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Foreword:
Facts Are Our Friends

They wrecked my day.

Three colleagues I trust and respect had just walked me through the findings of an elaborate—and quite expensive—congregational survey, and the results weren’t at all what I’d expected.

I’ve always believed the local church is the hope of the world. I still do. But what I learned from the survey on that day was that the local church I’d led for more than thirty years was not doing as well as I thought when it came to helping people grow spiritually.

Greg Hawkins, our executive pastor, and Cally Parkinson, our director of communications, had been working on the survey—a project that had my full support and interest. They recruited Eric Arnson, a research specialist who helped them develop and interpret the survey. Their goal was to find out which of the many activities and programs we offer delivered the greatest spiritual growth in our people. In other words, we wanted to identify which activities were most effective in helping people grow in their love of God and love of others (Matthew 22:37–40). The results of our survey would help fine-tune our various ministries so that even more people could grow deeper in their faith.

What they discovered challenged some of our core assumptions about our effectiveness as a church. For example, 18 percent of our congregation—more than 1,000 people—had stalled spiritually and didn’t know what to do about it. Many were considering leaving. And some of our most mature and fired-up Christians wanted to go deeper in their faith and be challenged more but felt as if our church wasn’t helping them get to the next level.

I was shocked. I had thought that helping people become fully devoted followers of Christ was what we were all about at Willow, but the facts told us we could do better.
After the team finished sharing the results of the survey, I thanked them and then told them I needed some time to process all their data and analysis. For the next several days I couldn’t stop thinking about all I had learned. I reassured myself with the findings that 50 percent of our congregation indicated they “loved God more than anything else” and were expressing that love by reaching out to their unchurched friends and serving the poor on a regular basis. But the disconnect between what we thought we were doing and what we were actually accomplishing was troubling and unacceptable.

We made the survey the focus of our annual strategic planning event that year, and like me, many on our leadership team found the results disturbing. I shared with them some of my own misgivings when I first saw the results of the survey, but I reminded them of something I had learned a long time ago: facts are our friends. One of the worst things we can do as leaders is to ignore news that we don’t like to hear. To their credit, the leadership team kept at it with open minds and hearts as they sought ways to improve the way we do ministry at Willow.

Here’s one simple yet profound fix that came from this survey. We learned that the most effective strategy for moving people forward in their journey of faith is biblical engagement. Not just getting people into the Bible when they’re in church—which we do quite well—but helping them engage the Bible on their own outside of church. We also completely restructured our Wednesday night service into a university format to better serve the varying needs of our people.

The changes we have made based on what we learned from this survey have made our church better. In recent years, we have baptized record numbers of people. We are healthier and more vibrant, and we are leading more people to faith. Most important, we are seeing more people growing into fully devoted followers of Christ.

As we saw how much the results of the survey changed the way we approach ministry, we decided to roll it out to a wider audience because we suspected that the issues we found weren’t just Willow issues—other churches would likely benefit from it as well. Working closely with their colleagues at the Willow Creek Association, Greg and Cally’s team expanded this survey to include 1,000 churches and over 250,000 congregants over a four-year period. This expanded database confirmed the findings from our own survey at Willow, and the result is Move, a book that will transform how you lead your church.

As you begin your own journey through this book, be open to hearing God speak to you. I offer the same encouragement to you that I gave to my
leadership team: facts are our friends—challenging friends at times, yet friends nonetheless. My prayer is that the information you wrestle with in this book begins an ongoing dialogue about how your church can reach its full redemptive potential.

Because the local church is the hope of the world, and it deserves our very best.

Bill Hybels
Founder and Senior Pastor
Willow Creek Community Church
Chairman of the Board
Willow Creek Association
Church work is extremely easy and incredibly hard. It’s easy because Jesus was crystal clear about the mission of the church: “Go and make disciples of all nations,” he said, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

He left no ambiguity when it came to those commands he cited, either, as he responded to the Pharisees’ question to name the most important commandment: “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–40 NLT). And what about that love he refers to? Did he leave that open to interpretation? Hardly. “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me” (John 14:21 NLT).

So the purpose of our churches — our commission, as church leaders — is to help the people in our congregations to become disciples who obey Jesus by loving God and loving others. That’s what Jesus wants us to achieve, and it’s pretty straightforward, making the what the easy part of church leadership. For close to two thousand years, however, each new generation of Christian leaders has struggled to get a handle on the how: How do we foster the transformation of our people into disciples of Christ? How do we know if those we lead are truly growing more in love with God and extending that love to other people? It sure would help if we had a way to measure changed hearts.

The 1962 movie version of How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss is a Christmas classic. If you remember the story, the Grinch is a grouch. No one really knows why he is the way he is, but the storyteller suggests that perhaps his heart is too small.

How do we verify that? Well, when we watch the animated movie, a magic X-ray screen shows us that indeed the Grinch’s heart is two sizes too small. Fortunately, that’s not the end of the story. After doing a lot of really bad stuff to the town of Whoville — and poor Cindy Lou Who — the Grinch has a life-
changing experience. We actually get to see the transformation of his heart. Thanks, again, to the magic X-ray screen, we watch as the Grinch’s heart grows *three sizes* that Christmas Day!

If church leaders had access to Dr. Seuss’s magic X-ray screen, measuring progress in making disciples might be a whole lot easier. Jesus said, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:35 NLT). So we could line folks up each week as they file into church and measure how full of love their hearts are. Then we could compare their X-rays from week to week and we’d know whether their love for God and others was growing and active. With such knowledge at hand we could determine, with a great deal of certainty, which of our church’s ministries really support spiritual growth. We’d have a far better idea of how to best spend our time and resources in order to maximize heart change. And we would know for sure if what we’re doing was helping our people become disciples who obey Jesus by loving God and loving others.

Alas, there is no such contraption at our disposal. That fact doesn’t quell our need to know, however, so we just do our best. We measure what we can. And we follow the lead of generations of church leaders, whose unspoken measurement of success has typically revolved around church activities.

We hear stories of great preachers, so we work on our teaching. Sunday mornings. Wednesday evenings. We teach as best we can — and encourage others to do the same. We realize too that our people have pressing needs: they are lonely, facing tough decisions, experiencing loss. So we offer counseling and spiritual guidance. We organize care ministries to provide assistance; then, as the need expands, we recruit, train, and organize volunteers. Understandably, people want to feel connected, so we launch small groups and wrestle with who is qualified to lead them and how these individuals should be trained and equipped. And then there are the needy in our larger communities: the hungry and thirsty, the strangers and the prisoners, the naked and the sick. Christ’s
admonition rings in our ears: “I tell you the truth, when you [cared for] one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!” (Matthew 25:40 NLT).

From time to time, we step back to review all we have done. All the work. All the hours. All the decisions and challenging conversations. It may look quite impressive. In our quiet moments, though, most of us still find ourselves wondering, “How are we really doing? How much impact is our church making on people’s lives? Are they closer to Christ? Do they exhibit more love and compassion? Are they more like Jesus in word and deed?” We’ve hoped the answer was yes, but there has been no way we could be sure. (Did we mention this was hard?)

It was that very difficulty — and church leaders’ long-standing desire to know whether they were taking kingdom ground or just staying busy — that led, in 2003, to unprecedented efforts to answer those important questions. What began as a survey of a single church — a questionnaire based primarily on conventional wisdom among church leaders — yielded some surprising initial results. Then, over the next several years, persistence prevailed, research tools were professionally honed, more than a thousand congregations provided their input, and unprecedented breakthroughs surged to the fore.

The results have been astounding. Paradigm busting. Hope generating. (In fact, who needs a magic X-ray screen?) Yes, there actually are ways to know whether the people in our congregations are truly growing more in love with God and extending that love to other people. Yes, there are churches among us that are experiencing significant and authentic spiritual growth within their people. Yes, there really are ways to measure changed hearts. And, perhaps most important for church leaders: yes, there are lessons we can learn, attitudes we can incorporate, successes we can emulate, and spiritual-growth milestones we can help our congregations reach.

We are thrilled to be able to share all this and more with you through the pages of Move. We predict you will be surprised by a number of findings that will appear, at least initially, to be quite counterintuitive. We know you will enjoy meeting and learning from pastors who shepherd hearts that are indeed on fire for Jesus. And we anticipate that people in your own congregation will benefit from your expanded knowledge, as they experience unprecedented growth in their love of both God and others. That is, in fact, our fervent prayer.
(Greg) should have been ecstatic.
Our numbers over the past five years weren’t just good, they were great. Twenty-six percent increase in church attendance. I know—bigger doesn’t always mean better, but our people were not just showing up on weekends. Participation in small groups had increased by 200 percent. We were also seeing more people than ever before spreading Christ’s love in local compassion initiatives throughout the greater Chicago area.

It wasn’t just the numbers, though. Behind every number is a person, and I saw so much evidence of life change in our congregation. Marriages put back together. People finding purpose for their lives. Students taking a stand for God. The look on a guy’s face when he finally gets what grace is all about.

This is why I do what I do. This is what keeps me going.

And yet.

One Sunday in 2003 I was sitting with my wife in the same spot in our auditorium where we always sit. As people streamed in, my heart was full of gratitude at the sight of so many people eager to worship God and learn from his Word. The weekend services are a visual reminder of all that has gone on during the week—small groups, special classes, serving opportunities, outreach experiences, and other events designed to help people grow. It’s hard not to get excited about ministry when you’re surrounded by people hungry to know God.

That’s when it hit me—a haunting question so jarring I couldn’t shake it off: Are all the things that we do here at Willow that these people so generously support really helping them become fully devoted followers of Christ—which is our mission—or are we just giving them a nice place to go to church? For all the work, all the financial investment, all the programming, and all the
planning we pour into “church,” is it really making a significant difference in people’s lives?

As I looked out over the crowd, I imagined every family returning to their neighborhoods after the service and I wondered, “Is our corner of the world here in the Chicago suburbs a better place because of what we do at Willow, or does life pretty much go on here as it does everywhere else?”

I love being a pastor, even though that’s not what I set out to do. I had my MBA and was working for a world-class management consulting firm, but God’s call on my life was so radical and so clear that I knew this was where I should be. This was what I should be doing.

But I couldn’t shake that nagging question rattling around somewhere between my heart and my head. You think you’re doing all the right things. You pour yourself into ministry because you love helping people grow in their faith. But are you really? I wasn’t so sure, and that’s what makes ministry so unsettling for me: not knowing if the work I do is really helping the people I love move closer to God.

If you know anything about Willow Creek, you know that we love guiding people on a journey from standing on the sidelines to becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. We’ve designed programs and activities to keep them engaged so that they grow in their relationship with Jesus and find ways to share his love with others (Matthew 22:37 – 40). From the very beginning in 1975 when founding pastor Bill Hybels and a small band of volunteers started this church, that’s been our focus. The fact that our church has grown from a few hundred people in 1975 to more than 25,000 today is humbling, and we’ve taken it as one indication that our way of doing church is having an impact.

At least that’s what we thought.

But when we surveyed our people in 2004, we got one of those wake-up calls that you’d rather not get but you know you can’t ignore. Our initial interest in conducting the survey was based on our long-held, overarching hypothesis that increased participation in church activities — small groups, weekend worship services, and volunteering — increases a person’s love of God and others. Said another way: Church Activity = Spiritual Growth (chart 1-1).

That’s what we believed at Willow Creek. Actually, our bias was so strong we would have said that we knew this was true.

We never questioned the validity of this approach to helping people grow in their faith. So what we really wanted to know when we conducted our initial survey was which activities produced the most spiritual growth. In other words, which activities were most effective in helping people grow in their love of God and love of others? We considered this the mother lode of church-leader
questions. If we could figure that out, we could make better decisions. Spend money more judiciously. Minister more effectively. Cut those programs that don’t help people grow and beef up the ones that do. We felt that we were doing a pretty good job of moving people toward spiritual maturity. The results of our survey would help us do much better.

Initially, we were very encouraged by the congregation’s response to the survey—a 40 percent return rate on the fifteen thousand surveys distributed. But despite questions designed to measure everything from church participation to spiritual maturity, and despite the application of state-of-the-art research techniques, the answers we were looking for just weren’t showing up.

Weeks went by, but the data still was not making sense to us. In fact, the data itself was perfectly fine. We were just blinded by our bias that increased participation in church leads to spiritual growth. Once we got over ourselves and let the data do the talking, we learned three shocking facts about our congregation: (1) Increased participation in church activities by themselves barely moved our people to love God and others more; (2) We had a lot of dissatisfied people; (3) We had a lot of people so dissatisfied that they were ready to leave.

CHART 1-1: Many churches work from a model similar to this: the more a person far from God participates in church activities, the more likely it is those activities will produce a person who loves God and loves others.
All the great things we were doing and our people barely moved! The haunting feeling that came over me that Sunday had now been confirmed by cold, hard facts.

That’s the bad news, and I have to admit, it was hard to take. But the good news that came from this survey has not only transformed how we do church at Willow, but it dramatically revitalized my own commitment to ministry. Here’s what happened.

What began as a survey to inform the direction of Willow Creek, a single church, slowly evolved into the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey—a tool that has been used by over 1,000 diverse congregations. Based on the responses of over 250,000 people who attend those churches, we discovered not only a new lens through which to view spiritual growth, but also a new way of understanding what it takes to lead a spiritually vibrant church. That’s what the rest of Move is all about: an opportunity to face the facts about what is really going on in churches just like yours and to make the changes that will most enhance your congregation’s ability to reach its full redemptive potential. And based on what we learned, we will share practical insights into how to get your people moving on a dynamic journey to spiritual maturity.

One important caveat: surveys and data are never the deciding factor in determining spiritual growth. In his sovereignty and providence, God often moves mysteriously in the hearts of people, which is why we continually sought his wisdom and guidance throughout the REVEAL experience.

At the foundation of this new way of understanding how people grow spiritually are eight significant discoveries—discoveries relevant to all churches and helpful to all ministry leaders willing to act boldly on strategies designed to move their people closer to Christ. Despite the fact that these findings are both universal (at least in the North American context) and verifiable, however, they are also surprising and sometimes even counterintuitive:

* **It is possible to measure spiritual growth.** Measuring spiritual growth is not something the REVEAL team set out to do. But in analyzing the results of our first survey in 2004, a framework emerged—based on how people describe their relationship with Jesus Christ—that predicts spiritual growth (defined by increasing love of God and increasing love of others—Matthew 22:37–40).

* **Church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth.** More precisely, increasing church attendance and participation in organized ministry activities do not predict or drive spiritual growth
for people who are in the more advanced stages of spiritual development. Church activities have the greatest influence in the early stages of spiritual growth, but things like personal spiritual practices, including prayer and Bible reading, have far more influence later in the spiritual journey.

- **Lots of apathetic nonbelievers who attend church are unlikely to ever accept Christ.** There are a significant number of people who have not yet made a commitment to Christ but have still attended church for more than five years. These people aren’t actively exploring faith. In fact, the longer they’ve attended church, the more likely they are to say they are content with the pace of their spiritual growth, or to say they are “stalled.” This means that the longer they attend church without making a commitment to Christ, the less likely they are to ever accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

- **Even the most devoted Christians fall far short of living out the mandates of Christ.** Mature believers serve the church, help the underresourced, evangelize, and tithe more than other Christians. However, high percentages of them are still surprisingly inactive. For example, even though most (almost 80 percent) very strongly agree that they “love God more than anything,” one-third do not serve the church and 50 percent do not serve the underresourced on a monthly basis. In the past year, 60 percent had fewer than six spiritual conversations with nonbelievers and 80 percent invited fewer than six people to church. Forty percent do not tithe.

- **Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture.** If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing the mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on Scripture every day.

- **Spiritually stalled or dissatisfied people account for one out of four church congregants.** People who are stalled spiritually and/or dissatisfied with how the church is helping them grow exist in all churches. On average, 13 percent of all congregants select the word stalled to describe their pace of spiritual growth; 18 percent of those surveyed described
themselves as “dissatisfied” — in some churches the number was as high as 50 percent.

★ There is no “killer app” for spiritual growth. While we did identify a number of churches that are spiritual powerhouses, we found no single “save the day” program that guarantees discipleship success. However, in the top REVEAL churches, we did find four best practices, which we’ll discuss in part 3.

★ Leadership matters. The leaders of the more highly successful churches who participated in the REVEAL survey have diverse personalities and styles — from quiet and reserved to self-assured and commanding. But they share one key attribute: an unrelenting, uncompromising focus and drive to help grow people into disciples of Christ. This matters — big time — because the strategies and programs they pursue are not radically different from those found in most churches. It’s their hearts — consumed by Christ — that make the difference.

These eight discoveries set the stage for the spiritual-growth framework detailed in this book — a framework based on a new way to think about doing church and a new set of tools to help church leaders answer the question, “What should we be doing to help our people grow spiritually?”

REVEAL has helped us answer that question for Willow Creek, and we believe it will help you with your church as well. Just to be clear, what you will see in this book is not just one church’s recommendations or opinions but a compilation of relevant, fact-based information. As my coauthor, Cally Parkinson, likes to tell people who question one finding or another from the research: “Listen, we did not make any of this stuff up!”

Such assurance is occasionally necessary, because many REVEAL discoveries take some getting used to. They don’t always align with what we thought we knew. In short, the new lens we have talked about requires that we also use new eyes. Or at least old eyes, opened slightly wider.

A Quick Take on Move

In the pages ahead you will find a great deal for those eyes to take in — all arranged in a three-part progression of what this new, more relevant spiritual-growth framework looks like (part 1), how that framework best facilitates spiritual growth (part 2), and how pastors and church leaders can most effectively serve their congregants and Christ’s church (part 3).
Part 1: The Spiritual Continuum

REVEAL identifies a spiritual continuum that includes four segments of church attenders (chart 1-2):

**Exploring Christ**: The people in this segment have a basic belief in God, but they are unsure about Christ and his role in their lives.

**Growing in Christ**: The people in this segment have a personal relationship with Christ. They’ve made a commitment to trust him with their souls’ salvation and for eternity, but they are just beginning to learn what it means and what it takes to develop a relationship with him.

**Close to Christ**: The people in this segment depend on Christ every day. They see Christ as someone who assists them in life. On a daily basis, they turn to him for help and guidance for the issues they face.

**Christ-Centered**: The people in this segment would identify their relationship with Christ as the most important relationship in their entire lives.

CHART 1-2: This framework emerged in our research as the most powerful predictive description of how people grow spiritually. This means that the strength of people’s spiritual beliefs and their level of engagement with spiritual activities depend on (or can be predicted by) how they describe their relationship with Christ.
They see their lives as fully surrendered to Jesus and his agenda, subordinating everything to his will and his desires.

You will hear directly from people in each of these segments as they share their stories with you. And we imagine that, as you read about the segments along this spiritual continuum, names and faces within your own congregation may come to mind.

**Part 2: Spiritual Movement**

As people grow spiritually, they move from one segment to the next on the spiritual continuum. In part 2, we take a closer look at three movements of spiritual growth (chart 1-3):

**Movement 1:** From Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ. Movement 1 is all about Christian basics. Developing a firm foundation of spiritual beliefs and attitudes is critical during this trust-building phase. The impact of church activities on spiritual growth is most significant in this movement.

**Movement 2:** From Growing in Christ to Close to Christ. In Movement 2 people decide that their relationship with Jesus is personal to them. It hinges on developing a routine of personal spiritual practices that make space and time for a growing intimacy with Christ.

**Movement 3:** From Close to Christ to Christ-Centered. In Movement 3 believers replace secular self-centeredness with Christlike self-sacrifice. They pour out their increasing love for Jesus through spiritual outreach activities, especially evangelism.

Importantly, each of these movements is most effectively fostered through unique aspects of what the church has to offer—an “aha” for most of us, who have long believed that weekend services, small groups, and serving opportunities carried with them much the same potential impact for just about everyone in our congregations. But the reality is that people in different segments have different spiritual needs, and we’ll take an in-depth look at how to meet the needs in each of the segments.

**Part 3: Spiritual Leadership**

Part 3 showcases those results in action. Once five hundred congregations had taken the REVEAL survey (we hit that mark in the fall of 2007), we could easily identify those churches most successful at fostering spiritual maturity. We performed a simple mathematical process, identifying what would become known as the “top-5 percent” churches. We wondered what those twenty-five
congregations were doing. Why were their results so exceptional? And, most importantly, what could the rest of us learn from their leaders?

A lot, as it turns out.

Rather than being concept driven, the information these pastors and leaders shared is vitality driven. It works. And—best of all—it is simple and reproducible, whether you lead a church with great resources or one that scrapes by from week to week. These are their four best practices and one overarching principle of leadership, which we’ll unpack in practical detail in part 3 (chart 1-4):

**Practice 1: They get people moving.** Instead of offering up a wide-ranging menu of ministry opportunities to newcomers, best-practice churches promote and provide a high-impact, nonnegotiable pathway of focused first steps—a pathway designed specifically to jumpstart a spiritual experience that gets people moving toward a Christ-centered life.

**Practice 2: They embed the Bible in everything.** At best-practice churches, the Bible goes well beyond its role as the foundation for teaching and life instruction. These churches breathe Scripture. Every encounter and
The experience within the church begins with the question, “What does the Bible have to say about that?” And church leaders model living life according to the answers to that question.

**Practice 3: They create ownership.** Best-practice congregants don’t just *belong* to their church; they believe they *are* the church. They embrace its discipleship values as part of their identity. Best-practice churches inspire and hold
people accountable for changing their behavior—for becoming more Christlike in their everyday lives as a reflection of their faith.

**Practice 4: They pastor their local community.** Best-practice churches don’t simply serve their community. They act as its shepherd, becoming deeply involved in community issues and frequently serving in influential positions with local civic organizations. They often partner with nonprofits and other churches to secure whatever resources are necessary to address the most pressing local concerns.

In addition to these four practices, we identified one overarching leadership principle that emerged in our interaction with the senior pastors of these top-5 percent churches. These churches are led by individuals consumed with making disciples. Absolutely consumed. Making disciples of Christ was unquestionably their most important aspiration and the deepest desire of their hearts. And that characteristic fueled all four of the practices you will learn more about.

I don’t know if you’ve ever had those nagging doubts that I had: Do I really know what’s going on in the hearts and souls of my people? Is all this activity and programming moving them closer to God, or are we all just spinning our wheels? The REVEAL survey told us the truth about how our people experienced church, and some of what they told us wasn’t pretty. But it also showed us how to do a better job of helping people grow spiritually, which, after all, is why all of us—you and me—do what we do. Now in *Move*, we’d like to share with you what we learned so that you can have greater confidence that what you are doing will make a difference in the lives of your people.

A few Sundays ago I sat in our auditorium watching people take their seats. This time the gnawing feelings of doubt about our ministries’ effectiveness had been replaced with a settled peace. We might not be doing everything right, but I knew we were making a real difference in these folks’ lives. Not because we came up with yet another creative program, but because we were willing to face, and act, on the truth: increased church activity does not lead to spiritual growth.

What does?
You might be surprised.
The Simplicity of Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is not linear or predictable. It is a complex process as unique as each individual, and it progresses at a pace determined by each person’s circumstances and the activity of the Holy Spirit. This observation, while true, can make spiritual growth feel very complicated—difficult to understand, hard to resource and support, impossible to measure. The findings in Move offer church leaders the encouragement that, while spiritual growth is complex, there appears to be a simplicity in its general progression that may help us to think about it differently, to resource it better, and to support it more productively.

The findings featured in Move suggest, in general, that spiritual growth progresses across a continuum of four segments, moving from those who are Exploring Christ to those who are Christ-Centered. Three movements of increasing spiritual maturity define this progression, and various spiritual catalysts, ranging from organized church activities to personal spiritual practices, influence how people advance from one segment to the next (chart 1-5).

Move unpacks these findings in the aggregate; it is not intended to describe how spiritual growth occurs at an individual level. As noted, that process is unique for each person and unlikely to follow a predictable path.

However, for church leaders who influence the spiritual growth of hundreds or thousands of people, we believe it is possible to think of spiritual growth in simpler terms. That’s because, while each person’s spiritual path is distinct, when we pool together thousands of individual surveys describing spiritual experiences, a general pattern emerges that transcends individual results.

This is similar to the progression of an entering freshman class to eventual graduation. The paths of individual students will be unique—some may transfer or drop out, others may change their major fields of study more than once. But, in general, the class will progress as a group through similar but varied learning experiences and graduate within a predictable time frame. The individual pathways are distinct and difficult to forecast, but the progression of the group overall is more dependable, and consequently, easier to predict.

So while the process of spiritual growth is unique for each person and will always have an enormous Spirit-led component, the simplicity of the findings described in Move offer insights and strategies church leaders can act on with a high level of confidence that their decisions will make a difference in the lives of those they serve.
Individual Spiritual Growth Is Not Linear or Predictable

CHART 1-5: Each individual follows a unique spiritual growth pathway.