

Why Don't Congregations Grow

Text : **Luke 14: 25-35**

INTRODUCTION :

A. Some countries stay poor while others increase in prosperity.

1. There are countries that are rich in natural resources, but those resources do not increase their lot in life.
 - a. In most oil rich countries only a few become wealthy.
 - b. The same goes for countries with mining, timber, etc.
2. In most historically impoverished countries the population accepts their condition.
 - a. They've never known anything else so it's just the way life is.
 - b. Young people go to college and then can't find work. (*often above 50% unemployed*)
3. There are reasons why poverty lingers.
 - a. Political corruption leads to poverty. (*Everywhere Spain ruled*)
 - b. Ungodly character of leaders and the rich produces general poverty. (*selfish greed*)

B. For basically the same reasons, some individuals stay poor while others prosper.

1. There is truth to the saying, "*The rich get richer while the poor get poorer.*"
 - a. It's true that it takes money to make money, but just having money does not guarantee continued prosperity.
 - b. Many who win vast fortunes in the lottery end up bankrupt.
 - c. Many professional athletes make millions and are soon impoverished.
2. Building wealth is a mindset. *Poor people think differently than rich people.*
 - a. When poor people get money they think "spend" while the rich think "invest."
 - * b. While in the Philippines a wealthy Chinese merchant told me,
 **"The difference between a Chinese and a Filipino is that if you
 give each a pig the Filipino he has Lechon (roast pig),
 but the Chinese has a brood sow."**
 -- His father had come to the Philippines with only the clothes on his back
 and the equivalent of less than one dollar in his pocket. He did not speak
 the language and had only an elementary education, but became very rich.
3. As with governments, there are reasons why most poor people don't escape poverty.
 - a. The children of poor people most often grow up to be poor. (*circle of poverty*)
 - b. In the home, they learn the values that lead to poverty.
 - c. One who grows up in a house with resources learns how to use resources.

Sl-#1

C. Why are we discussing “*the circle of poverty*” in a sermon ?

1. The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. SI-#2
2. Congregations that grow tend to keep growing year after year after generation.
3. Sadly, in America today many congregations have stagnated or dwindled over time.
 - a. It's like the weather, everyone talks about it but no one does anything about it.
 - b. People talk about the church growing, but don't do anything to make it grow.

This lesson will consider a few reasons why some congregations don't grow. SI-#3

- Though every congregation is different, there are principles which apply to all.
- There is a large body of research in the field of church growth.
- Most bible colleges have courses on church growth and most get very technical, but much if it is just common sense.

I. Some churches don't grow because their members are hesitant to accept change ? SI-#4

A. Growth without change is impossible.

1. Without change the past is the future. (*Heading north is always away from south.*)
2. * *To keep doing the same thing and expect different result is insanity.*

B. Resistance to change is a human characteristic.

1. We all have our comfort zones. (*The longer we stay in them the more comfortable...*)
2. Sameness makes us feel secure.
* *As an adult, how did you feel when your parents moved into a smaller place?*

C. God requires that we keep moving forward for Him, i.e., change for Him.

1. Maturity requires change : (**Rom. 12: 2**) SI-#5

I Cor. 13: 11 – When I was a child, I used to speak like a child,
think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man,
I did away with childish things. SI-#6

* *Many Christians have the Peter Pan syndrome ... they want to stay children.* SI-#7

2. We must learn from the past and then turn it loose.

Phil. 3: 13-14 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward
to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the
upward call of God in Christ Jesus. SI-#8

3. To become a Christian is to accept change :

a. **Rom. 12: 2** – but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, (*make changes*)

b. **II Cor. 5: 17** – Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;
the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.(*change*)

D. Look around you; this congregation will never be this congregation again.

1. People come and go.
2. Life changes people.
3. Events change culture.

*** So, the first thing we have to do in order to grow is to embrace change.**

II. Because members (including congregational leaders) don't accept the cost.

SI-#9

A. Remember the 12 spies. (Num. 13: 17-33)

SI-#10

1. They brought back amazing fruit to prove the quality of the Promised Land.
2. In spite of its desirability, 10 out of the 12 saw only the negative.
3. There are always pessimists who see only the problems.
* An optimist is defined as the guy who fell off a twenty story building and when he went by the third floor he was heard to say, "So far, so good". On the other hand the pessimist is the guy who blows out the candle just to prove how dark the room is.

B. The 10 spies gave a negative report because they were not willing to pay the cost.

1. Conquest involves a protracted military campaign. *Faith + Commitment = Success*
2. God had proven He could and He would fight for them. (*Egypt, Amalek Ex 17*)
3. Though there was an upfront cost, successful invasions were profitable in the end.

C. Likewise, church growth has upfront costs ... money, time and lots of work.

1. People don't line up at the door wanting to be saved. **GO .. Proclaim**
2. The majority of people have an overriding resistance to religion. (*By census 53%*)
3. We must go to where they are and bring them in. (*Invest time, effort, expense*)

D. As invasions, evangelism is never convenient and it takes sustained commitment.

1. Jesus advised every person to count the cost before becoming a Christian.
Luke 14: 27-28 **Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? (Face 20K w/ only 10K)**
2. It requires commitment sufficient resources to accomplish the task. (*Budget*)

SI-#11

3. The spies had a slave mentality, a mindset of dependency, **not** of conquers.

*** So, in order to grow churches must have the mindset of conquers.**

SI-#12

Our Lord said:

Matt. 28: 19 – Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, (includes our area)

(Start w/ home & go)

III. Many congregations don't grow because they like being small.

SI-#13

A. I knew of a congregation in another state that fired their preacher for baptizing too many people.

SI-#14

1. The congregation had been basically the same families for many years.
2. Everyone knew everyone and was comfortable with them.
3. When there got to be more new members than old ones, they rebelled.

B. By nature we're more comfortable being close with people we know well.

SI-#15

1. Members of small congregations all come to know each other well.
2. There is often an intimacy that does not exist in larger congregations.

C. In a small group people feel their opinion matters more. (Like having influence)

D. The only way a congregation can fail to grow is to fail to sow. That is rebellion.

SI-#16

1. **Mark 16: 15 – And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**
2. Only those who obey Christ can call Him their Lord. (**Luke 6:46 - Cf - 11:23**)
3. The early church grew because the members understood this to be true.
 - a. **Acts 8: 4 – Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word**
 - b. The context says the rank and file members went out, but the Apostles stayed.

IV. Some congregations don't grow because God withholds growth.

SI-#17

A. Though no congregation will grow without working at it, it's also true that no congregation can grow without God's blessing ... or Satan's involvement.

1. **I Cor. 3: 6 –7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.**
7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

SI-#18

- a. Planting and watering **MUST** occur. **If not,** a congregation is not faithful.
- b. True growth comes from God.

2. **Acts 2: 47** ... Man can add to the congregation, but only God can add to the church.

B. Sin acts as a barrier to church growth.

1. A sinful reputation in the community makes people unreceptive to the gospel.
2. Sin removes God's blessings from a church. **SI-#19**

a. **Isa. 59: 1-2** Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

b. **Rev. 2: 5** – (*Ephesus*) Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. **SI-#20**

C. False doctrine will cause a congregation to lose God's favor and blessing.

1. **Rev. 2: 14-17** ... Jesus threatened war against the church at Pergamum. **SI-#21**
2. They were tolerating the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

V. How can a stagnate congregation start growing ?

SI-#22

A. The congregation must realize that it has a problem and deal with it.

SI-#23

1. Do an honest self evaluation. **Are we growing ?**
2. Identify the reasons why. **If not growing, why not ?**
 - a. *It's hard to be honest about this.*
 - b. There is always a reason, but we don't like to face it.

B. Repent and make a commitment to God to serve Him by proclaiming Him.

SI-#24

1. The commands are so clear that failure to obey is open rebellion.
2. Commit to do whatever it takes for the rest of your life.
* *All of Christianity is a marathon, NOT a sprint.*

C. Set a goal for the congregation and each individual member set a personal goal.

SI-#25

1. Every faithful member MUST share the gospel.
 - a. Not everyone teaches a class or preaches.
 - b. EVERY member is called to be a proclaimer.

I Pet. 2: 9 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, **so that** you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (Compare ... **Eph. 2: 10**) **SI-#26**

*** Why were you called ... SO THAT you could proclaim Christ.**

2. A goal is neither a wish nor a dream. **It is a plan of action.**
 - a. It is a plan that clearly defines an identifiable and measurable objective.

*** *You don't shoot and then draw a bull's-eye around where you hit.***
 - b. A goal includes measurable steps to facilitate monitoring one's progress.
3. The whole congregation must share the goal and work toward it.

*** *A culture of evangelism must prevail in the congregation.***

D. There must be a budget set for regular evangelistic activities.

SI-#27

1. Evangelism costs money.
 - a. Advertising , training , motivational material, etc.
 - b. Teaching materials, etc.
2. Evangelism should be the focus of the congregation's annual budget.

E. There must be a regular schedule of evangelistic events.

1. Anything can be such an event. (*These keep minds focused on souls.*)
 - a. "Bring a friend Sunday"
 - b. Putting invitations under the wipers of every car in town.
 - c. Putting a poster up on every pole in town.
- ** 2. VBS is one of our most successful evangelistic events.
 - a. 19 out of 20 people who come to Christ do so before they are 25.
 - b. Many of the people who don't go to church will send their children to VBS.
3. **Matt. 19: 13-14** Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"

SI-#28

CONCLUSION :

SI-#29

- A. Church growth is vital : *When living organisms stop growing, they start dying.*
 1. Every member will die so there must be new members added.
 2. **Every soul that is not added to Christ is added to Hell.**
- B. We were all purchased to be servants. (*Compare ... Rom. 6: 16-18*)

I Cor. 6: 20 – For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body

C. We cannot decide IF we will be a servant only IF we will be a faithful servant.

Will we hear: **"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master."**

Lesson Texts :

Luke 14: 25-35

25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, **26** "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. **27** Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

28 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and **calculate the cost** to see if he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? **32** Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

33 So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

34 Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? **35** It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."