

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## PASTORAL BASICS

### LESSON 7: CHURCH GROWTH

The Apostle Paul speaks of true church growth in a warning and an encouragement that he gave to the church in Ephesus. He speaks of the need to 'grow up in every way into Him who is the head' of the Church so that the Church body would grow and be built up in love (see Ephesians 4: 11-16).

How do you measure success? What determines a victory or an achievement in the health of your church? There are many ways to count growth, but only some of them are truly helpful.

Does simply having a lot of people in your church mean that you are successfully growing?

True growth ought to reflect the Spirit of Christ and a growing in godliness, both individually and corporately. As people grow in grace, the whole congregation more accurately reflects the glory of God.

Christians know the importance of evangelism and discipleship. They understand the Great Commission and the importance of welcoming newcomers into the existing church. There are Biblical parables of wedding feasts to which all are invited – even those from the highways and bi-ways. This is, of course, how we ought to also view our churches. The Church is not only for a select few. The Lord intends that all who will call on His name will come and join the family of God.

Does that mean that simply having a lot of people in your church means that you are successfully growing?

First, let's consider some of the ways that the numbers in your church might increase. Some churches have found that when they offer fun and exciting programs for families, people come.

Some have found that flashy preachers and controversial sermon topics bring lots of people in to their building.

Some have found that when they soften or weaken the message of the gospel then people feel comfortable enough to come.

Some have found that giveaways and gimmicks will increase attendance.

But are these healthy ways of growth? Is the sight of many people coming to get something interesting from the church a sign of appropriate and desirable growth?

Clearly, no. You can increase numbers in all the wrong ways. In fact, while we do want many people to walk into our churches and to hear the Word of God preached, simply having a large number when attendance is counted is really not enough.

True growth ought to reflect the Spirit of Christ and a growing in godliness, both individually and corporately. As people grow in grace, the whole congregation more accurately reflects the glory of God. Desirable growth is measured by looking primarily at personal and corporate holiness.

The Church is primarily meant to point people to Christ and to demonstrate the beautiful covenant relationship we have with Him. When we focus on our ability to do that as the measure of our success, we are truly growing, in the godly definition of the word.

Looking again at the passage in Ephesians 4, we notice that the Apostle Paul was warning churches from falling into the temptation to remain as children in our faith, and to be tossed and confused by all the worldly

ideas and philosophies that may seem intriguing to us, or inviting to newcomers. He warns us not to be deceived by these things, or to deceive newcomers with these things, but to, instead, speak the truth in love so that we all grow in godliness. Isn't this what we want for our churches and for our newcomers: to grow in godliness and to mature in Christ?

Of course we want a lot of people in our congregations. We want the church building to be overflowing! We want so many people coming that we need to offer multiple services every Sunday, or so many that we need to split in to many church plants across our cities! However, we must constantly monitor our motives for wanting those large numbers. We must want so many people to be in our buildings so that they can hear the true Word of Jesus Christ and to be ushered into a saving relationship with Him!

We need to pursue church growth, but not for number's sake. No: we pursue church growth so that the Kingdom of God grows in number; so that we fulfill the Great Commission; so that we can serve more broadly and more effectively; so that we can impact our communities for Christ! But we must never forget that while the numbers are increasing, each member's personal holiness must also be increasing in order for the growth to be truly valuable. Our love for Jesus must be increasing; our zeal for Christ's glory must be increasing! We must not see church growth as an opportunity for pride or as a source of boasting in the community.

It is easy to get caught up in the frenetic desire to add more people to our congregations, and there are many good reasons to pursue that goal. However, if you were given a choice between a very large congregation of weakly committed Christians, or a very small church full of whole-hearted, godly men and women who were continuing to grow in abounding grace, I do hope you would choose the latter. Growth can be measured in many ways: ensure that you are pursuing the most valuable kind of growth.

We must constantly monitor our motives for wanting those large numbers. We must want so many people to be in our buildings so that they can hear the true Word of Jesus Christ and to be ushered into a saving relationship with Him!

## IN REVIEW

- The Great Commission tells us to go and make disciples of all nations, and in so doing, we trust that the Lord will increase our numbers.
- Having a large attendance record in our congregation can be a good thing, but if the growth in godliness is absent, then the numbers are not a measure of true, desirable growth.
- We must not pursue 'numbers' at any cost: there is too much to lose in Biblical integrity if we do whatever it takes to get large numbers of people into our churches.
- Small and godly is always better than large and worldly when it comes to church growth.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- Consider your congregation. How do you measure the growth of that body? Are you looking at numbers, amount of staff, event attendance, conversions, baptisms, godliness? Pray and ask the Lord to correct any wrong motives you might have for pursuing growth in your church.
- In your personal life, is growing in godliness a priority? Seek the Lord, asking Him to help you be an example of growing in Christ that will inspire the congregation to also pursue Christ more whole-heartedly.
- Pray for newcomers. Pray for a heart of evangelism in your church. Pray for opportunities to grow your congregation in all the right ways. Trust your plans to the Lord and wait for Him to establish His good purposes among you.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at [www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing).