

1. Wanting to stay small

The typical, stagnant small church is small in ways other than numbers. They tend to be small in vision, in programs, in outreach, and in just about everything else. Perhaps worst of all, they have small plans. Or no plans at all. Even if you are growing, you will always have good, wonderful members who regret the growth because they like it small.

“We like our church just the way it is now.” While that attitude usually goes unspoken—it might not even be recognized by its carriers—it’s widespread in many churches. The proof of it is seen in how the leaders and congregation reject new ideas and freeze out new people.

Are you friendly to people, or do you just stand and talk to people you already know ignoring others and coming off as cold and unwelcoming? The 30 minutes before and after the actual service are the most important times of the day when it comes to growth.

Maximize the impact of the first 5 minutes someone is on your property. The process of rejecting newcomers is a subtle one, never as overt as snubbing them. They will be greeted and chatted with but they will be excluded.

2. Maintenance Mindset rather than a Growth Mindset:

This one is similar to wanting to stay small, but would be even more hidden—Your stated goal is growth, but you are maintaining or managing more than you are leading for growth. You’ve experienced growth to some extent and now your goal becomes maintaining what you have attained rather than making room for more growth.

As a church grows, more management is required but we must be intentional and focused on being vessels for growth even while we are good stewards with what the Lord has given us. Otherwise we don’t maintain, we shrink. It’s the law of every living relationship—it is either growing or shrinking.

Some signs you are in Maintenance Mode:

- You are not equipping others or you are equipping the same people.
- You are not intentionally finding ways to connect with non-members and non-Christians.

- You do not know any intimate details about anyone new who was at church this week such as name, where they live, how they found the church, etc.
- You have lost some of the joy of ministry.
- Your problems are bigger than your purpose.

3. Inferiority complex.

“We can’t do anything because we’re small. We don’t have lots of money like the big churches in town.” So they set small goals and ask little from their members.

Feelings of inferiority can be found in all size churches as they compare themselves to other churches. The remedy is to put one’s eyes on Jesus Christ. “Lord, what do you want us to do?” That’s the best prayer one can ever pray, and it has nothing whatever to do with what another church is doing.

Peter said, “Lord, what about John here? What do you want him to do?” Our Lord said—and thus set a wonderful pattern for all of us for the rest of time—“What is that to you? You follow me!”

4. Don’t know your ‘hedgehog factor

What can your church be the best at in your ‘world’? Don’t just do church—stand out by doing something really well. If there are other churches in your area doing it really well already, then don’t try to ‘out-Amazon’ Amazon; find your own thing.

Focus on the two or three things they do best. Don’t try to be everything to everyone. And don’t try to be best at someone else’s ‘game’. If another church in your area is doing it great, then celebrate them and find your uniqueness.

This is not to say that the church should shut down everything else to do one or two things. Rather, they will want to keep doing the basics, but throw their energies and resources, their promotions and prayers and plans, into enlarging and honing two or three ministries they feel the Lord has uniquely called them into.

5. Not keeping the ‘main thing the main thing’:

Make your weekend experience a home run. If choices have to be made based on resources—time, talent or treasure—always choose the weekend experience. If you don’t do it well, you won’t get to do the other things anyway. **Are you hitting all 4 elements of a great weekend experience?**

1. **Spiritual**--creating an environment that welcomes the presence of God and makes it comfortable for people to encounter Him
2. **Excellence**--giving Him our best, doing everything as 'unto Him'
3. **Creative**--remembering that creativity that doesn't result in life transformation is not creative, it's just weird. :)
4. **Social**--creating inviting environments making it easier for people to connect to others

Are you really a church or are you a ministry/outreach center?

Jesus wanted to reach the lost, the hurting and the next generation. To do that, he didn't first go to them—he built a core out of healthy people. Most of his disciples were successful—maybe not godly, but successful (tax collectors, etc). They were fishermen, tax collectors, and other things, but they weren't needy. In order to reach those God wants your church to reach, you need to find those who **can** do that—those who, if trained and led properly, will stand with you. Yes we are called to reach a lost, hurting and broken world, but if your core is 'needy' you will never have the resources—time, talent or treasure—to effectively reach them.

A local church is defined in Ephesians 4 as an equipping center **for** ministry. We are not food banks, rehab centers, etc. Those are important and things the **members** of our bodies should be doing, but our primary focus as a local church is the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, helping them grow up into the full measure of Christ.

6. Unhealthy.

And by that, we do not mean just because they are small, they are sick. You can be small and healthy; behold the hummingbird.

An unhealthy church just can't break through, just won't grow. It may see some seasons of growth, but it always falls back to a certain place. And if an accurate diagnoses is not made and remedies put in place, that place will become smaller and smaller. The church may see a spurt of growth to 180, then fall back to 140. If not addressed, the next time it may fall back to 120, and continue shrinking with each successive time. The other thing that will happen is the growth spurts will become smaller and less frequent.

So, what is a healthy church and how do we get from here to there? Examine 3 areas: Pastor, Prayer, Practices.

Pastor: Are you and your spouse healthy—spirit, soul and body? Are you modeling discipline in your lifestyle? What does your relationship with each other and with God look like? Are you having fun? Are you continually growing in your shepherd skills? All of us like our speaking—just ask us how we think it went each week—but are we reaching the broken, hurting stranger on the back row or the satisfied consumer on the 3rd row? **Feed and lead.**

Prayer: Is prayer really a foundational part of the church? Are people given tools and taught how to pray for their church, their pastor, their community? Are you building intentional times of corporate prayer and fasting into your yearly schedule and, if so, is participation increasing? **Pray or quit.**

Practices: Natural Church Development. 8 habits of every healthy church.

Are You Lifting Up Jesus?

- Being prepared as a bride for Christ, not trying to become 'attractive' to the world
- The unchurched aren't looking for cool—they can find it in lots of places. They are looking for the presence of God. Be 'Presence-Driven'.
- Looking for the 'moment'—where is that spot in your experience where God 'shows up'?
- A foundation of prayer.
- Teach the Word
- Embrace the Holy Spirit.

7. A lack of excellence. A state of neglect permeates the church.

Not always, but often, an unhealthy or dying church shows signs of its weakening condition by the disrepair of its buildings and the neglect of its appearance. The interior walls haven't been painted in years and bear the collective fingerprints of a generation of children. The carpet is threadbare, the piano's keys stick, the chairs need reupholstering, and the outside sign is so ugly it would be an improvement if someone knocked it down.

Dying churches do not tend to their business. They let problems fester and divisions go unaddressed. Listen closely and you will hear

a leader speak those infamous words: “These things have a way of working themselves out.”

And so they do nothing, and the church drifts on toward the grave. No one gets saved, no one joins, people drift away, the community becomes less and less aware of the existence of that little church, and the remaining members complain that people just don’t love the Lord the way they used to.

Facility/Venue:

- “Kick the dead pig off the front porch if you have company coming!” Examples of things that will cause people to drive on past:
- Light bulbs: the ones not working send a message that you may be struggling—not a message you want to send to guests or to your givers
- Bathrooms: the ladies bathroom is still a biggie. Also, for those doing multiple services, does it look as good before the last service as it did before the first?
- Landscaping, signs, etc. (On the sign—what message is it sending?)
- Does what your facility and grounds say match the message you and your vision say? Who is the audience you are aiming at—those already there or those not there yet? They probably think differently.
- Location: How hard to find? Limited by community allegiances/prejudice? (It’s one thing to locate in an area that needs help, it’s another to locate in a place where the moms are fearful to bring their kids.)

8. Listening to the wrong voices:

Sometimes we give too much attention to negative opinionated people who want to complain about stuff, and since their voice is the loudest we adjust things to keep them happy, which of course only gets you off track. Sometimes to grow is to allow some people to be pruned. You can’t be everybody’s pastor and that is ok. Be the best church and pastor for those who want it.

9. Gathering around doctrine rather than around mission:

Jesus and His disciples were focused on mission rather than doctrine. When doctrine tried to become the central focus of the new

church in Acts, the disciples quickly refocused her back on mission. Yes, we must have clear essential doctrine, (**Acts 15:28-30** **28 “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.”**)

When we gather around doctrine rather than mission, we limit our growth to only those who agree with us on every point. Jesus didn't gather around doctrine—note how many disagreements the disciples had as they journeyed with Him—he gathered them around the mission. As they pursued the mission of Jesus, they eventually settled on some essential doctrines, but that happened ‘along the way’. And throughout the book of Acts, we seem these great leaders continue to gather around mission rather than doctrine. (Paul and Peter; Paul and Barnabas; Paul, Peter and Apollos)

10. A Lack of Marketing and/or the wrong emphasis in your marketing:

- The “70/30” rule: focus 70% of your marketing efforts on getting those who already come to invite others. Seize the natural events like Easter and Christmas, then create others that will cause them to invite the people they know. Observe the ‘breathe in/breathe out’ principle when doing this. You can't continually push them to invite (breathing out), you have to give them breathe out times or you will wear them out and they won't have fun. Push hard for a couple of weeks, then celebrate.
- Is your advertising/marketing actually putting down The Church to build up your church?
- Don't take the bait when resources shrink to cut marketing.
- Focus on lifting up Jesus and He will build the church.
- View your marketing as a conversation rather than a jackpot.
- **Are You a ‘Community Church’ or Just Another ‘Church in the Community’?**

Do what you do to be a blessing to your community first and foremost, not to get people to come to your church.

