

A Kingdom Growth Mindset in the Midlands of South Carolina

Serving as a Family of Baptist Congregations – Words of Challenge for CMBA

First Dispatch

By

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A family of Baptist congregations is at its best when the congregations have a Kingdom growth mindset more than a church growth or church sustainability mindset. What is the difference? Is one good and the other bad? It depends.

A church growth mindset is faithful to fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment in and through a congregation. This is good. Some congregations go beyond faithfulness and are also effective and innovative in how they fulfill the Commission and the Commandment. This is also good.

The result is – without any internal or external interruptions – a new congregation can potentially grow quantitatively and qualitatively for 18 to 21 years before they face their first significant church growth vs. sustainability crisis. Also good.

Having a faithful, effective, and innovative church growth mindset does not, however, guarantee a Kingdom growth mindset. In our denomination and programmatically, Kingdom growth refers to being a sending church. (I actually feel that what a congregation ought to focus on is being received by those to whom God is sending them rather than being sent. That dialogue is for another day.)

A Kingdom growth mindset is a perspective that sees each congregation as a missional outpost which is part of the larger mission of God. This is where congregations function as much or more as a scattered church as they do as a gathered church. One image of this is that they are a centered set without boundaries, rather than a boxed set with predetermined boundaries.

Another image is one of *push* and *pull*. A church growth mindset pushes its identity and actions as a congregation into its context to attract new people. A Kingdom growth mindset allows God to pull its identity and actions into their community context and beyond to invest spiritually in people who need the unconditional love of God through Jesus Christ.

A church growth mindset without a clear missional vision can often ask about every open door of opportunity – “How will this benefit our congregation?” A Kingdom growth mindset will ask about every open door of opportunity – “How will this benefit the greater Kingdom of God?”

Whether a congregation will focus primarily on church growth or Kingdom growth is typically determined when it is launched as a congregation. Its mission, purpose, core values, and vision reveal if its focus is more on church growth, Kingdom growth, or a synergy of both. A synergy is good, and preferred.

Even deeper, a synergy of church growth and Kingdom growth should permeate a congregation from the beginning of its life and stay with it forever as it journeys forward with God's empowering vision fueling it with missional discipleship flavoring it. A focus on church growth and Kingdom growth must happen concurrently and not sequentially. This is not only good, but also great.

Many congregations, however, develop foci on church growth and Kingdom growth sequentially. This happens when their actions are primarily about church growth from the beginning of the congregation to be sure they survive those crucial first seven years. In this case they declare they will get around to being Kingdom-focused and more missional later when they have the leadership, finances, and capacity to do so. This is not good.

In too many congregations, this means that a focus on things of the greater Kingdom is an add-on rather than a characteristic of being all-in for God's Kingdom beginning with the first time they gather. When Kingdom-focused missions and ministry come later they are a periodic or annual project rather than an ongoing part of the missional lifestyle of each congregant. This is bad.

Congregations may justify their Kingdom growth engagements by talking about the money they contribute to denominational missions, to local community ministries, plus their non-personal missional activities like contributing food, clothes, school supplies, or other commodities to people they never get to know and who never see the face of Jesus in their lives. This is worse.

Where is your congregation in its focus on church growth, Kingdom growth, or a synergy of both? Ponder spiritually this question. I will follow up with more insights to a Kingdom growth mindset with later dispatches.