



PRACTICES OF A
FLOURISHING CHURCH

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Ever feel like you're spinning your wheels?

Ever feel like all the work you're doing to get your church to grow just doesn't seem to be working? Ever feel like giving up?

I totally get it. For years, I read all the books, went to all the conferences, and watched all the webinars—all in attempt to get my church to grow.

But it never happened. Oh, sure, we brought in some new folks now and then. But I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that I was focusing on the wrong things.

I was so consumed with growing my church and being "successful" that I missed our true calling—to become a *flourishing* church.

After years of frustration, followed by research, coaching, and letting go of old paradigms, I've learned that these six critical steps will help your church not only begin to flourish itself, but also bring flourishing to your neighborhood and the world.

[STEP ONE] Ignore the Experts

Ok, don't ignore *all* the experts. But be wary of those experts who say they have all the answers.

The question you need to ask is: Who are we listening to? Are we listening to a so-called expert who wrote a book and says what we need to do is what they did at their church? Or...

Are we listening to the people who live in our neighborhoods? Are we listening to each other in our congregations? Are we listening to God—in the Scriptures, in prayer, in silence?

When we try to lead based on what worked for some expert in another context, we're bound to fail. When we lead from a place of healthy listening, the odds of a flourishing ministry start to skyrocket!

But don't get cocky if they do. Because experts aren't the only thing flourishing churches ignore...

[STEP TWO]

Ignore the Numbers

How should we measure success?

Normally, we focus on the three B's—Bodies, Budgets, and Buildings. How is your attendance? How much money are you bringing in? How impressive are your facilities?

But do numbers really tell us what God is doing in and through a particular congregation? How do we measure such things as loving our neighbors, union with Jesus, and improved family relationships? These are much harder to measure.

This is not to say numbers are always irrelevant. I serve a church with only 30-40 people each Sunday. But we provide food every week for over 100 households in a town of only 800 households. Seems like *those* are the numbers we should be using to measure success.

The numbers that healthy churches focus on have to do with restoration of shalom (Step Five), not what I like to call self-preservation or self-propagation...

[STEP THREE]

Forget About Self-Preservation and Self-Propagation

Some churches are struggling to survive. They've been declining for years. Their primary goal in ministry is self-preservation. *"What must we do to survive?"*

On the other hand, some churches are growing. Life is good. Their focus is primarily on self-propagation. *"What must we do to keep growing?"*

There is, of course, nothing wrong with surviving or growing. But if we allow self-preservation or self-propagation to be our primary agenda, we will likely miss what God *really* wants to do through us. God's principal purpose is not to have bigger churches. God's ultimate desire is to heal the world, to make it once again what God intended it to be from the very beginning.

We need to let go of the goals of self-preservation and self-propagation so that we can focus on what really matters. And the way we begin to get clear on what really matters is by eliminating dualism. What the heck does that mean? Read on...

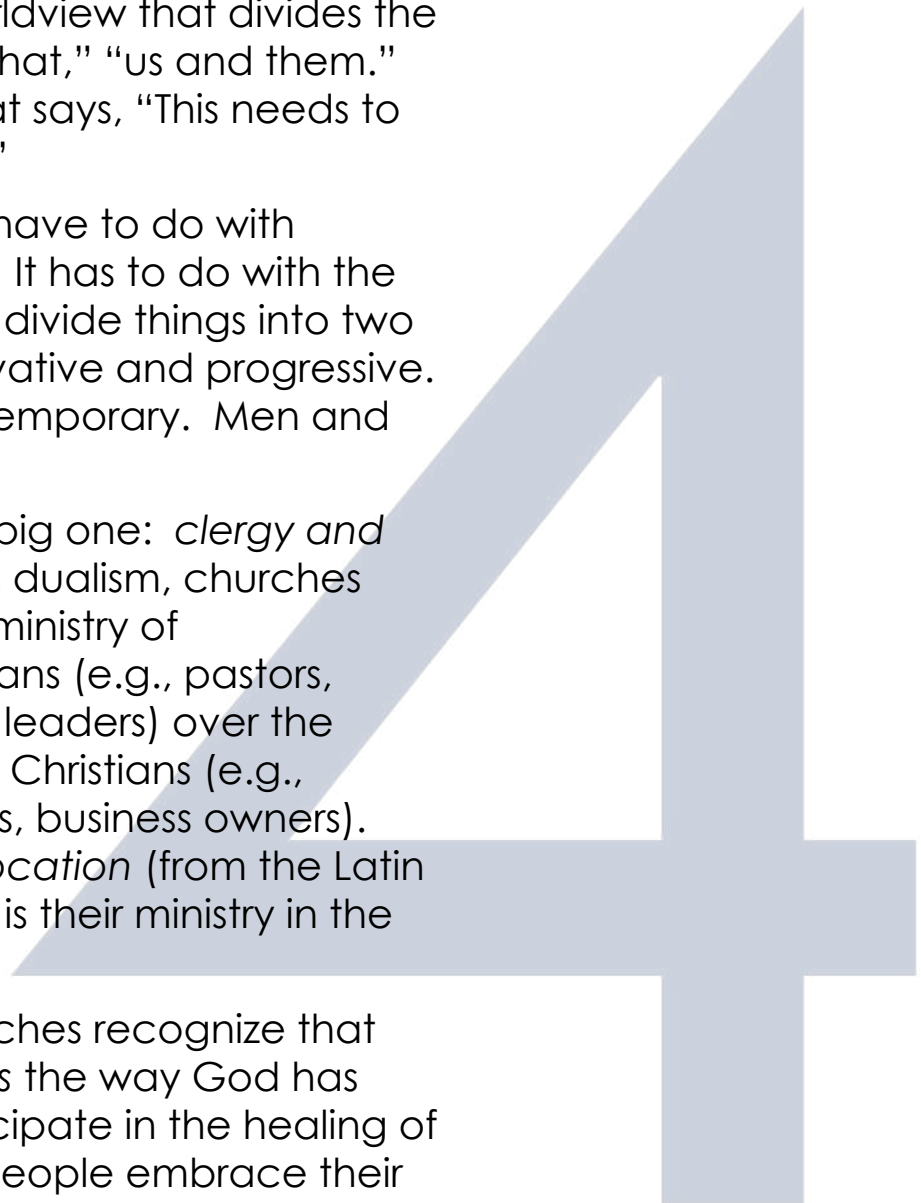
[STEP FOUR] Eliminate Dualism

Dualism is a worldview that divides the world into “this and that,” “us and them.” It’s a perspective that says, “This needs to be divided into two.”

What does this have to do with flourishing churches? It has to do with the fact that we tend to divide things into two *all the time!* Conservative and progressive. Traditional and contemporary. Men and women.

And here’s the big one: *clergy and laity*. Because of this dualism, churches tend to elevate the ministry of “professional” Christians (e.g., pastors, missionaries, worship leaders) over the ministry of “ordinary” Christians (e.g., electricians, teachers, business owners). But each person’s *vocation* (from the Latin *vocare*, or “calling”) is their ministry in the world.

Flourishing churches recognize that each person’s work *is* the way God has called them to participate in the healing of the world. Helping people embrace their God-given calling is what gives the church the ability to fulfill its mission—to restore shalom in the world...



[STEP FIVE] Restore Shalom

Shalom refers to a comprehensive state of well-being that touches every aspect of life. It is what we see in the Garden before sin becomes a part of our story (Genesis 2-3). Once shalom is broken, it becomes God's mission to restore shalom (Genesis 4 – Revelation 22).

Flourishing churches recognize that restoration of shalom is not only God's mission, it is also the church's mission. Churches exist to bring healing and wholeness—shalom—to all people in all areas of life all over the world.

There is a four-fold nature to the restoration of shalom. God wants to restore shalom (1) between human beings and each other, (2) between human beings and the created order, (3) within human beings themselves (inner shalom), and (4) between human beings and God. Flourishing churches focus on all four of these.

But how do we participate in God's mission of shalom while maintaining humility and without burning out? How do we keep it from becoming a duty or an obligation? By staying close to Jesus...

Prioritize Spiritual Formation

When I say, “Prioritize Spiritual Formation,” I don’t necessarily mean start more Bible studies or small groups. Or tell people to read their Bible every day. Or tell people to pray more and listen to Christian music.

Of course, that’s not to say we *shouldn’t* do any of those things.

What I mean is this: give people the tools they need to develop their own deep union with Jesus. Help them discover the truths of their own inner life. Help them grieve well. Teach them that God works even through so-called “negative” emotions. Help them embrace the dark times of their life as times through which God can work to shape them into the people God created them to be, as well as to bring deep inner healing. Teach them to develop a Rule of Life. (Learn more about a Rule of Life [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)

The goal is not more Bible study, more praying, and more worship. These are important—even critical—but recognize that they are means toward the goal of deep union with Jesus, leading to a life of profound mission and ministry, both personally and as a congregation.

Here's the Point...

Leading a flourishing church has nothing to do with how many people show up on a given Sunday. It has nothing to do with how big your budget is or how nice your facilities are.

It has everything to do with doing our part in God's mission of shalom. It has to do with discovering where God is already at work in our neighborhoods and cities so that we can participate in what God is already doing. It has to do with helping our people discover the unique ways God has called them to participate in God's mission of shalom.

It has to do with partnering with God to make this world the kind of world God intended it to be from the very beginning!

[I'd love to talk one-on-one with you...](#)

If you'd like to talk more about leading a flourishing church, [send me an e-mail](#) so we can set up a 20-minute Skype conversation (no charge!).

We'll talk about your ministry, the challenges you're facing, and possible next steps to help your congregation become a flourishing church.

E-mail me at markus@markuswatson.com.

Endorsements

“Markus Watson knows from experience that without a compelling vision, churches instinctively turn inward. But without the capacity to trust each other as a healthy and courageous community, the most enthusiastic mission-driven congregation settles for becoming a spiritual country club for the baptized. An excellent and engaging communicator and a wise and resilient coach, Markus Watson is the kind of consultant, speaker, coach, and leader who can inspire a community and its leadership to be their very best selves.”

—Dr. Tod Bolsinger, author of *Canoeing the Mountains* and Vice President and Chief of Fuller Leadership Platform at Fuller Theological Seminary

“Markus is an outstanding teacher, group facilitator, and peer coach. His teaching style is upbeat, light-hearted, and disarming even when approaching topics that stretch and challenge his audience. I highly recommend him.”

—Pastor Jason Coker, Senior Pastor of Oceanside Sanctuary

“Markus is a leader of profound character who has a passion to serve the Body of Christ and the world around him. He is a gifted communicator and able to clearly convey substantive thought in a way that is easy to comprehend. It is always a pleasure to work with him.”

—Micah Lunsford, Director and Founder of *Resonance: A Theological Journal*

Endorsements (cont.)

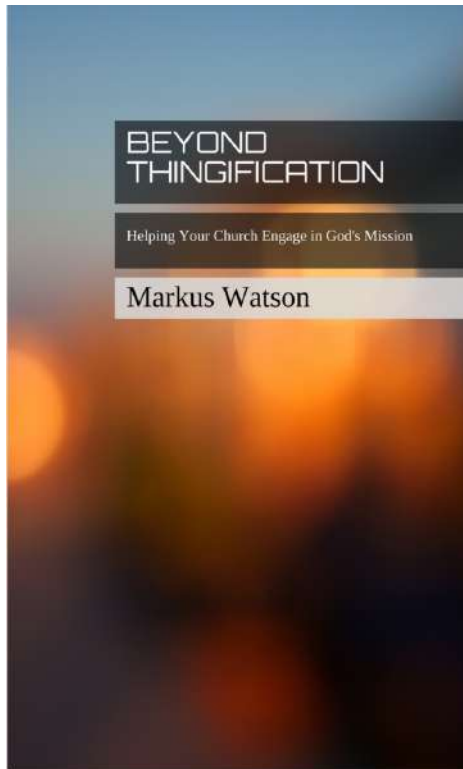
“Markus is a friend and ministry partner who worked with our organization to impact local middle and high school campuses in the community where he served as pastor. He conveyed vision to the congregation and assisted in mobilizing them to engage in beautification projects and student-led outreach clubs at public schools. Markus is a solid preacher who shares God’s word in practical ways that people can apply to everyday life. He enjoys developing leaders by unpacking the God-given dreams placed inside them that need to get out to benefit the world. He loves guiding leaders through this dynamic process of discovery and development. I encourage you to give Markus a call and begin the journey together!”

—Dr. Nate Landis, Founder and President of Urban Youth Collaborative, San Diego

“Markus leads those around him with a passion that is uplifting, encouraging, and unparalleled. His ability to articulate his stories of real life experiences, intertwined with his messages, keep you leaning forward in your seat, engrossed in his words, wanting to hear more.”

—Jimm Greer, Founder and CEO of UMTR2ME (You Matter To Me), suicide prevention organization

About Markus Watson



Markus Watson is a pastor, author, speaker, and podcast host. He currently serves as Interim Pastor at Westmorland Community Presbyterian Church in Westmorland, California.

Markus is also the host of [*Spiritual Life and Leadership*](#), a weekly podcast whose purpose is to help integrate the inner and outer lives of spiritual leaders. You can find *Spiritual Life and Leadership* by searching for it on your favorite podcast app or by clicking [HERE](#).

Markus' book, [*Beyond Thingification: Helping Your Church Engage in God's Mission*](#), will soon be available. Learn more about the book [HERE](#).

Here are a few ways to connect with Markus:

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