
Three Core Elements of a Growing Church

Church growth comes down to one word. It's a word that is easy to overuse but one that has to drive everything we do. That word is:

Gospel.

Church growth isn't about attendance or giving – it's about the gospel, the good news that even though we are dead in our sins, Christ died for us and reconciled us to God. The gospel is the message of hope that everyone needs to hear and experience.

And this is why we love serving pastors. You get to spend your time sharing the gospel. You don't just have to...you GET TO. It's a divine privilege. So many people in your town need to hear the Gospel, and your church gets to share it when they do. So many marriages in your church need to be restored by the gospel, and you get to model that.

This is why you don't need new tactics. You need a carefully executed strategy.

We've worked with hundreds of churches. Many of them are growing churches reaching lots of new people. Others are stuck, having been the same size for years.

Working with so many different churches, we have noticed three core elements of growing churches and want to share them with you today.

These are the things we've seen growing churches get right.

#1 Growing Churches Communicate Purpose AND Mission

Chances are, you've heard these two words before. And certainly, a church growth guy talking about purpose and mission isn't a new thing.

Hang with me because this is really important.

Growing churches are really clear about purpose and mission, and those are two very different terms.

Your purpose is the deep reason you exist.

It comes from God and it's eternal. It will never change. It has nothing to do with where your church is located or what kind of ministries you have. It's true now and it will be true 25 years from now.

One of my favorite leadership books is Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why*. He says every organization (and I'd definitely include churches) needs to clarify the WHY...the real reason they exist. He says it's more important to get clear about the WHY than it is to clarify the WHAT.

Before you talk about ministries and programs and strategies, you've got to have a clear WHY. You've got to have a solid PURPOSE.

Now your church may say this in a creative way, but I would bet all the money in my pockets that your church's purpose is pretty similar to the great commission or the great commandment. When we started the church in Atlanta, we had a sense of purpose but we hadn't taken the time to clarify it in a memorable sentence. We didn't really talk about it on a regular basis, because the purpose was understood. But a mentor challenged me to put in the hard work so we did.

We clarified our purpose statement and began talking about it all the time. We said our purpose like this: “We’re here to lead people from where they are to where God wants them to be.”

We said that in our welcome. I wrote it on our giver thank you notes. I made it my email signature. After a year or so, I would start to say it and our church people would say it back. That’s when we were just starting to get it.

Today, my family and I are involved with North Point Community Church where Andy Stanley is the pastor. The purpose of North Point is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. That’s a short, compact purpose statement and I hear it all the time.

But here’s the thing about purpose. It’s never really accomplished. You can’t check the box and move on to something else. It’s not like I was going to come to the church office one Monday and say, “Listen up everyone....we’ve led all the people from where they are to where God wants them to be...that’s done...what’s next?” It was never going to be mission accomplished.

That’s why purpose isn’t always the best motivator of people. Because it’s so long-term that it’s tough for people to grasp. Purpose is really important, but it’s really generic. That’s why growing churches communicate a second thing. I’m talking about mission.

Your mission is what you’re trying to do now.

Your mission isn’t about WHY...it’s about NOW. It’s about what’s next. It’s all about “here’s what our church is doing in this next season and here’s what it’s going to look like.”

NASA – explore space, land on the moon or Mars.

Christ’s Church of the Valley – impact 100k Phoenix area residents.

Now some people use the word mission where I use purpose. And some people use the word vision instead of mission. And some people will tell you mission, vision, and purpose are three different things. But we're all about keeping it simple and practical for you, so even if you adopt different terms, you need to communicate two things.

- One never-changing, never-accomplished, deep sense of why (we call this purpose)
- And one time-sensitive, going to check it off the box, here's what it looks like rally cry (we call that mission)

Growing churches have a deep sense of God-given purpose. And they have a clear vision of what the next few years looks like.

#2 Growing Churches do 1 or 2 things Well

When I was neck-deep in the church plant, one of the church leadership books I read was Church Unique by Will Mancini. I still recommend it to pastors all the time, mostly because of this one concept.

Will describes something he calls “the kingdom concept.” It's a unique combination of three things. First, you've got your local predicament. He says you have to look hard at the real needs of your community. Not what other churches are doing and not what's popular online, but in your own backyard. What are the unique needs and opportunities where God has placed you? That's part one.

Part two he calls your collective potential. When you look at your church, your location, your facilities, your history, and your people, what are their unique resources and capabilities God has brought together? In other words, who are you really?

The third circle he calls the apostolic spirit. What particular focus and energy gets you and the leadership excited? This is your personal and collective calling. What do you feel like God has put you here to do?

Right in the center...where those three circles meet is your kingdom concept. That's where you should focus your time, energy, and resources.

I was talking with a pastor friend here in Atlanta and I asked him what his church did better than all the others in the area. He answered quickly: Serve the down and out. That's what we do and that's who we are.

People who come to our church who share this value find a home and a mission and a purpose. If you aren't into those things, you're probably not going to stick. Doesn't mean you're a bad person, but it means we're not a good fit.

My pastor friend was describing his Kingdom concept.

As we've coached hundreds of pastors, we've seen this to be true with growing churches. They don't have it all together. They might not run like the well-oiled machine you think they are. They don't do everything great.

But they do one or two things really well. They don't dabble...they focus. In some cases, they intentionally choose to do some things poorly, or even not at all, so they can put the focus on what they do best.

I hope this takes some of the weight off your shoulders. You personally don't have to be great at everything. And your church doesn't have to be great at everything.

There's something in your church that deserves an UNFAIR amount of people and resources. See, fairness will get you into trouble. Dividing up the pie so every program and ministry gets the same amount of energy is a huge mistake.

It's like trying to spread a little bit of peanut butter and trying to cover a slice of bread. You don't have that much peanut butter in the first place and you try to

make it go a long way. That program gets a little bit of money. This ministry gets a few volunteers. You're spreading out resources trying to be fair and trying to keep everyone happy.

But it doesn't work.

When you look at the things God is likely to use to grow your church, that's where you need to focus your resources. You need to put an unreasonable amount of energy into your kingdom concept.

Pouring money and people into things just because other churches are doing it isn't the right way to grow your church. It's the way to be stressed. And broke.

What ministry in your church needs an unreasonable amount of resources? Maybe you're like my pastor friend and want to stake your claim on serving the community. Maybe you're in a young family area and need to invest heavily into children's ministry. When you figure out your kingdom concept, don't try to fit it in...double down on it.

#3 Embrace the Tension Between Church Health and Church Growth

There's this tension between church health and church growth. And we believe it's a tension that should never really go away.

Some say it's all about church growth.

"We'll do anything short of sin to reach people."

These statements sound great, but they are dangerously close to hype. If you're all about growth, you'll use a bozo tactic to get people to your church. Like preaching Song of Solomon from a king size bed. Nobody wants to see that.

There's just something off about a church that is solely focused on growth. It's like they are missing something.

And then there's the church health crowd. The people who says we have nothing to do with growth, we just need to preach the gospel and live faithful and leave it up to God. It's all about health. There's some truth here, but if you fully embrace this side, then you minimize things like the great commission or sharing your faith or inviting people to church.

If you fully resolve it one way or another...toward church health or church growth...you're probably going to resolve it in error.

Now, we love helping churches grow. Whether it's creating a solid outreach plan, following up with guests, planning services, or building a team.

But there's only so much we can do as pastors and humans.

Church growth is a God thing. And church growth doesn't depend on you. That's also a good thing.

Church growth doesn't depend on you. But you're involved.

Paul writes about this to Christians living in Colossi in his first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, he says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

That's the tension in a sentence. God is ultimately in charge of church growth, but he chose to use Paul to plant the seed and Apollos to water it.

The same is true in your church. God is ultimately the one who will make your church grow. But He wants to use you and involve you in his church and his redemptive plan for your community. God certainly doesn't need us, but he **CHOOSES** to use us.

That's why we want to be the best stewards of leadership and influence that we can be. That's why we want to learn how to lead, plan, organize, preach, hire and manage the church well.

How To Grow Your Church

Feel like your church should be growing, but it's not? From someone who used to be a pastor and church planter, I know it can be frustrating.

Ultimately, church growth is up to God. But are we doing everything we can to ensure our church is healthy? How do we overcome the barriers we feel are in front of us?

We know you care deeply about leading a healthy growing church because it means leading more people to Jesus. As a result we created a free guide to breaking barriers that will bring clarity and help begin to alleviate your frustrations.

Get your FREE copy of the Senior Pastor's Guide to Breaking Barriers today.

[Download the guide](#)