

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 8: The Local Church In Kingdom Growth, Part 1

In God's grand design, He has intended for His people to be part of a local church (Acts 9:26-28; as well as every passage that shows a local church in existence, i.e. Acts 9:31; Philippians 1:1). Therefore, He does not intend for people to be rogue citizens of the kingdom who are disconnected from other citizens of the kingdom. Instead, the local church is a key piece in growing God's kingdom. In this first part, let's focus on how the local church helps in kingdom growth regarding those who are already following Jesus.

1) Provide leadership. God has placed leadership roles in local churches. Leaders in Jesus's church are spiritually knowledgeable and mature people who can positively influence spiritual growth and development in others. These are like spiritual parents inside the family of God who can help nurture and guide those who are less mature (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Notice the impact leaders have on Christians in Ephesians 4:11-16. First, they equip the saints to do the works of service God desires from them. Second, they build up the body of Christ in the faith of Christ. Third, they help the body of Christ reach unity in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. Fourth, they help the body of Christ grow into spiritual maturity like that of Christ's maturity. Fifth, they help the body of Christ not be unsettled in or easily moved from the teaching of Christ. Sixth, they help the body of Christ work properly so that each one does its part, grows, and works to continually build themselves up in love. Although Christians may be impacted by one of these outside the local church setting, the most regular and influential way Christians will often experience the positive impact of these is in the local church.

2) Provide fellowship. While the fellowship of Christians extends to all who are Christians, the most prominent way Christians will often experience this fellowship is within the local church. For, God has *not* designed the local church to be a place where

strangers assemble periodically. Instead, He has designed it to be a spiritual family (Matthew 12:46-50). In this spiritual fellowship, there is a unique relationship that should be shared so that these brothers and sisters are engaged in one another's lives – both in the assemblies of the church and outside of them (Acts 2:42-47). In fact, the Scriptures give Christians many “one another” responsibilities (as discussed in a previous lesson). Such aspects of this fellowship as praying for one another, correcting one another, encouraging one another, carrying one another's burdens, teaching one another, etc. help to strengthen each member of the church spiritually (i.e. Galatians 6:1-2). This fellowship is pictured as being so close that when one weeps, all weep, and when one rejoices, all rejoice (1 Corinthians 12:26)!

3) Provide assemblies for edification. The local church is expected to assemble together (1 Corinthians 14:23, 26). Notice that when this happens, everything that is to be done in the assemblies must accomplish the work of edifying the church (spiritually building the church members up in the faith). Particularly, we see the Biblical pattern of the local church assembling on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), though the church is not limited to assembling on this day. In the Bible, the church engaged in the following activities when they assembled: Teaching God's word (Acts 2:42; 20:7), singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42; 12:5, 12), taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7), and giving to do the work of the church on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 8-9). As these activities are important for both worshiping God and building up Christians in the faith, the members of the church are not to neglect assembling (Hebrews 10:24-25). In fact, assembling is also a way in which

the Christians can encourage each other and stir each other up to love and do good works in service to God!

4) Provide accountability and discipline.

Accountability should be experienced between the members of a local church. Though this may not seem like a positive at first, it is a crucial element in Christians growing in the faith. For, if Christians were not accountable to anyone on this earth, it would be even easier for Satan to deceive and entrap them (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). However, as it is, Christians must both encourage each other so they are not entrapped by Satan and help restore those who have went back into sin (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Although the leaders of the church will have a critical role in this, so will all Christians. Then, whenever a Christian brother or sister lives in sin and refuses to repent, the other members of the church must “discipline” that one by identifying him/her as being unfaithful and keep away from him/her (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). This discipline accomplishes a few things: It works to cause the one in sin to be ashamed and influences him/her to return to Christ, works to separate the influence of the church from the one living in sin, and works to guard the other members of the church from the leavening effect of sin.

In God’s wisdom, He has designed the local church to play an important role in the growth of His kingdom. Though more may be considered, these have been some of the ways in which the local church positively impacts kingdom growth in those who have already submitted their lives to King Jesus. Some of these things are accomplished by the church collectively (acting together) and others distributively (acting individually). Next, we will consider how the local church impacts kingdom growth regarding those who are not part of the 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?