

A close-up photograph of a person's foot in a blue denim shoe with a high wooden heel. The shoe is stepping on a banana peel on a paved surface. A piece of the banana peel is being crushed and is stuck to the sole of the shoe, with some banana pulp visible. The background is blurred, showing a road with yellow lines.

Reflection Questions

for

The Unstuck Church

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The Unstuck Church Reflection Questions

The Unstuck Church by Tony Morgan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017)

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Reflection Questions

Ch 1 - LAUNCH

What is the benefit of when missionaries study the people, language, and customs of the people they are trying to reach (p 20)? What kind of people make up our mission field?

“When Church tries to reach everyone, they rarely connect with anyone effectively... If you try to be all things to all people, you become very ineffective at reaching anyone” (p 20, 23). Why would trying to reach everyone have the potential to reach no one?

How would you specifically describe the ones we are trying to reach, including their age? “To be effective in building a crowd, you need to know specifically who you are trying to reach” (p 22).

Describing various age groups, Morgan wrote, “Everything the church does and communicates will point to one of these key target audiences” (p 23). He went on to share results from a study of 5,000 ad campaigns that Nielsen did. What happens when a church makes its decisions and gets its direction based on an audience/target of older people rather than those under 35? What happens as the older people continue to age? What impact does this kind of design and decision making have upon those under 35?

Reflect on the style we use for the following categories to identify which age group is targeted by each. What age audience is reflected by...?

- Music
- Appearance of worship space
- Types of ministries and activities

What do our nursery and toddler areas and activities communicate about the priorities we have for parents and young children? Same question for youth?

“Here’s the reality. People inside the church can get very loud. Those voices are much louder than the people outside the church. That’s why churches focus inward. They let their inside voices drive everything. As soon as you make that shift and begin to prioritize the inside voices, your church is guaranteed to decline” (p 25). What evidence of outside influence, if any, is there upon our church?

“You need a mission that turns some people away from your church... if you are a healthy church, though, your church won’t be for everyone,” (p 26, 28). Obviously, this is only acceptable as we work in partnership with other churches. What is our mission? [Make Christlike disciples]

“In small churches, the senior pastor is expected to do all the ministry. Unfortunately, if you let this mindset take hold... the church will get stuck. Growth will stop because there’s only so much ministry one person can do” (p 34). How much could our church accomplish if everyone only did what you do, only serving in the way(s) you serve?

Ch 2 - MOMENTUM GROWTH

Morgan described the rapid growth of Heartland Church in Indianapolis and the Early Church (p 39). Then he asked, “Do you believe God is big enough and powerful enough to do the same miracle today?”

“These problems [of rapid growth] are the problems every church leader wants to have. Growth problems are a lot more fun than decline problems” (p 41). How realistic are our hopes or expectations to be problem-free?

Considering the common characteristics of churches in the stage of momentum growth, which apply to our church? (p 42-43)

Which seems like a higher priority: adding a new worship service or constructing a new building (p 43)?

What benefits can a church experience when adding a worship service that aren't experienced when constructing a new building? (p 44)

What factors would you consider when deciding whether to add a worship service? How would we know when its the right time? (p 45-47)

Without looking it up, what is our church's mission statement?

“Everyone needs to clearly know *where they are going*. That's the vision. The vision has to be specific” (p 48). Without looking it up, what is our church's vision for the future? Is it specific? Is it measurable?

“Clear vision creates accountability” (p 50). How?

Put our church’s vision for the future through Morgan’s test of rallying and repelling people (p 50-51). Does our vision make everyone happy?

Morgan stated, “If you want to have a stronger, healthier team, begin by being intentional about the values that shape the unique character of who is on the team” (p 55). What are our core values? Are they truly ours? (p 53-54)

Empowering others is what Morgan describes as *giving leadership away*. Who “calls the shots” in our church? (p 55) How intentional are we about giving leadership away so that the leader doesn’t become a bottleneck? (p 57)

God established intervals of renewal for us—both seasons and sabbaths. Morgan warned about the hurried pace often associated with a season of accelerated growth. “My strength and my success as a leader begins with my relationship with Jesus” (p 59-60). How long can our church experience success if our leader(s) aren’t caring for their own souls and life-balance?

Do our leaders have written guidelines for their day off, weeks of vacation, weekends off (but not away), and boundaries for evenings? (p 62-63)

What would it look like for us to celebrate our season of momentum growth?

Ch 3 - STRATEGIC GROWTH

Discussion questions not yet written. If you'd like to be notified when they become available, send a text to 833-515-7078.

Ch 4 - SUSTAINED HEALTH

Discussion questions not yet written. If you'd like to be notified when they become available, send a text to 833-515-7078.

Ch 5 - MAINTENANCE

Morgan wrote, “Churches are typically in the maintenance season for months or even years before they realize it... they don’t realize it, but the pinnacle of health, growth, and impact is in the rearview mirror” (p 117, 123). He went on to describe a number of similarities between the strategic growth season (moving toward sustained health) and the maintenance season (moving toward decline, p 118). Why do you think it’s so difficult to realize one’s church is in a season of maintenance?

He calls the maintenance season “even harder to accept” (p 117). What happens to the church that cannot accept it is in the maintenance season?

Several have commented their surprise celebrating that the congregation increased our giving during the pandemic. Morgan asserted, “It’s not uncommon for churches to experience the strongest giving ever in this maintenance season“ (p 118). The chapter explains why this sometimes happens.

Morgan listed **seven common characteristics** of churches in the maintenance season (p 120-121, 124). Which of these characteristics describe our church?

1. Attendance growth plateaus or declines
2. Insider-focus, the number of salvations and baptisms decline. There are fewer (or no) non/new believers (p 125). Morgan called insider-focus the one key factor that distinguishes churches on the left side (growth) from the right (decline, death, p 127).
3. Vision stales, fades, is generic, not specific
4. Silos form, one ministry competes with another instead of working as steps through a process

5. Ministry involvement is done more by staff and less by volunteers
6. Financial health, the giving lag - “Churches often feel safe because money hasn’t stopped coming in even as attendance has slowed or declined. In fact, per-capita giving can actually be the highest when a church is in decline” (p 125).
7. Holding onto past strategies and programs instead of embracing change

Morgan discussed mission and vision. “The mission explains why an organization exists... a short statement that’s typically twelve words or less” (p 122). What is our mission? Is our mission clear, concise, memorable, and able to be articulated?

“The vision clarifies where the organization is going... three to five years into the future... [it] needs to be refreshed every few years... Without a clear picture, it’s impossible to rally people to the cause... this is a critical first step” (p 122). Do we have a fresh, clear vision? How would you describe it?

Churches in the maintenance season usually feel “no urgency to change. Of course, if you want to return to health and avoid the next two stages of the life cycle [preservation, and life support, then death], you’re going to have to change before the emergency occurs” (p 126).

Note that Morgan asserted that avoiding the life support season and death of a congregation requires renewing the vision with the involvement of a few leaders but not the voice of the entire congregation. From the vision comes a strategy, what Morgan called “an action plan” (p 126).

“It’s essential that churches try to begin a new life cycle if they find themselves in this maintenance phase” (p 127) and even more important if the church has moved from maintenance to preservation. Do you feel prepared for the hard work, cost, fear, and loss required by this?

Morgan asked, “What are we willing to do to reach people outside the church and outside the faith? The churches on the upswing will do just about anything short of sin to reach new people. If what they’re doing today doesn’t accomplish that goal, they’ll embrace changes” (p 128).

Morgan wrote, “Outward-focused churches, by their nature, are more adept at creating environments, where the unchurched or dechurched are welcomed” (p 128). Give three or more descriptions of the physical appearance of an environment that is welcoming to the unchurched or dechurched?

Where are our physical environment(s) falling short in these areas?

Jesus explained the importance of a shepherd leaving the already-gathered flock to go find lost sheep (Luke 15:4). Morgan warned, “Any organization, including a church, that doesn’t focus on reaching new people has already started to decline, and will eventually die” (p 129). How does the illustration of the shepherd apply to us?

Ch 6 - PRESERVATION

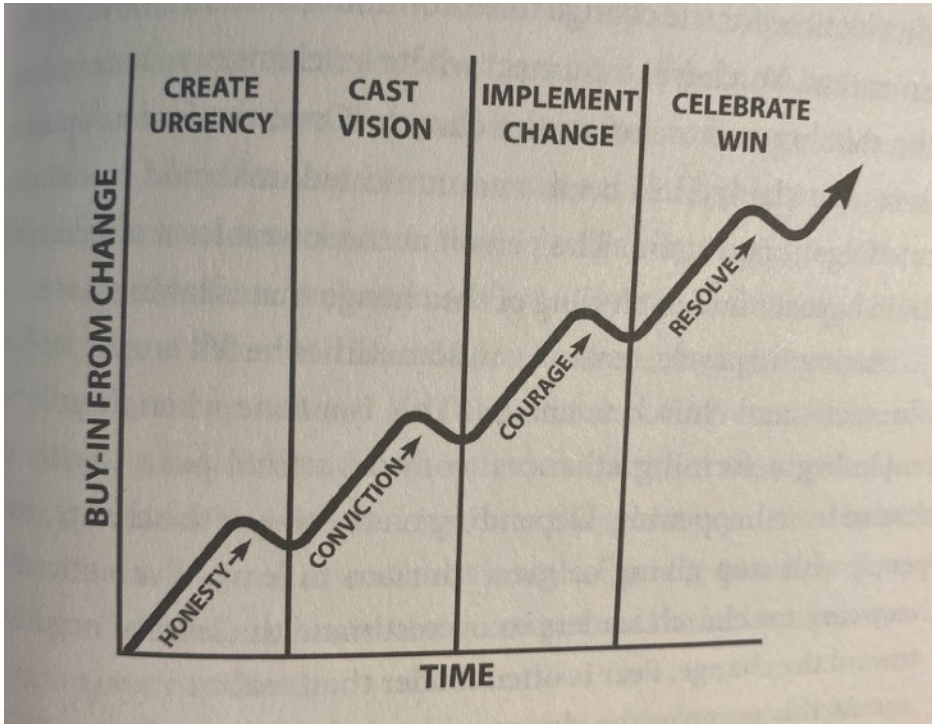
Morgan described a church in a growing community where people “pass by the church’s campus on a daily basis, but the ministry is completely disconnected from the community” (p 147). List the various ministries of our church. Then note how many of these are directly connected with the community surrounding the church (as opposed to ministries for the church).

Churches almost never want to die. But the tendency can be to try to reverse decline as opposed to moving forward to new vision and strategies. Morgan put it this way: “Everything is pulling to the past. The people who have been around the church for decades remember when the church was vibrant, and they want to take the church back to that time” (p 148). Are we pointing forward or backward? What’s the danger in pulling to the past?

“You can’t preserve the past and expect to go to a new place of health in the future“ (p 148). Why not?

What stood out to you from the example of Dr. Ike Reighard of Piedmont Church? “They went from a church entrenched in the preservation mode to a ministry that’s experiencing new life” (p 150-151)?

Dr. Reighard mentioned how implementing changes includes various challenges, some people leaving, and the elimination of certain things (like their choir, p 151). “If your church is in the preservation phase of the life cycle, it’s going to require some critical shifts to help the ministry



return to health and growth” (p 175). How do challenges like these make you feel about the cost of change?

Morgan identified six common patterns displayed by churches in preservation mode (p 152-153). Does our church show these patterns?

1. Attendance and finance are both declining. It becomes harder to pay bills and staff.
2. Methods become more important than mission, prioritizing preferences and ministry silos.
3. Pulling back to the way things used to be, calling for methods that worked before.

4. Strong leaders and visionaries have already left.
5. Power shifts from pastor and staff to lay leaders; leadership transition.
6. Focus is on keeping people from leaving instead of reaching new people.

It's painful to change. It's also painful to postpone change (and thereby die). Some of the pain that Morgan observed includes

- tension between leaders,
- alliances to push back against change,
- people stop giving, and
- some leave (p 156).

“The pain of staying where you are is much more harmful than the pain you'll experience by going through the change” (p 155). Pain comes either way. What are some pains our church is now experiencing? Is this pain producing new disciples?

Morgan described four cycles of change, displayed below (p 155-158). Briefly describe each one.

“If the church has made it this far down the life cycle toward life support, then major change will be required” (p 158). Why is this chapter so difficult to read?

What are five common factors that contribute to decline, which Morgan compares to warning lights on a car's dashboard (p 161-163)?

Have we been trying to cover the warning signs instead of dealing with them?

Morgan recommends recalling “the original vision that shaped the early years” of the church (p 165). List our early values and seek to identify what shifted over time. Have our values changed?

Morgan noted that we cannot always return to previously effective methods because culture has changed; but we can return to values that drive strategy (p 167). What’s the difference between what the church used to do versus who God designed the church to be?

How are our leadership structure and board similar and dissimilar from what Morgan described in this chapter? (p 168-171)

“Churches tend to become very event-driven over time... your supposedly successful event could actually be doing quite a bit of harm” (p 173). What drives us: our strategy toward our mission or our events and calendar?

Use the chart on page 174 to evaluate a recent or upcoming event. Should the even be altered or eliminated?

Ch 7 - LIFE SUPPORT

Morgan describes a church at this stage as having only two options: death or a new beginning (p 178). If our church is at this stage of the life cycle, how do you feel about a dramatic relaunch?

“If you jump to changes in methodology before you answer why you do what you do, then the changes, no matter how healthy they may be, are rarely going to take hold” (p178). Why do we do what we do?

Are those who we’re trying to reach more important than those we’re trying to keep?

Morgan mentioned that churches in this stage are usually “led by one key family or one key donor. The future really hinges on what these key influencers do next” (p 180). Who is that for us?

Sometimes identifying the source of a problem can be helpful when we act on it with wisdom. But assigning blame doesn’t fix anything by itself. “Rather than face reality, and make ministry changes that could propel the church back to health, [some] begin to blame others” (p 181). What signs of the blame game have we been demonstrating?

“For a church to experience health, and eventually growth, it must confirm why it exists,” to clarify the why before the what and how (p 183). Why does our church exist?

Starting a new life cycle can feel terrifying. Yet Morgan maintains if you “proceed as you have been... you’ll have the same results... You have nothing to lose at this point. Why not make a bold move and relaunch the church?” (p 186). What do we have to lose?

Morgan listed 3 options for the radical changes required to move a church from life support to relaunch (p 187-190).

1. Figuratively fire yourselves. Get new leadership by becoming someone new. Relaunch with a new strategy. Morgan recommend including an outside perspective.
2. Hire a new pastor. Give them authority to make changes, the freedom to chart a new direction.
3. Give your assets (including the church building) to another church who is moving forward.

What steps could we take to get an outside perspective as we consider the options listed above?

Can we consider getting a new pastor? How would that work?

If we give our assets and building away, which healthy church might receive such a gift?

Morgan cited Dr. Henry Cloud, saying, “Hope is not a strategy. Hope will not win people to Jesus. Hope will not grow people in their faith. Hope will not grow your church. You need a new plan” (p 191-192). What’s the difference between the hope and strategy? Which one do we have?

We can either act on a plan or drift along. Morgan wrote, “If you aren’t intentional about putting the plan into action, then you will naturally drift back into doing what you’ve always done you will never drift to health” (p 193). What evidence shows whether we have been drifting or acting on a plan?

Have we been getting stuck with perspective, planning, or putting a plan into action?



Steve Baney and Tony Morgan

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The questions here are designed to facilitate discussion based on the content of Tony Morgan's book, *The Unstuck Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017). These reflection questions are written by Steve Baney, PhD. and may be reproduced. www.pastorstevebaney.com