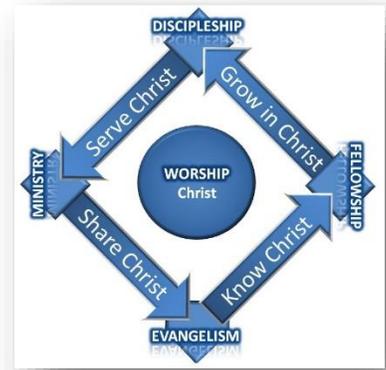




Many years ago in a galaxy not so far away, a youth ministry guru named Lyman Coleman put a “baseball diamond” graphic in his *Youth Ministry Encyclopedia* as a way of visualizing youth ministry. As far as I know, Lyman never did a lot with his diamond outside that book, but a young minister named Rick Warren developed Lyman’s idea and really “put it on the map.”

Rick first popularized his version of “the baseball diamond” in his best-selling book,

The Purpose Driven Church, and this became the conceptual model around which he planted Saddleback Community Church in California, now one of the largest churches in the land. For fairly obvious reasons, this approach to conceptualizing church life has become known as “the Saddleback Model,” and many congregations have found it very effective as a way to structure their common—and personal—lives.



I’m a fan of “the diamond,” and I’ve been using it in congregations I’ve served for a long time. I was pleased to discover nearly five years ago that our own Pastor Steve had a similar affinity for this model, and that our congregation was already structured in this way.

Those of you who are in worship at CBF regularly already know that I’m a visual learner with a whimsical sense of humor. It is in this sense that I offer this illustration of “the Hamburger Bun.” I very much doubt that you’ll ever see this anywhere else, and though whimsical, it does have a point.

You may remember ads some years ago whose punchline was “Where’s the Beef?” That’s the idea underlying this picture. As you can see from the diamond above, the main points of the diamond are WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, MINISTRY, and MISSION (the diagram has “Evangelism” where we have “Mission”).



WORSHIP is “the pitcher’s mound,” because in baseball the balls are put into play from that mound when the umpire throws the ball to the pitcher. In our spiritual lives, worship (private or corporate) is where God’s Spirit “puts things into play” in our lives. Without that divine and continually enlivening input, our lives are “sound and fury signifying nothing.”

“First Base” has to do with interacting with other believers through small group connections of various sorts. “Second Base” has to do with the practice of daily disciplines that support spiritual growth. “Third Base” has to do with deploying our gifts and abilities to strengthen the Body of Christ, and “Home Plate” has to do with pursuing Great Commission Living as we go about our lives in the world. Our congregation has leadership teams in each of these areas, and these five teams and functions are the “meat” of our life together.

The “bottom bun” is our ADMIN Team, whose responsibilities support and undergird our congregational life, giving us a place to meet and a place “to stand,” from which anchoring we gain the necessary purchase to carry out our primary ministries (the “meat”). The “top bun” is our DEACON Team, whose charge it is to oversee and to guard the spiritual health and strength of our common life as a “spiritual covering” over all we do. And when the leaders of those seven teams meet with our church officers and staff, that eighth group is our CHURCH COUNCIL.

As I’ve suggested above, this general model defines not only our common life, but is also an excellent model for guiding our individual spiritual journeys. It is in this sense that you see this version of the baseball diamond on our worship PowerPoint every week:



The point here is that in order to grow spiritually, every one of us needs to do these five things each and every week. I very cleverly call these “The Five Things,” and I suggest to you that they are really not optional equipment for persons who intend to grow in Christlike graces:

1. **WORSHIP:** We participate in corporate worship somewhere at least once a week, every week of our lives, on vacation, work trips, or whatever.
2. **CONNECT:** We participate in a small face-to-face accountability, prayer, and study group each and every week. This can be a Sunday School class, but it can also be another small group at another time during the week.
3. **GROW:** We participate in the regular, daily practice of disciplines that support spiritual growth, notably prayer, Bible reading, and stewardship.
4. **SERVE:** We use our gifts and abilities to do something to build up the local Body of Christ in some way every week. This could be the same thing, such as singing in the choir or teaching Sunday School, but it could also be something different every week.
5. **GO:** We pay attention every day to possibilities for witness and encouragement that God brings our way, speaking humbly and gently in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just as in the game of baseball, our “spiritual score” doesn’t “go up” until we complete the journey “around the bases” each week. But unlike baseball, each circuit of the bases isn’t accomplished on the same plane. Because The Five Things cause us to **gROW** spiritually, our circuits around the bases are more like a heavenward spiral than anything else, and that’s really pretty awesome.



And it is because The Five Things are so important that our Deacons are leading us in a forty-day Lenten Journey of Spiritual Transformation, beginning on Sunday, February 7. This study offers an in-depth study of The Five Things, and includes three principal components: (1) personal study; (2) small group study; and (3) corporate worship that enhances each week's study.

These next weeks have a real potential to be life-changing. I really hope you'll come along for the adventure!

Dave

