
Overcoming Church Growth Barriers

Mention the phrase “church growth” and you’ll hear a variety of opinions.

On one hand, you’ll find people who promise seven simple steps to explode growth now or organizations that will reveal the secret to growth for three easy payments of \$97.

And on the other hand, there are writers who use words like abomination and say the church growth movement usurps the Holy Spirit.

These are two very different opinions from two very different camps:
The spiritualists and the pragmatists.

Spiritualists are quick to point out the words “church growth” do not appear in the Bible. They remind us that because the church belongs to Jesus, church growth is something only God can do. Jesus said, “I will build my church.”

The focus is on discipleship, prayer and following Jesus while leaving the results up to God. Spiritualists don’t want any part tactics taken from the business world or tactics that push God into the margins.

Pragmatists, on the other hand, love to talk about church growth plans and strategies. They remind us that while church growth is up to God, He uses people and systems and technology to accomplish His purposes.

The focus is on leadership, engaging culture and executing at a high level, while asking God to bless everything.

So what is the right approach?

A Biblical Metaphor for Church Growth

Here's what Jesus said in Mark 4:26-29:

“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus used a farming analogy to explain how the kingdom of God grows.

Once the farmer plants the seed, it grows by itself. The farmer isn't in control of that process, and doesn't even fully understand it. The farmer is involved, but the farmer is not in control.

Growth happens naturally, but only after the farmer did the hard work of preparing the soil.

And that's how church growth works.

It's a combination of the blessings of God and the stewardship of man. God-given results somehow teamed with human endeavors. A combination of divine intervention and human leadership.

Paul makes a similar statement in 1 Corinthians 3:6. He says he planted churches, Apollos came along and watered the seed, but it was God who gave the increase.

Spiritualists focus on how God gives the increase. Pragmatists point out that Paul planted and Apollos watered.

Yes, church growth was all up to God. But two humans both played a part in the process.

So the pragmatists are right.

And so are the spiritualists.

Church growth is up to God because the church belongs to Him. But he chooses to use us in the process, giving us the opportunity to be great stewards.