

# Five Ways To Stay Small

God wants a congregation to grow because it is winning the lost to Christ and helping them to reach others. Most churches start small. The problem is that some stay small. The even bigger problem is that sometimes that smallness is due to distorted thinking (although often well intentioned). What does that thinking look and sound like, and how might it be overcome?

1. Blame it on God. "If God wants our congregation to grow, it will grow." What an easy way out. Now the blame shifts from us to Him. If one thinks this through, the folly will be clear. For example, does that mean that churches that are growing are the result of God playing favorites? Where is such thinking found in scripture? It isn't. If a congregation is small because few people live within driving distance from the building, that is understandable. But otherwise, God wants a congregation to grow. The answer: Look inward, not upward. Ask the question, "Why is our congregation not growing?" Human instruments may be standing in the way. Those human instruments may be elders who have not trained their people in evangelism. A congregation that specializes more in fighting than fellowship may make the congregation everything but inviting to non-Christians.
2. Seeing the neighbor but not the neighborhood. "If one person comes to Christ this year, it's worth it. God may have us here for just one person He wants to bring to Himself." No one could or would question the value of one's soul, but God's love does not stop with one; it extends to everyone. The answer: Vision. Specialize in contacts and let God specialize in conversions. Teach Christ to everyone within driving distance of the congregation. As the seed is sown, God in His time will bring forth fruit. The issue is not the worth of a soul who lives within the community; it is the worth of every soul who lives within the community.
3. Have a church that is spiritually attractive, but physically repulsive. Forgive my frankness, but some churches look like the building needs to be redeemed, not just the people. God may look at the heart, but man looks at the outward appearance. I said to a pastor, "Let's drive by your church as non-Christians." The answer: Drive past your church building as a non-Christian. Would it beckon me in or scare me away? It is amazing what a little paint, a flower bed, a cleanup crew, and a little remodeling might do.
4. Changing preachers every few years. Anything solid is built on consistent long-term stability. Starting over in any organization every few years is

seldom productive. Adjustment and readjusting takes its toll. Try doing 5- or 10-year planning when the leadership may change every 2 or 3 years. The answer: Go for long-term stability -- ones who come to stay and develop a reputation that enhances the congregation. That way the community not only becomes part of him, he becomes part of the community. Since he has developed a spirit of trust about him, people respond with an attitude "Preach on, and we will follow". Since they have seen him weather good and bad times, they know he will be there even during the roadblocks. Ask a person you hire, "Is this a stopping point or staying point?" The staying point may not be 20 years but it ought not to be two years either.

5. No prayer, no planning. Planning without prayer does not work nor does prayer without planning. An unbeatable combination is when God does His part and we do ours. Some churches stay small though because they do not always ask God to do His part and neither do they do theirs. The answer: Pray as you plan and plan as you pray. For the sake of the lost, ask God to help the congregation to grow. Pray that He will help you see the essentiality of evangelism. "As we grow there may be a lot of people we do not know" is not honoring the Lord. It is more important for others to know Him than for others to know you. Then plan: Decide how many are you going to contact with the gospel, over the next week, month, and year.

God is not hung up on numbers nor should we be. But God is concerned for the lost and a congregation that teaches the lost grows by conversion, not by members moving from congregation to congregation. The church grows when God and His people are working together (1 Corinthians 3:6). More people mean more workers, more funds, and more talents -- all of which increase the influence of a congregation in the community.

Adapted From R. Larry Moyer