free resource at caseyross.net called "DEEP FAITH: HELP ADULTS GROW THEIR FAITH IN JESUS."

STEP: LEAD PEOPLE TO TAKE UNIQUE NEXT STEPS THAT CAUSE THEM TO TRUST JESUS MORE

¹ A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders. Mark Sayers. Moody Publishers; 2022. Page 111.

Empower your people to live out their faith Monday through Saturday, away from the church.

Expect them to live out their faith Monday through Saturday away from the church.

Make Monday through Saturday, not Sunday, the priority. Make Sunday their launch pad, marching orders, strategic plan, fuel, inspiration, and safe place for Monday through Saturday.

Lead them to take steps through your preaching, communication, social media, the few *hows* you offer, etc. What kinds of steps should you lead your people to take? Steps that cause them to trust Jesus are steps that cause them to pause, feel nervous, and need Jesus' help. They don't have to be big, significant steps. They can be small steps. But they are steps that make them whisper, "Jesus, I need you to help me with this."

When they take this kind of step, they feel something on the other side of the step. On the other side, they whisper, "Thank you, Jesus!"

In Appendix 1, "More Unique Next Steps" in *Life & Faith: from "This is it?" to "This is it!"* there is a list of almost 100 unique next steps a person can take.

STEP: DECIDE WHAT YOUR CHURCH CAN UNIQUELY OFFER TO YOUR COMMUNITY

I believe all churches have the same answer to this step. You may disagree. I think the one thing every church can uniquely contribute to their community is faith in Jesus. The church can help people start and grow their faith in Jesus.

I don't believe the church uniquely offers community, friendships, food or clothing pantries, biblical knowledge, accountability, statements on current events, etc., to the people around them. Other groups can provide those things. Jesus established the church to take his Gospel to the world. That is what we should do.

If you dare to take this step, you must fight to stay clear and focused. You will always be tempted to provide more to your people. Don't do it. Provide one thing: faith in Jesus.

CAN I HELP YOUR CHURCH?

I love the church. And I'd love to help you and your church. If you think I could help, visit caseyross.net to contact me. Let's schedule a free 30-minute phone call to discuss your situation and setting. If I can help beyond that, I'd love to Zoom, fly, or drive in to work with you and your church.