

Growing Strong Churches

By Bill Scheidler

(Teacher's Notes)

I. Introduction

A. Every pastor desires growth and influence

This is the way that God has made them because it is consistent with His purpose for them.

1. Genesis 1:26-28 - "Be fruitful and multiply... Fill up and subdue..."
2. II Peter 3:9 - "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come the knowledge of the truth."
3. Hebrews 2:10 - "God desires to bring "many sons to glory."
4. God continually uses terminology that would indicate that He is interested in the masses. Ultimately those gathered around the throne will be a numberless mass of humanity.

B. Growth is a natural part of life.

It is one of the signs that something is alive. Churches that are alive are growing churches. As in the natural realm (a garden), so it is in the spiritual realm (the Church).

1. There are things can contribute to growth. These things we want to do. In the natural realm this includes: sowing good seed, watering, fertilizing, proper pruning, etc.
2. There are things can hinder growth. These things we want to avoid.

If there is no growth, something is wrong (e.g. a baby who doesn't grow or gain weight). When a baby is starting out you weigh it every day.

C. Growth is manifest in two major forms.

1. **Multiplication (or quantitative growth).** This is the growth in numbers. It is the most common growth desired by pastors. At times they will compromise convictions to see it happen. It is the one used most as a means of comparison. Words associated with this: size, numbers, and evangelism.
2. **Edification (or qualitative growth).** I Corinthians 14:12 states that we are to seek to excel in the edifying of the church. Words associated with this: maturity, strength, depth, discipleship.

3. One form of growth is not to be preferred over the other. We all want our children to grow in size, but we also want them to grow in maturity. One without the other is abnormal and problematic.
 - a. If you focus on multiplication it is easy to compromise to get more numbers and you end up with a crowd, but not a mighty army of God. There is a low level of commitment and no ability to fulfill the burden of the Lord. It is often said of such a church that “they are a mile wide and an inch deep.”
 - b. If you focus on edification/maturity it is easy to become inward, we can become withdrawn and loose touch with the task of reaching out in evangelism. A spiritual pride in personal perfection or doctrinal exactness can occur that says, “We’re not many in number, but we’re mighty.”
4. The New Testament church emphasized both in Acts 9:31.

Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

- a. 3,000 were added to the church – the gathering of materials
- b. These all continued steadfast – the fitly framing together (Acts 2:42).

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

D. Growth is not a simple matter.

In the church as in natural life growth is not a 1-2-3 process. Some seminars on growth tend to oversimplify the situation (in the natural there is an emphasis on a miracle food such as vitamin E or C). There are no easy formulas and no automatic progressions.

Eat right, get plenty of rest and drink lots of water usually works, but sometimes you do all of this and there is still a problem.

There are six reasons why there are no simple answers:

1. Because all individuals and churches are different.

- a. Different make up
- b. Different heritage
- c. Different purpose and vision
- d. Different dealings of God

- e. Different stages of development (children don't always grow at the same rate)
- f. Different cultures (There are cultures where you can die for your faith)

2. Because all ministers do not have the same capabilities.

There are rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (Ex. 18:25).

And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

God increases us as our capacities increase. If we are not doing well with a hundred he may not give us a thousand. God does want all of us to increase in capacity. God won't trust more into our hands until we do a good job with what we have.

3. Because all geographical areas are not the same.

Paul and the apostles had different results in different places. In this case you had the same preacher with the same message experiencing different results.

- a. Lystra and Athens were tough areas.
- b. Corinth responded well numerically, but maturity was a problem.
- c. Antioch and Samaria responded very quickly.

4. Because all growth depends upon the moving of God's Spirit.

- a. What is God doing and how is He moving (Samaria, Antioch)?
- b. God is still sovereign and rules in the affairs of man (Ps. 107:31-38).

Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! 32 Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, and praise Him in the company of the elders. 33 He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; 34 A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it. 35 He turns a wilderness into pools of water, and dry land into watersprings. 36 There He makes the hungry dwell, that they may establish a city for a dwelling place, 37 And sow fields and plant vineyards, that they may yield a fruitful harvest. 38 He also blesses them, and they multiply greatly; and He does not let their cattle decrease.

- c. We may sow and water, but God gives the increase (I Cor. 3:5-7).

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God

gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

d. “God sets the solitary into families...” (Ps. 68:6).

5. Because there are many aspects of truth.

In the human diet protein is good, but too much will kill you. Truth must be balanced to produce the proper effect. You need lots of different vitamins, minerals and nutrients to sustain life. A single message church may bring crowds, but it will probably not bring a balanced maturity to the believers. The tendency will be to cycle people through. Any good message can become an imbalance including healing, deliverance, worship, tongues, prosperity, faith, etc.

6. Because some simply work harder than others.

a. “He who gathers by labor will increase” (Pro. 13:11). Also “The diligent soul shall be made fat.”

b. There is no substitute for hard work.

II. Keys to Sustained Church Growth (we are building for the long term, visualize an oak tree as opposed to a mushroom)

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

A. Determine that they will not hold traditions of men above the word of God (Mt. 15:6).

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

By our traditions we can make the word of God of no effect. We can have no “sacred cows”. We must be willing to constantly evaluate everything. It is still producing life. Instead of “beating a dead horse” perhaps it is time to “dismount”.

1. There are good traditions that are based on the Word of God (II Th. 2:15; 3:6; Luke 4:16).

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. II Thessalonians 2:15

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. II Thessalonians 3:6

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. Luke 4:16

2. There are bad traditions that destroy the effect of God's word (Mt. 15:6; Col. 2:8).

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

- a. Seven last words: "We never did it that way before."
- b. Traditions are bad if:
 - i. They are dead, finished, fulfilled, only man made. The brazen serpent was once present truth, but it later became a dead tradition and a source of idolatry (Num. 21:8-9; II Kings 18:4).

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. Numbers 21:8-9

He [Hezekiah] removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. II Kings 18:4

- ii. They try to supersede or contest the word of God.
- iii. The white dress on communion Sunday

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

B. Determine that they will be responsive to the present dealings and operations of God.

This means staying open to change (change inspired by the Spirit and in harmony with the Word of God).

1. Most denominations are the result of closing the door to further light.
2. We must never get the idea that we have arrived and need nothing more (Rev. 3:17). This is what the Laodicean church felt. They cooled off and ceased to grow.

Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"-- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--

3. We must never get so rigid that we feel we have no need of adjustments or enlargements.
4. It is the wineskin that refuses to stretch that will be rent by the new wine. Certainly all new wine must be based on clear Scripture, but we must be open to what God is saying.
5. Some churches are not growing because they are locked in a time capsule. If we are going to continue to grow we need to be able to keep up with the times.

III. "If I become a Christian, do I have to look like them?"

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

C. Determine that they will accept the pattern of the Word of God as their pattern (Heb. 8:5b)

See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

1. God only promises to bless and fill that which is made according to His pattern (Mark 16:20). It is Christ's church. He planned it; He designed it; He purchased it; He owns it and He wants to live in it.
2. God's truth is applicable to all nations in every age.
3. We need to rightly relate to the pattern if we want biblical results. Are you practicing the things you see in the Bible—in worship, in structure, in discipleship, in giving, etc.
4. Do you believe what you believe because the Word says it or because it causes no problems? Principles of truth are sometimes costly to those who preach them.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

D. Determine never to accommodate Bible truth to please men.

1. Don't water down the requirements for salvation (Acts 2:38-40). Repentance, Water Baptism, Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Separation and a lifestyle of holiness. We need to have confidence in God's word.
2. Don't hesitate to preach the lordship of Christ.
3. Don't hide the cross (Mt. 19:21-22). Sometimes you also get the feeling that Jesus was trying to chase people away.

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

4. Don't be ashamed of the God-ordained forms of worship (e.g. the noise of the Tabernacle). ("If you people wouldn't make so much noise when you worship, people would feel more comfortable in the services.")

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

E. Realize that the gathering together of the saints is for the strengthening of the sheep (Heb. 12:25).

1. Don't feel you have to aim your services primarily at the unbelievers. Magnify the Lord and build up the church. People will still get saved in that context.
2. The church should be involved in the teaching and establishing of the believers (Mt. 28:19-20). Equipping the saints for the work of ministry.
3. When you produce healthy sheep, they will bring forth the lambs (Gen. 1:11).
4. Most of the services of the church should be believer oriented or the lambs will stay lambs (seeker-sensitive vs. people sensitive).

You cannot fulfill the admonitions of the Scripture regarding the corporate gatherings if you are overly concerned about offending the lost. We do, however, need to be people sensitive in terms of making it easy for them to relate to us (Friendliness, Signage, Language, Ministry).

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

F. Minister to the various growth levels of the believers ("meat in due season") (Mt. 24:45).

1. The babes need milk, grounding in the first principles and foundational teaching.
2. The young children need to be built up and given responsibilities.
3. The young men need meat (Heb. 5:12-14).

Children's ministry, Youth ministry

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

G. Put a high priority on bringing order to the families of the assembly.

1. The home is the basic unit of society. When the home fails, society fails.
2. God wants to restore the home at the same time that he brings restoration to the church (Jer. 31:1).
3. The church is no stronger than its homes. When God restores the home, He gets the church.

Family Teaching, Marriage Teaching, Men's & Women's Ministry. These should not just be events, but should include practical principles of living.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

H. Train leadership in all areas of church function (II Tim. 2:2).

1. Teach faithful leaders who will be able to lead others. Structure for growth.
2. The pastor must first take the lead (I Pet. 5:2). Sheep want to be led.
3. Train Sunday school teachers, ushers, and custodians initially that they may be able to train in the future.

Leadership training experiences.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

I. Give expression to the various ministries and gifts of its membership (Acts 6:1, 7).

The result of putting deacons in to share the load was increase.

1. We are to be a nation of priests unto God (I Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:5-6; Ex. 19:5-6).
2. We are all placed in the Body with a function (I Cor. 12:7; Rom. 12:4-6).
3. We will not find fulfillment unless we are operating in that place.
4. We will not be contributing our part to the edification of the whole (Eph. 4:16).

If someone in the congregation can do something that you are doing, they should be doing it. 20/80 principle

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

J. Realize the importance of team ministry (Eph 4:11; Acts 11:30; 14:22-23; 15:4, 22; 16:4; 20:28; 21:17-18; I Pet. 5:1-3; Heb. 13:17).

1. It takes more than one ministry to perfect the church. The five ministries were given for the “building up of the Body of Christ. The church will grow with our ability to take care of the sheep.
2. It provides checks and balances.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

K. Be ready to exercise discipline in the church (Mt. 18:16-20; I Cor. 5).

1. God is a God of order and discipline. This should be reflected in His house.
2. Deal with problems when they arise. Don’t just ignore them hoping they will go away.
3. Provide the banks for the river of God to flow in.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

L. Practice sacrificial giving and faithful tithing (Pro. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:10; Deut. 16:17; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 8:3-4, 12).

God promises increase when we honor Him in financial ways. Even in poor countries.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

M. Maintain a first love relationship to the Lord. (Rev. 2:4)

What makes a church spiritually alive? Not activities or programs but –

1. Maintaining the presence of the Lord.
2. Maintaining the joy of the Lord.
3. Maintaining the truth of praise and worship (Ps. 67:5-6).

May the nations praise you, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise you. Then the earth will yield its harvests, and God, our God, will richly bless us.

We cannot allow these things to become another form.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

N. Involve itself in a corporate prayer life (Is. 62:1).

For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns.

1. The prayer room is the powerhouse of the church. The church is to be the house of prayer for all nations.
2. Prayer precedes every visitation by God (Luke 2:37; Acts 1:14; 10:30). That which brings revival, maintains revival.
3. Prayer changes things.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

O. Determine to live what is preached.

We are in trouble if we think that understanding truth is the same thing as experiencing truth (Eph. 3:17-19, Gk word for know = experiential knowledge). Just hearing the truth is not experiencing it (Ps. 18:44).

As soon as they hear of me they obey me; the foreigners submit to me.

You can use all the spiritual jargon and yet have nothing. Obedience leads to blessing (Deut. 6:3).

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

P. Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Unity is the key to visitation and growth.

1. Unity was the atmosphere in the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:1).
2. Unity was the essence of the prayer of Jesus (John 17:21-22).
3. Unity will be a tremendous witness to the world where there is division and strife (Ps. 133; John 17:21-22).
4. Unity is an atmosphere that God has promised to bless (Ps. 133; Mt. 18:19 amplified).
5. Unity must be worked for and kept by effort for it has many enemies. Seven things which destroy harmony include:

- a. Scandal (Pro. 17:9)
- b. Backbiting (Rom. 1:30; Ps. 15:1-3)
- c. Slander (Pro. 10:18; Num. 14:36)
- d. Whispering (I Cor. 12:20; Rom. 1:29; Pro. 16:28)
- e. Gossip (Ps. 41:6)
- f. Discord (Pro. 6:16-19)
- g. Talebearing (Lev. 19:16; Pro. 20:19; 29:20)

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

Q. Open and maintain lines of fellowship with other bodies (Acts 2:42).

1. Recognize the need for other members of the Body. You don't have it all.
2. Do not become a loner
3. Open your platform to other brethren.
4. Do not separate yourself and make belonging to a group a sectarian thing (e.g. "We are part of THE group"). Realize that the church is bigger than us.
5. Continue to come together in minister's meetings. Relating in love to people is not a blanket approval of their doctrine or lifestyle.

A church that expects to grow (quality and quantity) and prosper must:

R. Involve itself in evangelistic outreaches.

1. Every church of Jesus Christ has a responsibility for missions.
2. There is that which scatters and yet increases (Pro. 11:24-25).

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.

3. Church planting and world outreach.

Closing Prayer: Psalm 115:12-15

The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great. May the LORD give you increase more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed by the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.