

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study 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.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



PASTORAL BASICS

LESSON 7: CHURCH GROWTH

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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 a spiritual leader, you are a Kingdom builder, and your goals and successes are defined by Jesus' directives. Consider the many ways that a church can grow (as outlined in this lesson), and prayerfully consider what God would have you do to help rather than hinder the growth of your local church!

GETTING STARTED

1. When you were small, did you want to grow up to be like your parents? Were you anxious to become an adult?

2. 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?



STUDY

❖ **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. Read the verses below, and note the type of fruitfulness it references:

Verses	Type of Fruitfulness
Genesis 1:22, Acts 6:7	
Philippians 1:22, Psalm 1:3	
Mathew 3:8, Galatians :22-23	
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.
- What would you say are some indications of a fruitful, growing church? How would you recognize one?



❖ **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.

What does [Matthew 7:18](#) say about how we can experience good spiritual health?

What are some 'good fruit' that a spiritually healthy church would produce?

What does [2 Peter 1:5-8](#) say we must pursue in order to keep ourselves from being unfruitful? How can churches encourage these things?

- **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).

- o **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).
 - o **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)
 - o **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)
 - o **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 (Psalms 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. Think about ways that a church could be more intentional about their inward growth. What is one way your church could change in order to focus on the inward growth of members?



❖ **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.

Read [Isaiah 54:1-2](#). The prophet Isaiah is giving hope to his people, and promising them that the barren would again be fruitful. What specific instruction did he give the people? How would this demonstrate faith in God’s promise to them?

- 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 by welcoming growth.
- **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](#)).

How is your church thought of in your community? How could this perception be improved?

- **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 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](#)).



- o **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).
- o **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).

- o Which of these markers of outward growth are true of your church?

- o 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?

- o What are the needs in your community, and how has God equipped your church to help? How would reaching lost, hungry or impoverished people in your community impact the message your church preaches?

❖ **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.

Read Romans 5:1-5. What has been given to us, by whom, and what is the end result?



- **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).
 - It is not easy to assess another person’s upward growth, but there will always be some markers. How have you grown ‘upward’ in the last year?
 - What is one thing you can do to help those you are discipling find a place to serve and grow in their faith?

❖ **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!

❖ **SUMMARY**

- There are many markers of success for business and education, but a fruitful church is evidence of a successful church.
- Churches that are growing inward will develop new leaders, use spiritual gifts, show grace to one another, show love and care to their own people as well as outsiders.
- Churches that are growing outwardly will be well thought of in the community, will be baptizing new believers, will have visitors return, will send out missionaries and will grow numerically.
- Churches that are growing upwardly will display an increased knowledge of God’s Word, devotion to prayer, humility, patience, faith, love, and an increased compassion for the lost.
- Churches should aspire to grow inward, outward and upward.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. 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?

2. As a result of this lesson, make a list of ways you can pray for growth in your church. Who can you share these ideas with? Who can you meet to pray with?