

Smashing the Goddess Many Pastors Fall Prey To

“... Perhaps the Lord will work for us. For the Lord is not limited to save by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6c).

Here's a truth that will minister peace to many: Effective leadership does not mean numbers.

Although numbers represent people, and it is worthy to reach as many as we can, I am no longer impressed by mere numbers. Numbers represent success only if a person is obeying God. Otherwise, they can actually be a cover-up and a facade for failure in real fruit, character and ethics.

The question often asked at minister's conferences when interfacing with other pastors is “How big is your church?” or “How many are you running?” as if the numbers determine how successful the pastor is. Both the question and response are extremely shallow and a superficial measuring gauge of health in a church. It's like asking me “How many children do you have?” to determine how successful a father I am. I only have one son, so I guess I'm not very successful, while other men who have more children are considered successful. Strange way of measuring success, isn't it?

A big church is not necessarily a healthy church any more than a big family is a sign of a healthy family, and it may not be a sign of effective leadership any more than a big family is a sign of effective parenting.

Our personal and ministerial leadership is determined by disciples we are making—mature and responsible people who adhere to the commands of Jesus and are being conformed into His image, and who themselves are reproducing other disciples in the community. Whether or not our leadership is effective is determined more by what happens in our daily lives outside

the church building than by what happens inside the building one or two or even three days a week.

Numbers should not be a goal, lest they become a god, but the goal should be lasting fruit of transformed lives.

Here's What Real Growth Looks Like

The most effective churches I know are those who are transforming their community person by person and family by family. The most effective disciples I know are those who have learned to leave the 99 who are doing well and love the one who is not. You don't need big numbers and big money to do that. You need kingdom values and the heart of God. You need a willingness to focus on the person in front of you and to be inconvenienced, when necessary, for other's sake.

Do you know why so many churches are failing in truly transforming their communities? Here is the scriptural answer:

"For the others all seek [to advance] their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (the Messiah)" (Phil. 2:21, AMPC).

There it is! When I was a young missionary, I wrote a book called *Soulsh Leadership* from a burden I received that came from all the pastoral turf wars I witnessed in every city and nation we were in. The envy, jealousy, strife, competition and personal kingdom-building were nauseating. I realized over time that men are primarily interested in advancing their own causes and agendas, but not the kingdom's.

It takes a man full of the mind and heart of God to endorse another. I have a dear friend who pastors a very healthy church and buys newspaper ads for new pastors who come into the area to start new churches. Those are what you call kingdom values. Would to God that all pastors followed this example.

What would happen in your community if it didn't matter who

received the credit for advancing the kingdom in your area? What is required from disciples of Jesus is not numerical growth of any particular group or church, but rather, growth of Christ's kingdom free of personal agendas, financial gain and personal ownership issues.

Until we stop caring about numerical "results" of our churches or of people and individuals we're reaching out to personally, but leave the fruit to God's workings and care, we will never see true growth like God sees it. What if kingdom growth meant the end of everything you're involved in? Could you let go of what is dear to you so that another might succeed? Would you be willing to be nothing for the greater good? Would you give away your time, talents and treasure for no other reason than the good it causes others? That is what will transform a community.

These are the true values of the kingdom of God. When our values are aligned with God's great heart and His meek and lowly nature, true kingdom growth will take care of itself. It is a rarity today, but there are some numerically small churches that are growing in numbers and in fruit who are not even trying to grow. They are growing this way because there's been a transformation in their thinking—not in their methodology or philosophy of ministry, but in their values. When our actions spawn forth from transformed Christ-like thinking and kingdom values, there is fruitfulness, but it won't always come in significant numerical growth as we might expect.

Do Numbers Mean as Much to God as They Mean to Us?

Please hear my heart. In this post, I am not suggesting that numbers are bad or wrong, but they are not to be the primary driving force. I've been given the opportunity recently to be on Arabic satellite television, which has a potential viewership of 400 million people. Although that is a very large number of potential viewers to be excited about, my

interest going into this endeavor is to see real fruit of conversions and changed lives through the call-ins and testimonies that may come in.

Our Lord Jesus fed thousands of people but focused His primary efforts in raising up 12 men. One of His hard teachings on eating His flesh and drinking His blood scared away those thousands and even a few of His own, but He did not chase them (John 6). Yet He was the example of the good Shepherd who left the 99 to go after the one who strayed, and He taught us to do the same.

And let's not forget our Old Testament examples of how the Lord cut down Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 able men (Judg. 7); or of the battle Jehoshaphat won when his armies were outnumbered three to one (2 Chron. 20); or of Elijah's victory over the 400 prophets of Baal (1 Kin. 18); or of the time the Lord's anger was stirred against David for counting his army (2 Sam. 24). Numbers can be very deceptive and misleading.

On the other hand, thank God when large numbers of people are being reached, hopefully for the good, but don't make the mistake of evaluating a man's success and spiritual credibility by those large numbers. Those numbers may only be a sign of a man's popularity. God rewards faithfulness, not ability. If God has called you to pastor only a few families, love them and nurture them faithfully, and you will receive the same recompense as any megachurch pastor who did the same.

Here's a grand piece by A.W. Tozer from *The Set of the Sail* that stirs me deeply:

Failure and Success: The Great Goddess of Numbers

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble, each one's work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work

each has done” (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

The emphasis today in Christian circles appears to be on quantity, with a corresponding lack of emphasis on quality. Numbers, size and amount seem to be very nearly all that matters even among evangelicals; size of the crowd, the number of converts, the size of the budget, and the amount of the weekly collections. If these look good, the church is prospering, and the pastor is thought to be a success. The church that can show an impressive quantitative growth is frankly envied and imitated by other ambitious churches.

This is the age of the Laodiceans. The great goddess Numbers is worshiped with fervent devotion, and all things religious are brought before her for examination. Her Old Testament is the financial report, and her New Testament is the membership roll. To these she appeals as arbiters of all questions, the test of spiritual growth and the proof of success or failure in every Christian endeavor.

A little acquaintance with the Bible should show this up for the heresy it is. To judge anything spiritual by statistics is to judge by another than scriptural judgment. It is to admit the validity of externalism and to deny the value our Lord places upon the soul as over against the body. It is to mistake the old creation for the new and to confuse things eternal with things temporal. Yet it is being done every day by ministers, church boards and denominational leaders. And hardly anyone notices the deep and dangerous error.

“Oh Lord, convict us. Forgive us. Deliver us from the goddess of Numbers! Amen.” {eoa}