

## How Are We Doing?

### Introduction:

A. Each year, generally near the beginning of a calendar year, we pull up and dedicate a Sunday or two to getting our bearings as a church family. Last Sunday, I addressed ► three important questions. Let me review them very quickly before I move on to a fourth question I want to address today.

1. The ► first question was: What is our purpose in life? This has to do with ► our mission. At Moon Valley, our mission is to love God in a way that reaches another generation. In short, we ► say, “one generation to another.”
2. The ► second question was: What does true success look like? This has to do with ► our vision. Our vision is that God would use us to nurture every person to become complete in Christ. In short, we ► say, “complete in Christ.”

We’ve developed a biblical profile of what it means to be complete in Christ. From the Bible, ► we’ve identified 31 Characteristics of Completeness across four broad categories: motivation, virtues, beliefs, and conduct.

Our vision of success is that more and more people would become more and more like this profile: complete in Christ.

3. The ► third and final question was: How do we become what we’re supposed to be? This has to do with ► our strategy. At Moon Valley, our primary strategy ► is Life Groups. Life Groups are small groups of people gathered regularly in homes to do what the very first church did nearly 2,000 years ago: ► worship, connect, grow, and serve. Life Groups are the church next door—the church deployed to reach our neighborhoods.

B. On the basis of what we covered last Sunday, I want to address just ► one more question today. Here ► it is: How are we doing? This has to do with ► our progress. Are we fulfilling our mission and vision?

Let me tell you up front, I have no interest in sugarcoating our progress or putting a spin on things to make us look better than we really are at Moon Valley. This is going to be more like a family chat—authentic, not slick. We’re not only going to celebrate our victories, we’re going to face squarely our dysfunction—and make no mistake, we *are* dysfunctional. Sometimes we don’t work right and things need to be fixed. We’re going to talk about it.

- C. It is important to evaluate ourselves within the biblical framework of our mission, vision, and strategy. Apart from that framework, there is a tendency to simply use the common cultural measures of success—the ABCs: attendance, buildings, and cash.

Based on the ABCs, I'm afraid you people need a new leader. Our attendance is flat, our buildings are dowdy, our cash is short. I do think a more charming and dynamic leader could bring in more bodies, bricks, and bucks.

But that's not what we're about. Remember what success looks like: more and more people becoming more and more complete in Christ. To me, if we built out our 20 acres with beautiful buildings, and filled our auditorium with 10,000 people every Sunday, and were flush with cash, but people were not becoming more and more complete in Christ, it would be a pitiful waste of time and resources. It would be like so many things in our culture that look rich on the outside, but are poor on the inside.

We want to grow from the inside out.

So, are more and more people becoming more and more complete in Christ at Moon Valley Bible Church? Let's consider some evidence.

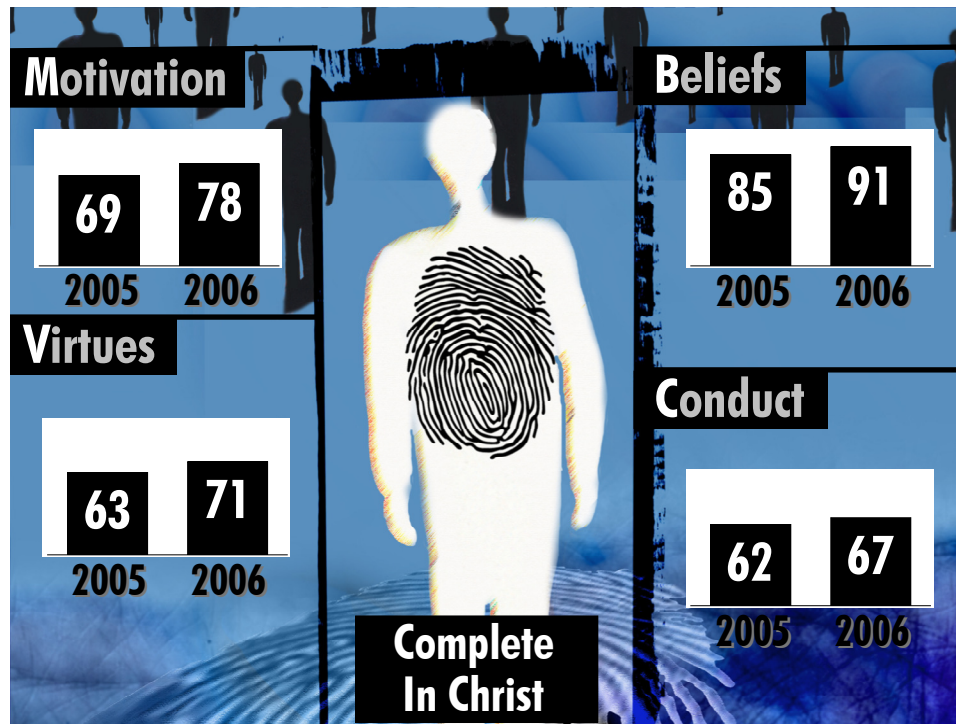
- I. It is admittedly very difficult to measure completeness in Christ or spiritual maturity. I suspect that most of us have a certain subjective sense by which we consider some to be more mature than others, but quantifying completeness in Christ is another matter.

We took a crack at quantifying completeness last summer, recognizing full well that our efforts would be very crude and incomplete. We conducted a written survey among all those who attend Moon Valley. People were asked to anonymously evaluate themselves on each of the 31 Characteristics of Completeness. Here's how the questionnaire reads:

*On each of the Characteristics of Completeness described below, please rate yourself from 0% to 100% to represent the degree to which you feel you personally reflect the character or fullness of Jesus Christ—0% meaning, "not at all," 100% meaning, "perfectly." Rate yourself both "now" and "one year ago," such that the difference reflects how you feel you've changed in the past year.*

I provided some preliminary survey results at our last Family Focus meeting back in September, and I've done some more analysis since. It's been a blast from the past for me because I used to do this sort of thing during my fifteen-year career in marketing research, before I went off the deep end.

In order to simplify the interpretation and presentation of the data, I created a single composite score for each of ► the four categories: motivation, virtues, beliefs, and conduct. Here are ► the results.



We can look at these results a number of ways.

- A. First, we can compare scores from 2005 to 2006 to see if we're improving.

Notice that we've grown significantly in all four areas over the past year. We ► are more motivated to be like Christ. We ► are more virtuous. We have ► grown in our beliefs. And even ► our conduct has improved.

By the way, for you statistics buffs, every increase shown here is statistically significant at a 95% level of confidence. That means that we can be quite confident that these increases are not just a result of random variation.

Of course, someone could quibble with our research methods. For example, because these are self perceptions, I suppose it's possible we could be giving ourselves more credit than we deserve. If we were pristinely scientific, we would have had a control group—a group of people outside the church measured at the same time to see if changes in Christlikeness could really be attributable to involvement in Moon Valley. An analyst might even wonder if our scores are increasing because we are systematically scaring off the folks with lower scores. But that's not happening. For one thing, while we are not experiencing strong growth in overall attendance, neither are we declining. For another, the changes cannot be a result of a different mix of respondents because, in one survey, the very same respondents evaluated themselves both retrospectively in 2005 and currently in 2006.

These are the kinds of things analysts wonder. Nevertheless, this analyst thinks these improvements are real and very encouraging because they fit my subjective sense of what's going on around here.

- B. We can also ► compare the magnitude of the improvements across the four categories to see where we're improving the most.

Notice, the greatest improvement overall is in our motivation, which increased 9 points. This is only marginally greater than the increase for virtues, but significantly greater than the increase for beliefs and conduct.

On the thinking that motivation precedes behavior, perhaps this suggests that we are poised for even greater life transformation to come. That would be good news.

- C. We can ► also just focus on our current scores for 2006 to see where we're strongest and weakest.

Currently, we are ► stronger in our beliefs than in our conduct. I think this is typical of evangelical churches in America. Our greatest need is not for more Bible knowledge, although that is very good. Our greatest need is to apply what we know. Our greatest challenge is not information, but transformation.

These results are corroborated by some research done by others which generally indicates that many, if not most, professing Christians in America don't behave all that differently than unbelievers. Skeptics who say, "You Christians are all talk" are overstating, but not much.

In one way, this is actually encouraging to me because it affirms our strategy. Our focus is not just on teaching the Bible on Sunday; it's on life transformation during the week. Survey results show that's what we need the most. Indeed, of all 31 Characteristics of Completeness, the lowest scoring was Bible Study, described as, "I read the Bible, drawing principles and applying them to my life." Our experience in Life Groups so far corroborates this, as only about one out of three Life Group participants share how they applied the Bible to their lives in any given week.

Why is application so hard? I think it's partly because, at some level, we all know something we don't dare say: Jesus messes up your life. It's true, and we know it. Jesus messes up your life. Give Him an application inch; He'll take a mile. Leave the application door cracked; He'll barge in. Application is dangerous.

In the Bible, a rich young ruler—a man knowledgeable in the Scriptures—made the mistake of asking Jesus for some help in application. Jesus gave the rich young man this application in Luke 18:22:

<sup>NAU</sup> Luke 18:22 “. . . sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

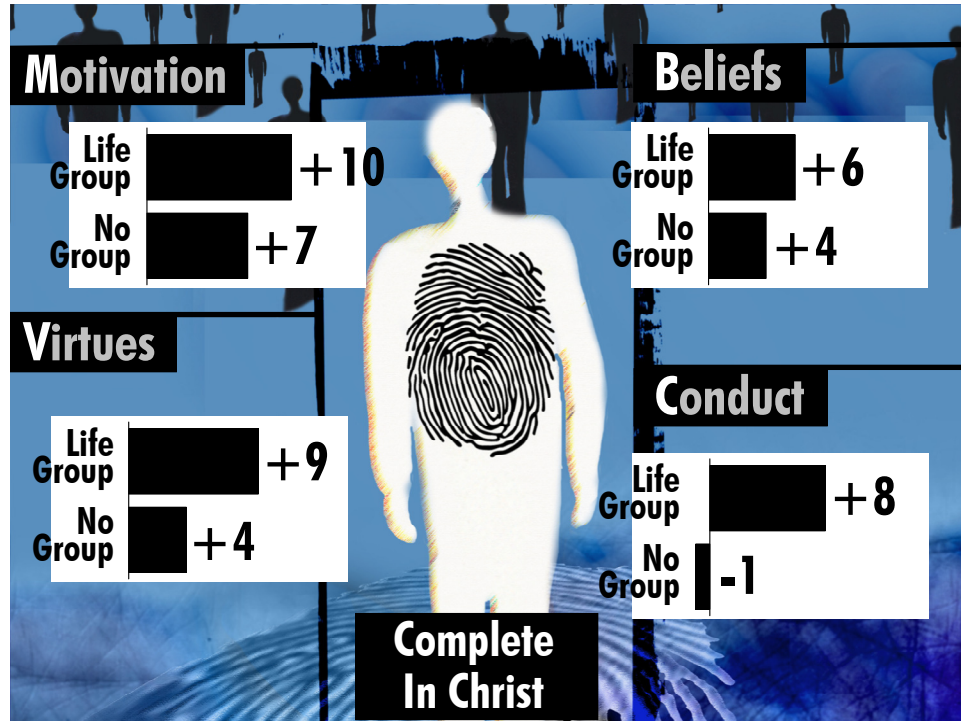
The rich young man went away sad, apparently giving up on the whole application deal. No more TPA for the CEO. Because it would have messed up his whole life. I imagine he was hoping for something more along the lines of “Just keep believing in yourself” or “You deserve a break today” or “Stay positive because you’re special.”

Jesus messed up Peter’s fishing business. Jesus messed up Paul’s career in academia. And Jesus messed up my business career. And the mess is needful and wonderful.

You see, when you open yourself up to application, the Messiah messes up your life, so that you can live His life, and live it abundantly. Without destroying our individuality, He systematically dismantles our selfishness, application by application, so that His love can show through us. Application is hard because, sometimes, I just don’t want Jesus messing up my selfish life.

We have a lot of room to grow in applying the Bible to our lives. And so, applying the Bible to our lives will remain a strategic point of emphasis for us.

- D. We ► can also look at the data in another way. We can compare year-to-year changes in scores by Life Group involvement.



In each of the four categories, the top bar shows the change in score for those involved in Life Groups. The bottom bar shows the corresponding change for those not involved in Life Groups. The results are telling.

First, ► we have no clear evidence that Life Group involvement makes much difference in motivation and beliefs. Improvements for Life Group participants are only marginally better than for nonparticipants.

Where ► Life Group participation does seem to make a significant difference is in virtues and particularly in conduct. This makes so much sense to me. If you come to church services on Sunday, you're probably going to grow in knowledge or beliefs and you may even find the services to be motivational. That's good. But if you really want to follow through on the increased knowledge and good intentions and move toward life transformation in virtues and conduct, Life Groups definitely help.

This is most apparent in conduct. Notice that, over the past year, the conduct of those *not* involved in a Life Group did not improve at all. In contrast, the conduct of Life Group participants improved significantly.

I'm not suggesting you can't grow in virtues and conduct outside of a Life Group. Nor do I want to make you feel like an inferior outsider if, for whatever reason, you choose not to be involved in a Life Group. I'm just providing some quantitative evidence that Life Groups help transform lives. If you're interested in life transformation, Life Groups are the best thing we've got around here.

- II. And ► the evidence is not just quantitative, it's qualitative as well. Stories of life change that cannot be quantified are all around. Let me give you just two examples: Tammalynn Gaddam and Dave Kresin. Both are involved in different Life Groups and we've asked them to briefly share what difference their Life Groups make in their lives. Tammalynn, would you share with us first?

(Tammalynn, then Dave give testimonies here. In the midst of Tammalynn's, she will allude to a slide of her custom license plate that says, ► "GROUP.")

- III. In ► addition to these testimonies, there are others who are being transformed. For example, this morning we have a number of people who want to be baptized as a public declaration of their faith in Jesus. I'd like to introduce you to Patrick Gibbs, one of our elders who will be doing the baptizing.

(Baptism ceremony occurs here. Advance to ► white slide.)

- IV. I've ► presented some evidence that indicates that people are indeed growing more and more complete in Christ at Moon Valley. But that's not all of what success looks like. Remember, it's more and more people becoming more and more complete in Christ. We seem to be making

some headway on the last part—more and more complete in Christ—but what about the first part—more and more people? Are we reaching more and more people? Results are mixed.

- A. The Life Group strategic initiative at Moon Valley is only about two years old. In that time, we've gone from no Life Groups to 13 Life Groups. We've gone from nobody involved in Life Groups to about 165 people involved. That's pretty good.
- B. But over the past year, growth in numbers has leveled off. There has been no increase in the number of Life Groups over the past year. The number of people in Life Groups has grown only modestly from 150 to 165. Few unbelievers—only 8 that we know of—have come to Life Groups as guests. In our survey, only 5 respondents said they believed in Jesus for the first time while attending Moon Valley. All 5 are involved in Life Groups, but all believed before Life Groups began.

I think these results are related to at least two challenges we face.

- 1. First, if churches were restaurants, I suspect Moon Valley would be one of those little, out-of-the-way, hole-in-the-wall places that changed hands a few years back. We've got great food and great service, but not many people know about us. We must rely on word-of-mouth because, let's face it, we certainly don't have any curb appeal—maybe for prairie dogs and cottontails, but not for human customers. Few would take the risk to eat at our place unless they are invited or we're recommended to them by some current customers they trust.

But the thing is, as existing customers, we're pretty comfortable. We get plenty of solid, nutritious Bible food here. And the service is good; by and large we take extraordinary care of our customers. When they're hungry—physically, emotionally, spiritually—we serve them. In fact, some of us may be secretly afraid that if we got a lot more customers, maybe the service wouldn't be as good. Maybe it would lose that comfortable, family feeling. And so, what's the motivation to get more customers? Why make the effort when it might even mess up a perfectly good thing? Why indeed.

Only one problem. This is not a restaurant, and we are not customers. The customer mentality has got to go. This is the body of Christ, and as believers we are all partners. And we're on a mission, not a cruise. Our mission is *one generation to another*, not *one generation self absorbed*.

If we're all partners in this body called the church, and if our mission is to love God in a way that reaches another generation, then we must all ask ourselves a very important question: What exactly am *I* doing to reach others? . . . Who am *I* serving? Who am *I* praying for? Who am *I* inviting to Life Group or to church? Who is hearing from *me* about the difference Jesus is making in *my* life?

If the answer to every individual question, *what am I doing to reach others* is *not much*, then, by definition, the answer to the collective question, *what are we doing to reach others* will be exactly the same: *not much*.

Earlier, I said that the Characteristic of Completeness, Bible Study, which says *I read the Bible, drawing principles and applying them to my life* scored dead last. Actually it was a tie. Another Characteristic of Completeness was right there at the bottom. It's Discipleship, which says *I am fulfilling Christ's commission to make disciples, reaching another generation*.

And so, a strategic point of emphasis this year in Life Groups will be reaching—reaching *outside* the group to love and serve and enfold others.

One small thing we've done to help you reach is print up some new brochures with Life Group information—brochures that make it a little easier to walk across the street in your neighborhood or across the hall at work to invite a friend to your Life Group. They will be available to pick up after the service.

2. In addition to reaching, I believe we need to train up more Life Group leaders. Some groups are packing out the houses in which they currently meet. They need to multiply, but we lack leaders needed to create more groups.

This puts us in an awkward, painful position because many of us who are currently leaders, myself included, are still trying to learn how to do it better. Moreover, it's a discouragement to reaching out when you've got about as many people in a group as you can reasonably accommodate.

That's one of the reasons why last fall we tapped Patrick Gibbs to be our Life Group Director. Patrick and I will be working this year to try to recruit, develop, and equip more and more Life Groups leaders.

- V. So, let's summarize. How are we doing? The answer is ► not bad. Are more and more people becoming more and more complete in Christ at Moon Valley? The answer is a qualified yes. It's qualified because there is a very large upside that we have not yet realized. We're on the right track, but in some ways, we've just left the station.

We'll be doing lots of things in the coming year, but we need ► to do more to: apply, reach, and train. Apply the Bible in Life Groups. Reach outside Life Groups to others. And train more Life Group leaders. Serendipitously, they form the acronym, ART: apply, reach, train.

As a partner in this body, I invite you to personalize these three things by putting them in the form of questions.

Apply. Am I applying? How can I better apply the Bible to my life?

Reach. Am I reaching? How can I reach others—maybe neighbors or coworkers or friends?

Train. How can I help with Life Group leadership? Maybe by praying for existing and future leaders, or by offering myself or my home.

Just in case any of this has prompted some interest in greater involvement in Life Groups, at the close of the service, there will tables set up in the back with representatives from each of our Life Groups. They'll have the brochures to which I alluded earlier. And you can ask them anything you want. Like, what kind of people do you have in your group? Or, what do you do? Or, where do you meet? Or, do you people handle snakes and drink Kool-Aid? No pressure. The representatives are not on commission.

After the second service today, we're having our Family Focus. It's a gathering right here in the auditorium of anybody who wants to come to eat a lunch that we'll provide, and to talk more about what's going on at Moon Valley. You're all invited.