

Choosing Between Growing a Church or Contending for Revival

God's world-changers always favor being idealistic ahead of being realistic.

They are dreamers, visionaries and supernatural theorists instead of analysts driven by logical data. They refuse to work within natural limits for the sake of quicker, more visible success. They would rather fail a thousand times contending for the impossible than succeed once at something that's humanly possible.

These leaders won't compromise the call to revival by seeking to fill the seats with the lukewarm. They are calling forth the burning ones. Their dream is to shock cities with a remnant army.

"But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many people. Bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. When I say to you, 'This one will go with you,' he will go with you. Everyone about whom I will say, 'This one will not go with you,' will not go" (Judg. 7:4).

Three hundred was better than 33,000. This truth is the focus of this article.

The Big Meeting

For as long as I can remember, I have loved the large-group atmosphere with innumerable zealous people worshiping God and going deep together. There's something about the catalytic power and synergy in an atmosphere like that—if the majority are raging radicals for Jesus. A gathering like this most always takes place in the form of conferences or conventions.

For example, for me, there's nothing like the Onething conference that the International House of Prayer in Kansas City hosts at the end of each year. That Missouri city becomes the focal point for people who embrace the call to a life of prophetic intercession in the end times. People from all over the world converge there, which results in the large-group atmosphere so many others and I value.

Over my 25 years of ministry, I have enjoyed many large conferences like this but have also discovered that such gatherings rarely exist within the construct of the local church. Understand, I'm not saying the local church can't attract a lot of people, become mega in size and become influential in the community. Many do just that. We've just ventured through an era where seeker-sensitive churches became some of the largest churches in the nation. What I am arguing is that it's extremely rare to find a church that's raging on fire by establishing a prayer-fueled, revival-focused, region-shocking, Upper-Room level culture.

In fact, I wonder just how common it is to grow a church to more than one or two hundred people with such an approach. I believe it is possible yet extremely rare. With some exceptions, small revival tribes of 30-70 people are a much more predictable expectation—until revival actually breaks out.

One hundred and twenty in the upper room can quickly become thousands in the church of the city.

9 Reasons Growing a Large Church and Contending For Revival May Be Mutually Exclusive Pursuits

1. Muzzled speech: It's all too tempting for today's church growth focused leaders to trade in their prophetic mantle for that of a salesman. Instead of cutting, bold, unapologetic truth being delivered with a prophetic edge, lesser, neutered messages are given in the hopes there won't be any kickback.

Fear of offending the tithers overwhelms fear of offending the Spirit.

The prevailing question becomes, "What will the people respond to?" I'll major on that. Then, "What will people resist?" I'll avoid those topics at all costs—even the cost of revival.

The demands of revival include, at the most foundational level, God's leaders refusing to be careful as they pierce with a sharp blade the sphere of influence with which they have been entrusted. If leaders consistently communicate revival truths, only the remnant will remain. The masses that promised a mega-church experience would leave the pastor with but a handful to run with. Very few are willing to pay that price. The alternative is much more attractive—muzzled speech that the majority will enjoy.

This, friend, is not the call of today's leader—not at this critical time in history. We must see troublers of Israel emerge once again.

Note: You don't want to miss the rest of this article. To read it, please click . {eo}

John Burton has been developing and leading ministries for over 20 years and is a sought-out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored nine books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. Additionally, he has planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing a prayer- and revival-focused ministry school in Detroit called the School of Prayer. John's mandate is to call the church in the nations to repentance from casual Christianity and to burn in a manner worthy of the King of kings. He is equipping people to confront the enemies of God (established religion, Jezebel and so on) that hinder an extreme, sold-out level of true worship.