

# Christ Experience

**Greetings in the spirit of Christ, God's mystery that blesses each person in the way they most yearn for grace.**

**My name is Tom Bandy. For over twenty years I have consulted with churches of all sizes, cultures, theologies, and traditions ... in North American and around the world. My website is [www.ThrivingChurch.com](http://www.ThrivingChurch.com).**

**Every growing church I know is centered on Christ. They may have different theologies and traditions. They usually have unique experiences with Jesus. But they are all centered on Christ.**

**The foggier you are about your experience of Christ, the less effective you are for mission, and the more your church declines. The clearer you are about your experience of Christ, the more effective you are for mission, and the more your church grows.**

**Today I want to introduce you to spiritual exercise that will help you focus your experience of Christ.**

**I speak especially to all church members who practice special spiritual disciplines during the year ... or at special seasons like Advent or Lent ... as an individual, couple, household, or small group. After church you can pick up the printed exercise to use in the weeks ahead.**

**This exercise helps you focus your personal perceptions of your church. How does our congregation experience Jesus? How does our worship reveal the presence of Jesus? How does our outreach focus the work of Jesus?**

**When you have finished, you can share the completed exercise (anonymously) with the pastor or board. It will help them discern the special relationship this church has with Christ ... and how our future strategic planning should focus worship and outreach.**

**The Christ Experience exercise is based on the traditional church awareness that Jesus blesses people in seven distinct ways. There are Gospel stories and lessons that illustrate each of the seven ways:**

- Some people are broken, and long to experience Jesus as a healer;
- Others are lonely, and long to experience Jesus as a true friend;
- Still others are trapped by addiction and circumstance, and long to experience Jesus as a Higher Power to break them free;
- Some feel hopeless due to age or anxiety, and long to experience Jesus as a Promise Keeper for the future;
- Some are abused, and look for Jesus to bring justice;
- Some are lost, and look for Jesus as a spiritual and moral guide;
- Finally, some feel forgotten and left behind, and long for a Good Shepherd who will gather them into the flock.

**Seven ways to experience Christ: People come to church hoping to be blessed in certain ways. Each church has a unique emphasis that allows them to bless the public in certain ways.**

**There are three steps in this spiritual exercise for Advent. You can do them in your own time and at your own pace.**

**Step #1:**

**How does our congregation experience Jesus?**

**Evaluate each of the seven experiences of Christ on a scale of 1-10. To what degree do we consistently experience Jesus as a healer, spiritual guide, higher power, perfect companion, vindicator, promise keeper, or shepherd?**

**A “1” means “not at all, not ever. A “10” means frequently, consistently, and constantly. Your evaluation may well be somewhere in between. Usually there are 2 or 3 experiences of Jesus that top the list of importance for a congregation.**

**Step#2:**

**How does our congregation focus worship?**

**Worship tends to reflect our priorities in experiencing Jesus. Worship may prioritize healing, education, or inspiration. Or it may emphasize care giving or mission outreach. Or it may focus especially on lifestyle coaching or personal transformation.**

**Evaluate each option on the same scale of “1” – “10”. Most churches can only blend 2 or 3 kinds of worship on a consistent basis through the year.**

**Step #3:**

**What is our congregation’s reputation for outreach in the community?**

**Outreach tends to highlight our experience of Jesus. Churches have a reputation for healing, wisdom, or joyful living; or a reputation for radical welcomes or social service volunteering; or for mature and balanced living; or for turning around lives.**

**Evaluate each option on the same scale of “1” – “10”. Most churches have a single, major reputation by which they are known to outsiders.**

**Remember:**

**There are no “wrong answers” in this exercise. It’s all good. All experiences of Christ are good; all worship options are valuable; and all outreach is a blessing. We are just trying to focus the uniqueness of our congregation, so that we can build on our strengths. We can grow the church and bless the community more effectively.**

**Use the exercise for meditation. Share your work with pastor and board.**

**Thank you! And thank God for your commitment to bless the world and renew the church. God bless all here!**