

# Characteristics of a Growing Church

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Phenomenal growth characterized the early church. Starting with about 3000 conversions on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:41), it wasn't long until the number of men reached 5000 (4:4). When we get to 5:14, "believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Dizzying, isn't it? What characteristics produced such growth? Can we develop those same qualities?

Obviously, our first-century brethren were intensely evangelistic. Even when threatened with severe punishment, they proclaimed the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and salvation through Him (Acts 3 & 4). But it doesn't stop there. Evangelism bears fruit only when people are listening. What motivated the crowds to hear?

The early church had credibility, and for good reason! Generous brethren gave bountifully to supply the needs of the less fortunate (2:44, 45). As a result, the church enjoyed "favor with all the people" (2:47). Someone has observed that "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." By demonstrating the love of Jesus, the Christians in Jerusalem earned the right to be heard.

A couple of them, however, sought to be praised rather than to be helpful. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, lied about their contribution, claiming to have donated the full proceeds from selling a possession when, in fact, they gave only part of it. Peter affirmed that they had every right to keep a part for their own use (5:4). Their sin was in lying about it. Ananias was struck dead instantly, carried out, and buried without ceremony; Sapphira, appearing later, suffered the same fate. "So great fear came upon the church and upon all who heard

these things . . . but the people esteemed them highly" (5:11, 13). Here was a church that upheld high standards! Even worldly people respected that. In our day, when so many are afraid to say or do anything that might seem "intolerant" or "judgmental," we might take a lesson from Acts 5!

Besides being evangelistic, being generous, and upholding high standards, these brethren were unified. "And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch" (5:12b). Nobody complained when Ananias and Sapphira were severely disciplined. None were introducing strange new doctrines or practices. Such unity attracts people who are weary of the world's chaos. They crave the rest that Jesus offers. No wonder they listened to the gospel. No wonder the church grew!

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## Read The Next Verse

Often the best correction of a mistaken view of a Bible text is to examine that passage in its context. An appropriate lesson might be called, "Read the next verse."

For example, John 6:44 says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." It is often understood to mean God supernaturally calls the elect to Himself. However, *the next verse* says, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."

God draws men and women to Himself by means of the inspired word.

-- Cecil May, Jr. (Montgomery, AL) adapted via *Preacher Talk*

## Whatever You Do, Don't Forget To Remember!

When asked what learning was the most necessary, Antisthenes replied, "Not to unlearn what you have learned."

The Greek philosopher had a point. Remembering what we have already learned, what we should already know, is imperative. But it can also be frustrating. In the words of one wit, "A man's memory is what he forgets with."

Consider the Bible. Many of us have heard and read and studied the Bible for years. It has been a regular and important source of our instruction. Yet how much of this marvelous book do we remember? How many of the great events of the Old Testament can we recall? How many rich New Testament texts can we locate? Can we show someone the plan of salvation laid out in Scripture?

You say you can't remember the Bible? Don't blame your brain. Researchers have calculated the brain's storage capacity to be somewhere in the range between one terabyte and 2.5 petabytes. Without getting into matters of high mathematics, let's just say that the brain has plenty of space for whatever Bible knowledge you'd like to store there.

Yet you still say you can't remember the Bible?

I wonder? Could it be that we remember what we have a deep and intense interest in? Don't we tend to remember best what we love most?

The Psalmist wrote, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You*" (Psalm 119:11). God's word was not merely in his home, or on his shelf. It was in his heart. And how was this possible? "*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*" (v. 97). The Psalmist remembered what he loved!

Could the same be true with us?

-- Dalton Key (Tulsa, OK) via Old Paths