

Churchgoing: What next?

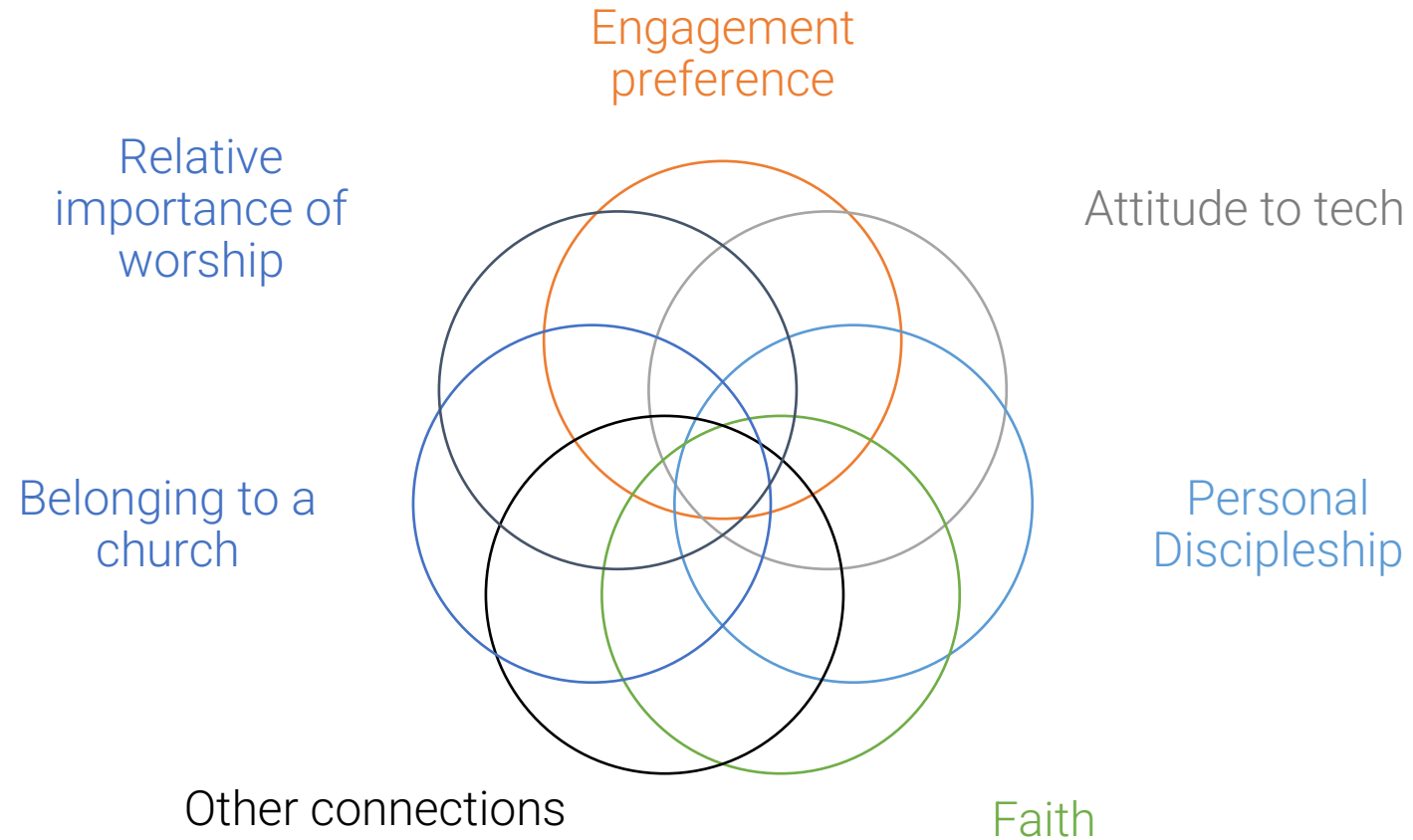
Webinar on findings from qualitative
research conducted 6th - 23rd May 2021

 **9 DOT**
research

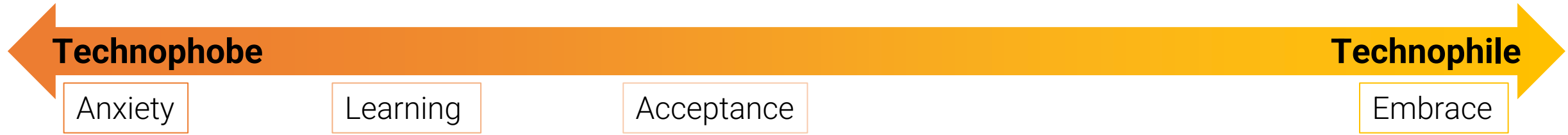


Benita Hewitt
September 2021

7 influential factors



Attitude to technology



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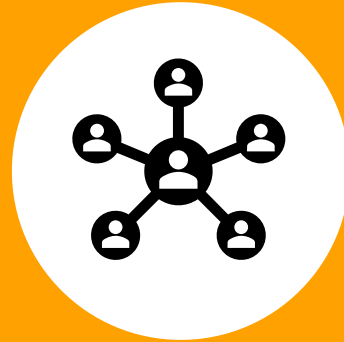
The church managed to produce a computer/tablet lending scheme, and every person in church was taught how to use them and access Zoom if they needed to. The computer lending scheme went well, as did the "learn to use your computer" sessions put on just before the lockdown. It has definitely enabled people to engage who otherwise wouldn't.

Engagement preference



Experiential

- Extrovert, singing, onsite worship, Eucharist, festivals, events, sensory prayer
- **Suffered most** – impossible to replicate online



Relational

- Female bias, relationships, community, small groups, praying together, outreach
- **Mixed** – good stories of deepening relationships



Intellectual

- Introvert, male bias, self-motivated, isolated, study, private prayer, digital savvy
- **Thrived** – time, isolation and online resources

How **relationships** have been built

- **Improved communications**

- Social media, particularly WhatsApp groups
- Newsletters
- Phone calls
- In person visits (sometimes at a distance)

- **Helped and supported each other**

- And working together to support the local community

- **Deeper relationships**

- Getting to know each other better – being online helped some to engage and become more open



Small groups



Teaching



Pastoral care



Creative outreach



Prayer



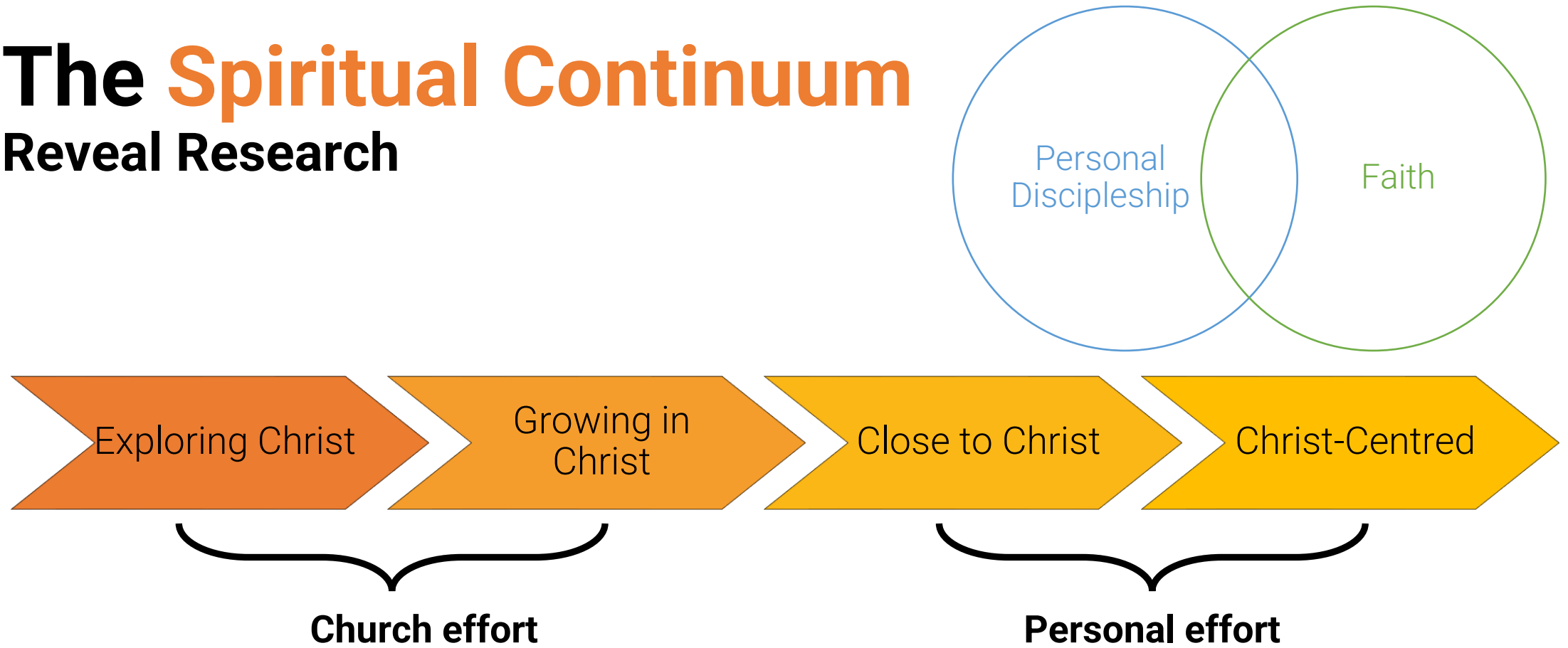
Christian networks & communities



Meetings

The Spiritual Continuum

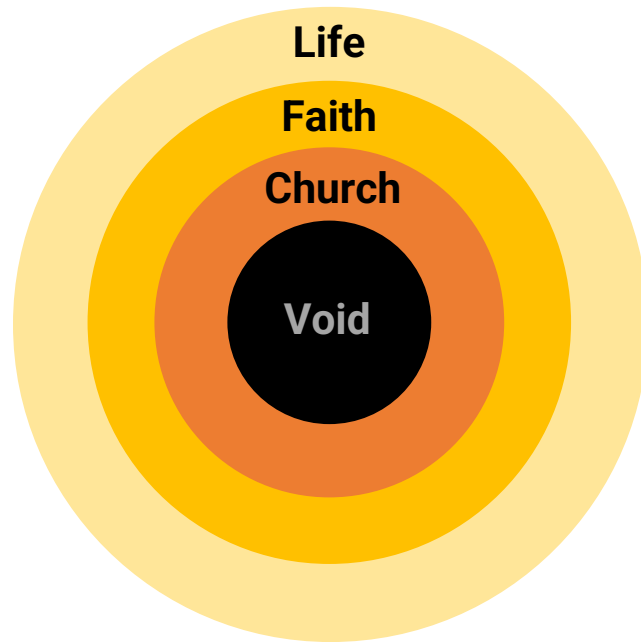
Reveal Research



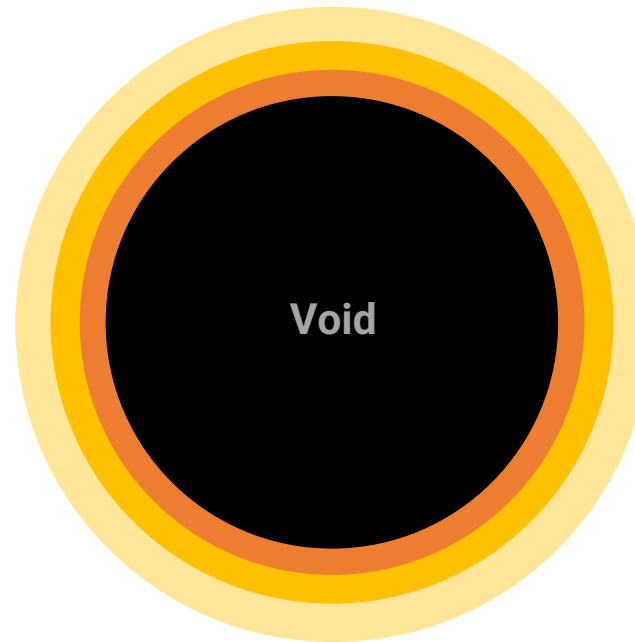
The pandemic provided a **catalyst for shift in emphasis** from church to personal

Those with a more **fragile faith** needed supporting more

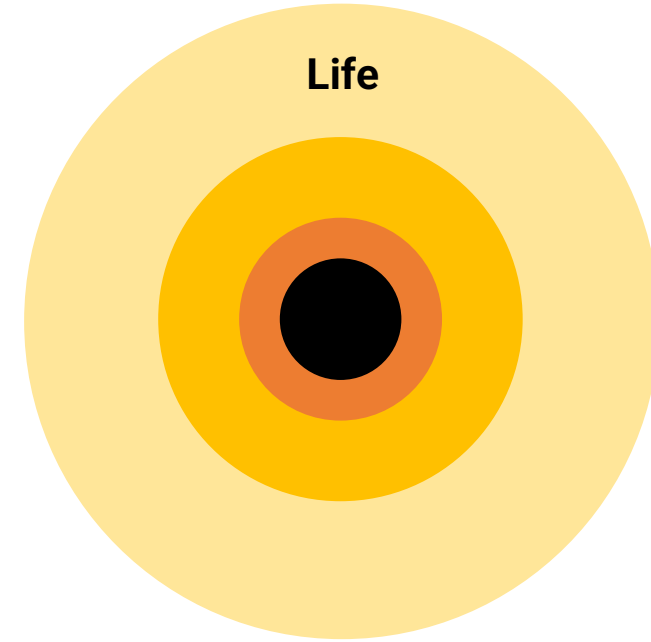
The potential impact of removing onsite worship



Example person 1



Example person 2



Example person 3

People have been exploring church online

Why?

- It's easy, more widely available and accessible than before
- Less is at stake: less involvement, more anonymity, less time invested

Motivation?

- Family/friends inviting or sharing links to services (as some respondents did)
- Searching for something in particular
- Curiosity
- Looking for new 'home' church
- To get a wider perspective
- To engage more often



Not just church services



**Courses
& training**



**Social
media**



**Online
communities**



**Prayer
groups**

“

I would say that I have consumed a lot more of church and different churches since it all went virtual. I use YouTube a lot so I like to have messages playing in the background at home and while I'm working.

Impact on faith: **positive**

For most, faith grew deeper/stronger/more authentic.

Factors:

- **More opportunity**
 - **Time** - to develop personally, less crowded by rest of life, time for reflection
 - **Resources** – online, wider input – services, online communities, online training
 - More **interaction**, easier to ask questions (online)
- **Motivation**
 - People felt the need to be more **self-reliant**, motivation from onsite worship was absent
 - **Covid impact**
- **Growth in fellowship/community**

Impact on faith: **negative**

For some, their faith was challenged.

Factors:

- Became less disciplined, less focussed
- Distanced from the support needed
- Not being able to serve others
- Depression or mental health issues



Rita's journey through the pandemic

“

I feel like I have come full circle. I have felt at times isolated from my church community. I fell back on more solitary spiritual practices, but fundamentally still believe that some form of community with other Christians is important. I feel more connected to the Church as a body that spans throughout history and throughout the world, and using prayers from communities and liturgies where our words are shared, even though not said together, has been helpful to me. I now feel a deeper appreciation for the individuals that I have in my church community than I did before.



Online church: **the positives**



More **accessible**

- For those who need it
- For those who want it



More **convenient**

- Time-shifting, no travel (saves time/cost)



Better for **learning**



Can be more **creative**



Can be more **interactive**



The **equality** of being behind the screen

Reasons to leave: pandemic related

- **Online church related**
 - Remote church led to a drifting away (not as engaging)
 - Technology related
 - Not being made welcome online
- **Not being together to worship**
 - This led to a questioning of faith
- **Feeling isolated and uncared for**
 - Some finding other online communities more attractive



I could not work the technology to take part in online meetings. The church did have a WhatsApp group, but only admin could post. I completely lost touch. I really needed pastoral care but could not get any.

- David

The church response

Worst response

Active rejection

No response

People left unnoticed (much easier due to covid)

... Or the church noticed but did not seem to care

Best response

Kept in touch, people showed they cared.

Helped people to feel loved/valued and helped to keep their faith alive.

Previous research has shown for **92%** of church leavers no one followed-up or asked why

Karen (35-44)

“ May last year my nephew died. He was 14 and took his own life in his bedroom one night I blamed God. I stopped going to church, but because it was all online, no one really noticed. I thought people would fight for me more actually. I thought there would be staged interventions and vicars visiting my home to talk to me. But everyone has just accepted my decision. Even my husband hasn't pushed me to pray or go to church or anything.

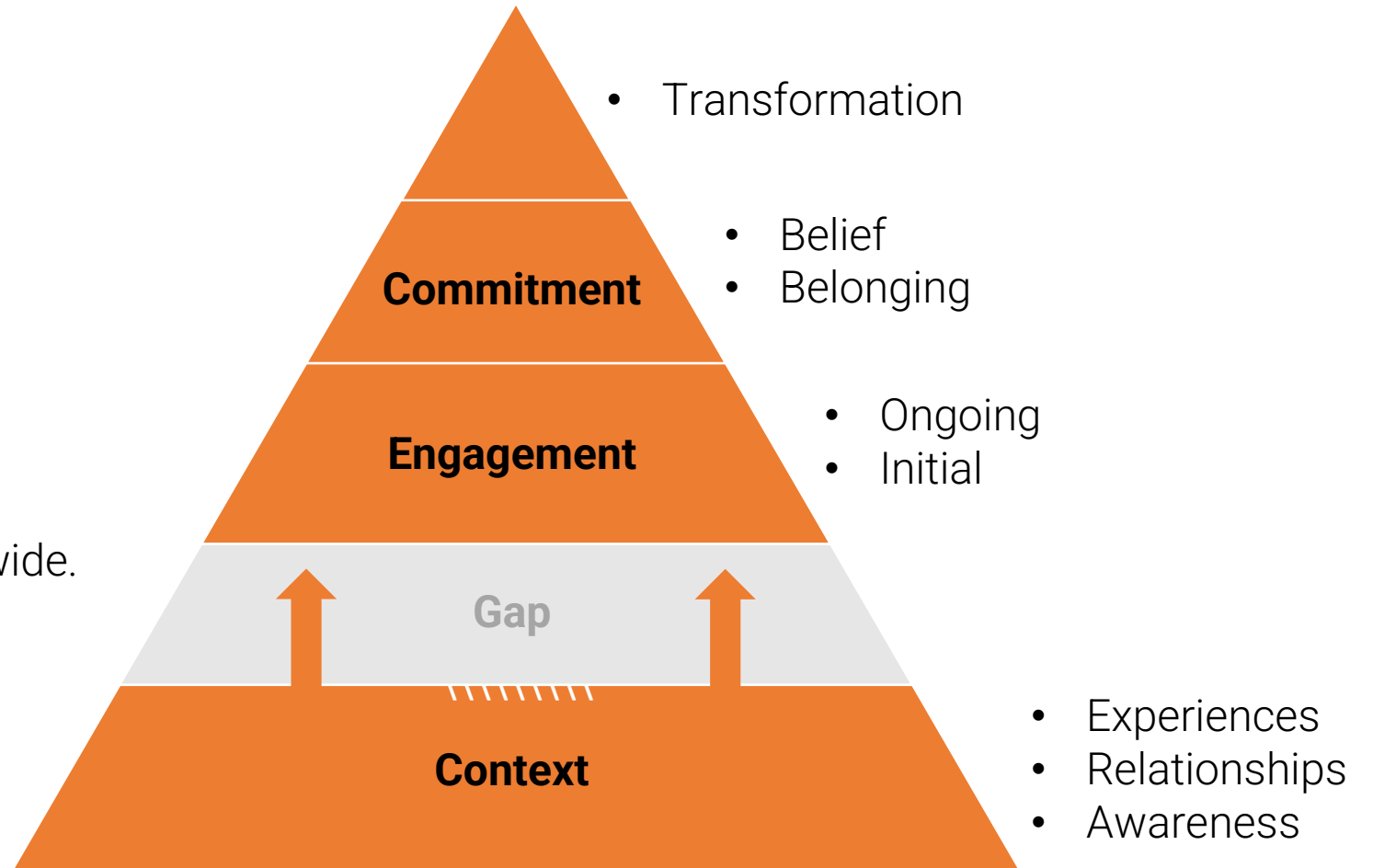
I think I've left my faith behind for good.

“ Don't go backwards. COVID-19 has been so very horrible, but find the positive, continue to embrace technology. I would encourage you to reach out to the members you've lost. I have walked away unnoticed by so many, when church returns, chase down those lost sheep. Many will still have gone, but even they will appreciate that you have bothered to care.



Church visitors: pre- and post-pandemic

Historically, this gap has always been very wide.
Recently, online church has made this gap much narrower.



Joiner: Daniel

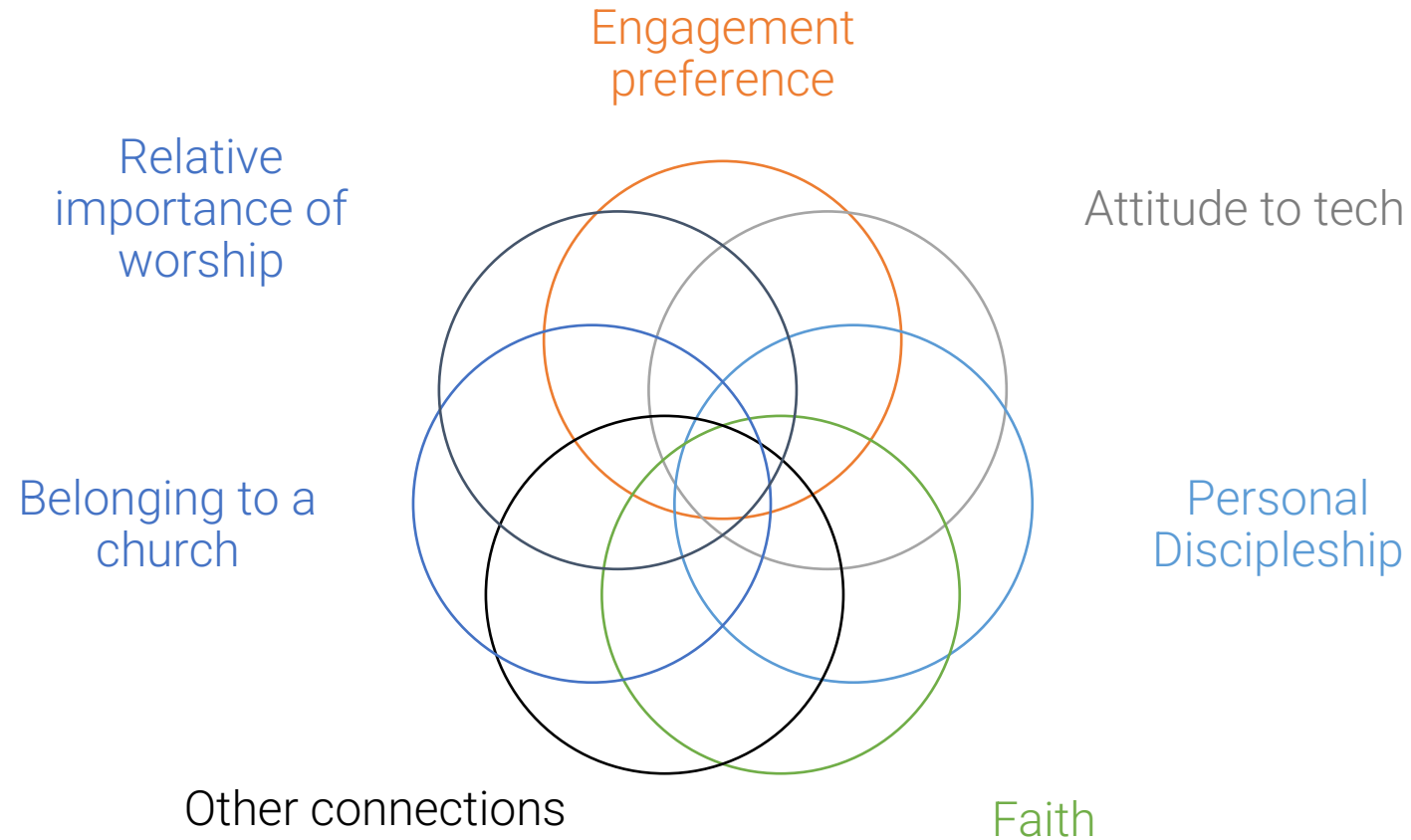
“ You might think the timing wasn't great as all of this happened in the middle of a pandemic but actually I think it helped me. It meant that much of my early learning was carried out online and because we physically couldn't go to church, it meant I wasn't thrust into the middle of all these people in church which would have been quite overwhelming for me. Instead, I could learn at my own pace and on my terms which I found really helped me, and over time I was able to meet other members through zoom and gradually face to face, and I've never felt so welcomed and loved at any other time in my life. Now of course we can go to church and it is wonderful to be able to meet people that I have been speaking to, and my faith continues to grow day by day.



There will be an increase of the 'fuzzy edge'



7 influential factors



What this means for churches now

- Encourage and support people to use **technology**
- Help people to deepen their **faith**
- Be active with all three styles of **engagement**
- Focus on depth and breadth of **relationships** with church
 - do not let on-site worship dominate exclusively
- Encourage other Christian **connections**
- **Follow up** those who have left or drifted away
- **Invite** people to visit online, make this a focus for **welcome**