

LIVING PORTRAITS OF THE CHURCH

Making Room for the Family

Selected Scriptures



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Most people from large families were too young to remember all that their parents went through as their family expanded. Some of us who are parents of several children have vivid memories of how we shifted and adjusted, bought bunk beds, and added on to our house to make room for more. Growing families—especially those whose numbers continue to enlarge—call for all kinds of creative responses.

Growing churches experience the same kind of stresses. There are times when attending a growing church is exciting . . . and other times when it is irritating. Church parking lots choked with cars, pews packed with people, nurseries and Sunday school classes full to the brim, and long lines waiting to enter the worship center isn't anyone's idea of a relaxed morning at church!

At times like these, questions arise. Should a church get this large? Wasn't the first-century church small and easy to manage? Is it okay to make more room for our growing family . . . or should we attend elsewhere? The answers to these types of questions may surprise you.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Quick Look at How We Got Here

We have large, growing churches today. Worshipers attend these churches by the thousands each weekend. No doubt these churches would all claim that their growth is due to the work of God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). But the question we must wrestle with in light of such exponential growth is a simple one: Can such large congregations be supported by the biblical record?



Quotable

*God often turns
tragedies into
yet another
opportunity for
spiritual growth.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Discovering the Gates of Hades

Of all the gods of Greek mythology, he was one of the ugliest — with goat’s horns growing from his head, goat’s hooves in place of feet, and the shaggy hair of a goat covering his lower body. But the half-man, half-goat god, Pan, was merry, bounding among the thickets and mountains playing his reed pipe. It was among the trees and craggy hillsides of Caesarea Philippi that a temple was built to honor Pan. At the base of this temple exists a cave long believed by those who worshiped there to be the doorway into the netherworld. Worshipers threw goats from the precipice into the mouth of the cave in hopes that their sacrifice would be acceptable to Pan.

It was in the vicinity of this grotto, the alleged gateway to hell, that Jesus promised: “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18). Beginning with a small group of Jewish outsiders in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, Christ built His church to reach even the remotest parts of the world. And from that day to this, Satan has attempted to destroy Christ’s church — yet it endures. Despite controversies, wars, and denominational splits, the church continues to be the means through which God announces to a dark and dying world that light and life have come in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

2. A Close Look at What Happened Then

The church in the era of the apostles was anything but small. The response to Peter’s first sermon added three thousand new believers to the church (Acts 2:41). The additions only continued through the faithful preaching of the apostles. This exponential growth was not something man-made either. Rather, God was with the church as it continued to grow (11:21).

Of course, any church with people will struggle. Add more people, and watch the troubles increase. Human beings tainted by sin have always made up the church. Therefore, when Ananias and Sapphira darkened the doors of the Jerusalem church, they were, in a way, forerunners of the troubles that would infiltrate the church throughout its history. However, none of the troubles changed the growth pattern for the church that God had in mind. Even after the difficulties surrounding church leadership, God’s gospel continued to spread (6:1–7).



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LET'S LIVE IT

God stretches us and teaches us through new ideas we could never have imagined. So what does that mean for the church going forward?

- First, *churches must have vision because vision broadens our perspective and gets us out of our own backyard.* Vision keeps us all flexible and unselfish.
- Second, *churches must have creativity because creativity enlarges the possibilities.* Creativity brings new vistas into view, keeping us innovative and open to whatever is coming ahead.

Are you a person of vision and creativity? How do these values play out in your life?



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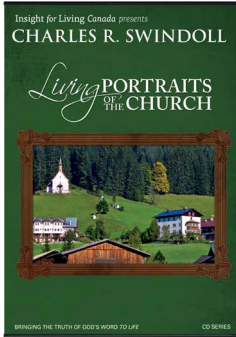
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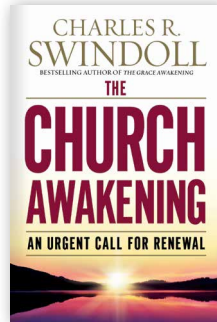
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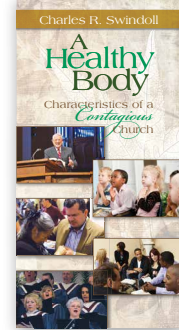
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