

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## What is Our Mission? Part 2

Our mission is inseparably bound up with the mission of Jesus Christ. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus asserted he was on a mission from the Father. At least twelve different times in John's Gospel, Jesus declared that God sent him. For example, after talking with the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus told his disciples "My food is to do the will of Him *who sent Me* and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34, emphasis mine). Later he healed a lame man by the pool of

Bethesda and was criticized by the Jews for healing on the Sabbath. Shortly after that the Jews sought to kill him, not simply because of healing on the Sabbath, but because he claimed that God was his own Father (John 5:1-18). In the conversation that followed, Jesus instructed the Jews that "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him *who sent Me*" (5:30, emphasis mine).

His very works bear witness that the Father sent him (5:36-37); to work the works of God is to believe in Jesus whom the Father has sent (6:29); and the Father who sent Jesus draws others to him (6:44; see also 6:38, 40, 57; 8:16, 18; 12:49; 14:24). God the Father sent Jesus and now Jesus transferred his mission to his followers: "as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

The sending of the disciples as a missionary band has theological roots. While none of the disciples were present at Jesus' birth, they engaged with him early in his earthly

life. John remembered "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). They came to see Jesus as the "lamb of God" (1:36), and they followed Jesus, stayed with him for a short while (1:37-39), and invited others to share in their experience (41-46).

From the beginning the small fellowship band of disciples was a missionary band witnessing to their experience with Jesus. What held them together was their theological understanding of Jesus following the initial testimony of John the Baptist. They were much more than a loving fellowship; they were a witnessing band of believers!

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**Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.**

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# Jesus is the unique and only way to the Father.

## The message of salvation demands a verdict.

The power for witnessing came from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the small band of believers that he would not leave them alone after his resurrection, but would send the Spirit. The Spirit bore witness at Jesus' baptism (1:32); Jesus spoke about the importance of the Spirit in conversion (3:5,8); and he promised the Spirit would be with them after his resurrection (John 7:37-39; 14:16-26; 15:26-27; 16:13). Following his commission to the disciples—"as the Father has sent Me, I also send you"—, Jesus breathed on them as said "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22). Thus, the Gospel of John concludes with the small band of disciples going forward as a witness in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus pointed out the fact they were a community on a mission in his words "I also send you," where the word *you* is plural rather than singular. The disciples were sent, not just as individuals, but also as a group, a point he repeated following his resurrection (John 20:21).

And to what mission were the disciples sent? The mission of the disciples flowed out of Jesus' mission. Since the earthly work of Jesus was to bring eternal life to lost mankind that is the continuing mission of his witnessing band of believers, now the Church. The work is stated in terms of "eternal life," as Jesus communicated to Nicodemus in John 3:16-17. "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." The mission of the Church is to bear witness that eternal life is only available in Jesus Christ. This is highlighted in the seven "I am" allegories: "I am the bread of life" (6:35-48), "I am the door" (10:7-9), "I am the vine" (15:1), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "I am the light

of the world" (8:12; 9:5). The church's mission is to witness to the fact that eternal life is only found in Jesus Christ who died on the Cross to pay for mankind's sin. The world of John's day was filled with numerous religions, each with its own understanding of finding a relationship with the Devine. Thus, the mission of the disciples, as well as ours, was and is, to proclaim an exclusive way to the Father. Jesus shocked his hearers by declaring "no one comes to the Father but through Me" (14:6).

The world is in rebellion against God and his people. Yet, it is an enigma that the world is also the context where the mission of Jesus and his Church is carried out. The world is winnable (3:16-19; 6: 33, 51) and Jesus has sent his people "into the world" (17:18). As the mission of Jesus was carried out in the world, so the mission of the church must be, too.

What is our mission? It is to proclaim that eternal life is available to those who believe in Jesus Christ, particularly through his death on the Cross. It is to proclaim that Jesus is the unique Savior of the world, and he is the only way to the Father, the only way to eternal life. It is a message that demands a verdict for or against Jesus Christ.



Gary L. McIntosh is editor of *Growth Points* and speaks at several leadership events each year.

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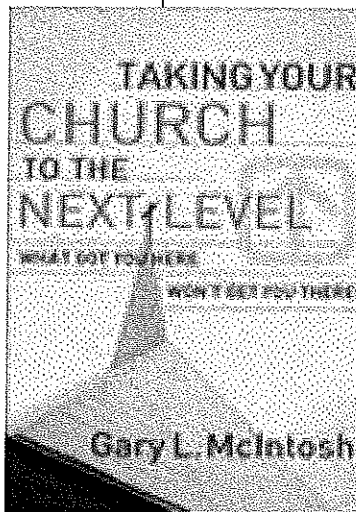
## Taking Your Church to the Next Level

“There are three aspects of church ministry that challenge all leaders,” says Gary L. McIntosh in his new book *Taking Your Church To The Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. “The first is that local churches experience a predictable life cycle of growth and decline. The second is a lack of recognition that larger churches are a different organism than a smaller church and need to be led a certain way. The third is perhaps the most important: what got your church *here* won't get it to where you want it to *be*.”

Churches go through natural cycles. For instance, smart church planters recognize that attendance generally increases from September - Easter then declines from Easter - August. But church patterns are also evident outside of the calendar. Churches reach predictable barriers when they reach a certain size, as well.

McIntosh, president of the Church Growth Network, has found what appears to be a correlation between church size and congregational development. He discusses church size and common growth/decline trends for five common church sizes: Relational Church (15-200 members), Managerial Church (200-400 members), Organizational Church (400-800 members), Centralized Church (800 - 1,500 members) and Decentralized Church (1,500+).

*Take It To The Next Level* explains the impact that age and size have on churches and outlines the improvements that must be made at each point of growth if a church is to remain fruitful and faithful to its mission over many years.



“You can't organize a church of 200 members the same way you organize a church of 2,000 members. In much the same way that a championship sports team needs to change its strategy in the off-season to better their chances of winning again next year, churches need to change if they are going to stay vibrant.”

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