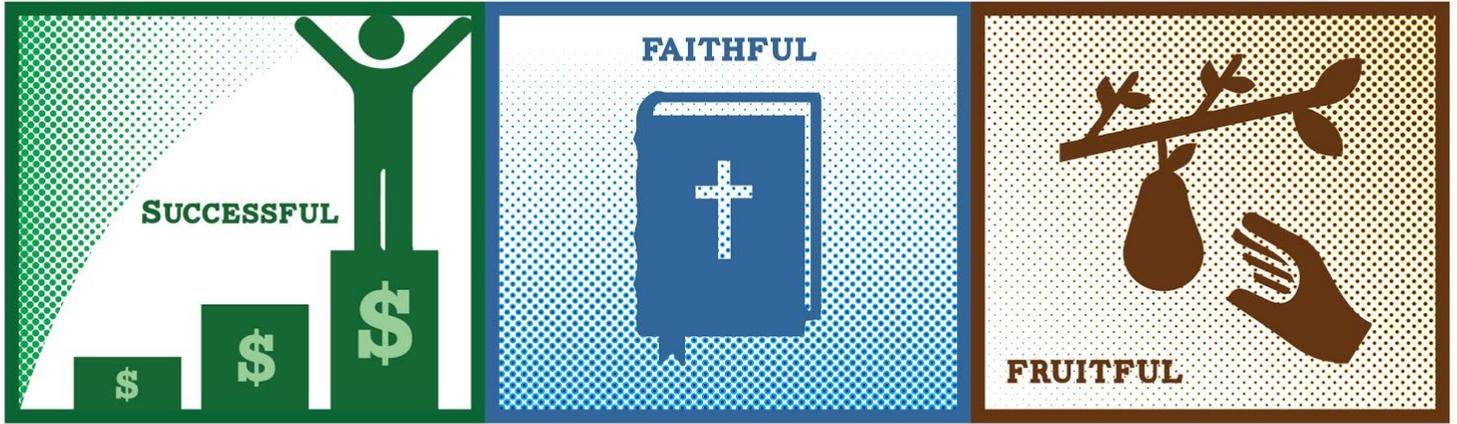


Categories of determining effectiveness of ministry according to Rev. Tim Keller, "Center Church."



Butts in seats - Money in the bank

Orthodox - Incompetent

Faithful - Skilled - Dependent

"As I read, reflected, and taught, I came to the conclusion that a more biblical theme for evaluation than either success or faithfulness is fruitfulness. Jesus, of course, told his disciples that they were to "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Paul spoke even more specifically. He spoke of conversions as "fruit" when he desired to preach the gospel in Rome "that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles" (Rom 1:13 KJV). Paul also spoke of the "fruit" of godly character that a minister can see growing in Christians under his care. This included the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22). Good deeds, such as mercy to the poor, are called "fruit" as well (Rom 15:28)

Paul spoke of the pastoral nurture of congregations as a form of gardening. He told the Corinthian Christians they were God's 'field' in which some ministers planted, some watered and some reaped (1 Cor 3:9). The gardening metaphor shows that . . . [g]ardeners must be faithful in their work, but they must also be skillful, or the garden will fail. Yet in the end, the degree of the success of the garden (or the ministry) is determined by factors beyond the control of the gardener. The level of fruitfulness varies due to 'soil conditions' (that is, some groups of people have a greater hardness of heart than others) and 'weather conditions' (that is, the work of God's sovereign Spirit) as well. Therefore, 'When fruitfulness is our criterion for evaluation, we are held accountable but not crushed by the expectation that a certain number of lives will be changed dramatically under our ministry.'" (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

I recently shared these categories from Tim Keller's book, *Center Church*, with our leadership team. From day one of Bridge City Community we have had to redefine measurements determining the effectiveness of our ministry. Time and again we've felt the pressure to "measure up." The result has always been an unhealthy and unfair contrast to ministries with differing values, methods, and demographics. In all honesty, there are some in our denomination that consider us a failure because we aren't "successful" according to ordinary metrics. We beg to differ, and I know you would as well.

Standing in a cold parking lot, I was recently speaking with someone from an organization attempting to make inroads into South Chattanooga. We've partnered with them in the past in an attempt to pursue eco-justice. I asked how things were going and he admitted they'd make almost no progress in their first year. "Nobody knows what to do with Alton Park. Everyone's afraid to come down here because it is such slow going to ." I smiled. I can see a wry smile sneaking onto your face as well.

We do not fear the challenging task of tilling hard soil, planting seeds (many of which will fail to reach the surface and glimpse the sun), watering when it feels like a drought, patiently expecting blossoms to bud and fruit to grow. Neither do you. You've proved that this year. Thank you. Let us continue to demonstrate our resolve to tending the soil of South Chattanooga.

A fruitful year because of your support!

You Sow Seeds that Bear Fruit

According to Scripture, hope isn't defined as 'wishful thinking' but *confident expectation*. When you plant a seed in the ground you exhibit a great amount of hope. Since you can no longer see the seed you must trust that it is growing. Of course you water and fertilize the soil. But, ultimately, you *hope* that the seed germinates and grows into a healthy, strong plant that bears fruit. The garden metaphor, regularly utilized in Scripture, is incredibly helpful. Not only does it demand a posture of faithful dependency but encourages development of skills necessary to toil, till, and reap most effectively our little patch of God's Harvest Field in South Chattanooga.

Your financial contributions enable all of this! You work under the radar and do things unseen that make a big impact. Here are a few examples from 2017 --

A Car for Kieva An email I received a few months ago began with the statement: "My wife and I would like to donate our gently used car for ministry. Does anyone have a use for it?" -- Yes, I shouted at my computer screen while quickly scrawling a reply. The same shout I heard in my mind that day was repeated only a month later, but this time through the speaker of my iPhone as I asked Kieva if she could use a new car - one without a monthly payment. Long story short, she couldn't believe that someone would be willing to give a car away, especially one as clean as this one. "Your call came right on time, I was just praying about my car before church this morning!" she said through tear filled eyes as we signed the title transfer paperwork.



Fagan Street Mattress Set After years of encouraging Calvin Donaldson (our partner elementary school) to reach out when a family hits a crisis, I finally received the call the Monday before Thanksgiving: "Pastor Josh, there was a fire in the bedroom of a student's home. They lost the mattress they sleep on and everything in the bedroom due to smoke damage. Is there any way you can help?" Just a few days before Thanksgiving I gave greater thanks. Because of your generous support we had money in the bank to purchase a brand new king mattress set for a family in need. From devastated to delivered!

Comfort at Christmas on the Corner Almost as soon as we began worship at our first ever Christmas on the Corner (2016) we had to pause and wait for the blaring sirens of an ambulance to pass. What we didn't know then, but soon found out, was that the ambulance was called to the home of one of our members, El Mondo. His mother died that night. A worst case scenario on Christmas Eve to say the least. Mondo is a young man in his twenties still tied to the streets. However, he's also a member at BCC and part of the family. Until Christmas Eve (2017) I had only seen him once - when I gave him a ride to the Chicken Slaughterhouse for work one afternoon. As soon as I opened my mouth for the invocation to Christmas on the Corner this year, my phone buzzed in my pocket. I glanced down and saw it was Mondo calling - on the one year anniversary of his mother's death. Mondo came to Christmas Eve worship that frigid night for comfort. He knew he could turn to BCC when his heart was flooded with suffering. Mondo received comfort on the eve of the arrival of the Savior of the Nations.