

Towards an Effective Church Growth: A Biblical, Theological, and Missiological Mandate

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Abstract

Church growth is a multifaceted phenomenon beyond mere numerical increase; it represents a vital expression of the church's fulfillment of the Great Commission as mandated by Jesus Christ. In a world where the relevance of the church is often questioned, understanding the dynamics of church growth becomes essential for nurturing churches that vibrantly and actively participate in God's mission to the nations. The biblical narrative of redemption and restoration serves as a foundational framework for this exploration, illustrating how the church is called to be an agent of transformation in the world.¹ The biblical foundations of church growth not only provide theological insights but also offer practical guidance for contemporary church practices.

As congregations strive to embody the teachings of Christ, it is imperative to recognize that effective church growth is intricately linked to a holistic understanding of the church's mission. This paper introduces the concept of "missiocentric ecclesiology," a proposed term that encapsulates the idea of a church that is fundamentally centered on God's mission as a missional church that is established, as a result, "by" mission "for" mission. This approach emphasizes the intentional alignment of the church's activities and goals with *Missio Dei*, the divine mission of God

¹ Bruce Riley Ashford and David P. Nelson, "The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative" in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, Bruce Riley Ashford, ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 1: 6-16.

in the world. By engaging with the theological and missiological mandates that inform church growth, this paper seeks to explain the essential components that contribute to a thriving church, including spiritual vitality, authentic discipleship, and community engagement.

To accomplish this, the article sequentially explores and develops an understanding of the need for an effective church to begin with the intentional mission set out by God or *Missio Dei*. Although the concept of a “church” is not visible in the Old Testament, the idea of gathering people to worship is profound. As Bosch intended to bridge the gap between theological/biblical scholarship and the vocation of the community of faith concerning missiological studies,² this article explores the biblical, theological, and missiological mandate to exhibit church growth as part of God’s mission and its apostolic role in the community. Bauckham explains that missionary hermeneutics is an approach to reading the Bible in which mission serves as the hermeneutical key. This means interpreting the entirety of Scripture with mission as its central focus and goal. Such a hermeneutic seeks to discern the true nature of the church’s mission as portrayed in Scripture, providing insight and inspiration to guide the church’s missionary practice.³

In exploring these themes, we will examine how missiocentric ecclesiology can guide churches in their efforts to grow not just in numbers, but in depth and impact. This perspective encourages congregations to view their mission as a partnership with God, responding to His call to reach out to the world with love and service. By examining the interconnectedness of biblical, theological, and missiological perspectives, we can better appreciate the church’s mission and its impact on both individual believers and the broader community towards an effective church growth.

Theology of Redemption

Redemption is a central theme on which the Christian faith is established. In Christianity, the term “redemption” refers to God’s

² Girma Bekele, “The Biblical Narrative of the *Missio Dei*: Analysis of the Interpretive Framework of David Bosch’s Missional Hermeneutic,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 2011, vol. 35, no. 3: 153-158. <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2011-03/2011-03-153-bekele.pdf>. Accessed December 27, 2020.

³ Richard Bauckham, “Mission as Hermeneutic for Scriptural Interpretation” in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, Michael W. Goheen, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 2: 28-44.

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extraordinary deliverance from evil to restore humans' diluted relationship with God due to human sin. Satan, dissatisfied with Christ's preference, desired equality with God. Lucifer carried out his work of deception in such secrecy that many angels in lower positions believed he was the rightful ruler of heaven. Loyal angels sought to reconcile him to God's will, reminding him that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had always existed with the Father and that the honor given to Christ did not diminish Lucifer's prior position.

However, Lucifer sowed seeds of doubt and criticism about God's government among the angels, using subtle manipulation and deception to gain sympathy. He cleverly reframed his own rebellious thoughts as originating from others and accused loyal angels of indifference. By distorting simple truths and casting doubt on God's clear purposes, Lucifer leveraged his high position to strengthen his influence and lead others astray.⁴

John C. Peckham affirms that the devil has accused and continues to charge that God is not wholly caring and decent and that His government and law are not equal.⁵ Conversely, the truth is, as John Peckham states, "Divine love is a central component of God's character, with abundant implications regarding all areas of theology."⁶

For the sole intention of restoring the God-world relationship, the redemptive approach was initiated by God for humans. Vanhoozer states, "It is not as though God needs the human creature, for it follows from the notion of a perfect being that nothing can add to God's enjoyment of himself. Yet, it is clear God loves us."⁷ Humans have tried all avenues to approach God to rectify the lost privileges they had in the Garden of Eden. They used both magical and mystical approaches, solely to use it for their own purposes. However, none of it could help.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Truth About Angels* (Silver Springs, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., 1996). <http://www.centrowhite.org.br/files/ebooks/egwenglish/books/The%20Truth%20About%20Angels.pdf>. Accessed on November 26, 2020.

⁵ John C. Peckham, "Great Controversy Issues" in *God's Character and the Last Generation*, Jiri Moskala and John C. Peckham, eds. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 1: 15-22.

⁶ John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction: The Love of God—Its Place, Meaning, and Function in Systematic Theology" in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 1: 1-29.

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Additionally, Paul Tillich states, “personalistic world views lead to a person-to-person relationship to divine power, which is appropriated through prayers, that is, through an appeal to the personal center of the divine being.”⁸ However, this alone was not sufficient as a man cannot earn favors of God by mere prayers as that contradicts the theological doctrine of *Justificatio sola fide* or justification by faith alone.⁹ It was then that there was a perceived need for a plan of redemption. The Son of God, commander of heaven, had compassion for the fallen race and the lost world. As the violated law demanded the sinner’s death, divine love devised a plan for his redemption. Christ alone could redeem man from the curse and restore him to harmony with heaven. Christ would assume the culpability and disgrace of sin, delivering the ruined human race from the depths of misery.¹⁰

Thus, the plan of redemption came into action to rescue the ruining world. The Bible speaks of the extraordinary sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. The Bible says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence. . .” Eph1:7-8 (NKJV). Paul is emphasizing Christ’s death on the cross as a complete payment for all believers’ sins. It was an ultimate price paid to be free of the everlasting consequence of our own sins.

With the plan of redemption, God provided humans the uniqueness of faith. Ezek 11:19-20 says, “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” Second Cor 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Eph 4:22-24 says, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man who grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Eph 2:8-10 states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that

⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Sola Fide: The Reformed Doctrine of Justification*. (Fig Books, Kindle edition, 2012).

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Altamont, TN: Harvestime Books, 1999).

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not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The plan of God is redemptive, transformative, and constructive. God’s redemptive plan includes human’s character—His will to replenish the original creation. Rom 12:2 states, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” A transformed identity is provided to the believers of Christ, who are required to be anew in Christ as God’s will. A continuous companionship can induce such a transformation with the Holy Spirit. God desires to accomplish His mission by providing His free redemptive plan for the entire human race—hence, it becomes the mission of God or *Missio Dei* to save His creation in this world, for the world to come.

Theology of *Missio Dei*

Missio Dei, or “Mission of God,” is a popular term used for the “mission of the church” as a central theme of God for the church. Karl Barth coined the concept in 1932, and a similar belief was shared by Karl Hartenstein in 1933, articulating mission as God’s own activity.^{11, 12} However, the term gained popularity after the meeting of Willingen in 1952. Around the 1960s, the term was used frequently in missionary writing.¹³ The origin of the concept begins with the biblical narration of the fall of man. Adam and Eve’s disobedience against God led them to the nakedness of their sins rather than experiencing goodness and happiness.¹⁴ The mission of God or “*Missio Dei*” is to rescue, restore, and revitalize humanity’s broken relationship with God.

¹¹ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

¹² Gerold Schwarz, “The Legacy of Karl Hartenstein,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 8, issue 4 (1984): 125-131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693938400800413>.

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

¹⁴ Keith Whitfield, “The Triune God: The God of Mission” in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, Bruce Riley Ashford, ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 2: 17-34.

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Humans chose to move away from God, but “God through Jesus Christ presents the medium to be reconciled with God.”¹⁵ The restoration of the relationship is possible only when an individual accepts Him as a savior and obeys his commands. God’s will is that humans must believe in Jesus and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross to be saved. The Bible says, “For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14, NKJV). Therefore, God’s mission needs to spread to accomplish His will for every believer. Lesslie Newbigin annotates that “there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world.”¹⁶ One may believe in Jesus, but may not be wholly surrendered to Him if he has not participated in the mission of God. Keith Whitfield argues that the mission exists because God exists. He states that God’s mission and the church’s role in that mission are defined in His personality and works in the *Missio Dei* notion and leads the church to see its calling in the light of His mission.¹⁷

Christopher J. H. Wright states that the term mission has one central theme—sending or being sent.¹⁸ God’s mission involves sending Jesus Christ, the son of God as the rescuer for humankind. Humans participate as the recipients of God’s rescue mission and the responsible component in extending and expanding His mission. Wright concludes, “If Jesus of Nazareth is the one who embodies the identity and mission of YHWH, the one to whom the Lord God has given all authority in heaven and earth, the one to whom every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, then the Christ-centered heartbeat and witness of all our mission is non-negotiable.”¹⁹ Darren Sarisky quotes Bosch elucidating the meaning of *Missio Dei* when applied to the church, stating, “The classical doctrine of the *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another

¹⁵ Santosh Kumar, *Salvation: In the Light of the Cross and the Crescent—A Comparative Study on the Concept of Salvation in the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible* (Chennai, India: Notion Press Publications, 2019).

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

¹⁷ Whitfield, 17.

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

¹⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

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‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”²⁰

The “sending” is a central action of the Mission of God that engages God in reaching out to humankind. The Bible, on several occasions, profoundly presents the engagement of God among humans. The Old Testament shows God’s keen interest to be among His creation that He may be with them to guide them. “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). In the New Testament, the divine intervention in Mary and Joseph’s life to parenting the ‘Son of God’ affirms God’s continuous missional engagement in human affairs to eradicate sin and restore the ‘Paradise Lost.’” “Behold the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (Matt 1:23). *Missio Dei* determines God himself is a missionary God who is actively engaged in reaching the unreached. Sarisky rightly says that the church is also “sent” to be missionaries among the people of this *world*.²¹

Missio Dei in the Old Testament

George W. Peters states that the Old Testament has often been misinterpreted in narrow nationalistic terms or from a legalistic viewpoint. The Old Testament is rarely viewed as a magnificent intervention of God into the world for the sake of salvation.²² Furthermore, the Old Testament is rich with examples that illustrate God’s missional purpose and His desire for all nations to know Him. In Gen 12:1-3, God calls Abraham with the promise that through him, all families of the earth will be blessed. This foundational covenant establishes a trajectory for God’s redemptive plan, emphasizing that His mission extends beyond Israel to encompass all peoples. Isa 49:6 articulates God’s intention for Israel to be “a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth,” indicating that His salvation is meant to be universal.

Furthermore, the book of Psalms demonstrates a global invitation to worship encouraging people from all nations to offer praise to the Lord (Ps 117:1). This highlights the inclusivity of God’s mission and His longing

²⁰ Darren Sarisky, “The Meaning of the *Missio Dei*: Reflections on Lesslie Newbigin’s Proposal that Mission Is of the Essence of the Church,” *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2014): 257-270. <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.andrews.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0091829613497465>. Accessed December 24, 2020.

²¹ Sarisky, 259.

²² George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972).

for a relationship with all humanity. As Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. notes, the missional character of God is evident throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, where Israel is not only chosen for their own sake but is tasked with the responsibility of revealing God's glory to the world.²³ Engaging with the OT will help gain a deeper understanding of the values and needs that God addresses through His people, which remain relevant for contemporary evangelism and mission work today.

The scriptures require missional attention to understand the mission of God. T. Desmond Alexander quotes Christopher Wright, "a missional reading of the entire Bible is a major key that unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture."²⁴ As discussed earlier in this article, God's intention of being a missionary was to restore what was once destroyed in the Garden of Eden. Additionally, it is crucial to establish that God's mission existed in the Old Testament, as seen profoundly in the New Testament. Hence, the apostolic nature of God is undeniable in the Bible.

To establish the above statement, the researcher encourages the readers to refer to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.'s book, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. Conversely, Kaiser reports that Peters' idea that "send" is only linked with the NT disregarding the OT reference to the concept of mission.²⁵ Instead, God's missionary character is profound in the OT writings. The Psalmist had envisioned, God sending His messengers with His message, calling on all the people of all lands and nations to worship the Lord. Missions cannot be an afterthought for the Old Testament: it is the center and the essence of God's plan.²⁶

Bosch explains that according to the Old Testament, there is no indication of believers being sent out by God on a mission to convert others to faith in Yahweh.²⁷ He further mentions and adds,

²³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

²⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger and T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, second edition (New Studies in Biblical Theology Ser. IVP Academic, 2020, Digital Edition).

²⁵ Kaiser, 36.

²⁶ Kaiser, 37-38.

²⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

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As Yahweh's compassion reaches out to Israel and beyond, it gradually becomes clear that, in the final analysis, God is as concerned with the nations as with Israel. On the basis of its faith Israel can draw two fundamental conclusions: Since the true God has made himself known to Israel, he is to be encountered only in Israel; and since the God of Israel is the only true God, he also is the God of the whole world. The first conclusion emphasizes isolation and exclusion from the rest of humankind; the second suggests a basic openness and the possibility of reaching out to the nations.²⁸

Jesus Christ often presented the missional authenticity of the Old Testament. Peter states, "Jesus Christ constantly related Himself, His message and His mission to the Old Testament. He did not contradict or destroy but modified, enriched, expanded, and in many ways, transformed and glorified the Old Testament."²⁹ Alexander mentions, "In its entirety, the biblical metanarrative is framed by two acts of divine creation. Genesis opens by briefly describing how God created heaven and the earth in the beginning. On the other hand, at the end of the biblical canon, Revelation concludes by anticipating the divine (re)creation of a new heaven and a new earth."³⁰

The correlational aspect of the Bible begins with tumultuous situations caused by humans and ends with a salvific assurance eliminating sin and restoring humans to the image of God. Wright states, "God's mission, through Israel, is to bless all nations. Israel's mission, therefore, is to be the people of God and to serve his purpose in the world."³¹ The passage Isa 46:9-11 presents a theological affirmation regarding the distinctiveness and supremacy of God. It emphasizes God's ability to accurately predict future events and to bring about the realization of His intentions according to His will. He possesses the ability to summon individuals from distant locations in order to execute His intentions. The motif of God's mission is not limited to a generation, but is to all generations. Ps 33:11 says, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation."

²⁸ Bosch, 2011, 17.

²⁹ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972).

³⁰ Köstenberger and T. Desmond Alexander, Ch. 2, Digital Edition.

³¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

Missio Dei in the New Testament

The centripetal approach that seems to be profound in the OT incorporates the centrifugal approach of God, prominent in the NT. God's vision in the OT to bless the nations is futuristic, clearly depicted in the NT.³² Unlike the OT, the NT shows the ideologies that engage God's mission for the redemption of humankind. In Jesus' death, God triumphed over the old age's evil powers (i.e., sin, death, evil, Satan). The age to come (i.e., knowledge of God, harmony, righteousness, joy, and love) dawned in the resurrection of Jesus. In his death, Jesus acted on behalf of all creation and decisively defeated the power of evil that dominated the old age.³³

In the New Testament, God's mission emerges as the world's central theme after Jesus' ascension to heaven. Bosch mentions theologians' position, such as Adolf von Harnack, who first interpreted the Gospels in the New Testament, excluding the heathens.³⁴ Bosch concludes,

We are not suggesting that Harnack and those who followed or opposed him, use the Bible as a "mine" from which they unearthed texts in support of their respective positions. It is nevertheless true that, first they tended to get bogged down in small details where the preferences of the researcher only too often played a decisive role, and secondly, they accepted as axiomatic the traditional Western definition of mission as point of departure.³⁵

Hence, the lack of information, knowledge, and approach to the scripture may create a deluded attitude towards the gospel's holistic universality. Beginning with the commission of Jesus before His ascension in Matt 28: 19-20, God made it evident that the mission needs to reach "all the nations." The emphasis on "all the nations" clearly exhibits God's intentionality for all and not an individual. In Mk 11:17, Jesus calls all the nations to God's temple. Matt 24:14 says, "And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Mk 16:15 affirms that Jesus' command to proclaim

³² Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010).

³³ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

³⁴ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

³⁵ Bosch, 2006, 47-48.

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the gospel included “every creature.” Lk 24:47 says, “and the repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Undeniably, *Missio Dei* in the New Testament presents the universality of the gospel. It clearly shows that the deluded limited idea of being a “chosen nation” expands to the missional horizon to “all the nations.” However, it doesn’t diminish the particularity of the gospel. Daniel L. Migliore explains,

Recognition of the inseparable bond between the particularity and universality of the gospel helps to explain both the necessity and the challenge of contextual theology. On the one hand, if we seek to emphasize the universality of the gospel by generalizing its message and stripping it of all historical contingency, we lose sight of the gospel’s own particularity and its power to receive and transform human life in all its historical particularity and diversity. On the other hand, if we emphasize one particular expression of the gospel to the exclusion of all others, we lose sight of its universal power.³⁶

N. T. Wright states that Jewish texts have expressed both the purpose of God for Israel and the purpose of God being fulfilled through Israel. He further mentions, “we see a vision of the mission of God, Israel’s God, the creator God, in and for the whole wide world—the creator reaching out to embrace that whole world.”³⁷ The embracing of the entire world requires the growing numbers of believers. The early followers of Jesus experienced extraordinary events that perhaps shook their lives and strengthened their faith. It was because of this ever-increasing faith in God that many accepted martyrdoms joyfully. The experience led them to worship, share their faith, and testify for God in a gathering of believers—a church.

The church represents the faithful believers of Christ who train, testify, and taste the Holy Spirit’s work. The church is the reflection of God’s mission that mandates the involvement of *Missio Dei*, believers, and God,

³⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

³⁷ N. T. Wright, “Reading the New Testament Missionally” in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, by Michael W. Goheen, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 9: 175-193.

in the absence of any of these, we may not rightfully deliver the mission of God towards the redemption of humankind.



Figure 1. A Model for “Co-existence of Church and *Missio Dei*”

Church Growth—A Biblical and Theological Mandate

It is conspicuous that God’s mission profoundly exists in the New Testament, establishing that the church must include the mission of God. N. T. Wright states, “the purpose of the New Testament emerges from the entire missional agenda of the early church.”³⁸ Timothy van Aarde validates that God’s mission and the church’s mission are mutually dependent and interrelated.³⁹ Several ambiguities associated with church growth thinking can be clarified if we know what church growth is.⁴⁰ Hence, it is indispensably significant to understand the biblical and theological perspective for church growth.

What is church growth? Much has been written to define and provide the best response to the question. Any discussion about church growth cannot be complete without mentioning Donald McGavran, the person who is credited with bringing the words *church* and *growth* together and

³⁸ Wright, 2016, 176.

³⁹ Timothy Van Aarde, “The Relation of God’s Mission and the Mission of the Church in Ephesians,” *Missionalia*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2016): 284-300. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7832/44-2-117>. Accessed on December 29, 2020.

⁴⁰ T. Joe Culumber, “Misunderstanding Church Growth,” *The Asbury Seminary*, vol. 33, no. 5 (1978): 23-29. <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol33/iss5/6>. Accessed on December 30, 2020.

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was the founder of the “school of church growth.”^{41, 42, 43} Questions such as, “when a church is growing, why is it growing?” were first raised by Donald McGavran, who dedicated his life to the church growth movement.⁴⁴ McGavran defines church growth as,

Anyone who would comprehend the growth of Christian Churches must see it primarily as faithfulness to God. God desires it. Christians, like their Master, are sent to seek and save the lost. Rather than gaining something for oneself, finding the lost is to become “your servant for Christ’s sake.” Church growth is humane action: the strong bearing the burdens of the weak and introducing to the hungry the bread by which humans live. Nevertheless, God’s obedient servants seek church growth not as an exercise in improving humanity, but because the extension of the church is pleasing to God. Church Growth is faithfulness. Only where Christians constrained by love obediently press on, telling others the good news of the Savior, does the church spread and increase. Church growth follows where Christians show faithfulness in finding the lost. Church growth follows where the lost are not merely found but restored to normal life in the fold—though it may be a life they have never consciously known.⁴⁵

Elmer L. Towns states,

The term “church growth” has several connotations. First, it is generally associated with churches that grow, both internally and externally; and as such, church growth has a generic meaning that began with the growth of the first church in Jerusalem. Second, the term is associated with

⁴¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

⁴² David Smith, “The Church Growth Principles of Donald McGavran,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, vol. 2, issue 2 (1985): 25-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537888500200208>. Accessed on December 30, 2020,

⁴³ Jörg Schmidt, “Church Growth as Part of a Wholistic Missiological Approach,” Master’s Thesis, University of South Africa (UNISA), 1994 http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/17677/dissertation_schmidtj.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed November 13, 2020.

⁴⁴ George G. Hunter, III, “The Legacy of Donald McGavran,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1992): 158-162. <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/1992-04/1992-04-158-hunter.pdf>. Accessed December 30, 2020,

⁴⁵ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, C. Peter Wagner, ed., third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).

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evangelism and/or missionary enterprises that imply outreach to the lost and their incorporation into a church, hence causing local church growth.⁴⁶

Towns quotes Wagner's definition, stating,

Church growth is that science which investigates the planting, multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate specifically to the effective implementation of God's commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 18:19-20). Church growth strives to combine the eternal theological principles of God's Word concerning the expansion of the church with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences, employing as its initial frame of reference, the foundational work done by Donald McGavran.⁴⁷

Each of these definitions above exhibits church growth as a mandate for *Missio Dei*. However, one may question its biblical and theological validity. It is evident that the church is central to God's mission, that is, to present the gospel to humans and restore their lost identity. A church becomes a center for people who desperately need to be redeemed both physically and spiritually. The "church" where believers gather is also referred to as "the body of Christ." The Bible says, "so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5). First Cor 10:17 says, "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." The church assures unity in Christ as one. The Bible records, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jews nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28).

The church's mission to the nations is not limited to an ethnic group of people. Glasser notes that God has set Israel apart from the nations. *She* was to represent the Kingship of God and the first fruits of Him in the world. To show His glory and bring the nations to His empire, she was to be a servant people.⁴⁸ The unitedness of the church "from all nations," "all

⁴⁶ Elmer L. Towns, "The Relationship of Church Growth and Systematic Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1986): 63-70. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/58823560>. Accessed on December 30, 2020.

⁴⁷ Towns, 63-64.

⁴⁸ Arthur F. Glasser, "Church Growth Theology," *11th Biennial Meeting*, 1972. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/216986602.pdf>. Accessed on December 31, 2020.

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people,” results in a growing church. In Matt 16:18, Jesus says, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” The established early church was blessed, and it grew in numbers (Acts 2:46-47; Acts 5:14; Acts 9:31). In Mark 4:26-29, Jesus’ parable narrates a metaphor for church growth. It says, And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. Understanding church growth must not be limited to any generic ideas that need to be accepted universally, but several other aspects may need attention. Having established the significance of spirituality in creating a dynamic church community, we can now explore how this spiritual foundation supports the church’s missiological mandate to engage with the world. The next section will investigate analyzing the biblical and theological mandate for church growth.

Church Growth—A Missiological Mandate

The mission of God has faced impending challenges over time—from past to present. From Jewish opposition to present-day objections, questions are raised as to how to justify the mission of God among reasonable people in the light of several objections.⁴⁹ However, these challenges must be dealt with by the theological-missiological approach.

Timothy C. Tennent states, “it is one thing to propose that mission should not be a subset of the doctrine of the church; it is entirely another to disconnect the *Missio Dei* altogether from a robust ecclesiology.”⁵⁰ McIntosh admits that studying church growth concepts made him aware of the social dynamics that influence a church’s growth.⁵¹ Köstenberger proposed that the twenty-first-century church’s mission needs attention. The church’s mission should be grounded in biblical theology, affirming the authority of Scripture and faithfully responding to the missionary mandate of Jesus Christ; it should be hermeneutically sound, theocentric,

⁴⁹ Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, 55-56.

⁵⁰ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010).

⁵¹ Gary McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

and trinitarian in orientation while considering the contemporary context without compromising its commitment to Scripture and the gospel; the church is ordained by God to carry out His mission, extending His kingdom through believers' faithful actions in various spheres of life; lasting social transformation requires personal conversion; human organization can align with God's mission; and the church's task is to nurture, renew, and establish biblically faithful churches with spiritually regenerate members and leadership.⁵²

The above theses by Köstenberger could perhaps be indicated as *missiocentric ecclesiology*. Exercising Neologism, I am proposing this term that means mission-centered or mission-engraved. A missiocentric ecclesiology must be promulgated as the missiological mandate in the contemporary world. *Missiocentric ecclesiology* is the way a church functions missionally. It does not merely adopt a character of being a *missionary church*, but it is born with the mission of God, as a result of the mission of God. It means the church responding to the mission set before it by God and exemplified in the life of Christ is a church in partnership with God. Without the existence of mission, the church is

⁵² See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Twelve Theses on the Church's Mission in the Twenty-first Century" in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*, edited by David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 6: 62-70. He reports twelve theses: 1) The church's mission—in both belief and practice—should be grounded in the biblical theology of mission; 2) Reflection on the church's mission should be predicted on the affirmation of the full and sole authority of Scripture; 3) The church's mission should be conceived primarily in terms of the church's faithfulness and responsiveness to the missionary mandate given by the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Scriptures; 4) The church's understanding of its mission should be hermeneutically sound; 5) The church's mission is to be conceived ultimately in theocentric rather than anthropocentric terms; 6) The church's mission, properly and biblically conceived, is to be trinitarian in its orientation, but not at the expense of neglecting the distinct roles of the three Persons within the Godhead; 7) The contemporary context of the church's mission, while important, ought not to override the church's commitment to the authority of Scripture, it needs to be grounded in the biblical theology of mission, and the understanding of its task in terms of faithfulness to the gospel; 8) The church is the God-ordained agent of His mission in this world today; 9) The way the kingdom of God is extended in this world today is through regenerate believers acting out their Christian faith in their God-assigned spheres of life: the church, their families, their workplaces, the societies in which they live; 10) There is no true lasting social transformation apart from personal conversion through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 11) Human organization is perfectly compatible with an acknowledgement of God and His initiative in mission; 12) The church's task today is to nurture, renew, and plant churches composed of a spiritually regenerate membership and constituted in keeping with the biblical teaching regarding church leadership (6: 63-68).

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nullified. Being missionary by its inner nature and not just exhibiting outer qualities that humanity identifies as its character. Michael Goheen quotes Lesslie Newbigin's statement that the essence of the church's missionary work is demonstrated by the church's involvement in the mission of the Triune God.⁵³ Such involvement must not be mere initiatives, but subconsciously intentional. Hence, proving the fact that it is deeply rooted in the heart of the church. For example, humans do not have to struggle to breathe even though they know that breathing is essential for their existence. It is because breathing is subconsciously intentional. Similarly, a church does not need to initiate its missional involvement; it is already missionally motivated.

To accomplish missiocentric ecclesiology, a spirit-filled approach is required, followed by principles that can help the church grow naturally. There could be several church growth approaches, but a divinely guided, spirit filled, missiocentric approach is required for the contemporary world. Christian A. Schwarz mentions that approaches can be deluding as they expect similar results of a program designed for another context.⁵⁴ Schwarz rightly states, "If we follow the biblical example of learning from the laws inherent in God's creation and applying them to life within the kingdom of God, we encounter many principles which govern all of life. . . ."⁵⁵ Hence, church growth factors that are the missiological mandate for the contemporary world must be discussed.

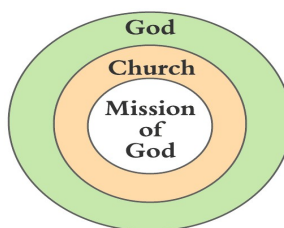


Figure 2. A Model of Missiocentric Ecclesiology

⁵³ Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

⁵⁴ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Chennai, India: Church Growth Association of India, 1996).

⁵⁵ Schwarz, 61.

Redemption and Transformation

The role of a church is not limited to the “religious affairs” of the believers. Still, it expands to embrace “all the affairs of human beings,” including spiritual and social concerns. Humans are social beings, and their emotions (physical, mental, emotional) are all woven together towards—social and spiritual concern. Therefore, the church grows when all the need of a believer is met, both socially and spiritually.

Although it is universally practiced that the church’s primary concern is to nurture a believer to overcome spiritual deprivation, nevertheless, it is undeniable to nurture their spiritual needs without nurturing their social needs. Such nurturing must not be misinterpreted as “a development that is constructed on the ideology of human progress and accumulation of wealth as its main goals.”⁵⁶ In the contemporary context, it is imperative to acknowledge that the church must engage in the analysis, evaluation, and formulation of strategies that promote the well-being of its adherents, encompassing both social and spiritual dimensions, with the ultimate goal of fostering the expansion of the church community. The various modes through which it can occur include biological, evangelistic, transfer-based, and spiritual means.

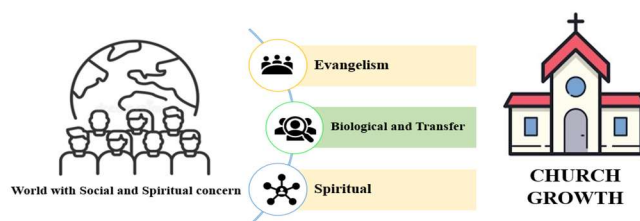


Figure 3. A Model for Understanding Church Growth in the Contemporary World

⁵⁶ Wagner Kuhn, *Redemption & Transformation Through Relief and Development: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives of God’s Holistic Gospel* (Benton Harbor, MI: Department of World Mission, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2013).

Discipleship

The Bible is a religious book with diverse features yet united themes, qualifying it to be a book with a high standard of almost everything related to everyday life or people. This book has led many towards their transformation and becoming an entirely new being. The transformation progresses with time as the believer matures in the understanding of the word of God. This progressive and transformational attitude in a person is often referred to as becoming a *disciple*. To understand the concept of discipleship biblically, it is appropriate to understand the core meaning of the term and discover the biblical context where these concepts are employed, both historically and linguistically. This article does not attempt to investigate the term exegetically, but to introduce it with possible connected synonyms. The biblical language is referenced briefly, but does not attempt to add any meaning or over emphasize the general concept.

The *SDA Bible Dictionary* defines a disciple as “one who as a student, follows the teaching of another.” It demands a radical living condition meeting up to the standard of discipling, hence, differentiating the disciples from the rest.⁵⁷ Discipleship is a process of learning and growth while living as a disciple of Jesus.⁵⁸ Matt 10:25 mentions, “It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher. . . .” Discipleship is not cheap grace, but a precious one because it demands one must follow Christ.⁵⁹ This grace is a gift and cannot be used as a dispensation from following Christ.⁶⁰

Contrary to the New Testament, the term disciple is mentioned only once in the Old Testament, Isa 8:16 (NKJV), “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.” The concept of discipling is understood as an ongoing process from one generation to another and has been in practice from the beginning. The word תלמיד (*talmid*) is the closest term which can be used to understand the term disciple. The verb למד (*lāmad*) is used closely to understand the term “to learn, to exercise in.”⁶¹ However,

⁵⁷ K. H. Rengstorff, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich, editors (Grand Rapids, MI: Logos Research Systems, 1964).

⁵⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Harper Collins e-book, 2006).

⁵⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1995).

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, 55.

⁶¹ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*.

scholars have suggested that the concept can be understood and expressed in numerous ways.⁶² Kaiser mentions that one of the twelve words for “teaching” in the Old Testament, *lāmad* elucidates as both training and educating.⁶³ The word *lāmad* appears over eighty times in the Old Testament, including seven in the book of Deuteronomy presenting God himself as part of educating. As mentioned above, the meanings related closely or loosely with *lāmad* have various features, and therefore, each of these features is the principle of discipleship. Kaiser mentions that, unlike Greek, Hebrew uses the same root for both “learning” and “teaching.”⁶⁴ Claiming the neglect of the adjectival form *lammudh* derived from *lāmadh* by Rengstorf, Wilkins presents the understanding of מֵלֵךְ as the master-disciple relationship.⁶⁵ Further, he states that the equivalent of the Greek term μαθητής is *talmidh*. Măcelaru mentions that the concept is expressed in numerous ways and represents a one-on-one relationship.⁶⁶

In the New Testament, it may be His charismatic approach and leadership that made Jesus such an influential man in the history of humankind. One of His unique calls was to Peter when he was busy with his brother Andrew in his daily job, perhaps preparing to go fishing. Jesus unexpectedly made a call “. . . Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). A response to this could have been anything, but with a surprise, “they immediately left their nets and followed Him” (Matt 4:20). In another incident mentioned in (Matt 9:9), Jesus made another call, this time to a tax collector named Matthew, “And He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ So, he arose and followed Him.” Regardless of ethnic distinctions, he made disciples using all His power and authority.⁶⁷ Many followed him, watching him heal the sick, raise the dead, preach, and walking through

Based on the lexicon of William Gesenius (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

⁶² Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term μαθητής* (New York, NY: E. J. Brill, 1988).

⁶³ Robert Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, Logos Research Systems, 1980).

⁶⁴ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 480.

⁶⁵ Wilkins, 90.

⁶⁶ Marcel V. Măcelaru, “Discipleship in the Old Testament and Its Context: A Phenomenological Approach,” *Plērōma anul*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (2011): 11-22. https://www.academia.edu/3811502/Discipleship_in_the_OldTestament_and_Its_Context_A_Phenomenological_Approach. Accessed on October 12, 2018.

⁶⁷ Willard, 5.

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their roads. Wilkins states all these miracles were working power stressing teaching on discipleship.⁶⁸

The mission of God is to “bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph 1:10). Baptism is viewed as a prerequisite for a sign of religious transformation, yet Hoefer states that conversion is not merely a religious matter; but cultural, political, economic, and social concern for the individual, the church, and the society, as a whole.⁶⁹ A disciple is the only cornerstone that the church must focus on so that the church of Christ proliferates. Unless discipleship is practiced, one cannot be a believer ultimately. It must be a stepping-stone, a gradual learning process towards the likeness of Jesus Christ. Hence, the disciple is to be trained to be Christ-like, to be impactful, effective, and empowering. It is crucial because it is impossible to teach someone to live like Christ if the converts are not disciples.⁷⁰

One of the many methods used to advance God’s mission since the first century is evangelism. Moreover, evangelism is appreciated as the essence of the great commission.⁷¹ The term evangelism, or εὐαγγέλιον in Greek, meaning good news, is a vital factor that is essential to accomplish *Missio Dei*, resulting in quality church growth.

William J. Abraham discusses his observation that evangelism is not just the proclamation of the gospel as it has been in contemporary churches, completely disregarding evangelism as a “constructive element of the church’s mission.”⁷² McIntosh states that evangelism must be prioritized in the process of making disciples, but without creating any difference between evangelism and social action.⁷³ Although several

⁶⁸ Wilkins, 131.

⁶⁹ Herbert E. Hoefer, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001).

⁷⁰ Willard, 6.

⁷¹ Thom S. Rainer, “Barriers to Growth in the Middle-Sized Church” in *The Every Church Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow*, Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Thom S. Rainer, eds., (EPub edition, 1998), 4: 104-134.

⁷² William J. Abraham “A Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter” In *the Study of Evangelism: Exploring A Missional Practice of the Church*, Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 2: 18-32.

⁷³ Gary McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

barriers hinder a church's growth, such as barriers to E-0 to E-3, every such obstacle must be addressed within cultural sensitivity.⁷⁴

The apostle Paul displays his burden to evangelize considering the culture and engages by incorporating the cultural values to present the gospel that is probably received well. In Acts 17:22, Paul addresses the idol that the people at Athens worshipped, observed its value, the art, the text written for the idol, and carefully incorporated this in his preaching about Jesus Christ. As mentioned above in this article, it is crucial to be contextually conscious of incorporating God within culture. God is not a destroyer of culture, but ungodly practices within the culture. Hence, not all within a culture is wrong. Therefore, evangelism incorporated with social culture,⁷⁵ values,⁷⁶ and needs-based⁷⁷ is ideal for effective evangelism. Graham Warner makes the following statement regarding relevant evangelism, "Finding the right seeds to sow in each situation and the best manner in which to sow them is just part of the equation."⁷⁸

Effective evangelism must be carefully conducted based on well-researched data of a community—such evangelism results in dramatic progress of the community and the church. In his book, Wayne L. Gordon, *Real Hope in Chicago*, adds values to the statement as he first observed,

⁷⁴ Thom S. Rainer, "Barriers to Growth in the Middle-Sized Church" in *The Every Church Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow*, Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner and Thom S. Rainer, eds., (EPub edition, 1998), 4: 104-134.

⁷⁵ This means that evangelism should consider the social and cultural context of the community being reached. Understanding the local customs, traditions, and social dynamics is crucial for making the message relevant and relatable. See C. René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2010), 107-113. Also, Brian J. Hurn, and Barry Tomalin, *Cross-Cultural Communication: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁷⁶ This refers to the beliefs and principles that are important to the community. Effective evangelism should align with or respect these values, as this can help build trust and rapport with the audience. See, Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Twelve Theses on the Church's Mission in the Twenty-first Century" in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*, David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds., (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 6: 62-70.

⁷⁷ This implies that evangelism should address the specific needs of the community. This could include social, emotional, or spiritual needs. By focusing on what the community requires, evangelism can be more impactful and meaningful. A very good example is Wayne L. Gordon, *Real Hope in Chicago* (Chicago, IL: Urban Ministries, 2009).

⁷⁸ Graham Warner, *The Evangelism Handbook: Gaining the World without Losing Your Soul* (Andhra Pradesh, India: OM Books, 2000).

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evaluated, and developed programs for the Lawndale community.⁷⁹ As a result, the Lawndale community transformed and many were discipled, resulting in establishing a church.

Worship

Worship is an essential part of any Christian service that renews, nurtures, and revitalizes faith in the divine. God's greatness should be magnified in all the universe and before the entire creation.⁸⁰ Missiocentric Ecclesiology remains in a vacuum without doxology in the church, ultimately hindering its growth. Christian worship compliments and nurtures the faith of a believer resulting in quality church growth.

On several occasions, the Bible records the importance of worship. Beginning with the book of Genesis, God illustrates His desires to have a relationship with us through creation.⁸¹ Gen 22:5 records, "And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." First Chr 16:23 says, "Sing to the Lord, all the earth; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day." Deut 10:21 states, "He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen." The Bible says, "Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, Bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples" (Ps 96:1-3). Rom 12:1 states, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." A beautiful scenario is described in Rev 4:8-11,

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and

⁷⁹ Wayne L. Gordon, *Real Hope in Chicago* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

⁸⁰ Ott, Strauss, and Tennent, 80.

⁸¹ Nina Marie Tedeschi, "An Exploration of Musical Influences Throughout Worship: Enhancing Worship Experiences Via Hymns Encompassing Spiritual Gifts" DWS diss., Liberty University, 2019. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3120&context=doctoral>. Accessed on January 6, 2021.

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cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

Worship music is used to reflect, pray, devotions, and a form of nurturing spiritual growth and expression.⁸² Apparently, praise and worship in the church must not be taken frivolously. Matt Boswell states, “One of the greatest needs of the modern church is theologically driven worship leaders.”⁸³ Without quality worship leaders, the worship ambiance of a church could be either bleak or whimsical. Hyo Seop Kim portrays seven biblical principles to evaluate worship leaders who have spiritual and musical talent.⁸⁴

However, there is a strain between traditional and contemporary worship styles. Phillip Lee identifies and explores the conflict between the two types of worship styles. A third style suggested as “blended worship,” that, according to Walter in Phillip Lee, “practicing blended worship is more difficult than it is in theory” Lee states,

In order to understand blended worship, one needs to clearly know its purpose. Worship is revelation of the Triune God and the response of His people. The purpose of blended worship is to absorb the advantages of all worship styles and to maximize participation of the congregation in worship. Therefore, the ultimate goal of blended worship is not only that the congregation experiences the presence of God and His revelation through various elements of worship, but also that they are able to form an expressed response to God through active participation in worship.⁸⁵

Thus far, it is evident that worship plays a vital role in the church. However, what kind of worship style is suitable for the church depends on the congregation. A conscious contextual approach, hence, is imperative

⁸² Tedeschi, 105.

⁸³ Matt Boswell, *Doxology and Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013).

⁸⁴ Hyo Seop Kim, “Effective Worship Leaders in South Korea Churches: Seven Biblical Attitude Principles of a Worship Leader” D. Min. diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1894&context=doctoral>. Accessed on January 6, 2021.

⁸⁵ Phillip Lee, “Blended Worship: A Future Model of Worship for the Presbyterian Churches in South Korea” D. Min. diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1895&context=doctoral>. Accessed on January 6, 2021.

for quality church growth. Such conscious contextualization plays a vital role in observing and evaluating the needs of a church.

Fellowship

One of the unique elements the Bible exhibits is the God of the Bible fellowshipping with humans in personal and spiritual affairs. The word fellowship, in Greek *koinonia*, means fellowship, participation, communion, or partnership. Paul Alvis mentions, “it is the shared relationship, the common participation, that gives it substance.” It includes communal participation in the Lord’s supper, Christ’s suffering, and harmonious association as an apostolic community that teaches, sups, and prays together.”⁸⁶ This *koinonia* is the spiritual association of believers in the triune God (1 Jn 1:3). Such *koinonia* edified the church and it grew in spirit and faith precipitously (Acts 2:42-47). Seyi Oladimeji rightly states that once a sinner repents, confesses, and becomes a believer, he belongs to God’s family, and therefore, he needs to grow with other members of God’s family. He further states, “True fellowship encourages freedom and increases love bonds.”⁸⁷

Jesus’ mentoring and discipleship included fellowship. Jesus continued with on-going discipling and trained His disciples around the clock. He allowed His disciples to follow Him everywhere. One incident towards the end of Jesus’ ministry on earth is when Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane after the last supper along with His disciples. He instructed Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, “Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me” (Matt 26:38). This instruction is to train them to be perseverant in prayers. Jesus’ fellowship method was not just to socialize, but also to form a community who is together in prayer and supplication. The book of John records, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:6, 7). Jesus lived with His disciples, investing time and emotions both for disciple-

⁸⁶ Paul Alvis, *Jesus and the Church: The Foundation of the Church in the New Testament and Modern Theology* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, E-book, 2021).

⁸⁷ Seyi Oladimeji, *Growing Your Church from Within: Building A Dynamic Home-Fellowship System* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011).

making.⁸⁸ The physical growth of a church is impossible without the spiritual growth of its members. Dennis McCallum mentions, “Growth is never a matter of mere individual pursuit of God. It is always pictured as something we pursue as a community.”⁸⁹ The Bible states, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25). A growing church needs to be proactive in every aspect of its function. As mentioned in figure 5, a growing church’s concern includes both spiritual and social concerns of an individual. And, only with fellowship can a church encourage the members into meeting their spiritual and social needs, towards unifying them with the love of Christ in God’s spirit.

Contextual Consciousness

Contextual theology gained a reputation among theologians and missiologists during the 70s, primarily through the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Movement.⁹⁰ Jörg Schmidt states, “church growth is assumed as the best contextual approach for many situations and therefore to be treated the same as the others so-called “contextual theologies.”⁹¹ Bergmann states, “contextual theology is therefore understood as the interpretation of Christian faith which is conscious of the importance of the situation and connection for shaping the theology.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Ralph Moore, *Making Disciples: Developing Lifelong Followers of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2012).

⁸⁹ Dennis McCallum, “Fellowship as a Means of Growth,” Dwell Community Church. <https://dwellcc.org/learning/essays/fellowship-means-growth>. Accessed July 26, 2023.

⁹⁰ Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas, *Contextual Theology: Skills and Practices of Liberating Faith* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

⁹¹ Schmidt, 13-14.

⁹² Sigurd Bergmann, *God in Context: A Survey of Contextual Theology*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).

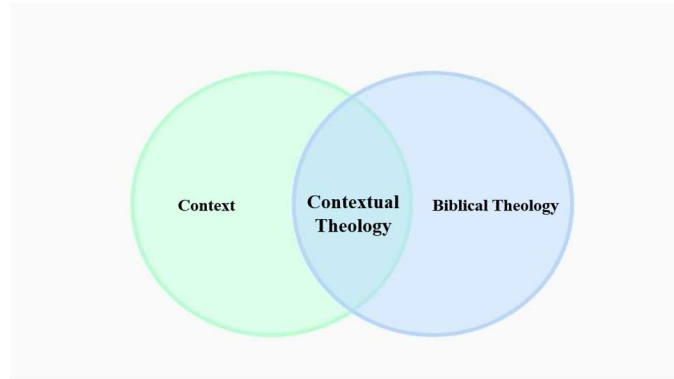


Figure 4. A Model for Contextual Theology

Charles Van Engen calls it “Appropriate Contextualization,” which includes five elements of different contextualization perspectives.⁹³ Contextual theology cannot be developed out of a vacuum, but must be induced within an active conscious approach. René Padilla rightly states, “Neither the interpretation nor the communication of the gospel can be carried out in a vacuum; they are realized in, and conditioned by, a given cultural context.”⁹⁴ He confirms that consciousness of how culture affects communication is critical for the gospel’s cross-cultural communication.⁹⁵ Due to the lack of conscious communication, sometimes the message may not be accurately transmitted or understood.⁹⁶ Hence, a contextual consciousness is a mandate to develop a contextual theology for any missiological approach.

⁹³ Charles E. Van Engen, “Five Perspectives of Contextual Appropriate Missional Theology” in *Appropriate Christianity*, Charles F. Kraft, ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 12: 183-202.

⁹⁴ C. René Padilla. *Mission Between the Times*. (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2010).

⁹⁵ Padilla, 112.

⁹⁶ Brian J. Hurn and Barry Tomalin, *Cross-Cultural Communication: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

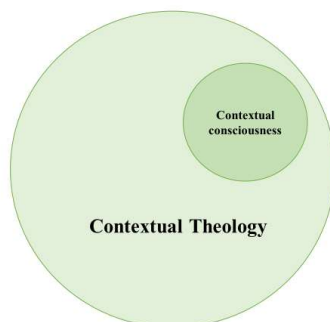


Figure 5. A Model for Contextual Consciousness

Spirituality

Christian Schwarz highlights spirituality as one of the eight principles for healthy church growth.⁹⁷ The church's spirituality and lifestyle show the fullness of the Holy Spirit and its authority.⁹⁸ Kim discusses the early church and their progression due to spiritual engagement through God's word, prayers, evangelism, love, and filled with the Holy Spirit.⁹⁹

Kim concludes that it was the early church's emphasis on spirituality that led the church to grow. He mentions that while addressing a church, the apostle Paul, in his letters, emphasized spirituality that begins with faith, hope, and love. The early church engaged in learning and meditating on God's word with prayers and associating with other believers.¹⁰⁰

In his book "An Introduction to Christian Spirituality," F. Antonisamy, in detail, addresses the core values and factors that altogether contribute to Christian spirituality. He advocates strong values that connect the human to the divine. He states, "spirituality can also express the state of being perfect as God is perfect or being holy as God is holy."¹⁰¹ Biblical spirituality can be defined as a relational process of the divine

⁹⁷ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Chennai, India: Church Growth Association of India, 1996).

⁹⁸ Kim, 12.

⁹⁹ Kim, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Kim, 18.

¹⁰¹ F. Antonisamy, *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Coimbatore, India: The Bombay Saint Paul Society, 2000).

restoration and peace within the broken relationship between God and humanity.¹⁰²

Philip Sheldrake states, “the contemporary concept of spirituality refers not only to spiritual practices but also a framework of values, often implicit rather than explicit, directed at a more intentional lifestyle.”¹⁰³ Alister E. McGrath suggests that different types of spirituality can be understood in the essay “Types of Spirituality,” written by Geoffrey Wainwright. The latter suggests that the five categories set out by Richard Niebuhr in “Christ and Culture,” could be used to analyze the type of spirituality within Christianity.¹⁰⁴ All believers can grow to maturity if they consistently perform the proper behavior.¹⁰⁵

Watson rightly concludes that spirituality can be understood as a way of living out our relationships with God and people in a way that leads to a holistic transformation—both families and communities.¹⁰⁶ A spiritually uplifting church accelerates spirit-filled contagious discipleship among the believers who, in response, are bound to advance the gospel commission. Understanding the role of spirituality in church growth is essential, as it directly informs the church’s ability to fulfill its missiological mandate.

Pastoral Ministry

The role of a pastor in the church is as crucial as the existence of the church building. The church is incomplete without the presence and involvement of a pastor. The Bible relates the position of a pastor as a shepherd. As the shepherd cares for the sheep, a pastor is to care for the congregation. An effective pastoral ministry in a church helps divert individuals from sin-trapped worldliness towards a Christ-centered spiritual experience. The role of a pastor is not limited to church services, but demands an interpersonal relationship with the members of the church.

¹⁰² “A Statement on Biblical Spirituality,” Andrews University. https://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdats_bibspir.pdf. Accessed July 26, 2023.

¹⁰³ Philip Sheldrake, “Christian Spirituality and Social Transformation,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2016. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-231?print=pdf>. Accessed on January 12, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*. (Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ Rick Warren. *The Purpose-Driven Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, ePub Edition, 1995).

¹⁰⁶ David L. Watson and Paul D. Watson, *Contagious Disciple-Making*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014).

Like Jesus, a pastor must engage with the members, disciple them, and draw them closer to God.

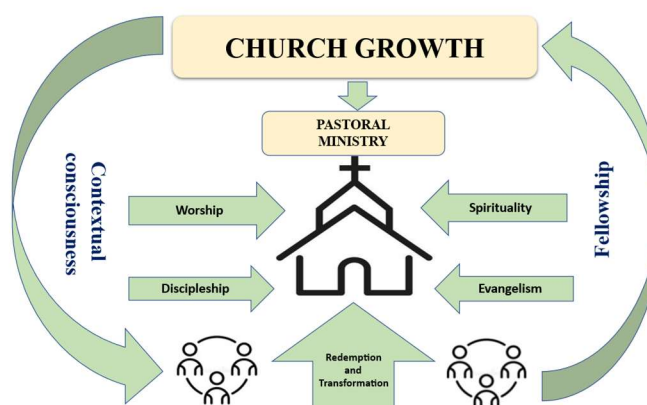


Figure 6. A Model for Pastoral Ministry
Towards Redemption and Transformation

Being a pastor of a church, large or small, it is the responsibility of the church pastor to mentor the members, meeting their physical, spiritual and social needs; however, there can be challenges for a pastor on his own to develop a close mentoring relationship with all members in the church. Jesus Christ himself disciplined only twelve closely. McIntosh gives a typology of church sizes and how they see their pastors.¹⁰⁷

One thing is quite evident and that is that the role of a pastor is subjected to different levels of leadership in the church. Therefore, pastoral ministry that fits all levels, assisting the needs, instigates organic church growth. Gi In Lee comments on the life and ministry of Paul who exemplifies pastoral leadership that accommodates the members of the church as the servant of the Lord, the Word, and of others.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ Lee, 61-64.

Table 1. McIntosh's Typology of Church Size

Factors	Small Church	Medium Church	Large Church
Size	15-200 worshipers	201-400 worshipers	401+ worshipers
Orientation	Relational	Programmatical	Organizational
Structure	Single cell	Stretched cell	Multiple cell
Leadership	Resides in key families	Resides in committees	Resides in select leaders
Pastor	Lover	Administrator	Leader

Apostolic Church of an Apostolic God

The word Apostle comes from the Greek word *Apostolos*, meaning “the sent one,” who is sent to proclaim the gospel, for the redemption of humankind. The church was commissioned to carry forward God’s redemptive approach to all humankind, making the church the messenger of God to the earth dwellers. The redemptive approach must be intentional and holistic just as it was for Jesus who was intentional for the holistic redemption of humankind. An apostolic church disciplines and nurtures the believers to be organically apostolic.

Aubrey Malphurs explains, “the Great Commission has both an evangelism and an edification or spiritual growth component. To make a disciple, first one must win a person (a non-disciple) to Christ. At that point he or she becomes a disciple. It does not stop there. The new disciple then needs to grow or mature as a disciple, hence the ‘edification component.’”¹⁰⁹ A matured disciple becomes apostolic and advances a holistic approach under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, discipling others for Christ.

Malphurs provides a five-step process to design a disciple-making process to lead people to spiritual maturity. 1) Articulating Christ’s Mission for the church, 2) Identifying the characteristics of mature disciples, 3) Identifying the primary ministries for disciple making, 4) Aligning the characteristics and the ministries, and 5) Measuring the church’s spiritual progress.^{110, 111}

¹⁰⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013).

¹¹¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, third edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dynamic interplay between spirituality and the missiological mandate is essential for the growth and vitality of the church. This relationship empowers believers to engage actively in God's mission, nurturing a deeper understanding of their role within the broader narrative of Scripture. A robust comprehension of church growth, rooted in biblical principles, serves as a foundation that unites theological insights with missiological imperatives, promoting an organic and sustainable expansion of the church.

Embracing a missiocentric ecclesiological approach revitalizes the church, allowing it to thrive both in membership and spiritual richness, as it aligns with the very essence of its identity. It is crucial to explore various strategies that can effectively contribute to church growth, emphasizing the need for a contextual, missiological theology that is intentional and responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities present in different communities.

This article has examined the biblical perspectives on church growth as articulated in both the Old and New Testaments, highlighting the centrality of God's mission and the church's pivotal role in it. The Scriptures reveal a profound divine commitment to fulfilling His mission through the church, underscoring that the mission of God remains incomplete without the active participation of every member of the body of Christ.

As the church embraces its identity as a missional community, it must recognize that each believer is called to contribute to this divine mission. By incorporating a culture of engagement, discipleship, and service, the church can effectively reflect God's love and purpose in the world. Ultimately, the call to participate in the *Missio Dei* is not merely an obligation, but a transformative journey that invites believers to experience the fullness of life in Christ while actively participating in the restoration of creation. In this way, the church can fulfill its mandate to be a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change, embodying the heart of God for all people.

KUMAR: TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH GROWTH

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