

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## PASTORAL BASICS

### LESSON 7: CHURCH GROWTH

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Pastoral Basics. This module will be helpful for untrained leaders who are serving as pastors, for churches who are looking for a pastor, and for those pursuing a pastoral role. It will outline the many duties a pastor may have in a local church, and what church members should expect from their pastor. Some specific challenges are also included, such as ministry to different age groups as well as considerations for church growth.

#### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who wish to encourage people in their Christian service, and identify spiritual gifts in those they are discipling.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# PASTORAL BASICS

## LESSON 7: CHURCH GROWTH

### PURPOSE

This lesson looks at church growth, which is actually Kingdom growth. It includes how to encourage it and how to face its challenges.

### LEADER'S NOTE

This lesson is in many ways a culmination of everything taught in course 2 of *Discipleship Essentials*. We have looked at the qualifications of a spiritual leader, and some practical topics for those in this position. Now we will deal with the fruit of spiritual leadership in the Church. There are many ways that fruitfulness can be measured, and we will consider three of them. The emphasis of church growth should always be *Kingdom Growth*, rather than dollars in the bank or members in the seats. As spiritual leaders, your participants have an opportunity to be Kingdom builders. Help them keep perspective in this lesson and encourage them to share their own ideas. Much of the content will only work in certain contexts. You may have to adapt this material to fit their churches and related needs.

## INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ When you were small, did you want to grow up to be like your parents? Were you anxious to become an adult?
- ❖ Do many visitors or new Christians come to your church every week? Explain why this is so. What changes has your church gone through in the last year? In the last five years? Are these positive changes in your opinion?
- ❖ Explain how you became a part of your church? Were you brought there when you first believed? Is it the only church you have attended? Or did you select this church for particular reasons?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH

- ❖ **What is Growth?** Businesses may use profits to determine their success, awards are given to athletes to acknowledge achievement, an army uses the number of soldiers and their skills and abilities to determine strength, a city may be applauded for its modern infrastructure and rich culture – but how do we measure the success of a church? We usually speak in terms of 'growth'. A church in the big city might be growing rapidly, and you may remember a time of growth for your own church in the past. How does a leader keep his church growing, and what does that growth look like?
  - **Fruitfulness:** the Gospel of Luke tells us that while Jesus was a boy, He grew in wisdom, stature and in favour with God and with man ([Luke 2:52](#)). He grew in multiple ways and ultimately lived a life that produced great fruit. The Bible tells us the ultimate goal for individual Christians, and therefore the Church as a whole, is fruitfulness. But fruitfulness can mean many things! Here are just a few examples:
    - **Multiplication:** Increasing in number is only one measure of fruitfulness ([Genesis 1:22](#), [Genesis 47:27](#), [Psalm 128:3](#), [Acts 6:7](#), [Acts 16:5](#)).
    - **Producing Good Things:** The work of our hands and lives produces desirable things ( [Philippians 1:22](#), [Psalm 1:3](#), [Psalm 128:2](#), [Romans 4:20](#)).
    - **Proven Godly Character:** How we behave is an expression of our character, and the Bible refers to it as fruit. God grows this fruit in us, and it identifies us as true disciples ([Matthew 3:8](#), [John 15:8](#), [Galatians 5:22-23](#), [Ephesians 5:9](#)).
    - **Kingdom Building:** More than just adding numbers and changing lives, God's Kingdom will produce spiritual fruit ([Matthew 21:43](#), [Matthew 13:23](#)).
  - **Result of Action:** Fruitfulness in the above passages is always the result of specific action. What specific actions will lead to this growth? In this lesson we will examine three ways in which the Church can grow, and offer practical advice to enhance this growth. These three areas are inward growth, outward growth and upward growth. All are aspects of discipleship, and should be worked on at the same time. All three are equal in importance.

### ASK:

*What would you say are some indications of a fruitful, growing church? How would you recognize one?*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **Inward Growth:** Numerical growth is not the only indicator of a healthy church. We might think of church growth only in terms of more people coming through the door, or not having enough chairs, or even needing to purchase a new building! However, just moving to a bigger location will not benefit an unhealthy church; it will only relocate its problems! New members are likely to be temporary if the church environment does not offer them spiritual nourishment. In short, painting a car when the engine has died will not make it run again!



- **Healthy Churches are Fruitful Churches:** If you want your church to be fruitful, you must look inside and determine its health. This can be seen in the leadership structure, and how character is modeled in relationships between members. The way that the body of Christ behaves towards one another will either attract or repel those who are outside. Respect for one another, and the ability to work together in peace and love are evidence of fruit.
  - Matthew 7:18
  - 2 Peter 1:5-8
  
- **Evaluating Inward Growth:** We look at the following markers of a church to determine whether it is growing inwardly or not.
  - **Are they developing leaders?** Have they had the same leaders in place for years, who are perhaps in maintenance mode only? Or are they apprenticing and discipling new leaders? Experienced leaders serving alongside new, younger leaders would indicate health and growth. There must be opportunities for those God has gifted to be trained and then serve, and they should do so with the right motives (Matthew 20:25-28).
  - **Are they using their spiritual gifts?** In a healthy church, every person should be serving in some capacity. If people merely sit through a service and don't participate in any other way, they are not functioning as part of the body. It is essential to identify gifts in others and give them opportunities to use them (1 Peter 4:10-11, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
  - **Do they show grace?** The way a church handles disagreements is one of the most revealing signs of its health. Is there arguing, slander, manipulation or revenge? These are signs of death, not life (Ephesians 4:31-5:2).
  - **Do they care for one another?** When a need arises, how does the church respond? Is it quick to share meals, comfort the mourning, give of their money and possessions, or serve one another? Do people feel known, encouraged, and prayed for? (Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 13:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
  - **Do they lead families well?** Is the church filled with healthy families? Are fathers and mothers taking on the responsibility God gave them with joy? Are older men and women mentoring the younger in parenthood and marriage? Do young people honour their parents and elders? Are families who are in crisis met with help and encouragement? (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
  - **Do they welcome outsiders?** When a newcomer walks through the doors of the church, they should not be met with suspicious glares, but with open arms! Do new people feel welcome? Do the church members provide them with helpful information about the church community? Do they help them find a place to fit in and belong, develop friendships, give opportunities to



learn and serve? Would an unbeliever find answers to their questions? (1 Corinthians 14:23, Colossians 4:5, Matthew 25:35)

- o **Do they express love?** Do the members of the church delight in meeting together? Is there much laughter and joy? Are people making authentic friendships, or merely tolerating one another? Love is the marker of a changed life, and a healthy, growing church (Psalm 16:3, 1 John 3:14, 1 Corinthians 13).
- **Practical Ways to Promote Church Health:** While no church body will be perfect, we can evaluate areas of weakness and seek to improve. A healthy, fruitful church can be developed by discipling members in their relationships with one another, and putting into place healthy church policies and practices.

**ASK:**

What are some practical ways a church could work on its inward growth?

**TEACH:**

Practical Ways to Promote Church Health	
<b>Adopt a culture of apprenticeship</b>	In order to develop leaders, every ministry leader should perpetually be training a replacement who could go on to minister in that church or in others. Allow apprentice pastors to preach. You may not grow if you do not have enough leaders. Sociologists say the number of people we can have in a friendship circle is no more than 150. If your church is larger than this, you need more leaders.
<b>Fellowship regularly</b>	Promote opportunities for your church family to be together in a social setting, perhaps sharing meals, or holding celebratory events. One large church worked on promoting new friendships within the church by holding a ‘Guess who is coming to dinner’ event. Families signed up to receive guests, or be guests themselves. The resulting dinner parties forged new relationships between families who had not met.
<b>Organize care</b>	Place someone in charge of each care ministry. Make meals for the elderly, sick, and new mothers; visit those who cannot come to church; offer food and clothing to those in need. Designate someone to coordinate this ministry of caring for others.
<b>Model Christ-like character</b>	Sermons should include teaching on the following topics: conflict resolution, Godly parenting, practical love, and other aspects of Christ-like character. Hold the congregation to a high standard of behaviour, and ensure that leadership models this behaviour for others to see.

- ❖ **Outward Growth:** Of course, when a church is only concerned with its own inward health and comforts, it becomes unhealthy and stops producing fruit!



- **Expanding Churches are Fruitful Churches:** Churches that concern themselves with evangelism and serving their community produce more fruit than those who wait and see if anyone joins them. We are not called to wait inside and make disciples, but to go out and find them! A fruitful, growing church will not neglect reaching out into their community. This also requires that the church have a vision to serve more people. Isaiah gave his people hope that God would make the barren fruitful, and the people should enlarge the place of their tent. While he was speaking metaphorically to their specific situation, we can apply this principle in our churches today. We can trust God to make us fruitful, lengthen our reach into our communities, and grasp a bigger vision for what God can do through us.
  - Matthew 28:19
  - Isaiah 54:1-2
  
- **Evaluating Outward Growth:** There are many signs of a healthy church that is reaching outward. They include the following:
  - **They are well thought of in the community:** What do people think of the Church? Do they see it as a place of fear and condemnation, or a place where people are loved? Is it hypocritical, or authentic? Do businesses or ministries want to work with them? Does their character witness to the power of God? (Colossians 4:5)
  - **They are baptizing new believers:** The best marker for success of evangelism is not how many people are now believers, but rather how many choose to be baptized. Decisions to follow Jesus are sometimes reversed when they understand the cost of discipleship, and some new people may simply come from other congregations. Baptisms typically indicate newly committed disciples, those who are serious about following Christ (Acts 2:38).
  - **Visitors return:** When newcomers return, they have found something they were looking for in a Church. This is a great sign! Most people make a decision about whether to return before the sermon even begins (Acts 9:31).
  - **They are sending missionaries:** A church is passionate about reaching the world for Jesus Christ when its people (young and old) are dedicating their lives to missions, and there are sufficient volunteers to fund and pray for them. Talking about missions is good, but sending out missionaries indicates a fruitful church (Matthew 9:37-38).
  - **Their attendance increases:** Increased attendance isn't the only marker of successful outward growth! It can be a good sign, but a church will only retain these new people if it is healthy to begin with. The goal should be new believers, not those coming to us from other churches, who might be running from problems or looking for a change (Acts 2:47).
  
- **Practical Ways to Promote Outward Growth:** There are many practical things we can do as a church to make those who come to a service or Gospel presentation feel welcome. We often forget what it feels like to be someone who is new to the Church! Outward growth is the concern of every member, not just the pastor or missionary; it



involves a whole church strategy – not just to increase numbers, but to increase disciples!

**ASK:**

What are some practical ways a church could work on its outward growth?

**TEACH:**

Practical Ways to Promote Outward Growth	
<b>Add more space</b>	When your building is 80% full, you should consider expanding. Many churches have increased their numbers by adding another venue (place to meet), or a second or third worship service on Sunday. Expanding may be as simple as setting out more chairs, or as complex as a building renovation.
<b>Make Sunday special</b>	Put a great effort into your Sunday worship experience. Plan the sermon carefully, rehearse it, and develop your preaching skills. Use your people's gifts in music, drama, and visual arts to create a worship service that is positive, relevant, full of truth, and honouring to God. A memorable, engaging worship service will help people connect with God and want to return to your church.
<b>Pretend you are an outsider</b>	Consider what it would be like to enter your church doors for the first time. Can you find the worship area? Washrooms? Children's programs? How do you know who to talk to, or where to go? Will anyone greet you or help you find a seat? How will you know what to expect in the worship service? Where can you go if you have questions? Consider placing a leader responsible for 'first impressions', greeting people, signage, and pamphlets that help newcomers find their way.
<b>Contact visitors</b>	Collect names and contact information from newcomers. Follow up with them during the week with a visit or phone call if appropriate. Find out how your church can help them spiritually. Remember them and welcome them when they return.
<b>Practically serve the community</b>	What are the needs of your community, and how has God equipped you to help? Jesus healed the sick, loved the lost and fed the hungry. We can surely offer meals! What vision has God given you? Do you want to build a school? A clinic? Help refugees? Offer language classes? How can you practically show the love of God to those who do not know Him yet?
<b>Hold new believer classes</b>	Create an easy way for new people to have questions answered and explore who Jesus is, or hold discipleship Bible studies for new believers. This helps them meet other newcomers who are at the same stage in their faith, and it makes it easier for them to be disciplined and fit into the church body. Consider advertising these classes, and even holding them in locations within the community.
<b>Partner with other organizations</b>	If another charity or ministry is producing good spiritual fruit in your community, you may choose to partner with them. This could help you make new contacts as you serve alongside others, but also demonstrate that you practise what you preach!
<b>Be intentional about evangelism</b>	Create opportunities for the Gospel to be presented, especially around special dates on the Church calendar. Print invitations to



	special Gospel-centered events, bring in music groups to give concerts and testimonies, distribute literature, show Christian movies, and create other opportunities to present the Gospel.
<b>Pray for a harvest</b>	Join your people in prayer, asking God for a great harvest. Suggest each member write down the names of 3 people they know who need salvation, and pray for them by name as a Church or in small groups. Offer opportunities for these people to be invited to outreach events or evangelistic presentations, and train your people in personal evangelism methods.

❖ **Upward Growth:** The inward and outward growth of a church is important, but unless individual people in the Church are becoming disciples and growing in their relationship with God, it is all form with no substance.

- **Discipling Churches are Fruitful Churches:** The purpose of meeting together is not to share great food and have a church calendar full of programs, but to impact the lives of people so they will turn from their sin and follow Jesus Christ. Upward growth requires solid preaching, sound teaching, and a reverence for the Word of God. The evidence is changed lives through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Evaluating Upward Growth:** There are many evidences of upward growth. Some of them will be less visible, because only God knows people's hearts.
  - **Increased Knowledge of God's Word:** We grow in our knowledge of God's Word by listening to pastors' sermons, by studying it on our own, by seeking God's guidance through it, and by memorizing verses and quoting them to one another (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
  - **Increased Devotion to Prayer:** When your people are devoted to prayer, it indicates that they are growing in their relationship with God. Seeing God work in their lives through prayer encourages them to trust Him more. When the first response to a problem in your church is to pray, they are growing upward (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17).
  - **Increased Humility, Patience, Servant Hearts and Love:** Simply having knowledge of God is not the same as spiritual maturity. Jesus said we would know true disciples by their fruit, which is changed (improved) character. Anger, hostility, and pride are totally inappropriate for Christians (James 4:10, Matthew 7:16, John 13:35, Ephesians 4:31).
  - **Increased Faith:** Trusting in God in difficult circumstances and acting in faith rather than doubt and fear, are markers of spiritual maturity. When the people of the Church are fearful, they need to be encouraged to pray for faith (Hebrews 11:6, Isaiah 41:10).
  - **Increased Compassion for the Lost:** A deep concern and love for those who have not yet received the Gospel is evidence of spiritual maturity. Christians will pray fervently for their salvation, and they'll make evangelism a priority as they give their money and time (Acts 1:8, Isaiah 6:8, Luke 19:10).



- ❖ **Practical Ways to Promote Spiritual Growth:** Promoting spiritual growth among the members of your church is simply encouraging discipleship. When people come to your church, they are looking for God. If they don’t see evidence of spiritual growth in the members, they may not stay long. Numbers are not as important to God as true disciples, so a focus on real spiritual growth is essential. Ask: What are some practical ways a church could work on its upward growth?

**TEACH:**

Practical Ways to Promote Spiritual Growth	
<b>Match Mentors</b>	Encourage mentor-disciple relationships within your church. Look for a leader who can administrate matching potential mentors with those in search of one. The biggest barrier to mentor relationships is finding one another. The second challenge is knowing what to teach. Use material such as <i>Discipleship Essentials</i> for this purpose.
<b>Preach the Word</b>	Preach the Word on Sunday meetings, but also hold Bible studies, classes on doctrine, and especially classes which help people engage with their Bibles on their own time outside of Church. Teaching people how to know, love and learn from God’s Word will lead to growth.
<b>Everyone Serves</b>	Serving produces more spiritual fruit than fellowship, so create opportunities for people to serve alongside one another. Teach about spiritual gifts, help individuals identify them, and make opportunities for people to serve one another and their community. It is in serving that we learn Christ-like character in practical ways.
<b>Worship Celebrations</b>	Consider scheduling special gatherings where worship, praise and celebration happen. Recognize what God has done among you and for you, and praise Him for it. Let those with musical gifts prepare special concerts, or write a song for your congregation that expresses all God is doing among you, etc. Spiritual maturity can be joyful, passionate and vibrant!
<b>Small Groups</b>	Encourage all people of your church to be part of a small group that studies the Bible, serves together, and disciples one another. Train those leaders to teach the Word and model spiritual disciplines. Strive for authenticity in this small group ministry.

- ❖ **Conclusion:** We all long to please God with our lives. We should want Him to be pleased with our church also! There are times when a church is immature, but that is a time when the need for growth can be most noticeable. Our growth as Christians is an excellent example of the power of God to change lives! Let our churches do the same. If we are not a fruitful church, God may allow us to enter a time of pruning ([John 15:2](#)). If this is where you are right now, God may have things for you to learn before you are ready for more growth. God is working in all of us and in His Church to be the vehicle through which the Gospel is made known to the whole world. If your church is growing, be encouraged to grow more and more. If you lack growth, pray and do not settle for less than a vibrant, energetic community of God’s people!



## DISCUSSION

- ❖ Consider your church over the last few years. What can you point to as indicators of inward, outward and upward growth?
- ❖ Is it possible to have a church that is growing rapidly in numbers, but is not a spiritually fruitful church? Why must our definition of fruitfulness go beyond increase of membership?
- ❖ What is one thing your church could do in order to grow more as a result of this lesson?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that Jesus would bless His Bride, the Church, with a revival, a renewed passion for the work of the Gospel, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Pray that the Church would experience inward, outward and upward growth, and honour God in all things. Pray that your participants would love the Church, and eagerly desire her to be whole and holy. Pray that your church and every church member would "... grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).*