

MAKE IT **COUNT**

A 10-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine

# What Growth Is and How It Happens

By STEPHEN BLANDINO



**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

## MAKE IT COUNT

### A 10-Week Study For Leadership Teams

## What Is Make It Count?

**M**ake It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at [influencemagazine.com/Downloads](http://influencemagazine.com/Downloads).

These lessons are written by **STEPHEN BLANDINO**, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



# What Growth Is and How It Happens

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**

**M**ost pastors want to see their churches grow — spiritually and numerically.

But what exactly is growth, and how can you facilitate it in your context? Such questions are at the heart of this installment of Make It Count. The following 10 lessons unpack specific insights concerning spiritual and numerical growth in the Church:

1. *Understand Growth.* We tend to see growth as something we







can control, but the reality is, growth is the outcome of God's sovereign work in the Church and His people. Paul makes it clear that God is the one who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

2. *Embrace Responsibility.* While God makes things grow, leaders still have a role to play in the growth. Paul defined that role as planting and watering the seed (1 Corinthians 3:5–9). We must do our part while simultaneously ensuring we don't do things to inhibit growth.
3. *Engage Processes.* People often think of growth as an event. However, true growth is a process that involves examining our lives and churches, engaging in learning, and putting those lessons

into practice. At the center of the process is reliance on the Holy Spirit.

4. *Recognize Seasons.* Some growth seasons in churches involve launching or building momentum in a ministry. Other seasons are all about pruning for future growth or persisting during difficult seasons. Each season corresponds to a different dimension of growth.
5. *Adjust Thinking.* Growth requires a mindset that values learning and maturing. How we think is the baseline that puts growth within reach in our lives and churches. If our attitude is wrong, we will not fully realize our God-given capacity.
6. *Close Gaps.* Leaders and churches won't grow if they're unaware of their growth gaps. Once we become aware, we must create a growth plan and assemble a growth team to help us close those gaps.
7. *Develop Disciplines.* The apostle Paul described discipline as the key for runners to win the prize. Similarly, to experience the full impact of growth, we must embrace spiritual, personal and organizational disciplines.
8. *Practice Stewardship.* As the Parable of the Bags of Gold illustrates, the wise stewardship of time, talent, treasure and influence reveals whether God can trust us with additional growth.
9. *Multiply Progress.* Growth was never meant to die with us. As we grow, we should invest in the people and churches around us. Our growth can be a catalyst of growth in others.
10. *Measure Trends.* We need to establish measurements that foster long-term health. Not only should we measure numbers, but we should also measure life change, spiritual vibrancy, and forward trends in the most important areas.

As you read and discuss each lesson with your team, let these principles inspire you and your church to welcome the growth God desires.

# 1 | WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Understand Growth

### Assess

How would you define growth in the context of a church?

### Insights and Ideas

Growth is a big focus in many environments — including the Church. But what exactly is growth? When discussing that issue, church leaders often point to specific types of growth. They may talk about spiritual growth among members or numerical growth in attendance, for example. But the question remains: What is growth?

Growth is the outcome of God's sovereign work in His Church and His people. As much as we might hate to admit it, we can't make things grow. That's God's job. The apostle Paul made this clear when he said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

This does not mean we have no responsibility when it comes to church growth. (In fact, the next lesson addresses our responsibilities.) But we must begin by recognizing that at the end of the day, God is the source of growth. Growth is the byproduct of His activity in our lives and ministries.

This truth should free us from guilt when we don't see the kind of numerical church growth we had hoped to attain. It should likewise give us a sense of peace when we feel frustrated over a congregant's lack of spiritual growth.

We have clear responsibilities. But even when we carry out our responsibilities, growth remains in the hands of God.

This is not an excuse for laziness or a permission slip to ignore growth. However, we must understand there are some things only God can do. If we don't settle this issue as leaders, we will carry a yoke God never intended us to have.

God makes things grow. So, if your church or ministry is growing, give God the glory for it. And if your church or ministry isn't growing — or isn't growing at the pace you think it should — invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you in this season. The lack of growth might be God's way of preparing or maturing you. Or it might not be the right season in your church for rapid growth.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Do you agree with the definition, "Growth is the outcome of God's sovereign work in His Church and His people"? Why or why not?
2. What tension do you feel when you hear God alone makes things grow? Why?
3. If we could embrace the reality that God is the source of growth, how would it change our perspective of ministry?

### Apply

Take some time to process this lesson. What does it mean for you, your leadership, and your ministry approach? What stress should it relieve? As you prayerfully reflect on this truth, take some time to let the Holy Spirit reorder the affections and ambitions of your heart.

## 1

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Understand Growth

Growth is a big focus in many environments — including the Church. But what exactly is growth? When discussing that issue, church leaders often point to specific types of growth. They may talk about spiritual growth among members or numerical growth in attendance, for example. But the question remains: What is growth?

Growth is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God's sovereign \_\_\_\_\_ in His Church and His people.

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

God is the source of growth. Growth is the byproduct of His activity in our lives and ministries.

This is not an excuse for laziness or a permission slip to ignore growth. However, we must understand there are some things only God can do. If we don't settle this issue as leaders, we will carry a \_\_\_\_\_ God never intended us to have.

If your church or ministry is growing, give God the glory for it. And if your church or ministry isn't growing — or isn't growing at the pace you think it should — invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you in this season. The lack of growth might be God's way of preparing or maturing you. Or it might not be the right season in your church for rapid growth.

### Apply

Take some time to process this lesson. What does it mean for you, your leadership, and your ministry approach? What stress should it relieve? As you prayerfully reflect on this truth, take some time to let the Holy Spirit reorder the affections and ambitions of your heart.

## 2 | WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

# Embrace Responsibility

### Team Review

What work has the Holy Spirit done in your heart as you've reflected on the fact that God is the source of growth?

### Assess

While God makes things grow, what responsibilities do we have when it comes to growth?

### Insights and Ideas

The last lesson established that God is the one who makes things grow. However, we still have some responsibilities in the growth process.

The apostle Paul outlined these responsibilities with broad strokes in 1 Corinthians 3:5–9: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.”

What do we learn from Paul as it relates to embracing the responsibilities of growth? Consider three lessons:

1. *We give God something to work with when we take care of our responsibilities.* God makes things grow, but our job is to plant and water. Without getting seed in the ground and tending it, nothing will be in position to grow. We have a responsibility and privilege to partner with God as Kingdom planters and cultivators. When we cooperate with God in His process, He brings about the growth.
2. *Failure to manage our responsibilities can inhibit growth.* We can't create growth, but we can hinder it. Growth requires seed and water. If we don't plant and cultivate the seed, we inhibit the growth God desires to bring in our ministries.
3. *Our work will be rewarded.* Paul says forthrightly, “The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor” (1 Corinthians 3:8). What we do, and how we do it, does not escape God's notice.

When we embrace our responsibilities in the growth process, God does what only He can do. We don't produce the outcome, but we choose whether to cooperate with the One who does.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What does it look like to cooperate with God in the growth process?
2. What do planting and watering look like in your ministry environment?
3. What are specific ways we are currently inhibiting growth?

### Apply

Take time to reflect on the responsibilities God has entrusted to you that contribute to the growth process in your church. Then identify two things you can change, stop, or start that would help you deliver these responsibilities with a greater level of effectiveness.

## 2

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

**Embrace Responsibility**

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:5–9).

Three lessons on the responsibilities of growth:

1. *We give God something to work with when we take care of our \_\_\_\_\_.*

God makes things grow, but our job is to plant and water. Without getting seed in the ground and tending it, nothing will be in position to grow. We have a responsibility and privilege to partner with God as Kingdom planters and cultivators. When we cooperate with God in His process, He brings about the growth.

2. *Failure to manage our responsibilities can \_\_\_\_\_ growth.*

Growth requires seed and water. If we don’t plant and cultivate the seed, we inhibit the growth God desires to bring in our ministries.

3. *Our work will be \_\_\_\_\_.*

What we do, and how we do it, does not escape God’s notice.

**Apply**

Take time to reflect on the responsibilities God has entrusted to you that contribute to the growth process in your church. Then identify two things you can change, stop, or start that would help you deliver these responsibilities with a greater level of effectiveness.

## 3 | WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

# Engage Processes

### Team Review

What changes did you make in how you deliver your growth responsibilities?

### Assess

What does the idea of growth processes mean to you?

### Insights and Ideas

In our event-driven culture, many people treat growth like it's nothing more than a big event. We go to conferences, camps, retreats, workshops and seminars expecting to learn something new and experience transformational growth.

However, growth seldom happens at events. Instead, events *inspire* growth. They motivate us to make changes and adopt new habits, but the actual growth doesn't happen until after we leave an event.

For transformation to take place, we need to engage processes of growth. These involve four steps:

1. **Examine your condition.** The apostle Paul said, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Growth begins when we examine the condition of our lives and churches and understand the areas in which we need to grow.
2. **Learn something new.** Proverbs 1:5 says, "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance." Wise leaders are lifelong learners. They learn deliberately, strategically and continually. As pastors and their teams learn, the churches they lead benefit from what they learn.
3. **Practice what you learn.** Referring to preaching, teaching and the public reading of Scripture, the apostle Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress" (1 Timothy 4:15).

Simply put, practice is the key to progress. It is as true in your ministry as it was in Timothy's. Practice makes what you learn applicable and transformational.

4. **Rely on the Holy Spirit.** At the center of growth is ongoing reliance on the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16). He wrote those words right before saying God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

Paul understood the Spirit's power is essential for transformation. We can examine, learn and practice, but the Holy Spirit brings the growth.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the steps above are easiest to overlook? Why?
2. Which step do you personally need to engage more?
3. To which step do we need to give more attention collectively as the leadership of the church?

### Apply

Spend some time reflecting on growth processes. Choose an area in which you need to grow as a leader. Then take the time to examine your condition, learn something new, and practice what you've learned — relying on the Holy Spirit above all. Keep a journal as you grow, recording insights you glean from the process.



## 3

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Engage Processes

Growth seldom happens at events. Instead, events *inspire* growth. They motivate us to make changes and adopt new habits, but the actual growth doesn't happen until after we leave an event. For transformation to take place, we need to engage processes of growth.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ *your condition.*

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

2. \_\_\_\_\_ *something new.*

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (Proverbs 1:5).

3. \_\_\_\_\_ *what you learn.*

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (1 Timothy 4:15).

4. \_\_\_\_\_ *on the Holy Spirit.*

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being” (Ephesians 3:16).

**Apply**

Spend some time reflecting on growth processes. Choose an area in which you need to grow as a leader. Then take the time to examine your condition, learn something new, and practice what you've learned — relying on the Holy Spirit above all. Keep a journal as you grow, recording insights you glean from the process.

## 4 | WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

# Recognize Seasons

### Team Review

How have growth processes changed your approach to growing?

### Assess

What do growth seasons look like in your church environment?

### Insights and Ideas

Life, leadership and ministry move through different growth seasons. Solomon said, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). No church experiences rapid growth every day, month and year. However, each season in the life of a church does have a dimension of growth to it.

Consider these four growth seasons:

1. **Launch seasons.** Some seasons involve launching new ministries, programs and churches. These seasons come with a great deal of planning and preparation, as well as excitement and anticipation.

2. **Momentum seasons.** These are the seasons when you experience results you hoped and prayed would come. Change is sometimes easier during these momentum seasons because you’re benefiting from the sustained energy of forward progress.

At the same time, momentum seasons can reveal areas needing attention within systems and structures. Sustaining momentum might require improving the quality of those systems.

3. **Pruning seasons.** Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1–2).

Pruning seasons often follow times of reflection, assessment and even seasons of growth. These seasons may require us to make difficult decisions, cut certain programs, and perhaps even make changes within our teams. Pruning is rarely fun — or popular — but it’s essential if we want to make room for healthy growth and future flourishing.

4. **Persistence seasons.** The apostle Paul said, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Hard seasons require patience and persistence. In these seasons, Paul’s advice is direct: Do not give up. A harvest will come if we remain faithful.

Each of these seasons brings a unique dimension to growth. During launch seasons, something new grows. Momentum seasons see existing ministries grow to new levels. Pruning seasons make room for future growth. And persistence seasons help grow our character and resilience.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How do these four growth seasons challenge you?
2. Which growth season are we in right now as a church?
3. What do we need to do to maximize this season?

### Apply

Put together an action plan to navigate your church’s current season. Make sure your plan answers three questions: When have we experienced this season before, and what lessons did we learn in that season? What is most important lesson for us during this season? What gap, challenge or inhibitor do we need to address?

## 4

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Recognize Seasons

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Four growth seasons:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ seasons.

Some seasons involve launching new ministries, programs and churches. These seasons come with a great deal of planning and preparation, as well as excitement and anticipation.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ seasons.

These are the seasons when you experience results you hoped and prayed would come.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ seasons.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1–2).

4. \_\_\_\_\_ seasons.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

Each of these seasons brings a unique dimension to growth. During launch seasons, something new grows. Momentum seasons see existing ministries grow to new levels. Pruning seasons make room for future growth. And persistence seasons help grow our character and resilience.

### Apply

Put together an action plan to navigate your church’s current season. Make sure your plan answers three questions: When have we experienced this season before, and what lessons did we learn in that season? What is most important lesson for us during this season? What gap, challenge or inhibitor do we need to address?

## 5 | WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

# Adjust Thinking

### Team Review

What does your action plan include for navigating your current growth season?

### Assess

How do growth-minded leaders think differently?

### Insights and Ideas

Growth requires a way of thinking that values improvement. It's the baseline that makes growth in our lives and ministries achievable. Without a growth mindset, we cannot fully realize our God-given capacity. Yes, God makes things grow, but if our attitude is wrong, we'll stand in the way of the work He desires to do in us and in the churches we lead.

Jesus modeled the kind of attitude we should have toward growth. When He was in the temple as a 12-year-old boy, Jesus was "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). And Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Jesus was committed to growth in the most important areas of His life.

Authors Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller wrote, "Growth for leaders is the treasure that funds the future journey. Stop finding the treasure along the way and the journey ends."

Finding that treasure begins with a willingness to search for it.

How can you know whether you have a growth mindset? Begin by rating yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 in response to each of the following statements (with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 10 being "strongly agree"):

- I have the humility to learn from anyone and any environment.
- I have an insatiable curiosity that drives me to explore, learn and grow.
- I welcome candid feedback that will help me improve.
- I seek training, resources, coaching and experiences to help me grow.
- I have the ability to bounce back from setbacks and grow through adversity.
- I have a listening posture and am more of a question-asker than an answer-giver.
- I don't just learn information; I regularly apply it for personal transformation.

Your answers reveal the level of your growth mindset. They give you a glimpse into how well you seek growth opportunities, maximize growth resources, leverage adversity for growth, and apply wisdom to help you improve.

Author John Maxwell said, "Growth's highest reward is not what we get from it, but what we become by it. ... What you think about yourself determines the investment you will make in yourself."

That investment involves thoughtful steps that will position you for the growth God wants you to experience.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What difference does a growth mindset make in leadership and in ministry?
2. Which of the seven statements above most challenges you? Why?
3. What does it take to develop the right attitude for growth?

### Apply

Reflect on the seven statements above. Choose the two statements where you rated yourself the lowest based on a scale from 1 to 10. Then identify two things you can begin doing to bolster your growth mindset. Share your scores with a friend and tell him or her what you plan to do to improve.



## 5

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Adjust Thinking

Jesus was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46).

“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

“Growth for leaders is the treasure that funds the future journey. Stop finding the treasure along the way and the journey ends.” — Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller

Rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 10 being “strongly agree”):

- I have the \_\_\_\_\_ to learn from anyone and any environment.
- I have an insatiable \_\_\_\_\_ that drives me to explore, learn and grow.
- I welcome candid \_\_\_\_\_ that will help me improve.
- I seek training, resources, \_\_\_\_\_ and experiences to help me grow.
- I have the ability to bounce back from setbacks and grow through \_\_\_\_\_.
- I have a \_\_\_\_\_ posture and am more of a question-asker than an answer-giver.
- I don’t just learn \_\_\_\_\_; I regularly apply it for personal \_\_\_\_\_.

“Growth’s highest reward is not what we get from it, but what we become by it. ... What you think about yourself determines the investment you will make in yourself.”  
— John Maxwell

### Apply

Reflect on the seven statements above. Choose the two statements where you rated yourself the lowest based on a scale from 1 to 10. Then identify two things you can begin doing to bolster your growth mindset. Share your scores with a friend and tell him or her what you plan to do to improve.

## 6

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Close Gaps

**Team Review**

What does it mean to you to have a growth gap?

**Assess**

How can leaders and churches increase their awareness of their growth gaps?

**Insights and Ideas**

Leaders often visualize where they want to be and who they want to become. But between us and our dreams, there are gaps. Growth gaps are the spaces between the leader we are today and the leader we hope to become. They are the spaces between where our church is now and where we hope it will be soon.

The writer of Hebrews describes such a gap: “Let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so” (6:1–3).

Because the recipients of this epistle had stopped growing, a gap appeared in their level of maturity.

Such gaps are real, which is why leaders and churches must intentionally focus on closing them. Closing growth gaps requires two important steps:

1. *Create a growth plan.* A solid personal growth plan answers questions such as, Where do I need to grow? How do I plan to grow? Who will hold me accountable to grow? How will I measure progress?

When you create a written growth plan, you’ll have the roadmap to move you from where you are to where you want to be.

Your church needs a growth plan, too. Yes, God makes the church grow, but we need a plan that leverages our time, talent and resources as we walk in step with the Holy Spirit’s direction.

A church growth plan will help you maximize God-given strengths, remove roadblocks, and leverage opportunities for greater Kingdom impact.

2. *Recruit a growth team.* Pastor Scott Wilson talks about the importance of a growth team. A growth team consists of the people who help you grow in the most important areas of your life. For example, you might have a financial advisor, fitness trainer, counselor, pastor, and mentor on your growth team to help you grow financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually and professionally. No individual can prepare you for growth in every area. That’s why you need a growth team.

Similarly, you need a church growth team. This team might include coaches, consultants, advisors, and board members who help the church assess and reach its full Kingdom potential.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. What growth gaps are you dealing with personally right now?
2. What growth gaps is our church experiencing?
3. What steps do we need to take to close our church’s growth gaps?

**Apply**

Create a growth plan and growth team for yourself and for your church (or ministry or department). Include practical steps that will foster greater health. In addition, identify and recruit a team of people who will help you and the church improve.



## Close Gaps

“Let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so” (Hebrews 6:1–3).

Two steps to closing growth gaps:

1. *Create a growth* \_\_\_\_\_.

A solid personal growth plan answers questions such as, Where do I need to grow? How do I plan to grow? Who will hold me accountable to grow? How will I measure progress?

A church growth plan will help you maximize God-given strengths, remove road-blocks, and leverage opportunities for greater Kingdom impact.

2. *Recruit a growth* \_\_\_\_\_.

Pastor Scott Wilson talks about the importance of a growth team. A growth team consists of the people who help you grow in the most important areas of your life. For example, you might have a financial advisor, fitness trainer, counselor, pastor, and mentor on your growth team to help you grow financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually and professionally.

A church's growth team might include coaches, consultants, advisors, and board members who help the church assess and reach its full Kingdom potential.

### Apply

Create a growth plan and growth team for yourself and for your church (or ministry or department). Include practical steps that will foster greater health. In addition, identify and recruit a team of people who will help you and the church improve.

## 7

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Develop Disciplines

**Team Review**

What's your plan, and who's on your team to help you and the church grow?

**Assess**

If God is the source of growth, what is the relationship between disciplines and growth?

**Insights and Ideas**

God is the one who makes things grow. Yet discipline is a real part of growth. As noted earlier, Paul planted the seed and Apollos watered it (1 Corinthians 3:6). But for those practices to bear fruit, Paul and Apollos had to practice them regularly. In other words, discipline is critical to growth.

Paul described the power of discipline when he said, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (1 Corinthians 9:24–25).

Discipline was the path to the prize. The same is true for us and the churches God has called us to lead. Discipline is multi-dimensional, and it's essential if we want to create space for growth. Start with these three disciplines:

1. *The discipline of spiritual habits.* Spiritual habits are essential to fostering intimacy with God. The greatest growth in our lives and churches happen when we discipline ourselves to create space for the Holy Spirit to shape us and the ministries we lead. Habits such as prayer, Bible study, worship, fasting, and engaging in community provide space for spiritual formation.
2. *The discipline of personal learning.* If we are not lifelong learners, we'll become the lid to our church's growth. We don't make the church grow, but an unwillingness to learn can inhibit growth. The discipline of learning best practices will expose us to new methods God is using to expand His Church across the globe.
3. *The discipline of organizational focus.* Many churches struggle with staying focused on the mission at hand. Our job is to get clear vision from the Lord, organize the team around the vision, and then stay focused amid a world of distraction. As author and leadership expert Jim Collins has observed, organizations need disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action. That combination helps us maintain focus on what matters most.

We are naturally more disciplined in some areas than others. The key is to develop spiritual, personal *and* organizational focus so distractions don't hinder growth.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. With which of the three disciplines above do you most struggle? Why?
2. What impact might personal learning have on your leadership and the church?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how focused are we as a church? What would improve our focus?

**Apply**

Determine which of the three disciplines needs the most attention in your life and ministry. Then name three things you can do to cultivate that discipline, both personally and as a team.



## 7

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Develop Disciplines

Discipline is a real part of growth. As noted earlier, Paul planted the seed and Apollos watered it (1 Corinthians 3:6). But for those practices to bear fruit, Paul and Apollos had to practice them regularly. In other words, discipline is critical to growth.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:24–25).

Three disciplines that create space for growth:

1. *The discipline of \_\_\_\_\_ habits.*

Spiritual habits are essential to fostering intimacy with God. The greatest growth in our lives and churches happen when we discipline ourselves to create space for the Holy Spirit to shape us and the ministries we lead.

2. *The discipline of \_\_\_\_\_ learning.*

If we are not lifelong learners, we’ll become the lid to our church’s growth. We don’t make the church grow, but an unwillingness to learn can inhibit growth.

3. *The discipline of \_\_\_\_\_ focus.*

Many churches struggle with staying focused on the mission at hand. Our job is to get clear vision from the Lord, organize the team around the vision, and then stay focused amid a world of distraction.

**Apply**

Determine which of the three disciplines needs the most attention in your life and ministry. Then name three things you can do to cultivate that discipline, both personally and as a team.

## 8

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Practice Stewardship

## Team Review

What progress are you making toward developing spiritual, personal and organizational discipline?

## Assess

What role does stewardship play in the growth of the Church?

## Insights and Ideas

There is a unique relationship between growth and stewardship. Growth seems to come when we wisely steward what God has entrusted to us. The Parable of the Bags of Gold perfectly illustrates this truth.

When the master entrusted three servants with his wealth, the first two servants doubled their shares, while the third servant simply hid the master's money in the ground. When it came time to settle accounts, the master said to the first two servants, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21,23).

With the first two servants, the master commended the stewardship of his wealth. He considered them faithful because they managed the funds in a way that led to growth. However, the master called the third servant wicked and lazy because of his careless attitude and poor management.

God is the one who makes things grow, but our stewardship matters. God does not entrust us with resources so we can mishandle them. He is looking for trustworthy servants who will care for the increase He sends.

What kind of steward are you? Consider four questions:

1. Do I wisely manage money with the desires of the true Owner (God) in mind?
2. Do I wisely manage time, investing it in priorities aligned with the heart of God and eliminating time-wasting distractions?
3. Do I wisely manage the gifts and abilities God has entrusted to me by growing them to their full potential and using them for the good of others and the glory of God?
4. Do I wisely manage people, using my influence to serve and support them?

Money, time, gifts and influence are resources God has entrusted to us. How we manage those resources determines whether God can trust us with more. In that way, growth is connected to stewardship.

God tends to give more to those who have proven faithful with what they've already received. The Parable of the Bags of Gold equates faithfulness with stewardship.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. How does the relationships between stewardship and growth challenge your perspective?
2. On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you (and our church) wisely steward time, talent, treasure and influence?
3. How could we become better stewards in the church?

## Apply

Do a personal inventory on how well you and your ministry manage time, talent, treasure and influence. Then identify one thing you can do — personally and as a ministry — to steward each area more effectively.

## 8

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Practice Stewardship

There is a unique relationship between growth and stewardship. Growth seems to come when we wisely steward what God has entrusted to us.

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:21,23).

God is the one who makes things grow, but our stewardship matters. God does not entrust us with resources so we can mishandle them. He is looking for trustworthy servants who will care for the increase He sends.

Four stewardship questions:

1. *Do I wisely manage \_\_\_\_\_ with the desires of the true Owner (God) in mind?*
2. *Do I wisely manage \_\_\_\_\_, investing it in priorities aligned with the heart of God, and eliminating time-wasting distractions?*
3. *Do I wisely manage the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ God has entrusted to me by growing them to their full potential and using them for the good of others and the glory of God?*
4. *Do I wisely manage \_\_\_\_\_, using my influence to serve and support them?*

God tends to give more to those who have proven faithful with what they’ve already received. The Parable of the Bags of Gold equates faithfulness with stewardship.

### Apply

Do a personal inventory on how well you and your ministry manage time, talent, treasure and influence. Then identify one thing you can do — personally and as a ministry — to steward each area more effectively.

## 9

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Multiply Progress

**Team Review**

What changes have you made to improve your stewardship of the time, talent, treasure and influence with which God has entrusted you and your church?

**Assess**

What are specific ways you invest in the growth of others?

**Insights and Ideas**

Growth was never meant to die with us. Instead, when we grow, we become positioned to invest in the growth of others. A great example of this is Paul's investment in the Thessalonians.

Paul said, "You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thessalonians 1:5–8).

When Paul grew, he invested in the growth of the Thessalonians. Then the Thessalonians invested in the growth of the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Finally, the growth from these believers went on to influence people everywhere. Paul's growth multiplied in the people around him and beyond him.

How can we live in a way that multiplies growth? Below are three strategies:

1. **Modeling.** Paul said, "You know how we lived among you." In other words, Paul's personal growth exhibited behavior that became a model for the Thessalonians. In the same way, we can inspire growth in others by the way we live and lead. Matthew Henry said, "Those who teach by their doctrine must teach by their life, or else they pull down with one hand what they build up with the other."
2. **Equipping.** We equip people to grow when we provide training, resources, coaching and experiences. Equipping doesn't happen by accident. It requires leaders to identify people in whom they will invest and determine how they will make growth deposits in the lives of those individuals.
3. **Connecting.** Sometimes people express a desire to grow in areas outside of our experience and expertise. In those moments, we can still invest in their growth by connecting them with the right people or resources. When we serve as connectors, we are able to leverage our influence for the benefit and growth of others.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. How does Paul's example among the Thessalonians inspire you to invest in the growth of others?
2. What strategies have you used to multiply growth in people in your area of ministry?
3. Which of the three strategies above — modeling, equipping and connecting — do you need to be more intentional about to grow leaders in your area of ministry?

**Apply**

Identify two people in your ministry area in whose growth you can begin investing. Then put together a plan to equip them strategically and systematically. As you see them grow, challenge them to begin investing in the growth of someone else.



## 9

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Multiply Progress

“You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thessalonians 1:5–8).

Three ways to multiply growth:

1. \_\_\_\_\_.

“Those who teach by their doctrine must teach by their life, or else they pull down with one hand what they build up with the other.” — Matthew Henry

2. \_\_\_\_\_.

We equip people to grow when we provide training, resources, coaching and experiences. Equipping doesn’t happen by accident. It requires leaders to identify people in whom they will invest and determine how they will make growth deposits in the lives of those individuals.

3. \_\_\_\_\_.

Sometimes people express a desire to grow in areas outside of our experience and expertise. In those moments, we can still invest in their growth by connecting them with the right people or resources.

**Apply**

Identify two people in your ministry area in whose growth you can begin investing. Then put together a plan to equip them strategically and systematically. As you see them grow, challenge them to begin investing in the growth of someone else.

## 10

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Measure Trends

**Team Review**

In whom have you started investing to help them grow, and what does your equipping plan look like?

**Assess**

How do you measure growth in your church?

**Insights and Ideas**

Measuring growth in churches can be somewhat controversial. Some leaders love it, and other leaders loathe it. However, measuring is simply a tool. The key is measuring growth in areas that provide a balanced picture of health.

Here are four measures to consider:

1. **Stories:** *Are lives being changed?* When we stop hearing stories of life change, that should be a warning sign. Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). How often do you hear stories of life change through the disciple-making efforts of your church?
2. **Numbers:** *Are we growing?* Although some leaders bristle at the suggestion, there are some benefits of tracking numbers. For example, such records can help us know whether we’re reaching more people with the gospel or growing in generosity.

Such tracking can reveal when it’s time to expand a facility, open a new room for kids, or add more parking spaces. If we disregard what the numbers reveal about our needs, we can miss opportunities for impact.

3. **Percentages:** *Are we trending forward?* It’s good to know your numbers, but it’s also important to know your percentages. The latter highlight health and forward movement.

For example, what percentage of your weekend attendees have been baptized in water during the past 12 months? How many have served in the church? How many belong to a small group?

Your attendance can increase, but that does not automatically mean the health of the congregation has increased. Measuring percentages helps you determine whether the church is trending up or down in key health metrics.

4. **Vibrancy:** *Is the spiritual temperature increasing?* One way to measure spiritual vibrancy is to administer an annual survey with the same questions. In addition to demographic questions, ask questions such as these:

- Which best describes your spiritual life? (Fully surrendered to Christ; spiritually growing; spiritually stalled; spiritually declining.)
- Which steps have you taken in the past 12 months? (Baptized in water; joined a small group; served in the church; served in the community.)
- How often do you spend time reading the Bible each week? (Never; 1–2 times; 3–4 times; 5+ times.)

When you ask these questions year after year, you’ll begin to notice trends in spiritual growth and the vibrancy of the church.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. How have you traditionally viewed the idea of measuring growth in the church?
2. Which of the growth measurements above is most intriguing to you? Why?
3. What would it look like for us to improve our measurements at our church?

**Apply**

Put together a system for measuring growth at your church. Make it simple so you can easily monitor progress on a regular basis.

## 10

## WHAT GROWTH IS AND HOW IT HAPPENS

## Measure Trends

However, measuring is simply a tool. The key is measuring growth in areas that provide a balanced picture of health.

Four growth measures:

1. \_\_\_\_\_: *Are lives being changed?*

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

2. \_\_\_\_\_: *Are we growing?*

If we disregard what the numbers reveal about our needs, we can miss opportunities for impact.

3. \_\_\_\_\_: *Are we trending forward?*

Percentages highlight health and forward movement. For example, what percentage of your weekend attendees have been baptized in water during the past 12 months? How many have served in the church? How many belong to a small group?

4. \_\_\_\_\_: *Is the spiritual temperature increasing?*

Measure spiritual vibrancy through an annual survey, asking questions such as these:

- Which best describes your spiritual life? (Fully surrendered to Christ; spiritually growing; spiritually stalled; spiritually declining.)
- Which steps have you taken in the past 12 months? (Baptized in water; joined a small group; served in the church; served in the community.)
- How often do you spend time reading the Bible each week? (Never; 1–2 times; 3–4 times; 5+ times.)

### Apply

Put together a system for measuring growth at your church. Make it simple so you can easily monitor progress on a regular basis