

10 Spiritual Seasons Your Local Church Will Likely Experience

Like every individual believer in Christ, there are various seasons every local church experiences, including highs, lows, growth, renewal, decrease and testing. As a local church pastor since 1984 and overseer of a network of pastors since 1999, I have observed the following 10 seasons most local churches experience.

Believers who do not understand these seasons will run from church to church when their season of purging comes. Hence, it is vital to understand these following points if we want to avoid confusion and continue in the purpose of God.

The following are 10 seasons of a local church:

1. Seasons of New Beginnings and Birth

This is perhaps the most exciting time in the history of a local church. Everyone is filled with vision; many people even attend from other older stagnant churches and everyone is filled with great anticipation.

The early church started off with wind, fire and 3,000 getting saved in their first service. Of course, it is not how we start but how we finish that matters. Many churches start off strong but are unable to survive the other seasons of their life.

2. Seasons of Establishment in the Faith

This is the season in which the focus should shift from evangelism to teaching, from gathering to establishing (Acts 2:42; Heb. 6:1-3). Churches that become intoxicated with phenomenal growth and gathering crowds often never shift to

this necessary phase. The result is that maturing believers get frustrated and look for a place that will disciple them.

The unfortunate result is there is a huge back door as big as the front door, resulting in unnecessary transition. This is why some large churches are immature and lack a strong infrastructure.

3. Seasons of Growth

Every healthy living thing reproduces and multiplies. Consequently, there are seasons of growth spurts in most typical churches (Acts 2:47). How long this lasts depends upon many factors, not the least of which is the location of the building and the leadership capacity of the pastor.

This is also an exciting time, and the wise pastor will ride the wave as long as possible and then consolidate and establish all new people quickly as possible. Pastors without a plan to consolidate and assimilate new people waste this important season.

4. Seasons of Purging and Decrease

Jesus taught His disciples that He will prune them so they can produce even more fruit as a vinedresser prunes the vine (John 15:1-7). I have observed that, in churches, God leads people in but also takes some out, for various reasons too many to enumerate here. This is perhaps the hardest season for pastors, because they want to keep everybody in their congregation so it continues to grow in number. However—when we attempt to keep folks in a congregation that God is removing, we harm the potential growth of the body of Christ. This is especially true in some cases when God is sending mature believers elsewhere to help another church grow or get started.

Now don't get me wrong—many believers are involved in church-hopping or leave a congregation for the wrong reason. Maybe

they were offended or were stepped down from a ministry position. Case in point—not long ago, after a few people left our congregation, I was disappointed, until God showed me He was doing us a favor because they would have held us back from where God was taking the church next. As an arrow has to go backwards before it has the momentum to shoot forward—God has to sometimes decrease the numbers of people attending a church before He can cause more fruit to manifest.

5. Seasons of Correction and Judgment

I have found that often, when God visits a church, it is not always in revival and renewal. Sometimes He comes as a chiropractor to adjust things. Adjustments are often painful!

As God judged Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), He also judges certain individuals and removes them either from a church or even from the earth. Paul even said that God allows some who cause division to be weak, sick or even die (1 -34).

No prayer of faith can override a toxic church culture replete with backbiting, division and self-focus. God had to warn five of the seven churches of Asia Minor of pending judgment and correction, even to the point of shutting some of them down if they did not repent (Rev. 2-3). The reason, of course, is that God first and foremost protects the purity of His name and purpose and will not allow a congregation to continue in His blessings apart from holiness and obedience to His Word.

6. Seasons of Refreshing and Renewal

My favorite season for a local church is when, after the severe dealings of God, He sends rest, renewal and revival (Acts 9:31). Revival and renewal do not last forever—only for a season until the church is properly built up, encouraged and ready for the next season. Consequently, pastors who try to build their church on revival will be discouraged and disillusioned because it comes and goes in cycles.

7. Seasons of the Miraculous

There are seasons in the life of a church when there are extraordinary moves of God with great demonstrations of His power. While I do believe we should always expect the miraculous, there is at times a sovereign move of God with an overflow of signs and wonders.

At one point, the early church walked in such power that even the shadow of Peter healed and delivered many (Acts 5:12-16). God moved so powerfully in the establishment of the church of Ephesus that even clothes from the hands of Paul healed the sick. Eventually, the fear of God fell on the whole city and caused a riot due to a depletion of their economy, which depended upon polytheism (Acts 19:21-41).

8. Seasons of Testing

As the early churches experienced prolonged seasons of testing and persecution—so all churches undergo some form of tests and trials (Acts 8:1; 2 Thess. 1:4-6). God allows these tests to try our hearts to see if we will follow in the will of God in spite of great challenges and tests to our faith.

9. Seasons of Transition

As the Church of Antioch was required by God to send out its two top leaders—so God continues to transition out some key leaders in local churches to expand His kingdom (Acts 13:1-2). This results in huge leadership transition that releases people to walk in a higher level of purpose. When great leaders are sent out of a church, it makes room for other leaders to emerge and take their place.

10. Seasons of Theological Paradigm Shifts

As pastors and congregations mature, they also develop theologically and embrace new paradigms of biblical understanding. The first major theological shift that took

place was when God taught Peter that the gospel was also for the Gentiles (Acts 10). This, and Paul's extensive ministry to Gentiles (Acts 13-15) brought about a huge debate, resulting in the first ecumenical council broadening the implications of the gospel. I had my own theological shift in 1995 when I embraced the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Churches who refuse to adjust their biblical understanding, including both the message and the method, will become the new dinosaur and will eventually be extinct.

Finally, may every believer recognize the times and the seasons we as His church are presently in. {eoa}