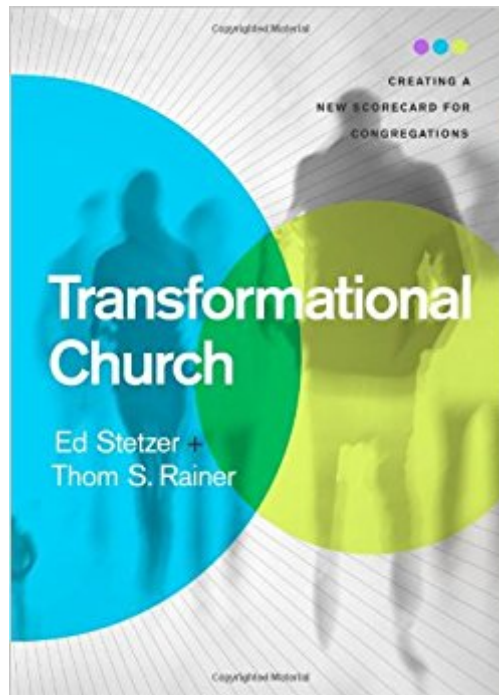


The book was found

Transformational Church: Creating A New Scorecard For Congregations



Synopsis

How are we doing? The church, that is. And how are we doing it? Congregations have long measured success by "bodies, budget, and buildings"--a certain record of attendance, the offering plate, and square footage. But the scorecard can't stop there. When it does, the deeper emphasis on accountability, discipleship, and spiritual maturity is lost. Ignoring those details, we see fewer lives transformed, Christian influence wane, and churches thin out--a situation that is all too familiar across North America today. It is time to take heart and rework the scorecard. According to Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, the authors of *Transformational Church*, "Too often we've highlighted the negative realities of the declining American church but missed the opportunity to magnify the God of hope and transformation." Based on the most comprehensive study of its kind, including a survey of more than 7,000 churches and hundreds of on-site interviews with pastors, *Transformational Church* takes us to the thriving congregations where truly changing lives is the norm. Stetzer and Rainer clearly confirm the importance of disciple making for all through active biblical engagement and prayerful dependence on God alongside of ever-increasing, intentional participation in mission and ministry activities. As the church engages these issues, the world will see the change: * More people following Christ * More believers growing in their faith * More churches making an impact on their communities The transformation starts now.

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Customer Reviews

Thom S. Rainer is president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, one of the largest Christian resource companies worldwide, and the best-selling coauthor of *Simple Church*, *Essential Church*,

and Simple Life. Rainer and his wife, Nellie Jo, have three grown sons and live in Nashville, Tennessee. Ed Stetzer is director of LifeWay Research and missiologist in residence at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tennessee. He holds two masters, two doctoral degrees, and has written dozens of articles and acclaimed books including *Planting Missional Churches*, *Breaking the Missional Code*, *Comeback Churches*, and *Lost and Found*. Ed and his wife have three daughters.

I have great respect for both authors and appreciate the work they have done for the church, but this book was very disappointing to me. The authors claim to be searching for a new scorecard for the church based on an in-depth study of "transformational churches," but they base their research on categories that are from the old scorecard - growth in church attendance and high percentage of people in small groups or Sunday school. They seem to be stuck in the trap of equating transformation with growth and increased development of programmed community (like small groups). I will admit that the basis of the research probably negatively biased me against the rest of the book, but I can't help but share the rest of my thoughts anyways. Worse than the flawed methodology, in my opinion, is the vague and predictable results of what makes the top 10% the best. The distinctive features turn out to be that the churches who bring transformation (meaning they grow 10% and plug people into small groups) embrace the right values (leadership, prayer, and relationship) and engage the right activities (worship, community, and mission). Was anyone truly surprised by this? In a sense, the argument made is that churches that do a good job at bringing more people into worship services and small groups are well-led, pray, and value relationship as they worship God, develop friendships, and serve God's purposes. While it is certainly hard to disagree with that, it is also hard to see how this is any kind of helpful insight. There are some good things in the book and I appreciated learning at least a little bit about how some traditional churches are trying to engage the emerging and missional conversations, while still being "normal." Overall, though, I would not recommend this book. Better reads include Lois Barrett's *Treasure in Clay Jars* (on practices of missional churches), McNeal's *Missional Renaissance*, and Gibb's and Bolger's *Emerging Churches*.

I had great hope for this book because of the caliber of the authors and research. I was surprised that the insight per page ratio was so low. The early chapters emphasized the care given to the quality of research, but many of the conclusions were often only a step above common sense, e.g. friendly churches are more healthy than unfriendly churches, transformational churches are churches that are open to change, churches are better lead by teams than individuals. The final

chapter did a good job summarizing the main value of the book. The key to a church impacting a city is to have a long-term presence with a plan to affect the city in a comprehensive way. We must think beyond a church's main activities as being in a building on a Sunday and focus on the church in the community during the week. The audience that would benefit most from this book includes those who have a basic understanding of church life, but have not carefully reflected on the distinctions between healthy and unhealthy churches. The book offers an introduction to the categories used to evaluate churches that may be helpful for people who are new to the Christian faith.

This book had potential, but fell very far short. If you have read much in the way of healthy evangelical congregations, this book will be repetitive. If you haven't read much in the way of healthy evangelical congregations, there are better resources, including (though certainly not limited to) Thom Rainer's more recent Breakout Churches.

I am rating this as OK because it falls into the category of another book that has some good ideas that will pass away with the next fad in the church. We definitely need a new scorecard to count success in the church but don't know that this book has found it. We have become so enamored with numbers in the church that we have forgotten that God looks at the heart, not the outside. Success in the church today is always counted by the numbers.

I just returned from the Annual Conference for the Society for Church Consulting and The Great Commission Research Network where I heard Ed Stetzer (via Skype) unpack the research behind this book. During an interactive time, he referred to the Transformational Church Survey as another tool for the toolbag. I couldn't agree more. Thom Rainer spoke the next day and joked about Ed's capacity for statistical research. We laughed in part because Ed does have the capacity to go to multiple layers of thought, but also because he and LifeWay Research work on behalf of the body of Christ far beyond the expertise of most of the rest of us. I read Transformational Church in preparation for the conference and because I have been consulting to a church that had taken the survey. These three perspectives (reading, conference, consulting) have all convinced me that this is a tool the Church should seriously consider. The book begins with the objectives and methodology of the substantial research LifeWay had done to find what factors are behind the growth of churches that had grown 10% or more from 2003-2008 and also have a significant number of congregants engaged in some form of small group. One premise of the book is that, while overall the numbers on

church growth in America are discouraging, within the overall stats there are churches that are growing. A second premise is that the church needs to stop measuring success as bodies, budgets, and buildings, and get to the underlying factors that drive growth. The next seven chapters unpack the seven areas of church health they found in their research: Missionary Mentality, Vibrant Leadership, Relational Intentionality, Prayerful Dependence, Worship, Community, and Mission. Each chapter contains illustrations of the church health concept from a variety of transformational churches from a variety of denominations. The book ends with a message of hope for the church, detail about the research, and other ways to engage the material (DVD, Retreat, Training). From a critical perspective, I would have liked more on the descriptive and prescriptive Scriptural aspects of church health. The book could also have done more by including a comparative analysis of Transformational Church to Natural Church Development, Church Health Survey, and other measures of health. Nevertheless, the book will give you hope about how God is at work and how your church can become more healthy and grow. Jim Barber Barber Church Consulting Executive Director, Society for Church Consulting

Fair read, it satisfied my need.

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