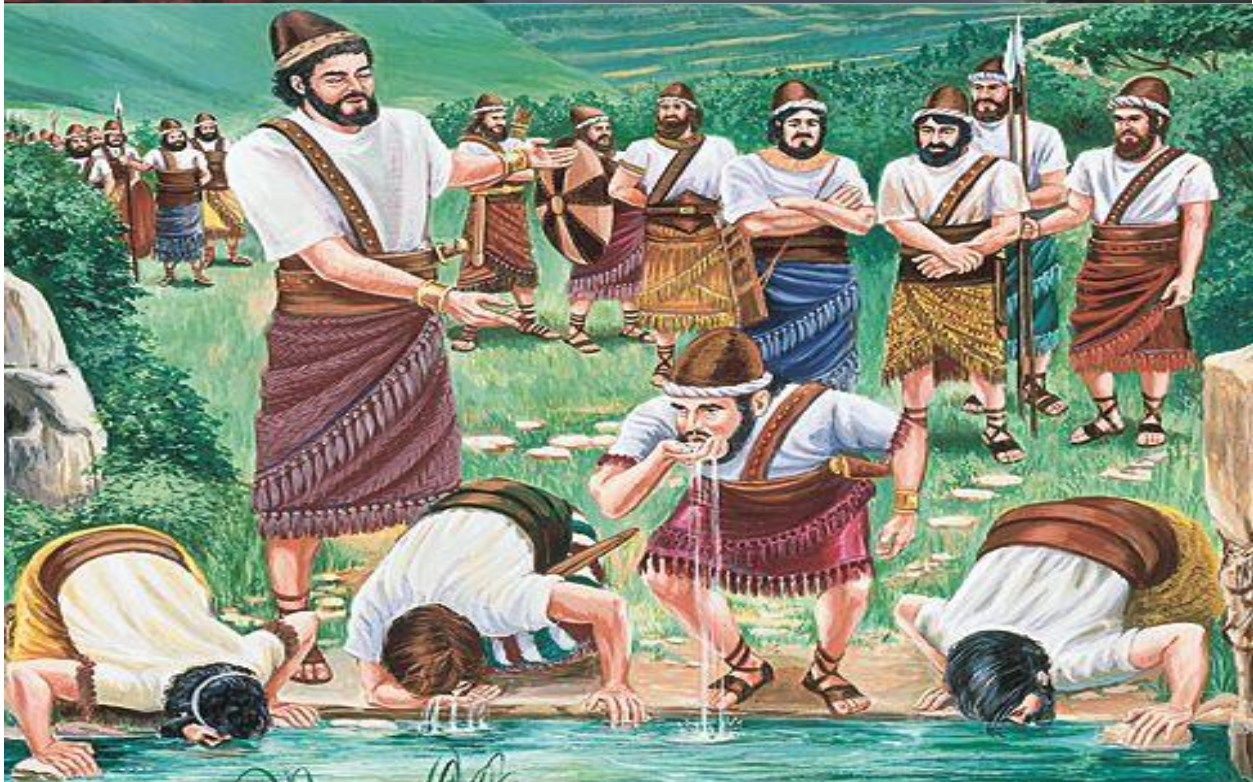


SPIRITUAL SWEET SPOT OF GOOD GROWTH

by **David Lee Burris**



**3% of American Colonists Defeated the Entire British Empire
1st Cent. Christians @2% Population Fulfilled Matthew 28:19ff**

1st Century Christians Changed The World By Raising The Bar

Christians in the Roman Empire

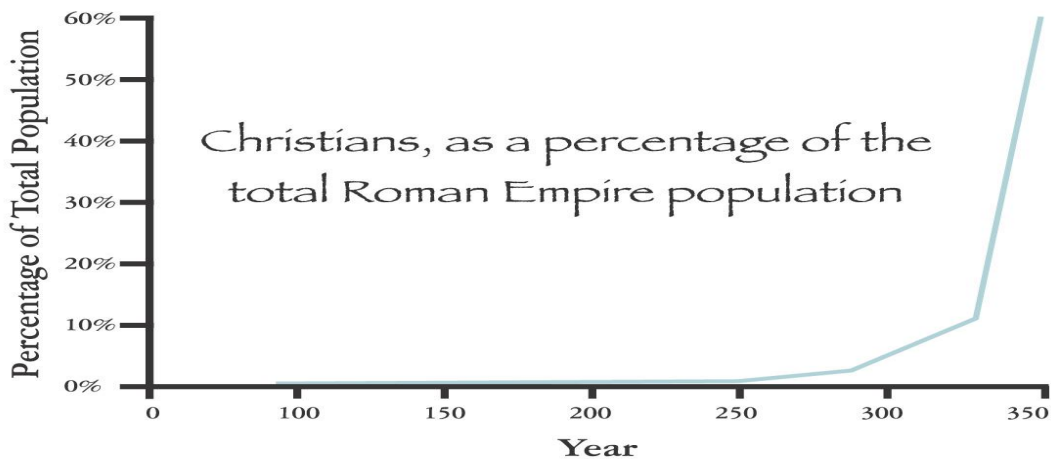


Chart 55

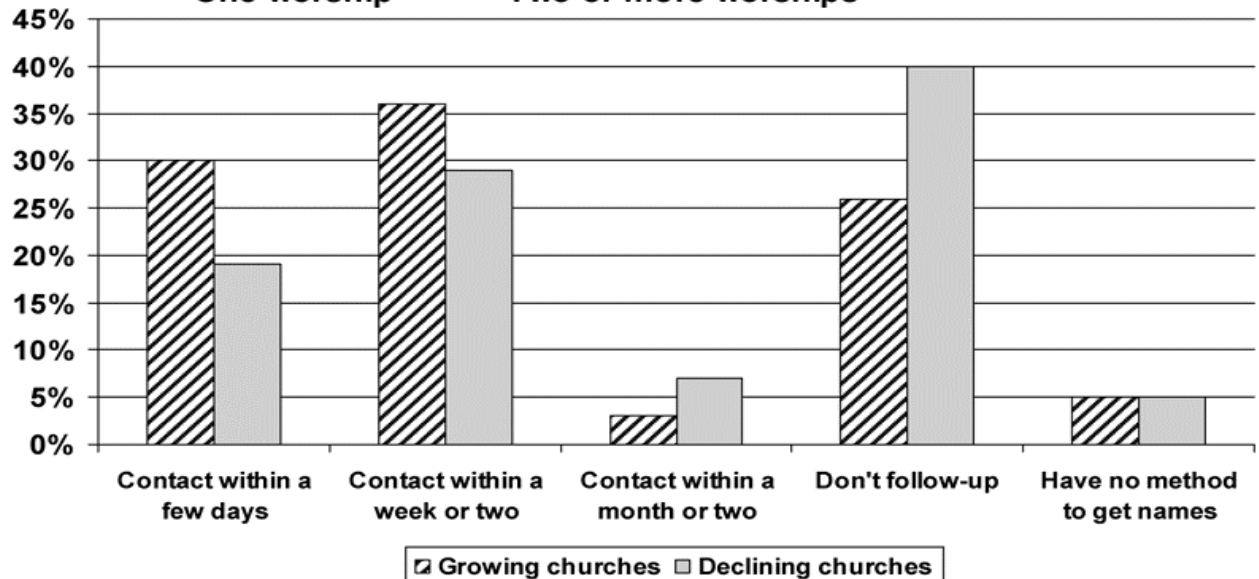
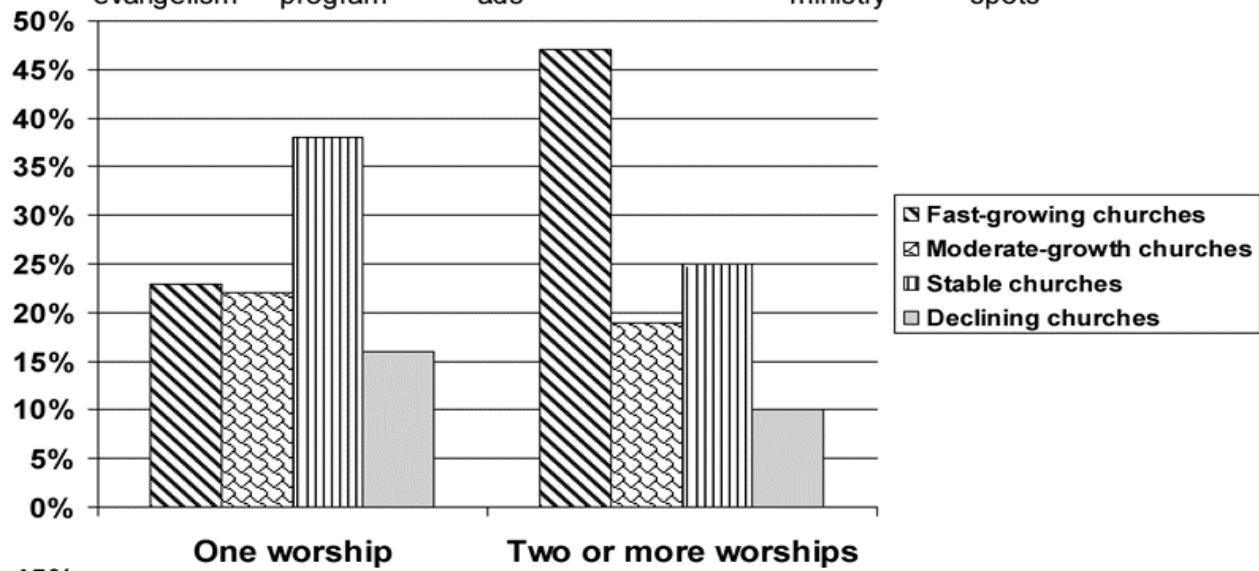
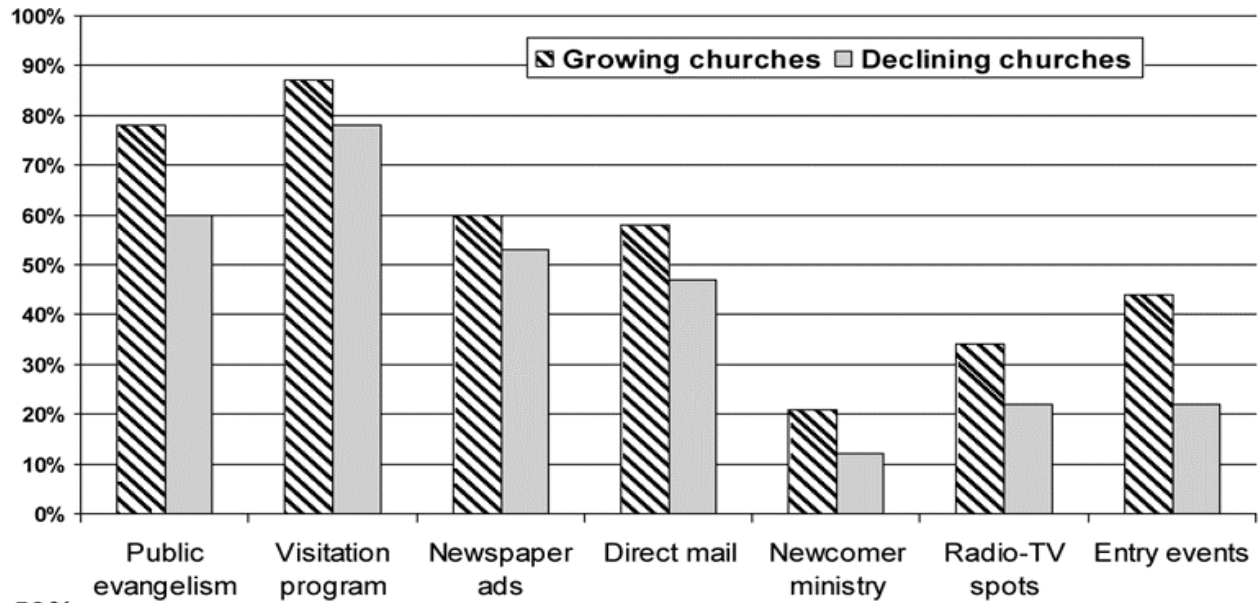


of people, events
life and faith from

The Church Across The Ages

More Than A Building

- o The earliest Christians did not have church buildings. They typically met in homes. [The first actual church building to be found is at Dura Europos on the Euphrates, dating about 231.] They did not have public ceremonies that would introduce them to the public. They had no access to the mass media of their day. *So how can we account for their steady and diverse expansion over the first three centuries?*
- o After the Apostle Paul, we do not run across many “big names” as missionaries in the first few hundred years of Christian history. Instead the faith spread through a large multitude of humble, ordinary believers whose names have been long forgotten.



Map of Homiletic Structures



Preaching Style & Church Growth

48 Congregations Net Growth Rate	Negative Approach	Positive Approach
HIGH ¹	2	14
MEDIUM	13	3
LOW ²	12	4

(1) Campbell Conversational Or Non-Manipulative Dialogue

(2) Information Transmission Or Manipulative Monologue

* Source: "Why Churches Grow" By - Flavil Yeakley

CHURCH GROWTH OR THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH?

In many ways, the placement of the word *growth* makes all the difference in how one thinks about these matters. Whenever the word *church* is used as an adjective to describe something else, there is a tendency to turn the church into a functional entity that ends up serving primarily an instrumental purpose. While the church is an instrument of the Spirit intended to bear witness to the kingdom of God and to bring redemption to bear in every dimension of life, this is not the primary basis of the church's identity. The church is more than its functionality, a set of purposes to be performed. Its core identity is related to its nature, which is the creation of the Spirit. Thus, when phrases like *church renewal*, *church growth*, or *church effectiveness* are constructed, the tendency is to place the focus on the function that is being described by the noun—renewal, growth, or effectiveness. This can end up subverting the character of the church by turning it into a malleable tool that is intended primarily to accomplish a particular function. Instead of the church's character, through its nature, giving expression to what the church does, it is not uncommon for one dimension of what the church does to become the criterion for constructing an identity for the church. Thus, what becomes most important is the church's renewal, growth, or effectiveness. What is often lost in this approach is an understanding of the richness of what God has already created within the very nature of the church that exists in the world.

Taking a functional approach, with its instrumental view of the purpose of the church, is problematic when trying to come to an accurate understanding of the church. From a biblical perspective, the church, rather than themes such as renewal, growth, or effectiveness (or whatever), needs to function as the noun. **Qualitative words** that deal with functionality or instrumentality need to define the church. Thus, **it is more biblical to speak of the “growth of the church” rather than “church growth,”** or the “effectiveness of the church” rather than “church effectiveness.” This shift in emphasis is not just a matter of semantics; profoundly important ecclesiological issues are embedded in this distinction.

It is important to note that the Bible does, in fact, speak about the growth of the church. Gaining a biblical perspective on growth in relationship to the church is a matter of ecclesiology, how we view the church, and it is also a matter of pneumatology, how we view the person and work of the Spirit. Biblically, a case can be made for the growth of the church as the work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who creates the church to bear witness to the redemptive reign of God in Christ, and it is the Spirit who leads the church into bringing redemption to bear on every dimension of life.¹

¹ Van Gelder, C. (2004). [Gospel and Our Culture View: Church Growth lacks a sufficient view of the church, which hinders it from effectively engaging the culture.](#) In P. E. Engle & G. L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (pp. 88–89). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

People become hostage to the metaphors they employ. *Church Growth* has become one such metaphor. Thus, seeking to understand causes of growth, places where growth is possible, and qualities of leaders of church growth becomes the lens through which Scripture is interpreted. This metaphor is “both provocative and evocative in the ways it shapes our assessment of ourselves and our mission.” Furthermore, numerical growth was not a “pervasive concern of Jesus and the New Testament writers.” Only Luke, “with his fondness for statistics documents the numerical growth of the early Christian Church.” Luke’s purpose, however, was not to document church growth and development but to authenticate the Gentile mission.

John Mark Hicks, on the other hand, writes that the biblical scholar should not be “disconcerted” about “the issue of numerical growth.” Luke’s use of statistics is based on a theology of covenant restoration rooted in the Old Testament. Numerical growth is a covenant blessing.” This “restoration-fulfillment” theme is reflected in the writing of Acts. The use of words like *auxano*, an agricultural term meaning “to grow” or “to increase,” & *pleroo*, which means “to multiply,” infer numerical growth.

These same terminologies are used in the Creation scene when God tells the people he created to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen. 1:22; 8:17; 9:1, 7). This emphasis is also reflected in a few places in Pauline literature. Although Paul’s primary emphasis in the epistles was to equip young missionaries and churches to deal with specific problems, in Colossians 1:6, for example, he “uses *auxano* to describe the spread of the gospel into the whole world.” This growth in the church is a blessing from God in the same way that children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3) and “the increase of Abraham’s descendants” was a blessing (Gen. 12:2; 13:14–16).

How, then, should we understand these differing perspectives of growth in Scripture? Surely, reading Scripture through the narrow lens of Church Growth accentuates the success and truncates the struggles of the church to become a community reflecting the kingdom of God. The motivation for use of statistics becomes self-aggrandizing and self-promoting.

The use of statistics and the numbering of Christians should be motivated by compassion for the flock, finding those who have wandered away (Luke 15:3–6). The value of church growth studies is that they typically reveal unperceived weaknesses. This is likely due to the fact that when people come to Christ, there is public celebration, but those who leave go unnoticed.²

² Van Rheenen, G. (2004). [Reformist View: Church Growth assumes theology but ineffectively employs it to analyze culture, determine strategy, and perceive history](#). In P. E. Engle & G. L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (pp. 183–185). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Growth from Conflict in Acts 6

The complaint of the Hellenists that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food led to a decision to add additional leadership to the church. This resulted in expanded ministry, which in turn facilitated even more growth, and even many in the priesthood became Christians.

Growth from Persecution in Acts 8

Jesus had made it very clear that the apostles were to go from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, but they remained in Jerusalem. Finally, a persecution scattered the disciples throughout Judea and Samaria. The disruption caused by this persecution led to substantial growth, bringing into the church many from among those whom Jewish Christians tended to look down on, the Samaritans.


Growth from Ministry on the Margins in Acts 11

Also, as a result of this persecution, some of the Gentile converts to Judaism, who later became Christians, started sharing the faith directly with other Gentiles without requiring them to observe Judaism first in order to become Christians. This ministry was a surprise to the Jerusalem church but eventually became the foundation for the mission to the Gentiles. What began on the margins came to the center.

Growth from Insights into Culture in Acts 10 and 15

Peter's strategy, in light of his understanding of the gospel as being shaped by the ceremonial practices of Judaism, would never have taken him to the Samaritans or to Cornelius. God intervened to disrupt and reframe Peter's understanding of gospel, although for some time, Peter still continued to struggle with fully accepting Gentiles as fellow believers in Christ.³

³ Van Gelder, C. (2004). [Gospel and Our Culture View: Church Growth lacks a sufficient view of the church, which hinders it from effectively engaging the culture](#). In P. E. Engle & G. L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (pp. 92–93). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

APPROACH	TYPOLOGY
Christ Against Culture	Radical Christians
Christ & Culture In Paradox	Dualists
Christ Transforms Culture	Conversionists
Christ Above Culture	Synthesists
The Christ Of All Cultures	Culturalists
CHRIST & CULTURE go2jeh.com	

KINDS OF GROWTH

When the concept of *growth* is added to the word *church*, the question is naturally asked, What kind of growth? A church can experience several kinds of growth, and most growing churches may experience some growth in each category.

The first kind of growth is *internal growth*, which is qualitative growth in the Word of God, the Lord, grace, or spiritual maturity. This is also called the “spiritual factors of church growth.”

The second kind of growth is *external growth*, or *numerical growth*. Numerical growth deals with growth in those qualities that can be objectively measured: attendance, membership, offerings, baptisms, enrollment, and so on. This growth relates to data that are observable, measurable, and countable. Those who strive for numerical growth without seeking spiritual growth are limiting the effectiveness of their ministry.

A third type of growth is *biological growth*. As church members have babies, the attendance figures of the church swell.

A fourth kind of church growth is *conversion growth*. This is sometimes called “making sheep.” Evangelism is winning people to Christ and his church. If a church is effectively reaching its community with the gospel, this will also result in a numerical increase in the church.

Transfer growth is the fifth kind of church growth experienced by many churches. Some object to this kind of growth, calling it “sheep stealing,” but others realize that mobility is increasingly a part of Western society and prefer to call this kind of growth “finding lost sheep.” Approximately 22 percent of Americans move every year. The adjustments involved in a major move make a person more receptive to changes, including a change in attitude. If a church is serious about reaching people, it should have a strategy for reaching Christians moving into its community.

Expansion growth is yet another kind of growth experienced by many churches. This sixth type of growth results in a church beginning another church like themselves.

The seventh type of growth is extension growth. This means a church begins a new **ministry geared at reaching another culture or ethnic group moving into the community.** In communities experiencing changes in ethnic character, churches are developing strategies that produce expansion and extension of growth. This type of church growth also applies to a church that plants a church different from itself in a community that is different from the community in which the planting church is located. This is truly cross-cultural church planting or cross-cultural evangelism.⁴

⁴ Towns, E. (2004). [Effective Evangelism View: Church Growth effectively confronts and penetrates the culture](#). In P. E. Engle & G. L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (pp. 44–45). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The nature of living things is to grow and reproduce themselves. Therefore, the growth of the church is always to be expected, though growth can occur for healthy or unhealthy reasons.

The fact that the nature of the church is to grow is the most important biblical and theological principle of church growth. I say *biblical and theological*, rather than *natural* or *pragmatic* because this fact is more than mere observation from nature. It's assumed throughout Scripture. God's creatures are to be fruitful and multiply.

Many of Jesus' parables make sense only because of the vital principle of growth and reproduction built into God's world—the germination of seeds, the growth of plants, the expectation that fig trees will produce fruit, even the leavening power of yeast. Images of growth and reproduction can be used of evil and judgment, as well as of righteousness: "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe" (Rev. 14:18 KJV).

Thus, the main "secret" of church growth is not the discovery of methods or techniques to make the church grow but rather those biblical principles of church vitality that are so much the focus of the New Testament.

The "all-by-itself principle." "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" (Mark 4:26–28). It is important to note that this parable refers not in the first instance to the church but to the kingdom of God. But the principle of life is the same. God has placed the power of life within living things, and "all by themselves" they grow and reproduce if the conditions are right.

The church is a living thing and that its life is fundamentally organic, or "biotic." Often Church Growth thinking has not paid enough attention to this organic, biotic nature of the church and its meaning for the nature of church life and reproduction.

This fact of a principle of life and reproduction within the church reminds us also that **the key issue is not growth but health**. The issue is not growing churches but healthy churches. Healthy churches grow under normal circumstances; planning for growth is not required if the proper environment exists. **Growth takes care of itself!**

Leaders nurture the growth and to turn growth into producing “much fruit” (John 15:5, 8). **If the primary focus is on growth rather than health, however, an inversion of values & priorities takes place. Growth can occur at the expense of health.** Doctors know this is true and watch for a whole range of *pathologies in which growth is a sign of disease*, from hormone imbalances to cancer. We can spot parallels in the life of the church.

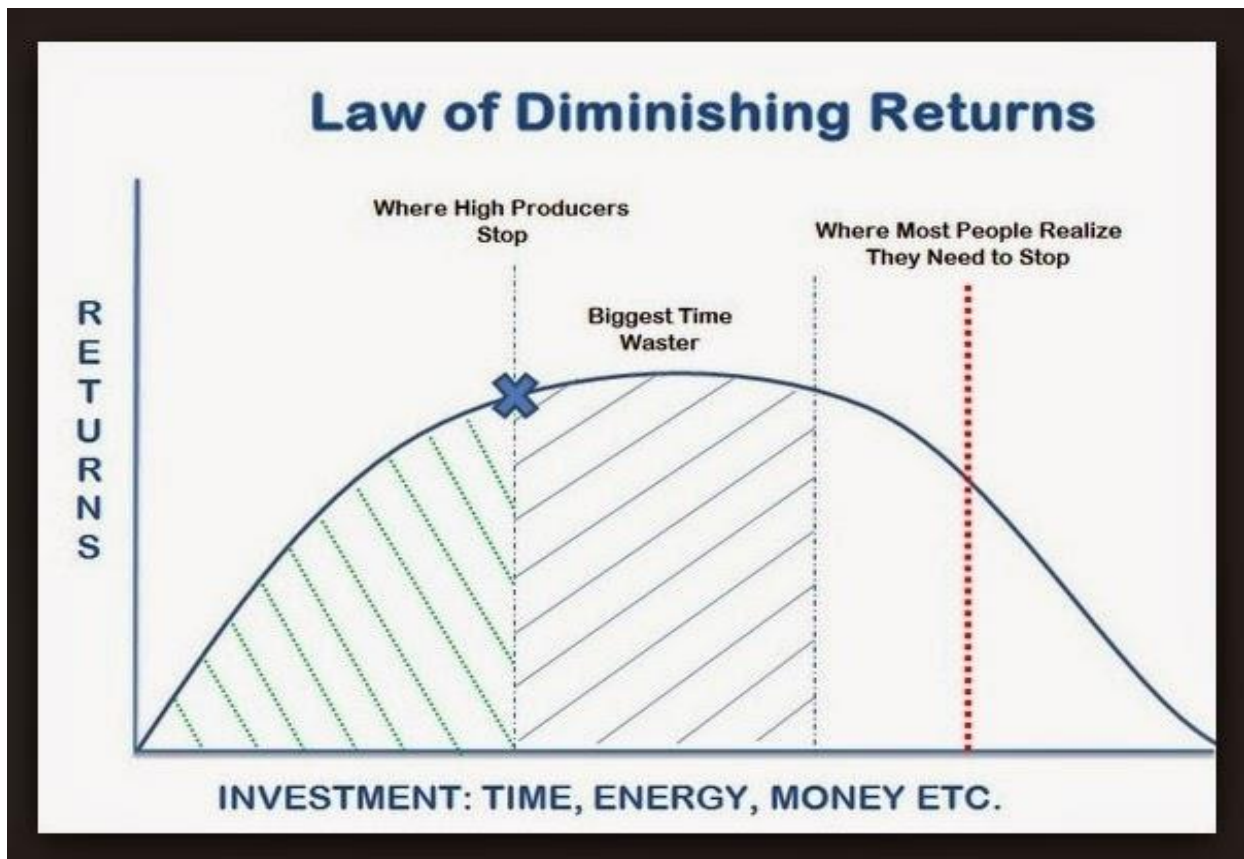
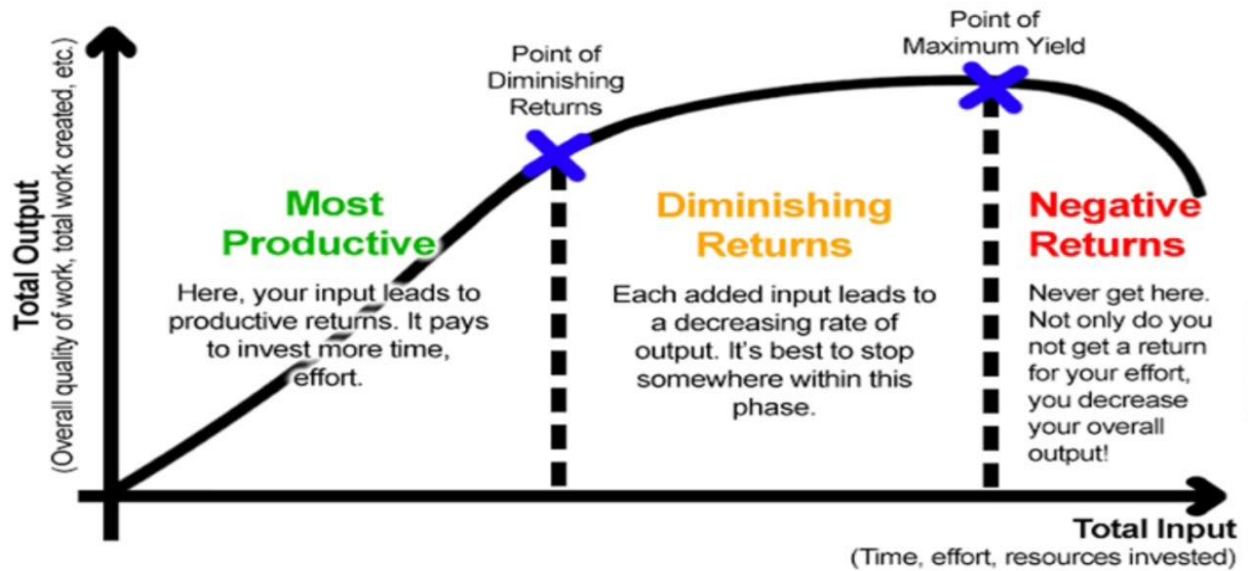
Doctors worry not only about disease but also about substances that artificially speed up growth, such as certain kinds of steroids, at the expense of overall health. Alien factors can be introduced into the body of Christ that greatly increase growth but perniciously undermine health and spiritual wholeness.

Focus on church health has its own pitfalls, however. First, “health” can be understood too therapeutically. It then becomes a damper on genuine spiritual vitality, undercutting genuine worship and faithful witness. Second, church health can focus too narrowly on the church and miss the fact that the church exists not for itself but for God’s mission in the world. A church may look vital and healthy—it may be growing and reproducing itself, nurturing its own children, teaching the Word, helping people live upright lives—but if it is not bearing effective witness - its conception of health is far too narrow. It would be like a family that is safe and healthy within its own home but that is doing nothing to overcome the disease and pollution surrounding it in the larger community.

Biblically understood, the church has life within it. Too much church growth strategizing is like exhorting a plant to grow, placing it in an artificial environment, giving it artificial nutrients, shaping it artificially and manipulating its growth into a grotesque hybrid form of the church—rather than letting the church grow into the vine God intends, subject to the nurturing and pruning that God brings.⁵

⁵ Snyder, H. (2004). [Renewal View: Church Growth must be based on a biblical vision of the church as the vital community of the kingdom of God](#). In P. E. Engle & G. L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (pp. 213–217). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURN



Growth, however, is not the same thing as making disciples. Swelling numbers is not a guarantee of growing disciples. It takes more than filling a pew to be a disciple. *Some have suggested that the only healthy churches are the ones that are growing numerically. They further imply that if a church is not growing, it needs to change.*

In Revelation, John remarkably never mentions numerical growth when he assesses the spirituality of the seven churches of Asia. He says much, however, about their spiritual growth, their works, their love, and their faithfulness to the Lord and the truth. The healthy churches were those remaining faithful during times of persecution, and those who remained free from immorality.

Having the largest congregation in the world is of little good if the devil runs it; and he will try! One of the ways he enters churches is by the promise of numbers. **The devil tempted Jesus with quick growth** if Jesus would jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus declined and pointed to a deeper spiritual truth.



The devil tempted Jesus with the world at His feet if Jesus would merely bow down to him. Jesus declined and pointed to the one true God. We must be careful to assess the cost of church growth that is too quick and too easy. The cost may be higher than we imagined. **The Bible**

doesn't mandate "church growth"; it mandates gospel preaching and making disciples. The real disciples of Jesus are those who abide in the word of God (John 8:31), who bear fruit (10:8), who love others as Christ does (13:35), and who remain faithful to Him (6:63-66). It is better to make one true disciple than add 100 to a congregation run by Satan.

This is not to approve laziness and a lack of evangelistic fervor; it is to point out that numbers are not necessarily the proof of God's blessing. Jeremiah preached 40 years with little success. God did not honor him for his numerical success but for his faithfulness.

We might be numerically successful with a watered-down gospel, but a watered-down gospel does not make disciples who will die for the faith. **If we compromise our message to get large numbers, we will have to compromise even more to keep those numbers.** In the end our faith will become worldly, insipid, irrelevant and ineffectual.

Jesus did not compromise or waver on the things that mattered. He held firm to the hard line. The Lord meant what He taught. He did not take back what He said when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. Our Savior said, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26-27).

At one point Jesus taught His disciples a very difficult thing. They asked, “[W]ho can listen to it?” (John 6:61) Jesus was conscious of their grumbling and asked them, “Does this cause you to stumble?” Jesus knew that some of the people there simply did not believe Him.

To be ashamed of what Jesus teaches is to cut yourself off from hope of life. As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (vv. 66-69). **There simply is no substitute for the gospel message; only it has the words of eternal life. To be ashamed of the words of Jesus is to cut oneself off from the blessings of the Lord.**

When the people left, Jesus did not trip all over Himself trying to get them to come back. He did not take back His message in order to get or keep the numbers. He did not apologize. He did not reduce His standards in order to give more people opportunity. **He let them go.**

Sanders, Phil. *Adrift: Postmodernism in the Church.* Gospel Advocate Company. Kindle Edition.



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EXPERIENCE**

Church Growth: By Gospel or By Gimmicks?

Is the gospel still sufficient for church growth? Are modern gimmicks necessary to attract bigger crowds?

By Wayne Jackson | [Christian Courier](#)

On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of the Lord, the church of Christ exploded in to existence.

Under the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, the apostles, for the very first time, proclaimed the full facts of the gospel message—namely, that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified and buried, but that he had been raised from the dead and was now in heaven.

When the Jews who were assembled on that auspicious occasion heard these glad tidings, they exclaimed: "What shall we do?", expressing an interest in obtaining pardon for their complicity in death of the Messiah. The inspired response was: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

We are subsequently informed that those who happily embraced the apostolic message were immersed, and "there were added in that day about three thousand souls" (2:41). Since the Greek text is a bit ambiguous here, it cannot be affirmed absolutely that the entire 3,000 were immersed that day.

Be that as it may, the church was off to a roaring start. In fact, the body of the saved grew "day by day" (2:47). Within a very short time, the number of men alone was about 5,000 (Acts 4:4). It is a thrilling exercise to trace the amazing growth of the primitive church as that expansion is revealed in the book of Acts. It has been estimated that by the end of the second century A.D., those professing Christianity in the Roman empire numbered some sixty million souls (Hurlbut, 68). Whether many of these were genuine Christians might be questioned. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that the early church experienced a phenomenal growth.

As one reflects upon the rapid spread of the gospel in the apostolic era and compares that excitement with the almost snail-like pace of the current church (at least as it is in America), one is bound to wonder: “What are we doing wrong?” “Why isn’t Christianity growing today as it did in the 1st century?” We fervently long to see the church dramatically expand today. What on earth can we do to remedy this situation?

It is at this point that a certain disposition develops in some—that almost borders on panic. We’re so desperate to see the church move forward with great momentum that we become vulnerable to high pressure tactics and bizarre methods of evangelism; methods that actually do not effect genuine church growth. They are, in fact, harmful. Ultimately, they leave us disillusioned and in a state of disarray. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to illustrate this point with a couple of current examples.

Modern Examples of Church Growth Gimmickry

Several years ago, a number of congregations that sensed a greater need for evangelistic fervor became enchanted with a fad known as the “Crossroads Movement.” Without going into detail, it is sufficient to note that this movement boasted of a tremendous number of conversions, which naturally made it appealing.

What many failed to recognize, however, was that this concept was a humanly devised regimented bondage system of church growth which robbed its devotees of both personal and evangelistic liberty in several ways. In many respects it was similar to the Watchtower system in its methodology. Its destructive thrust of misguided zeal was revealed in the fruit it produced—scores of churches were left in shambles!

Another ideology in vogue these days is the “ministering-to-the-whole-man” concept. It is really the subtle notion that the gospel is not intriguing enough to capture the honest person’s attention. We need more—some new angle—to elicit public interest. Hence, some churches are implementing multifaceted programs which provide a variety of community services. One can read of churches offering exercise classes, weight-loss clinics, art sessions, community movies, sports activities, etc. Such programs are designed to serve as “bait” for the gospel.

There are two observations that can be made concerning such matters. First, there is not the remotest indication that the original disciples, under the leadership of inspired teachers, resorted to this type of gimmickry in an attempt to facilitate the spread of Christ’s message.

Second, it has become painfully apparent that the “gospel” these groups are preaching is but a thin veneer of truth. Sound doctrine has been filtered out, and a denomination is being evolved. Some of these brethren obviously mean well, but their ignorance is rendering a great disservice to the cause of Christ.

What Is the Solution to Church Growth?

What, then, is the solution to our growth problems? We believe that the matter can be addressed as follows.

First, there is certainly no denying the fact that we have fallen far short of the “evangelistic zeal” that we should have. We have snuggled down with a comfortable Christianity. We must rekindle a passion for the lost!

Second, the idea has been advocated in some sectors that God will not hold accountable those who are never exposed to the gospel. Allegedly, they will be judged simply by whatever “light” they possess. It hardly seems necessary to observe that such a concept is totally at variance with the New Testament, and it can do nothing but retard church growth. Nevertheless, it has made an impact upon the thinking of some.

Third, a disposition that is sympathetic to sectarianism has invaded the mentality of many church members in recent years. Some are just not sure whether people outside the church are lost or not—provided they are somewhat or nominally “religious.” When this type of attitude sets in, the spirit of evangelism dies.

That aside, however, we absolutely must recognize that there will never be another Pentecost! We must be aware of the fact that the unique conditions which existed at the time of the church’s birth will never be duplicated. It is highly unlikely that the body of Christ will ever again experience the rapid growth rate which early Christians witnessed. This is not resigned fatalism; it is informed realism.

In eras of great ease, the people waxed fat and ignored God. In times of rigor, the tendency was to look upward for divine assistance. This has been illustrated even in our own nation. The church probably grew more vigorously back in the 1930’s depression era than at any time since.

Social and economic factors can either facilitate or hinder the acceptance of the gospel. There is a contrast between the generally impoverished first century Mediterranean world, and the sleek environment of modern America.

- Hurlbut, Jesse Lyman. *The Story of the Christian Church*. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co.

Christians in the Roman Empire

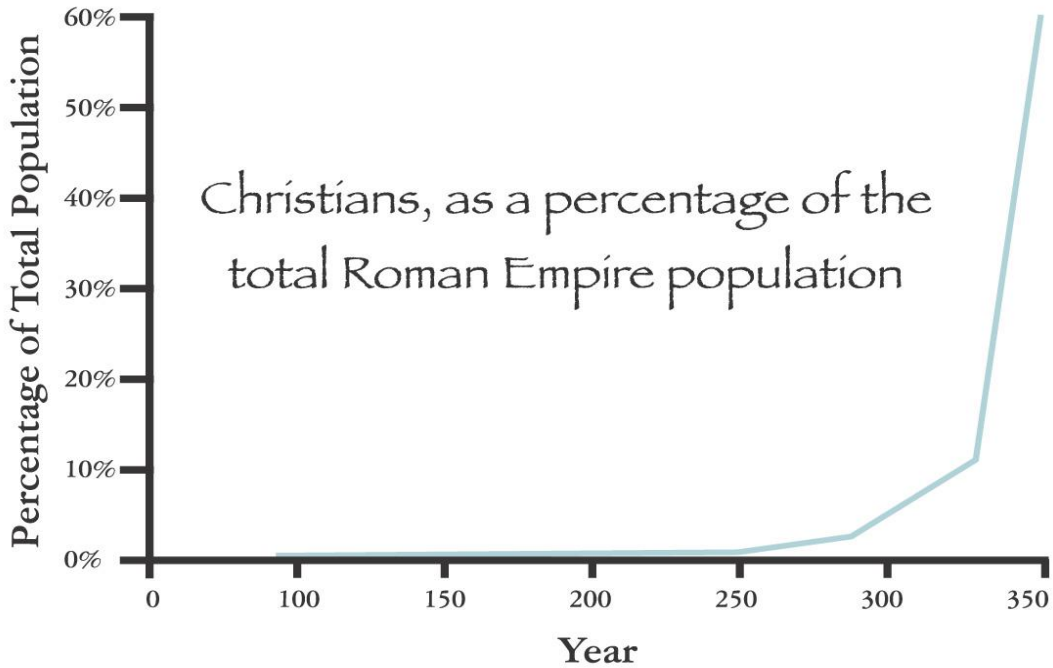


Chart 55

Article In Brief...



The early church increased in number dramatically in a relatively short period of time for a variety of reasons. Yet, one reason for the rapidly expanding first-century church often gets ignored in today's shallow, better-felt-than-defended religious environment: the early Christians' commitment to apologetics.

The Causes of The Early Church Growth

The early church grew so rapidly because the apostles, evangelists, and early Christians were courageous in their constant teaching and preaching of the Word of God. The Christians increased in number because they put a priority on souls and eternal salvation rather than upon materialism and temporary, earthly matters. Despite negative peer pressure, poverty, persecution, the early church grew because so many disciples were committed (individually and collectively) to telling the world that the Savior, the promised Messiah, had died and risen from the dead, and “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

They were a praying and preaching people **who would not be stopped**. In fact, for so many early Christians, death was the only thing that would keep them from spreading the Good News of Jesus. Ironically, it was the death of Stephen and the great persecution that arose against the Jerusalem church which actually **assisted** in the spread of the Gospel in Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and other places around the world (Acts 8:1-4). The Acts of the Apostles could be titled Acts of the Apologists, for what the apostles and early disciples did throughout the book of Acts was repeatedly give rational defenses of the Christian faith. — Eric Lyons, *Apologetics Press*

Guardian of Truth Magazine @ Church Growth

Two short parables that have to do with kingdom growth are found in Matthew 13:31-33. “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which is indeed the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Perhaps the Lord is suggesting that the kingdom (church) enjoys two kinds of growth – external and internal. The kingdom was (and is) produced by seed – the word of God (Luke 8:11; 1 Pet. 1:23). From a small beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the church grew until, in a few years, there were churches of Christ in every major city of the Roman Empire. We are reminded of the prophecy found in Daniel 2. The stone cut without hands, became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the kind of growth symbolized by the mustard seed – growth that could readily be seen.

Leaven produces growth of a different nature. Dough rises and may even overflow the container, but the leaven is working on the inside. As each citizen in the kingdom feeds on the milk and meat of the word, strength builds (1st Peter 2:2; 2nd Peter 3:18). Both kinds of growth are essential. External growth means that souls are being saved, and internal growth means that the spiritual vitality necessary to Christian living is developing.

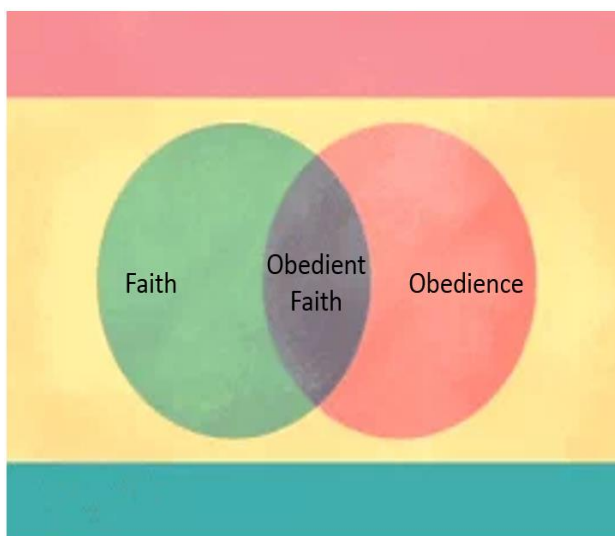
When local church growth is under consideration, there are other circumstances involved. There are some congregations that have grown rapidly in numbers, but with conversions few and far between. Because of their location in developing areas, they have been able to profit from preaching and teaching of others. There are churches that have experienced unusual growth in size because of serious internal difficulties in other congregations. Also, over the years all of us have known of local churches that have determined to grow at the expense of other faithful churches of Christ. Often this is referred to as “sheep stealing.” Another means of growing, some churches have learned, is to tolerate sin. A local church might acquire a reputation of being the place to go if you are involved in an adulterous marriage or social drink. Then, some churches of Christ have learned from our denominational neighbors that a lot of people like to have their sensual appetites satisfied. And so they build kitchens and install recreational equipment, bus young people to amusement parks, build “family life centers,” and on and on. Now, one of the latest fads to attract attention is to always to be positive. The statement, “Churches don’t grow on negative preaching” can be heard in some quarters.

We rejoice over every sinner that is led to the Lamb of God. There is no other way that God’s universal kingdom can grow in number. There is no other way that the “little stone” can become a “great mountain and fill the whole earth.” Likewise, we thank God for the growth “in grace and in knowledge” of God’s people. But at the same time, **we need to be cautious of placing emphasis on numbers. It can lead to compromising the truth, stealing sheep, embracing false doctrine, involving the church in unauthorized activities, and failing to plainly and forcefully condemn sin.**

AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- HEARING:
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- BELIEVING:
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- REPENTING:
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- CONFESSING:
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- BAPTISM:
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Wh* O that will be glory for me, e grace,

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

