

January 2011

## Transformational Church

**Creating A New Scorecard For Congregations**  
by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer  
(B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, TN, 2010)

A book review by Jack De Vries

**H**ow are we doing? I am talking about the church? How do we measure success? As churches, that is?

Congregations have long measured success by “bodies, budget, and buildings.” But as churches will discover, the scorecard cannot stop with things like attendance, the offering plate, and the size of a building. This is the premise of Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer’s recent book, *Transformational Church*. According to them, “we believe that measurements matter for the church. ...we think a change in scorecard is needed. We believe one of the most important measurements is ensuring that men and women are being changed by the power of the gospel.” (25) It is about transformation!

Transformation – isn’t this what we hope to see happening in and through our churches? In my work among the churches of the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia (CRCA) we have used Natural Church Development (NCD) as a scorecard for our churches (check out the NCD website:

<http://ncd-australia.org.au/welcome/>). NCD

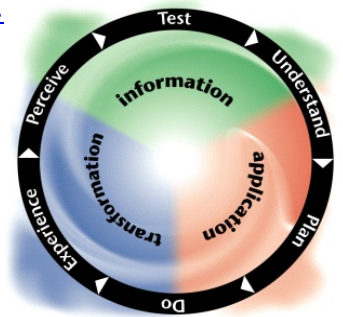
measures church health by looking at the eight characteristics of a healthy church. Once churches complete the NCD survey they gather all the

**information** and move toward **application**:

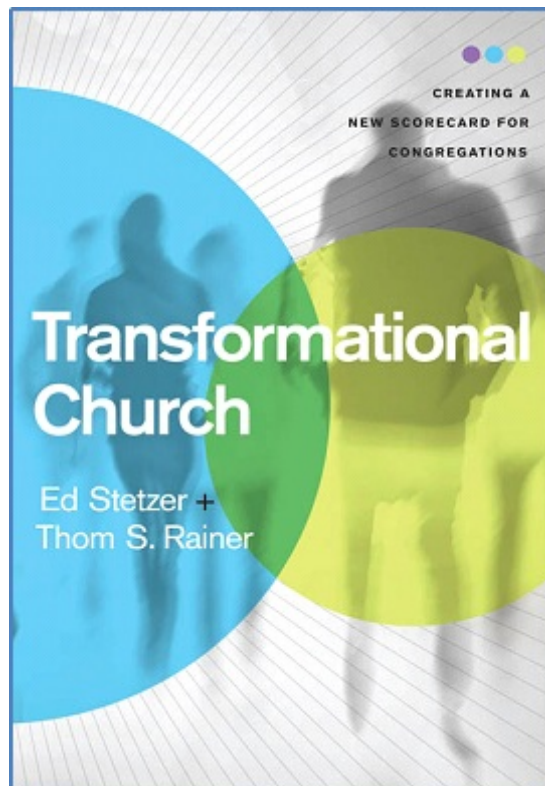
putting together and executing a strategic plan. In the experience phase of the NCD process churches look at how the Spirit brings about transformational change according to His agenda. The object of the NCD process is **transformation**. More people following Christ. More believers growing in their faith. More churches making an impact on their communities.

Whether or not churches have engaged the NCD process, Stetzer and Rainer’s book is an excellent tool for church leaders. Their approach is not unlike that of NCD and provides a good

companion to churches engaged with NCD. Their new scorecard is based upon extensive research of churches which are transformational. They were not simply interested in churches with large attendance rosters. They based their scorecard on churches where lives were being changed, churches were growing, and communities were being changed and served. By the time



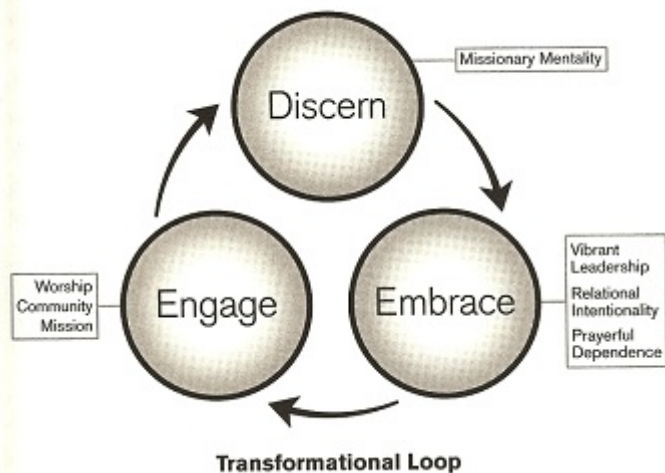
The NCD Cycle of Change



the study was done, 7000 churches were contacted and surveyed. It is clear that Stetzer and Rainer love the church. There are many critics of the church who simply point out what is wrong with the church. Stetzer and Rainer do not complain about the church. Rather, they point out what God is doing among churches that are seeing genuine transformation happening. As they write: “The new scorecard must continue to prioritize the greatest need of humanity, women and men being changed by the power of Christ. Churches must continually engage the ministry of making new disciples. And it is more than that – it is disciples changed by Jesus that change their church that changes the world.” (42)

Churches need to decide to measure the things that matter to the kingdom of God.

The new scorecard for churches is what Stetzer and Rainer call the “transformational loop” (see diagram below). Rather than giving “seven steps to success” the authors provide seven elements or principles found in transformational churches. The transformational loop is composed of three categories with seven elements: missionary mentality, vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, prayerful dependence, worship, community, and mission. The book goes on to describe these seven elements in great detail. Not only do the authors ground these elements in Scripture, but they give helpful real life illustrations of how these elements are practically lived out in transformational churches.



At the base, the foundation, of the Transformational Church (TC) is a “missionary mentality.” “Transformational Churches

demonstrate a passion to touch the world. The exceptional part of TCs is that they are actively involved in praying, giving, and going to specific places to live out their passion.” (62) Passion seems to be the key with TCs. The authors go on to say that they “believe that a missionary mentality matters ... but any real missionary mentality must be global in focus.” (63) While many churches might have a desire to grow and reach out locally – the focus of TCs is global. It is refreshing to see this global focus rekindled among churches today. TCs are truly Acts 1:8 churches. “They have a mindset to be a missionary in their community and ultimately to the entire world.” (70)

The authors go on in the rest of the book to describe how this missionary mentality embraces every aspect of TCs. Each chapter discusses one of the other six elements of the transformational loop. Rather than describing each in detail, I will share some of the insights which I found particularly helpful and critical for churches today. For example: “Transformational leaders move beyond the clergy-laity divide and engage everyone for the mission of God.” (93) For the past 2 ½ decades I have been arguing for this in churches. As Reformed Christians we believe in the priesthood of all believers, that every Christian shares in the anointing of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Regardless of age, gender, or culture every believer is anointed by God to engage in the mission of God.

Another key element Stetzer and Rainer found among TCs is prayer.

“Transformational Churches want to pray together. Praying together is consistent with a deep desire to see lives and their community transformed by the power of Christ... Churches that pray together see God’s work together.” (141) I am grateful for the Christian leaders who designed the missional vision of the CRCA around the Fourfold Task of Prayer, Multiply, Train, and Align (cf. [www.ministryformation.com.au](http://www.ministryformation.com.au)) It all begins with prayer – praying for revival, praying for the lost, praying for workers in the harvest – prayer! As Leonard Ravenhill is noted for saying, “Failing here we fail everywhere.” (144) So true!

The chapters on worship and community ought to be studied and applied by every leader in the church. These chapters alone are worth the price of the book. Most, if not all, worship wars would cease if leaders and church members alike would study and apply the worship principles of TCs. For example, “Worship must never be about me but about God and His glory.” (164) “[God] calls people to worship Him in spirit and truth. The question driving us should be: What will God use here in this place in this time? TCs determine worship style based on biblical mandates about worship in principle and appropriate to their cultural setting in style.” (165) This chapter is a good illustration how TCs have taken the missionary mentality and applied it to the element of worship.

A similar comment could be made of the chapter on “community.” Again we see how the missionary mentality is applied to a key element of TCs: community. Much has been written over the past several decades on the importance of small group ministries for healthy church life. Stetzer and Rainer point out that if a smaller group is to become transformational, it needs to move on to the level of *communitas*. “*Communitas* is a threshold or space where deeper sharing and

conversations take place. The dynamic of a deeper level or threshold of sharing is not automatic.” (192) Every small group leader would benefit from studying and applying “the five elements of a transformational small-group environment” (192-196). Not only would small-groups be transformed, but more importantly, the people who are part of these groups.

Much has also been written over the past couple of decades on the importance of social justice and churches being difference makers in their communities. Stetzer and Rainer discovered, however, that compassion ministries alone are not what brings about transformation in and through churches. “Churches with transformational practices were active – even aggressive – about service in the community. But TCs place an emphasis on social ministry only as far as it serves the purpose of sharing the gospel.”

(203) The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ remains in focus through and through. “To be transformational, a church must constantly commission their people into service for the city to display and tell the gospel.” (218)

I have only highlighted a number of the key insights of *Transformational Church*. Every pastor or church leader ought to digest this book for themselves. The book is not without its weaknesses. The chapter on “relational intentionality” is only somewhat helpful. This element did not need a separate chapter but could have been included in the chapter on “community”. Also, the research upon which this book is based was done among churches in the USA. The research done by NCD is much more global in perspective. I just hope that churches here in Australia would not dismiss this study simply because of its American flavour. The Biblical principles discussed come out of the same source. A similar research study focused on “transformational churches” would be most welcome here in Australia. But

Worship must  
never be about  
me but about  
God and His  
glory.

would the results be much different? I hardly doubt it, having pastored churches in both hemispheres.

But test the book out for yourself. It is a good read, packed full of helpful insights, and illustrated thoroughly with stories of transformational churches. We can only hope that as churches study and apply these insights that there will be more people following Christ. More believers growing in their faith. More churches making an impact on their communities. Isn't that what the church is all about: transformation!

---

## About the authors:

### Ed Stetzer



is president of LifeWay Research and missiologist in residence at LifeWay Resources in Nashville, Tennessee. He holds two masters degrees and two doctoral degrees and has authored many popular books, including *Planting Missional Churches*, *Lost and Found*, *Breaking the Missional Code*, and *Comeback Churches*. Ed and his wife, Donna, have three daughters.

### Thom S. Rainer



is the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, one of the largest Christian resource providers in the world. Also a respected pastor and researcher, he has written more than twenty books and is the best selling coauthor of *Simple Church*. Thom and his wife, Nellie Jo, have three grown sons, are proud new grandparents, and live in Nashville, Tennessee.