
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Key Insights for Growth

Jesus Christ is the leader and builder of his church. He declared that he would build his church (Matthew 16:18), and has been doing so for nearly 2,000 years. However, to accomplish this, he has worked through human leaders, particularly skilled pastors, to facilitate his work.

Research on the topics of church renewal, church growth, church health, and missional church over the past fifty years has demonstrated that skilled pastors who lead growing churches often focus on the following aspects of ministry.

Common Foundations

Churches that experience biblical growth have four foundations in place. Without these basic foundations, it is difficult for any church to grow.

First, a clear purpose: Skilled pastors seek to do what is right rather than what is expected.

Second, a growth conscience: They focus ministry externally on the lost, as well as internally on the members.

Third, training in growth principles: They

maintain a learning attitude by reading, attending conferences, and seeking advice from others.

Fourth, a vision of the future: They establish a clear dream that the members and attendees accept and buy into.

Discern the Body

Churches that experience biblical growth effectively use the resources that God has given to them.

First, skilled pastors seek to understand the strengths of their local church, and they are good stewards of its strengths rather than worrying about its weaknesses.

Second, they model what they want the church members to do, and build a proper pride or self-image among the congregation.

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Third, while they are aware of their church's lack of resources (weaknesses), they use what they have and ask God to supply the needs.

Fourth, they acknowledge that the church cannot reach everyone by defining a clear target audience.

Understand the Community

Churches that experience biblical growth take the time to investigate and understand the people in their ministry areas.

First, skilled pastors exegete their immediate community to discover where the unreached groups of people reside.

Second, the level of receptivity of unreached groups is determined and new ministry programs are developed to reach the most receptive.

Third, they determine and find the resources of people, budget, and time that are needed to reach their target group.

Fourth, they elicit support from people in the congregation to reach their target group.

Structure for Growth

Churches that experience biblical growth organize the systems of their church to

support ministry growth and development.

First, skilled pastors mobilize as many people in the congregation as possible to discover and use their spiritual gifts.

Second, they organize their members and attendees to reach their households and associates for Christ.

Third, the church develops a workable system for welcoming, and assimilating newcomers into the life and ministry of the church.

Fourth, numerous entry doors of ministry are created to attract guests.

Fifth, they build infrastructure for involving people in fellowship, e.g., small groups or classes.

Sixth, they raise financial support by regularly training and encouraging all attendees to give sacrificially to the work of ministry.

Seventh, they evaluate and improve the overall ministry program.

As you read over these activities of skilled pastors . . .

Which ones are you doing well?

Which ones do you need to work on?

Which ones do you need to emphasize this coming year?

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Where Is Our Treasure?

How people and churches handle money declares the kingdom to which they belong. Jesus said there are two options. We can either store up treasures for ourselves on earth or store up treasures for ourselves in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20). He also said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the others. You cannot serve God and wealth" (v. 24).

Handling Money

Money has two primary distinctions in the Bible. It can be an instrument of good or evil, and God does not leave us in the dark about managing it. Consider the following biblical guidelines for managing money, and think about what they mean for a church.

Matthew 6:33. We must first seek God's kingdom and righteousness.

Acts 4:32-35. God's grace calls believers to be generous.

1 Corinthians 16:2. We are to give to God on the first day of the week.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2. Even the poor can be generous in giving.

2 Corinthians 8:4-6. Giving is first to the Lord, but is also a way to serve

others.

2 Corinthians 8:7. Believers should excel in everything, including the grace of giving.

1 Timothy 3:2-3. Leaders must be trust worthy with money.

James 5:1-3. Accumulating money wrongly will bring harm.

These passages present several principles that fit churches wisely embrace in their stewardship ministry.

Unfortunately, in many churches the lack of God honoring stewardship is a major crisis, which, if allowed to continue without some intervention, will only get worse. In contrast to the lack of good financial stewardship found in some churches, fit churches honor God in the use of their finances. They believe wholeheartedly that to give is to sow. The result is fit churches are generous churches.

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Writing to the Corinthians, Paul introduced an important piece of doctrinal instruction. “Now this *I say*,” which is Paul’s way of saying, Pay attention. This is important. “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). While Paul was talking to individual believers, he addressed the church in Corinth as a whole body.

Fit churches apply this passage to themselves in understanding that by being generous, the church is sowing seed. Like a farmer, leaders in fit churches recognize that when seed is sown it may disappear for a time, but contrary to appearances, it will produce fruit in the future. Thus, fit churches seek to give generously to their staff, their people, and the world around them, realizing that by doing so, they will reap fruit in the future. In the case of churches, the fruit reaped may be new believers, or good will in the community, or a happy staff.

Fit churches recognize that their attitude toward finances reveals the heart of the congregation. Paul told the Corinthians, “Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The source of a church’s generosity is its heart.

Churches that choose to hoard money rather than providing generously for their staff, programs, and community outreach, are revealing a miserly heart. Each church should cheerfully give to others, but there is no quota or standard percentage that the Lord expects churches to provide. Like people, churches are free to control their expenditures of finances as the leaders think best. Yet, the true measure of a church’s heart is seen in its attitude of generosity.

The leaders of fit churches also realize that as they model generosity, God will meet the church’s financial need, and even provide more financial income so they can sow even more in the ministry of outreach. “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness: you will be enriched in every thing for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God” (vv. 10-11). As churches generously invest the finances God provides to serve others, he in turn provides even more income so the church’s needs are met and there is more to invest.

Adapted from the forthcoming book *Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church* by Gary L. McIntosh and Phil Stevenson. Available January 1, 2018 wherever books are sold.

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FACULTY-MENTORS

DR. GARY MCINTOSH is Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot. He has served as a consultant for hundreds of churches in North America. Dr. McIntosh is also the Founder and President of the Church Growth Network, which provides a wide range of professional consulting services in the areas of church growth analysis, strategic planning, and generational change. He is the editor of the Growth Points newsletter. Having published over 100 articles and written over 16 books, he is a prolific writer and church growth expert.

DR. ALAN MCMAHAN has served in churches in North America and on the Pacific Rim. He has also taught in the areas of missiology, church growth, leadership, organizational development and evangelism. He has been active in training undergraduate and graduate students including mid-career professionals, Bible school teachers, pastors, and denominational leaders through the U.S., Canada, and much of Southeast Asia in the effective means to develop leaders and grow churches. He has served as Vice President for the Alliance Theological Seminary and as the Academic Dean at the King's College in mid-town Manhattan. He and his wife, Terri, have two sons, Billy and Jonathan, and live in La Mirada, CA.

“As I look at the United States today, I see people who are receptive to spiritual things. We need to learn how to communicate to them in a way that draws them to Jesus Christ.”

DR. GARY MCINTOSH PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
AND LEADERSHIP

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