

Sermon: Elements of Church Growth 101

Text: Acts 14:19-28 ESV

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November 3, 2019

Introduction: After having been driven out of Lystra, Paul went to Derbe about 30 miles to the southeast. He made many disciples there. Paul returned to the area of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch even under possible renewed threat of death **SO THAT HE COULD ENCOURAGE THE NEW CHRISTIANS HE HAD HELPED TO ESTABLISH IN THE FAITH.**

Acts 14:19-28 (ESV) 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

Almost every minister's dream is to have a growing vital church, and a church that is making a difference in the community-at-large and reflecting who Jesus is!

Illus. (Talk about Mt. Pleasant Christian Church briefly and the churches that were a result.) One was Christ's Church in nearby Winterville, NC. Christ's Church began in January 2000. They began with 80 people who were meeting at a Boy's and Girl's Club. In Feb. of 2003, they moved into their first facility. They have completed Phase II of that facility. The attendance has grown from that original 80 to nearly 300 today. They currently have six staff. There are six elders and nine deacons in the leadership mix. One elder there now is Mike Dawson who I mentored, encouraged, and even would let him beat me in racquetball, occasionally.

Here at Weston, many of *you* have sacrificed, maybe a great deal, but it is worth it. We are in better shape fiscally than we have been for a couple of years, but there is still much to do and limited resources will inhibit our growth. It will take everyone committed to our vision and goals.

So what is the secret? Why do we remain flat in our attendance growth annually while other churches may grow at explosive, phenomenal rates?

I am convinced that the Bible will always offer practical answers to all our questions. What are some of the keys to Church growth and what is the bottom line . what is it going to cost? What will it take to see positive change here in Weston? I believe:

I. There Are Some Important Keys to Church Growth.

A. Preach the Good News . [verse 21](#)

[Acts 14:21 \(ESV\)](#) ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

Define: Good News needs to be shared to help people be saved.

Too many times, people believe what they hear (last). Sometimes it is the most dynamic presentation that gets the attention of the world. The print, visual media, and social media present their ideas of what is RIGHT.

Friends, we need to stop just defending our position and stop attacking others. Let's just let the Bible speak! - BUT, we must give it a voice!

B. Strengthen Disciples . [verse 22a](#)

[Acts 14:22](#) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. *i.e., this is not going to be an easy task.*

There needs to be training in the Scriptures and in ministry. The minister or elders can try to do everything, but if they are wise they will train others to help in ministry. We learned from [Acts 13](#) that the NT Church when missionaries were sent - they sent their best people. It also appears that the church did not collapse for lack of leadership in their absence. There were others who were trained.

Small groups like what we are offering can help grow our church if there is a good level of participation and support.

Praying for each other will strengthen us all.

C. Encourage Church Members to Remain True . [verse 22a](#)

There are those who have fallen away for all kinds of reasons. Would you encourage those people to remain true to God and His Church as you have opportunity?

We have to remain true to the Bible. It is the foundation for our faith (epistemology). To remain true to the Bible, you must KNOW IT. Please get involved in a Bible study.

There are some of you who think you know enough about the Bible already. If that is true, I encourage you to volunteer to START TEACHING A BIBLE STUDY, or get plugged into a ministry.

II. There Is a Cost to Church Growth.

A. We must go “[through many tribulations before we enter the Kingdom of God](#). - [v.22](#)

No cross - no crown. As Christians, we bear the cross daily and follow our Savior wherever that may lead us.

TAKE YOUR WALK SERIOUSLY WITH CHRIST and you will lose friends. At the same time, you will also gain a Friend who will never fail.

TAKE YOUR WALK SERIOUSLY, and you may lose a promotion, but through it all you will gain a crown and prize worth far more.

TAKE YOUR WALK SERIOUSLY, and the world will persecute you, but remember you have a Savior who was persecuted also. He will help you through. What was it that brought Paul and Barnabas back to an area where people had tried to kill at least Paul? They took their walk seriously. They knew God would not fail!

I Peter 4:12-19 (ESV) 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory[a] and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”[b]

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Footnotes:

[a] 1 Peter 4:14 Some manuscripts insert and of power

[b] 1 Peter 4:18 Greek where will the ungodly and sinner appear?

B. Strong Leadership is needed (elders) - [verse 23](#)

Acts 14:23 (ESV) 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Leaders need to encourage Christians to use their giftedness.

Leaders need to be involved and lead by example.

There is a reason that many 1st century elders were paid. There can be a huge commitment in being an elder. If you are in leadership, you need to:

C. Stay a long time . [verse 28](#)

Acts 14:28 (ESV) 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

Any successful growth in the Church will happen due to a long-term commitment. I will stay here as long as I believe the congregation wants to grow and fulfill the mission of the church.

III. Things Not To Do If We Want to See Growth

(Successful Churches: What They Have in Common by George Barna)

Successful Churches Do Not:

A. Limit God

Stagnant and declining churches “assume the role of God’s protector,” trying to keep Him from failing.

Growing churches tend to believe and practice that God can do anything. Many of them believe they have been called to particular ministries and that God will bless their efforts.

The HOW of ministry will always be supplied by the Holy Spirit. The WHY is also from God. **YOU SHOULD NEVER:**

B. Beat a Dead Horse

When the horse is dead dismount. If we keep doing the things we always have, we will continue to get virtually the same results.

Two Moose Hunters’ Joke: There was a bush-pilot who dropped Bob and Ted, two moose hunters, at a remote lake in Northern Ontario.

He tells them that he’ll be back in a week, and warns them that his plane won’t be able to take off with more than one moose.

The next week he returns, and sure enough, the hunters have bagged two moose.

The pilot tells them there’s no way they can take off with the two moose.

Ted says, “I don’t know, the pilot last year took off with two moose.”

To which Bob adds, “Yeah, but maybe he wasn’t a total coward!”

Not wanting to be outdone, the pilot loads up everything and they start to move down the lake.

The plane is gathering speed, but the pines on the shore are rapidly approaching.

Finally, the plane gets airborne, but one wing clips the top of a tree.

The plane spins, crashes into the trees, and breaks apart.

Sometime later Ted regains consciousness and begins searching for his buddy.

**He finds him, and when he wakes him up, Bob asks,
“Do you have any idea where we are?”**

Ted replies, “I think about 200 yards further than last year.”

It is OK to fail at a program or ministry. When that becomes sinful is when we promote and perpetuate an ineffective ministry. No one else would back a loser. Neither should the church.

Successful Churches Do Not:

C. Humiliate Visitors

There is a huge difference between being friendly and being suffocating.

D. Become Insulated from the Community

We must be sensitive to those around us. The Church may very well be planted in a hostile environment, if not a seductive environment, but we must not default in our responsibilities. We must be salt and light for them.

Wouldn't it be better if the world saw Christ's hand feeding its hungry rather than an agency of the government?

E. Alienate Themselves from Those Who Are Different

Those who hold to different ideas and views ought not to be silenced. We can learn from diversity (and gain perspective from dialog). The church of Jerusalem was concerned about the balance of Jews and Gentiles in the whole Christian Fellowship. -see F.F. Bruce, p. 281

It is sad indeed when churches are growing at the expense of losing long-time members, or capturing disgruntled members from other churches. Established members sometimes, somehow view new people and change as a threat and leave. God never wants that. It takes a small church at least a year to recover from unexpected growth IF AT ALL.

Successful Churches Do Not:

F. Engage in Cold-Call Evangelism (like Mormons and JW's)

It is better to do response or targeted evangelism or create events and programs that will attract the general public. Do not close the door before it can be opened.

G. Apologize for Seeking Help

Some people would never ask for help. We must, however, communicate needs and goals clearly so that EVERYONE knows where we are going. Strong leadership will always do that.

H. Avoid Confrontation

The Church cannot tolerate sinful or inappropriate behavior. We are to be a model for the world. When there is immorality, when there is gossip, when there is lack of commitment, the elders MUST ACT!

I. Hire Staff Based on Precedent

We have not had a Youth Minister for four years+. That is a something we must change for us to be more effective. Staff must be added on the basis of need. I hope you will be praying about that daily.

J. Take the Safe Route

We do not need to be reckless, but we do need to stretch our faith and come up with new solutions that have been influenced by God's Holy Spirit. STATUS QUO is not what we need or want here. Growing churches are innovative and creative in their approach to the unsaved. They take measured risks to be effective. Let's be pioneers in methods which will attract those who need to hear the gospel.

CONCLUSION: I want to suggest that we schedule all of our Board and take a Friday night and Saturday in January and pray together and establish a clear vision for our congregation. I want to further suggest that we as a congregation gather in early February for prayer and discussion how we can follow the vision set by the Elders and leadership of Weston Church of Christ.

Parachute Illus. If you are a paratrooper, it is understood, you have to use your parachute sometime. You have to trust the person who packed it. We will never be what God wants us to be until we put our faith in Him and use our parachute.

Don't walk around and never use your parachute. And you must realize it will not work unless you jump.

“All living things in God's creation are characterized by their ability to bear fruit. Inherent to the nature of this fruit — be it an apple, a chestnut, or even a baby — is the preservation of the species. Where there is no fruit, life is condemned to death.”
Natural Church Development, p.76

“Both in the literal and in the figurative sense, all of nature is designed to bear fruit. Where no fruit appears, something is wrong.”
Natural Church Development, p.77

Churches are dying at nearly 8000 per year. Let's change our trajectory and follow God's leading into our 125th year and beyond. Let's build this congregation to God's glory.