

Growing a church and impacting a community are not mutually exclusive.

In fact, these two complex endeavors are highly interrelated.

- A strategy to grow your church may or may not have a true and lasting impact on your community.
- An intentional plan to impact your community for good may or may not cause your church to grow.

The real issue is the order in which we prioritize the efforts and the motivation behind them.

If life changing impact in the community is the first priority, motivation, and the driving force, church growth will often follow.

It was probably about fifteen years ago, that I read this question for the first time. I don't know who first posed it, but it's powerful:

“Would your community miss you if your church no longer existed?”

That question has stuck with me ever since.

Another way to word that question is, are we as Christian leaders doing things that matter?

Do our actions and investments make an eternal impact outside the walls and halls of our churches?

That's a significant question we all should take the time and have the courage to answer.

Here are some observations to consider as you reflect on where your church stands in light of this idea.

5 principles to make a greater impact in your community:

1) The majority of Jesus' ministry was in the community, not in the Temple.

Jesus consistently took his ministry to the people.

The gospel accounts are filled with his interactions out among the people. It's true that He didn't have a modern church to lead and organize like you and I do, but he certainly had his own pressures to deal with and yet always remained out with people.

There is a great tension here because it seems like the larger and more successful our churches become, the more we are drawn inward to manage the daily affairs and programs of the church.

It is true for me and perhaps for you too. That's not an indictment of any of our larger churches, but it is a reality we have to be honest about and consider how to respond in the best way.

It's important for us to intentionally leverage our time, energy, and resources, along with whatever "success" God grants us, back out into the community rather than become fully consumed with those who already know Jesus.

One last thought, it's not about how much or how many things you are involved with in the community, it's how effective they are. What is really working?

2) The greater potential your church has to make an impact in the community, the greater the potential you will receive resistance.

The Enemy loves it when churches become a little comfortable or inwardly focused.

Comfortable churches are not much of a threat in the spiritual realm.

In contrast, when a church begins to make a significant impact in the community through dozens of possibilities from compassion to justice to simple intentional acts of kindness, the Enemy notices and problems seem to increase.

It's amazing how many battles can arise when you are attempting only to be kind and generous to those around you who are in need. But we can't let that deter us from doing well.

The great threat to the Enemy is genuine life change in the name of Jesus, and obviously that won't be received without a fight.

But we have the great weapon of prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit on our side. Keep going!

3) When your church gets involved in the community, the people are more receptive to your mission and your message.

There is a huge variety of possibilities including options like a local food co-op, or a foster care agency, or Habitat for Humanity, or support of a local

elementary school, or addiction recovery house, or a homeless shelter and that just scratches the surface.

Again, it's not about how many, how big or how much. It's about making an impact that changes the community. It's better to do two or three things well more than ten things halfway.

The bottom line is that when people in the community begin to see, sense and experience that you care about them, with no strings attached, their perspective about who you are changes.

That impacts their receptivity to your mission and the gospel message.

Perhaps many individuals will never attend your church that needs to be OK. But observation and experience says that God is pleased with this kind of ministry and ultimately it does draw people to your church

4) You grow a church on your terms, you impact a community on their terms.

You get to decide what structure and programs make up the foundation of your church.

The key leaders have the privilege and responsibility to make the major decisions that determine the culture of your church.

But when it comes to impacting the community around you, people require that you meet them on their turf, on their time and their terms.

For example, rather than create your own church sports league of some kind, why not go out into the community and volunteer to lead, coach and invest financial resources into sports leagues that already exist?

There is no right or wrong, but some ways are better to engage the community than others.

5) You can grow a church on history and tradition, but you must become relevant to impact a community

Relevance is not about your choice of worship or how casual you may or may not be, that is about style and preference.

Relevance means what you do matters. Relevance means that your ministry changes things, people are different and the surrounding community notices that they matter to you.

They experience that you care first-hand.

It's true that Christians in particular will come to your church because what you offer is tried and true and comfortable. There's nothing wrong that.

It's a simple reality that when churches get larger and really good at what they do, they often attract more Christians.

But when you serve people who are hurting, and/or far from God, that expression of compassion may not directly help your church, but you are definitely aligning with the heart of God.

Reaching the un-churched and impacting your community requires out of the box thinking, compassion, challenging the status quo and change.

Compassion for the outsider, over comfort for the insider should always take precedence.

So, what do you think?

What would God have you do differently to make a greater impact in your community?

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