

About the Authors

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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.