

Church Growth

Any man in the ministry wants to see results. If he does not, there is something wrong with his vision or he is getting older, and his body simply can not keep up with things any more.

I have heard talk about "why churches are not growing." While no one has asked my opinion, I thought I might weigh in here where it is open to the world and not pointed toward any one person who might ask.

1. Position

Some men are not in the correct position. I know a man who was an effective youth pastor, doing an amazing job. He was well-known, blessed, and used of God. After many years, he simply wanted to pastor. The next decade was filled with frustration. He and I sat down and talked many times, but especially towards the end. He was simply out of his God-ordained role. He is now again a second man, doing an amazing job, his marriage is doing better than ever. Once he got over the male struggle of walking away from what he felt was surely his calling, he is succeeding and very happy.

My school principal is amazing! But I doubt that he could pastor. Of course, only God knows, but most people who know him would agree with me that he is right where he belongs and succeeding.

In the secular world, there are men who run the company and there are men who are wonderful employees, but the employees would not do well in the CEO position. We are not all made the same; God has a place and a plan for all of us. Most people who know me understand that I could not run our church books -- that is not my gift. Everyone agrees that keeping the records take a certain type of skills. We hate to think that we could not be the leader; that God did not give us what it takes to be a pastor. Hmm... that way of thinking seems to smell of pride. In Ephesians 4, we read that the Lord gave pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc. to the church -- they are all from God but all are different.

2. Contentment and Trust

Our commission is to preach, to win, to baptize, to teach, to send, and to do much more; but never (that I know of) is there a numerical standard set for success. Most of us measure success by what is being done around us. "Measuring themselves by themselves..." (2 Corinthians 10:12)

I say this often: Bible colleges are filled with students of whom 90% come from churches that never saw 100 people in attendance. If you ask the pastors you know, you will find that most of them came from smaller churches; it is a work of simple numbers -- small churches are more abundant.

One of our men pastored a church that never saw 100 people. That pastor reached a man who is now pastoring a church that I do not think ever reached 100 people, and he reached a man who is now doing an amazing job on the mission field. All of these men would like more people in their churches, but I

call their small churches a success. I do not know anyone who does not want more. "The eyes of man are in the ends of the earth."

To some extent, be content to know that some lives are being changed. Today, I was thinking of the first senior trip that I took with our kids (as I am on a trip with my high school seniors now). That first trip consisted of only three young people; two of those three are still in my church. That was a long time ago. Their lives have been changed for God and for good.

Be content with meeting needs, seeing a life changed, helping the hurting, and walking with God. If you are not careful, you will worry yourself out of the ministry and out of the will of God. Now if there are no lives being changed, perhaps you need to go back to number one above and check out your position.

Remember, there are many congregations across America that may be small, but they have one or two key people who will grow. The teen who led me to Christ was a member of a church that probably never saw 50 people in church. I am glad there was a pastor who was willing to preach to a small congregation. Brother Hyles used to say, "There are no small churches, only small men who pastor them."

Be content with one life that is touched, and trust God to guide and to use you.

3. Location - the city

Matthew 13:58 "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

There was a city that limited the work Jesus could do.

Paul faced cities where little was achieved; he simply passed through some cities, others, like Ephesus, saw great things accomplished.

I can assure you, starting a church in San Francisco would be harder than starting a church in Wildomar. Eskimos would be more difficult to reach than Filipinos. You might be in a difficult location, but tough it out while seeing small victories or move to a better place. Jesus and Paul moved often.

4. Location of the church in the right city

The meeting location can be a significant problem. I can tell you of churches that did well in the most adverse conditions, but I can also tell you of several more churches that succeeded in good locations. You may do OKAY meeting in a home, but probably not. Starting a church in a motel can be done, but it is so much more difficult. The right part of town and the right type of building make a difference. You might need to move.

5. Church Leaders

Some pastors are terribly hindered by men in places of leadership in the church. I refer to deacons or strong laymen whose position or opinion on certain matters is similar to that of a sailing a boat with the

anchor out in the water. In these situations, you might be able to get the men out of position, but most often not.

The prior points are common; many of these situations exist, and a frustrated man needlessly beats himself up when the trouble is not him. He does right, but other things are wrong.

6. Work

This final point is not common, but it is a reality. The ministry is work! Many a pastor wants to fellowship, attend conferences, hang out with friends, golf, talk over the ministry with peers, and socialize too much. The ministry is a lonely walk. God calls a man to walk with God and work a great deal.

Many a man struggles with sitting down to study for long periods of time, or they do not do well spending hours out visiting and reaching people. Others can not "give themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer." It is a great deal of work! Most men in the ministry are not lazy, but they are not self-starters; they need a boss to help guide their day. This leads us back to being in the wrong position (number 1 above).

This lesson is being typed at 4:00 AM while I am on a high school senior trip. Getting work done involves a great deal of effort, self-start, sleep-deprivation, and tedious tasks. I fear some churches are not growing simply because of a lack of elbow grease, and pastors are blaming it on the standards, the lack of music, or people who will not get on board and help.

Shepherds, it is our job to work, feed, and keep the flock.

In upcoming days, I will bring a part two of this lesson, but let me assure you, the men I know in the pulpits of America are great men, and to place my finger on this one or that one and say why that church has grown and the other has not is simply impossible. Do not doubt yourself! Walk with God and seek to be where He desires you to be. There is no shame in moving positions or changing location.

Micah 6:8 "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

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