I Want the Church to Grow–But Do I Want Any More People? #8

How Can I Help the Church Grow and Evangelize More People?

Acts 8:1-4

Introduction:

1. You might be a country church if . . .
   1. The call to worship is, “Y’all come on in!”
   2. The preacher says, “I’d like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering”–and five guys stand up.
   3. The restroom is outside.
   4. Opening day of deer hunting season is recognized as an official church holiday.
   5. A member requests to be buried in his four-wheel drive truck because, he says, “I ain’t never been in a hole it couldn’t get me out of.”
   6. Never in its entire 100-year history has one of its preachers had to buy any meat or vegetables.
   7. Prayers regarding the weather are a standard part of every worship service.
   8. The church directory doesn’t have any last names.
   9. Four generations of one family sit together in worship every Sunday.
   10. The only time people lock their cars in the parking lot is during the summer and then only so their neighbors can’t leave them a bag of squash.
   11. There’s no such thing as a “secret” sin.
   12. You miss worship one Sunday morning and by two o’clock that afternoon you have had a dozen calls inquiring about your health.
   13. People wonder when Jesus fed the 5,000 whether the two fish were bass or catfish.
2. God wants His church to grow:
   1. Growth was in God’s plan. Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:44; Habakkuk 2:14, 20
   2. Jesus taught that it would. Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; 31,32
   3. Jesus commanded sowing which produces growth. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:47, 48; Mark 12:30,31; Luke 14:12-14; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 14:13-24
   4. Growth is normal for God’s created living things. Genesis 1:9-13; Genesis 8:20-22; Galatians 6:7-9; Mark 4:26-29; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7
   5. God wants to see people saved–which will cause the church to grow. Acts 2:47; Ezekiel 18:20-23, 30-32; Luke 19:10; John 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9
   6. God was pleased with the growth of the early church. Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 11:21, 24
3. But some of the people that are recorded in the Bible didn’t want everyone who wanted to follow Jesus.
   1. The disciples at Jerusalem were afraid of Saul of Tarsus. Acts 9:26
   2. Many of the Jews did not want Gentiles. Acts 10, 11
   3. Many of the Jews who would accept the Gentiles wanted them to be circumcised before they became Christians. Acts 15
   4. Peter, one of the apostles of Jesus, played the hypocrite – shunned the Gentile converts – when some better friends came from Jerusalem. Galatians 2:11-14
   5. James and John did not always love; they wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy some people who did not receive Jesus. Luke 9:51-56
   6. In a story that Jesus told, two very religious men did not want to help a man who was hurting and who would interrupt their schedule. Luke 10:29-32
   7. Jesus told another story of a man who was angry when his lost brother came home and would not obey his father’s request to celebrate his return. Luke 15:29-32
4. Is it possible that any person could have similar reluctance today about cooperating with God in the growth of His church?
5. Have you been in touch with mixed feelings about this congregation growing?
6. What does God want His church to be and do?
7. How can I submit my will to God’s will?
8. BE HONEST WITH YOUR FEELINGS.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,

And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom (Psalm 51:6).

* 1. Sunday School door hanger.
     1. One side: “KNOCK and the door will be opened to you. Luke 11:9.”
     2. Other side: “KEEP OUT.”
  2. Moving to Crow Valley.
     1. People didn’t want us to build; it would make the country crowded.
     2. That hurt my feelings, irritated me.
     3. I had as much right to live in Crow Valley as anyone else.
     4. I built and moved–then didn’t want anybody else to come.
  3. Do any of you remember those feelings when the new road North of our building was being discussed?
  4. Is the issue different when it is roads and land?
     1. These things have to do with political issues and personal choices.
     2. The church belongs to God.
  5. When I say aloud that I don’t want any more people in the church it sounds different from:
     1. “I like a small church.”
     2. “I want to go to a church where I can know everybody.”
     3. “We don’t need to get any more than we can control.”

1. RECOGNIZE THAT FEELINGS ARE NORMAL–GOOD PEOPLE HAVE FELT AND ACTED LIKE THIS BEFORE.
   1. What did Ananias want–what did God want? Acts 9:10-17
   2. What did the church want–what did God want?

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple (Acts 9:26).

* 1. What did Peter want–what did God want?

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:11-15).

1. TALK ABOUT THE ISSUE.
   1. Some in the first century church didn’t want the church to grow if it included Gentiles unless they became Jews first.
      1. They talked about it.

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

* + 1. When this brought dissension, dispute, and debate, they decided they needed to talk about it more with others.

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question (Acts 15:2).

* + 1. This meeting where they discussed strong mixed feelings about Gentiles was held in “one accord” and produced encouragement. Acts 15:5-11

It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement (Acts 15:25, 30, 31).

* 1. This is one reason I like Word Perfect word processor–it has more “reveal codes.”
     1. “Family secrets rule the world.”
     2. “What we won’t talk about, we will divorce about and divide about.”

1. GET A SPONSOR (FRIEND)–BE A SPONSOR (FRIEND).

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out (Acts 9:26-28).

1. BE COMMITTED TO INDIVIDUAL GROWTH–THIS PRODUCES CHURCH GROWTH.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me, and know my anxieties;

And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24).

1. BE CONCERNED ABOUT OTHERS AND EXPRESS IT TO THEM IN WORDS AND ACTIONS.
   1. Be able to separate feelings from actions.
   2. Remember how it feels to be an outcast.

“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

* 1. Remember what you wanted and needed in a similar situation.
  2. How would you want someone in another congregation to relate to you, your children, your parents, your relatives, your friends?
  3. Act that way toward others–even when you do not feel like it.

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

“And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31).

Conclusion:

1. I want to the church to grow, but do I want any more people?
2. I want to want what God wants.
3. I want to follow the attitude of Jesus.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”(John 6:38).

1. What does God want?
   1. All who are burdened with sin.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

* 1. All who want to be saved.

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

1. How will I cooperate with Him?
2. What is your response to God’s call?
   1. Are you weary?
   2. Do you have the desire?
   3. Will you come?