

The Life Cycle of a Local Church

Like all things in life, churches have a beginning, they grow and/or diminish, and they often die. Ideally, churches grow in healthy ways, last for multiple generations and multiply by giving birth to other likeminded churches.

The 1st Century model was made up of multiple small house churches in a city with no thought of building mega-churches. Churches are born through evangelism, they grow by maturing believers in the pew, preparing them to minister effectively to the souls in their own world, bringing them into the church & birthing new churches.

When believers in the church become complacent, stop reaching out through evangelism & ministry the church loses momentum & begins a downward spiral that will eventually result in the church dying. The lifeblood of the church is people hungry for truth & families with children who want to raise their children in a truth teaching church.

1. What constitutes a Local Church?

- a. Must consist of born-again believers; saved people indwelt by God, the Holy Spirit
- b. More than a bible study – more than believers participating in bible classes
- c. An administrative board is required, handling duties of running the church.
- d. As believers grow spiritually, the church organizes itself around spiritual gifts.
- e. As a group, they take responsibility for evangelism & teaching the word for growth
- f. God, the Holy Spirit motivates outreach through personal evangelism, & through the gift of Evangelism
- g. God, the Holy Spirit motivates outreach through ministry of growth & gifts to other believers
- h. Believers grow spiritually, training and equipping themselves to minister with the local church and to edify unbelievers with the gospel and other believers with Categorical Bible Doctrine.
- i. The Church grows numerically through evangelism and inviting hungry believers to the word.
- j. Organizations of unbelievers who claim to be a church are not churches at all.
- k. Any group that adds works to Grace salvation are not saved and can't be a church, regardless of what they claim to be or what they call themselves.

2. Life cycles of an average church.

- a. **Birth**
 - Through evangelism, mission church plants, bible studies, etc.
- b. **Growth**
 - Outreach through evangelism & ministry, adding new members, young people, couples with children, training ministers, looking for pockets of positive believers
- c. **Equilibrium**
 - Numerical growth levels off, and the church goes about the business of ministry
- d. **Decline**
 - Once growth slows, so does momentum, and the church begins to lose more members than it gains, even while everyone continues working. The same people end up in positions of responsibility perpetually, children's ministries die out and the members get old.
- e. **Death**
 - Eventually the ministry turns back into simply a bible study, attendance & giving decreases, ministries die out and finally the last few people close the doors.

This cycle of a local church body's life and death has happened millions of times over the centuries. It is part of God's design that when believers in local churches lose their passion for service, for outreach, that they lose the growth and momentum required to keep the local church vibrant & alive.

3. The health of the Christian church is determined by the individual believer's spiritual growth & fulfillment of the Plan of God revealed in the Word of God.

- a. **Positive Volition:** Listen & learn the truth of the word - grace
- b. **Faith Perception:** Attach faith to the truth as revealed by God, the Holy Spirit in bible class
- c. **Faith Application:** Attach faith to the word as recalled by God, the Holy Spirit in specific situations
- d. **Transformation:** Removing Old Man beliefs & replacing them with New Man beliefs
 - Rejecting & removing human programming based on your trend – lascivious – ascetic
 - Forming the New Man belief system through assimilation of Categorical Bible Doctrine
 - Replacing & embracing the motives & thinking of Jesus as revealed by God, the Holy Spirit
 - Christian character “no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”
- e. **Service - Growth:** Meeting needs of fellow believers Gifted: specific area of ministry
 - A breakdown in any of these areas results in reversionism, shutting down growth;
 - Learning whole realm of Categorical Bible Doctrine, Faith-Rest Cycle, removing false beliefs, replacing with the mind of Christ, forming His character, devoted to service, surrendering self to God.
 - When individual believers & groups of believers stop growing unto maturity leading to a total surrender to the Lord, the church begins to stall out and decline.
 - The church either makes changes to resume momentum or enters a death spiral.

4. The church at Corinth: abundant potential (1 Cor.1:4-7), overwhelming problems (1 Cor.3:1-3) managed to stay alive at least until approx. 100 AD.

(Phil 4:3) Clement of Rome, fellow minister with Paul; 100AD wrote letter to church in Corinth

- a. The church at Corinth was a mess of carnality, both lascivious & self-righteous sinfulness
- b. Life lived under the Old Sin Nature, all behavior is motivated by either lascivious or ascetic trends
 - **Lascivious:** Incest (1 Cor.5:1-13); Prostitution (1 Cor.6:12-21); Drunkenness & Gluttony (1 Cor.11:16-33); Idolatry/Aphrodite – sex religion – promiscuity (1 Cor.11:81-11)
 - **Asceticism** – Divisions (1 Cor.1:10-11, 11:19); Preference of Teachers (1 Cor.1:12-3:23); Lawsuits (1 Cor.6:1-11); Judging weaker believers (1 Cor.6:8)
- c. Marriage in the Corinthian culture was difficult: Idolatry & promiscuity were normal; infidelity was rampant; role reversal of authority
- d. Rejection of resurrection b/c of the influence of Greek philosophy & pagan religions
 - If any church had reasons to fail, it was the church at Corinth – so many sin problems
 - Paul's 2nd letter indicates that his instructions to correct some of the issues had been done.
 - The Corinthian letters written in 55 AD and the letter from Clement 100 AD indicate that this church was still alive 45 years later. Some give a date of 145 AD, so could be much longer.

5. Reasons for a church to die.

- a. Entropy – all organized systems naturally fall apart and die – campfire burns & dies out
- b. When we stop adding fuel to the fire through evangelism and outreach, we lose momentum and die out, no matter how special your ministry was in the past.
- c. Cause: believers stop growing in their personal life – God, the Holy Spirit will drive you to deeper depths within to take off Old Man beliefs and higher levels of surrender and sacrifice for His sake.
 - Lose interest in the message, become distracted by a message from the world, some other great thinker, speaker, but an unbeliever, allowing work, social life, other legitimate reasons to cause you to not hear a biblical message on a regular basis.
 - Refusal to make application: Applying the Faith cycle with adversities; Removing Old Man beliefs enabling you to renew your mind with truth & operate under the New Man belief system.
6. Resume growing & focusing on the service of outreach to unbelievers & believers.