

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 10: Developing Vision For Kingdom Growth, Part 1

God has provided everything necessary for His kingdom to grow. However, Jesus's prayer in Matthew 9:35-38 demonstrates the important roles God has given to people in doing work that impacts kingdom growth. A problem occurs, though, whenever the people who are part of God's kingdom do not have vision for doing the work of God. Clearly, whenever Jesus prepared to leave this earth, He had a vision He wanted His followers to embrace (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). Today, God desires for His people to continue the vision that sees God's kingdom grow to its full potential in this generation and throughout time. The first area which requires vision is concerning a local congregation of God's people.

1) Focus on making disciples. Churches can easily get distracted from the true goal of why they exist. They often focus on the numbers of attendees to the congregational assemblies, having large/nice facilities, raising money, or some unauthorized activities (i.e. social activities, entertainment, humanitarian work, etc.). However, the church *must* be focused on the work of making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). So, the focus of the church must be in helping other people be true followers of Jesus by going to the lost, preaching the gospel, baptizing for the forgiveness of sins, and continuing to teach what Jesus has taught. Sadly, many churches get distracted by all the modern concepts of what makes for a good church, that they have neglected the hard work of joining God in making disciples who make disciples by teaching, training, and equipping people to follow Jesus in their lives. This is accomplished through a focus on the word of God during the assemblies (Acts 20:32) and through the mentorship with other disciples (Titus 2:1-8). Therefore, a church must carefully evaluate what they are measuring, valuing, and celebrating. Rather than measuring "success" in

traditional ways, it should be measured by the work of making disciples for Jesus!

2) Pursue biblical leadership. Churches can often distort or lose focus on the leadership God desires. For example, many churches develop a pastoral system in which one man or a group of men who are not qualified to be shepherds are given this role. Some churches develop a clerical system in which only a few of the members are ever seen as being able to do God's work. Some churches are content with the church operating without biblical leadership and are not actively working toward and praying for leaders. Yet, a local church must be pursuing biblical leadership as outlined in the Scriptures! God desires leaders who will work in His kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-13; Philippians 1:1). Particularly, the Scriptures demonstrate the importance of there being elders (shepherds, overseers) in every congregation of God's people (Acts 14:23). These are required to possess specified characteristics that will be useful in leading the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Until a congregation has men (plural) who serve in this capacity, there is something that is still left undone (Titus 1:5). Such leadership in a congregation, though, must be developed over time with great diligence. Ultimately, as the congregation focuses on discipleship, men must step up into these leadership roles!

3) See opportunities for the kingdom. It is easy for churches to fall into their traditions and rhythms so that they become content with the status quo and no longer actively look to see the mission of God's kingdom. For example, some churches may experience times in which things are going well and they are existing comfortably. These can lose sight of need for the gospel to be sent beyond the church members in the assemblies and into the lost and dying world – including in places where the gospel is not

being actively spread. In fact, it is easy for churches to come together in “holy huddles” on Sundays and fail to recognize the need for the gospel throughout the world. Therefore, churches must develop the kind of vision for God’s kingdom as Jesus prayed people would have (Matthew 9:37-38)! This vision for the kingdom was demonstrated by some churches in the New Testament (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3; 19:8-10).

4) Grow, equip, and send. Sometimes people can mistake a church as the end goal rather than the means to accomplish God’s work. That is, sometimes complacency can set in once a congregation has been established in a community, a meeting place has been established, and other thresholds have been met (i.e. someone to preach). However, the Scriptures picture the members of the local church needing to grow in the faith and being equipped to do God’s work (Ephesians 4:11-16). Then, the local church should send people to do even more work that spreads the seed of the kingdom of God (i.e. through sending evangelists into other “fields,” Romans 10:13-18). Sadly, there are many churches that are content with members who never grow to the point of being mature and equipped to do God’s work so they can send evangelists and teachers into other areas or go themselves (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Although God can accomplish His work in whatever ways He desires, He clearly uses people and local churches to do this. But, local churches will not accomplish the work of kingdom growth just by existing and “playing church.” Instead, they must develop the proper vision to see what God is calling them to be and do through His word – and get to work doing whatever they can for the sake of God’s kingdom!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God’s service?