

What Works in Church Growth? What Matters?

I have been pastoring in our city since 1982 and have seen many churches change their names. I have watched Baptist churches drop the Baptist name, and guess what? This change did not help the church grow. I have watched churches go with contemporary music and a "dressed down" atmosphere and once again, they have not grown.

I have seen many churches that began as Bible churches, Community churches, or other non-denominational churches, and these good people often have small congregations of 50-100 people. That is the national average (I have heard). Some Independent Baptists act as if their growth is dependent upon becoming more like a non-denominational church, but most non-denominational churches do not grow **large**. Most Baptist churches do not grow **large**.

Taking Baptist off your name is not usually going to change your church growth. I know men who have dropped their convictions and standards and made the complete change to a relaxed, contemporary atmosphere at their church. If you check the churches in your area, I am sure you will find that the results validate my statement: **"When you drop your standards you do not grow; you just become a 'compromiser.'"**

A church I know well (in another part of the nation) averages nearly 2,000 in attendance; that is an unusually large ministry. That church was built with strong beliefs, convictions, and separation from the world. But over time, that church slowly forgot they had any convictions about modest apparel. Guess what happened? Their church did not grow; they just compromised on their belief system and stayed at the preacher's leadership ability. They lost the folks with conviction and gained a few as well, but their convictions did not hinder their growth. Whether it be Jack Trieber or Jack Hyles with their convictions and the old-time Gospel or the other guys without any convictions, numerically large churches are usually miracles of godliness, leadership, and management. The convictions did not build the church; God and wisdom did!

Jack Trieber pastors in a West Coast city, a high-tech city where housing is very expensive. Jeff Fugate is in a southern "city" of 300,000 people. It is a college town and a horse racing capitol of the nation. Both pastors are building very

large churches with high standards and preaching the “old-time religion.” It can be done without compromise, but not by everyone. Can you do it? I do not know? Talk to God about it, but do not throw out God's clear instruction and your own training in hopes of building something bigger.

I pastor in a town of 15,000 people, a very rural community, and we average around 1,000 people. I have the most amazing people, I mean men and ladies who SHOULD have a better pastor and if they did, I believe our church could be running several thousand. But the issue is ME, not that I preach on modest apparel or contemporary music. The issue is that I am limited in my leadership abilities, my organizational skills, or something else.

Islam pushes incredible dress standards on women (and bombs on men), and they are growing all over the world. Do not blame the lack of your church growth on preaching about pants on women, hymn singing, or old-fashioned preaching.

It is simple; churches, for the most part, run 50-100 in attendance. Preach what you will. Most men are called to minister to a group of 50-100 precious people — to be their preacher, to teach, to comfort, to encourage, to help in their dark hours, to love the unlovely, and to win some souls. Some men, and I mean very unusual men, can build a church up to 300 people, but that is large for a man to lead. That is far above average! Most of the churches reaching America are 50-100 in attendance, regardless of what they preach.

Consider this: there are closed churches scattered all over California. Most once had 50-100 in attendance. They did not die because of standards, convictions, and hymn singing, and they will not be resurrected because of choruses, an electric guitar, and a casual atmosphere. These churches live or die on the love and godliness of the pastor. Whomever the pastor may be when they open again, they are likely to run 50-100 in attendance.

Spiritual bondage is also the issue. Ask some of the men who fought to build a church and hear about the satanic oppression they faced. Some churches will not be helped without extreme prayer and fasting to “bind the strong man” who is hindering the work of God. Try building a church in San Francisco, New Orleans, or many other places; the darkness can be felt! Some places have hard-hearted leaders in the church, who have been rooted in carnality through

pastor after pastor, and they will not let the church grow. The area does matter, whether it be wealth, demonic strongholds, or carnal members. For the most part, growth has little to do with standards or convictions. Church growth relies upon God, the preacher, and the location.

The young man who led me to Christ attended a church that averaged 50 people. He was taught to witness to his public school friends, and I was one of them. I know of several people who went into the ministry from that little church. Do we want to build a giant church, or are we willing to love people, see a few lives changed, and keep poking holes in the darkness around us? I, for one, owe a great debt to that church that never saw 100 in attendance.

Most churches in America will average 50-100 people. If you pastor such a church, praise God and serve those people, but do not think that by trashing all you once believed that you will suddenly reach multitudes. It simply does not happen that way.

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