

“A true discipling ministry will include every aspect of winning people to the Savior, building them up in their faith, and equipping them to win and build others.” Dann Spader

This morning you have the wonderful privilege of witnessing New Testament Christianity, what Scripture teaches is to be normal in the local church and what Jesus commanded us to do. Unfortunately, it's something far too rare in the contemporary Church – *Discipleship*. Discipleship is true church growth and the biblical model of church growth.

Sadly, most churches rarely experience biblical church growth. We've often bought into *Churchianity* which has little to do with what the Bible teaches about the local church. Jesus designed us to be a “Christian Counterculture.” Because this is so different from what we experience in *Churchianity*, would you bear with me as I contrast what's commonly accepted as church growth with what Scripture teaches is church growth?

First, there is nothing wrong with being a big church. God is concerned with numbers. A whole book of the Bible called “Numbers.” The church at Jerusalem (Acts 2) was the first mega-church. Yet, the church model commonly accepted as normative today often has more in common with the Dow Jones and a marketing view of growth than a biblical one. Yet, this is how most churches in America grow. ***So how do churches grow?***

Most churches grow by birth. Those whose parents attend the church, come to Christ, grow up there, ultimately becoming part of the church. It's a healthy way for churches to grow. Hopefully, our own young people will come to Christ here, learn to love Jesus, and if they stay in the area, will make Grace their church home. They'll then disciple others, including their own children, passing on generationally what was given to them.

In our transitory culture, it's not the norm. Many young people, when they reach adulthood, head to college, marry, take jobs, moving to other communities. When young people raised in the church come to Christ, then raise their children in the church, wonderfully, the Church of Jesus Christ grows...even if they've moved to another area. Discipleship is the biblical model of church growth, even if ultimately it's not our church which grows, but another Bible-believing church.

The more common model of church growth is the marketing model of ministry. Tragically, it's the way most churches grow – through transfer growth, not new conversion growth. At Grace, along with some other Bible-believing churches, we discourage transfer growth.

Please understand, there are times when a Christian rightly believes they need to leave their church. Because the local church is a family and a body (New Testament metaphors for the local church), leaving the family or an amputation from the body should be highly unusual. There are times to leave a church, yet it must always be done in a biblical way.

Sadly, in our non-accountable world, many Christians hop from church to church to church. If a church has a new pastor, building or program, they'll hop there. If they get offended, they jump somewhere else...rather than seeking to biblically problem-solve. They're consumers rather than committed members, taking rather than giving. Kent Hughes calls them “*ecclesiastical hitchhikers*.” They're along for a free ride without committing or investing in what's needed for a healthy church family.

Personally, I'm not sure someone is truly part of our church until we've offended them...at least once. When we problem-solve, grow and forgive – God is pleased. You grow, we grow and we all become more like Jesus.

The latest church fad which encourages church hopping is multi-siting. It often has little to do with our God-given mission of reaching the lost, but is more about empire building of some rock star pastor or mega-ministry. It becomes apparent what the mission really is when the bulk of attendees are Christians from other evangelical churches (often they're targeted by the megachurch) who hop to the newest "game" in town. Add to that, most multi-sites are not planted where there's some great need for another evangelical witness.

It takes very little to realize where the greatest needs are in our culture. They're the areas which continually make the news for violence and crime. When evil is rampant, there's a corresponding lack of Bible-believing churches. Even Christians frequently foolishly buy into the conventional wisdom that it's because of poverty, poor schools or even ethnicity. It's not. It's a lack of light. The problem is poverty, spiritual poverty.

Too often we're so focused on the fields of the world, which we should be, we ignore the spiritual drought in our inner cities. We've bought into the American standard of success when we're enamored with bodies, bucks and buildings, rather than committed to the Great Commission.

So what is New Testament Christianity? It's demonstrated today by Mike Wiemer preaching. Not many years ago, Mike wanted nothing to do with the Gospel or church...but God began to work in his heart. Mike went through a one-on-one Bible study with another man from our church, who became his father in the faith, Dave Hughes. Mike was discipled and then baptized at Grace Church. He was born-again here and is Grace Family with a capital "F." Today he's one of our leaders, heads up our men's ministry and seeks to win and disciple others, just as he was led to Christ.

If you've heard Mike's testimony, you know prior to his coming to Christ, his life was messy. He's not from a "traditional family." Nearly everything Mike knows about Jesus, the Bible and what it means to be a Christian, he first learned at Grace. Since coming to Christ, Mike has become a student of the Word and is a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Mike, like the rest of us, hasn't arrived spiritually. He's a work of grace in progress. Yet, his filling the pulpit today is a picture of what we believe the New Testament defines as successful church growth. It's not flashy. Just someone who came to Christ, sharing what Jesus has done in his or her life.

How fitting too, that Mike is continuing our summer series on the Gospel because Mike is the poster child of what we at Grace Church are about – the Gospel. We're committed to sharing it in our world, seeing folk like Mike come to Christ, become a disciple and then a discipler. It's New Testament church growth and what Jesus commissioned us to do (Matthew 28:19-20). It's what we at Grace are unapologetically committed to! Are you? Are you committed to Jesus' plan for true church growth?