

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Planning for Sustained Church Health

## Episode 128

### *7 Phases of the Typical Church Lifecycle + How to Move Towards Health from Whatever Season You're In Today*

It's important to regularly check in on your church's movement in the typical life cycle so you can develop ministry plans that help you continue up the slope towards sustained health, or reverse the decline that has begun. In this last episode of our ministry planning series, we review the typical life cycle of a church, some characteristics of each phase, and how this knowledge can blow up assumptions and help you make ministry plans that actually lead towards ministry health.

### *7 Phases in the Life of a Typical Church*

- 1. Launch**  
Priority Focus: Reach new people.  
*Weekend services are key. Finances are tight.*
- 2. Momentum Growth**  
Priority Focus: Make space for new people—both physical space and ministry space.  
*There's an inviting culture: "Come and see."*
- 3. Strategic Growth**  
Priority Focus: Establish healthy strategy and systems.  
*Intentionally establish strategy, systems & structure to keep everyone aligned.*
- 4. Sustained Health**  
Priority Focus: Reproduce at all levels.  
*Replicate disciples through leadership development, groups, services, multisite, church planting.*
- 5. Maintenance**  
Priority Focus: Keep people happy.  
*The way we do church becomes more important than why we do church. Complexity reigns. Inward focus. Leaders control. Traditions are protected. Growth at a slower pace. Vision stales—but this can actually be the most financially healthy season.*

## 6. Preservation

Priority Focus: Keep people from leaving.

*Return to “good old days.” Unwillingness to change. Blame other churches for decline. Division takes root. People and money leaving. Culture becomes very bureaucratic.*

## 7. Life Support

Priority Focus: Reach new people with old methods.

*Bleeding both people and money. Remnant holding on. Endowments keep churches open. Key family-or key donor-driven.*

## Connecting the Life Cycle to Planning

- More than 14k churches have taken the free [Unstuck Church Assessment](#). Only 15% of churches landed on the left side of the life cycle or in sustained health, and 60% of churches self-identified in “Maintenance.”
- Sustained health is possible, but not easy. What does it look like? You keep a focused vision and strategy. You continually choose risk over comfort. You replicate and multiply.
- For planning to be effective, you need to understand your starting point. Learn where your church is today, but also equip yourself with an awareness of the key characteristics of other phases of the life cycle. You’ll be able to recognize movement more quickly.
- Pastors: It’s unlikely anyone else will give this kind of attention to the health of your church. That said, it does not have to be a solo journey. Invite key staff and/or lay leaders to join you as you assess where your church is today, discern where God wants you to go in the future, and then, with unity, determine the action steps toward sustained health.

## Next Steps

- Take the [Unstuck Church Assessment](#). It’s free, will take you about 15 minutes and it will help determine where your church is in its lifecycle today. More than 14,000 church leaders have gotten clarity on their church’s health with this tool to-date!
- Pick up a copy or several of [The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health by Tony Morgan](#) (HarperCollins Publishing, 2017). Read it with your leadership team. Get clarity on your next steps towards sustained health.

Listen to the episode on iTunes or at [theunstuckgroup.com/episode128](https://theunstuckgroup.com/episode128).