

How We Grow: Moving from Consumption to Contribution

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Welcome to Gather Night. This is one of my favorite events of the year. We gather around the table and gather around the Word with one another. **Pray.**

Consider this scenario with me for a moment. You have 8 members who faithfully attend your group every week. They're all believers, ranging in spiritual maturity from new believer to mature believer. Each week, you faithfully prepare to teach the Bible and shepherd your people. You organize a meal schedule, make sure people are welcomed, are on the lookout for new people to invite, and record prayer requests and pray diligently for them throughout the week. You do these tasks and do them well. In fact, your group members are growing in their faith and building relationships each week under your leadership. They're sitting under good Bible teaching, receiving spiritual care, and love the friendships they've made.

Let me point out to you the common theme throughout this scenario: the leader is the one doing most of the work. Your group members are consuming good food, Bible teaching, and prayer. But the reality is that they are contributing very little to the Group community.

What I just described to you is not incorrect, it's just incomplete. This pattern of consumption is vital for new believers, but in fact detrimental for mature believers. I'll give you a visual to help explain what I am saying.

RLD Spiritual Growth Wheel: How We Grow

In my own life and ministry, there were two catalysts for my spiritual growth. When I moved from spiritual death to life, and when I moved from consumption to contribution. I imagine this is true for you, too.

Here's the burden I have for the discipleship of our church. God has brought many new believers into our church—those who have experienced the first catalyst for spiritual growth. They've been saved by the gospel. This is great news! But many have never experienced the second catalyst to growth. Many have not grown up out of spiritual childhood. They've never experienced the joy of life together—the joy of moving from consumption to contribution.

Here's the big idea we will unpack. *Disciples grow by moving from a pattern of consumption to contribution in the life of the church.*

There are three main Scriptures we will root this idea in. The passages we will look at call God's people to a pattern of contribution. Let's allow God's Word to shape our conviction on this issue.

The First Passage (1 Peter 4:10)

Peter tells us that every believer has received at least one spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is a gift of grace given to every believer by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church. Peter also tells us what to do with our gifts—serve one another! Notice this command is not a qualification issue. It's a stewardship issue.

Using our God-given gifts to serve one another is something we want *for* people, not *from* people. We want our church to experience the joy of serving. Obedience to Christ always brings blessing. His commandments are not burdensome.

The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30) / 5, 2, 1 talents (20 years' wages!)

To the man who was given one talent, he did not invest it but buried it. The master's response? (v. 26-27) "You wicked and slothful servant! You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest." *Let these words not be true of the people under our care!*

The Second Passage (Ephesians 4:7-16)

Here is a summary of Paul's points.

1. God gave gifts to the church (**v. 7-11**).
2. We are to use our diverse gifts to collectively build up the body (**v. 12**).
3. As we mature, we become resilient, able to stand against false doctrine and Satan's schemes (**v. 13-14**).
4. The body only grows when the individual members play their part (**v. 15-16**).
 1. *Paul's body of Christ analogy.*

The point? God uses the gifts and service of his people to make his church collectively strong and individuals spiritually mature. We want this for Ignite Church. We want this for our people.

The Third Set of Passages (The One Anothers)

There are 59 one another commands in the NT. These are little commands with massive implications. These passages are prescriptions for living in biblical community. Regardless of spiritual gift or maturity, every believer can carry out these one anothers in the life of the church.

1. "Love one another." (John 15:17)
2. "Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)
3. "Welcome one another." (Romans 15:17)
4. "Serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)
5. "Bear one another burdens." (Galatians 6:2)

Notice these commands are rarely (if ever) directed at the pastors and or leaders of the church. They are directed at the church as a whole—the members. These are commands for every believer. They are the baseline for biblical community.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The Bible presents a paradigm for community in which every member serves one another and grows together into Christ. The leader-does-everything model is foreign to the NT church. We must train leaders to lead—yes, and we will continue to do so. But we must also train members to grow.

Considerations for Existing Groups (Life Groups especially)

Be honest—are the members in your group consumers or contributors? Does everyone in your group have a unique role in which they use their gifts to build up the body of Christ? This is how we make disciples. This is how we grow.

Let me ask it another way. When a group member misses a week of group, does your group feel it? If not, that means not everyone in your group has been equipped to use their gifts to serve others.

Implications for Leadership

Herein lies the fundamental (biblical!) paradigm shift for us as leaders. Biblical leadership is less about doing the work of the ministry and more about equipping God's people to do the work of the ministry. Biblical leadership is leading by equipping, not doing.

Conclusion

1. Spiritual gifts survey in all Life Groups
2. Take the long view—this will take time to see the fruit
3. Begin prayerfully considering areas of ministry you can give away to people in your Group to begin serving

Pray.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What are some wins and some burdens you're carrying this year?
2. Where are you on the RLD Spiritual Growth Wheel? Your Group members?
3. What are your spiritual gifts?
4. What responsibilities can you give away to members of your Group?