

## Losing No One In The Crowd

Franklin Church of Christ  
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AM Worship

### Introduction:

"I like a small church, everyone is close and nobody falls through the cracks." "I like a large church because nobody bothers me." These seem to be opposite statements, but in fact they are the same. Large churches can lose people in the crowd. Is this problem inevitable for large churches? If it is, maybe we should quit converting people. After all, what is the point of bringing people to Christ, if doing so pushes others away? Or is this a problem with modern approaches to keeping up with people? To answer these questions, we must first understand the problem. All Christians have needs: relational needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, benevolent needs, etc. When those needs are not met, even Christians will feel lost and drift away. Before scoffing at these as weak, keep in mind that God established His church so we could provide for one another. This year, we have focused on the Jerusalem church, seeing their devotion to worship, their unity in heart and soul, and how they handled problems. Another key to their success was losing no one in the crowd. In **Acts 2:41**, the church numbered about 3000. By **Acts 4:4**, the Jerusalem church had 5000 men, with wives and widows they easily numbered over 10,000. In **Acts 5:14**, multitudes were constantly added. The Jerusalem church was a large congregation. How did they keep up with so many people? They didn't have phones, e-mail, church directories or record keeping software. Yet, people were not lost in the crowd.

### Discussion:

- I. First, note the ways modern churches try to keep from losing people in the crowd.
  - A. Don't have a crowd. Some churches pride themselves in being small. They are close knit, but never convert anyone. After all, too many converts, and they will lose people in the crowd.
  - B. The preacher keeps up with everybody. The preacher did most of the work to get people into the congregation. Once there, he conducts studies with them so they will grow. If they have trouble, he counsels them. He mediates difficulties between the brethren. He visits people in the hospital. He does all the weddings and funerals. He calls the people who miss. Eventually, he is swamped and cannot handle another new member. When a new one comes along, his abilities to minister to the membership's needs are overextended and somebody gets lost in the crowd.
  - C. Divide up the congregation among the elders. The elders divide up the church so each one has a cross section of the congregation. The elders now strive to do the work the preacher was doing, but only for the people assigned to them. However, a small group of men can only do so much before they are also overextended. Eventually, they get to a point where new members take time away from old ones and people get lost in the crowd.
  - D. Assigned small groups. These seem to be the rage among churches today. The churches that have used them have had some success, but typically only for a while. I have yet to hear about a church that had a group system that kept on growing to be substantially larger than three or four hundred. There are inherent problems with most group programs in churches of Christ. First, most church-run group programs constantly skirt the dangerous field of the social gospel, with churches organizing social groups. Secondly, leadership is rarely developed for these groups. It is simply assigned. Thirdly, assigning people to groups in order to serve one another typically builds resentment among the membership. Let's face it, we like to pick our friends. And despite all the rhetoric offered about saying we ought to be friends with all our brethren (and we should, to the best of our abilities) there is something about being assigned that simply doesn't sit well with most of us. Finally, these groups typically only expand the worker base by a few volunteers in each group. Once they are overworked, new members take time away from old ones and people start getting lost in the crowd again.
- II. Jerusalem's two keys to losing no one in the crowd.
  - A. Leadership development.
    1. In **Acts 6:1**, we find one instance when the Jerusalem church overlooked someone: the Hellenistic widows. Notice how the church dealt with it
    2. The apostles did not tell the congregation as a whole to do better. They did not divide up the widows among themselves. They did not divide the congregation up into work groups with a

set number of widows in each group. They didn't start new churches all over Jerusalem. Rather they assigned seven men to be in charge of this task (**Acts 6:3**).

3. Consider the number of widows there must have been. If you extrapolate from the number of widows in our congregation, the Jerusalem church likely had between 350 and 400 widows following the day of Pentecost. As the multitudes added up to 15,000 members, they would have had over 1000. No wonder these seven were placed in charge of the task and not told simply to accomplish it.
  4. By necessary implication we recognize what happened in this church. The congregation was growing (**Acts 6:1**). This caused some of the members to be lost in the crowd. Their needs were going unmet. The church had authority to meet this need. So the apostles set up a group of men who would be leaders over this work. These seven men, of necessity, would then begin to develop others to accomplish the fulfillment of these needs.
  5. This demonstrates a key need we have. We have to develop leaders, who will in turn develop more leaders and equip the members to accomplish the work that is necessary.
- B. House to house relationships.
1. The other key is that the Jerusalem saints did not just relate to one another in the crowd. They related to one another in smaller groups. However, there is no indication of assignment. These Christians simply met together in one another's homes. Seemingly, this took place through what we might call "circles of contact."
  2. Allow me to show you an example of this in action. In **Acts 9:36-43**, we read the story of Tabitha. When Peter arrived in Joppa and came into the upper room, he found a group of widows displaying the tunics and garments Tabitha had made for them. Tabitha saw a need among a particular circle of believers and she filled it. We have these kinds of circles all around us. We have family circles, neighborhood circles, Bible class circles, role circles (elders, deacons), circumstance circles (widows or young-marrieds), age circles, similarity circles (baseball fans, enjoy sewing), job circles (Paul and Aquilla were both tentmakers), proximity circles (who we sit by in the congregational assembly), etc. We must not just view these as circles of contact, but as work circles. When we do so, who will be left out?
  3. What should we do from house to house?
    - a. First, as we noticed with Tabitha, we should learn to meet the needs that others have. Tabitha made tunics and garments for widows. Can any of us do similarly? Having spent time with others, have you learned that they need something you can provide? Then do it for them. Seek people out to serve.
    - b. Second, notice what the early Christians did when they spent time together. In **Acts 2:46**, the Christians spent time together socially. This demonstration of hospitality did more than just meet the needs of the saints who had come to Jerusalem from far off. It caused them to get to know one another. It caused them to grow closer to one another.
    - c. Third, in **Acts 2:47**, we learn that the Christians spent time from house-to-house praising God. For them, worship was not just about the assembly. No doubt, they sang with one another. In **Acts 12:12**, the brethren prayed with one another. In **Acts 20:20**, the brethren studied with one another.
  4. This demonstrates a key need in our congregation. Each of us must work on developing "house-to-house" relationships with others, spending time with one another and praising God with one another. And we must allow these relationships to be flexible: new people coming in, other groups branching off, etc.

### III. What all this means for you as an individual member of this congregation.

- A. This means the work of serving does not belong to others. It belongs to you. **Ephesians 4:11-12** says so. Don't wait for the church's next program. Don't bemoan what the elders haven't done. Don't expect somebody else to take care of a need. You do it. Then we will be held together by that which every joint supplies (**Ephesians 4:16**).
- B. This means you must not expect the preachers or elders to attend to your needs personally. Can you imagine what would happen today if our widows claimed they had a need and our elders or preachers said, "We do not have time for that, assign some other men to be in charge of that task." Yet, isn't that exactly what the apostles said in **Acts 6:2-4**. According to **Acts 6:5**,

this plan found approval among all the Jerusalem saints. Let me bring it home to something we actually deal with: hospital visits. It is not a preacher's job to make hospital visits. It is a Christian's job. And when all of us are visiting those who are in our circles of contact, everyone will be cared for. We must understand how the desire for the preacher to make hospital calls is crippling growth in American churches. I have received advice from numerous preachers. "Edwin, if you want people to listen to you when you preach, you have to visit them in the hospital." If you do not listen to Bible truth because I didn't visit you in the hospital, I will not be the one who is lost. But we might all be lost if we continue this pattern that is crippling our growth. Do you realize that one person can only handle the responsibilities of about 12 to 15 close relationships? I could never visit the nearly 300 sick and shut-in we would have if we converted as many people as the Jerusalem church did. And we will never convert that many people if I have to try. Brethren, we will lose our own souls if our desire to be personally attended by the preacher or elders limits the number of people we can bring to Christ. Let's be like the Jerusalem church and all work together on this.

- C. This means that you must recognize you are a working part in this congregation. According to **I Corinthians 12:14-18**, we may be an eye, an ear, a hand or a foot, but we all have to do something in this congregation. The worst concept people have today is that the work to do within a church is what is done on the stage in the assemblies. **Romans 12:4-8** provides a representative list of differing functions we have in the church. Only "teaching" is used in the public worship, but even it is not limited to the assembly. People need to be encouraged and comforted. They need to be taught. They need prayer. The sick need to be visited. Those in need, need help. What can you do in these situations? According to **I Peter 4:10-11**, we all have been given special abilities. We each can do something. Whatever abilities you have are to be used to serve others. Can you cook? Feed somebody. Can you work as a handyman? Help somebody. Can you speak? Teach somebody. Can you pray? Pray with somebody. You have abilities and you must use them to serve others. Do not sit back and wait to be served. Figure out what you can do to serve others. Then serve them.

### **Conclusion:**

Do not let this sermon cause you to say, "Wow, that is exactly what we need. I can't wait until somebody gets that started." Right now, determine to do something this week. Meet with one of your brethren for a Bible reading or study. Invite some people over to sing praises to God. Invite some over to pray for some specific needs this congregation has. Call someone who is absent. Catch someone doing something right and honor them for it. Seek someone out to serve this week. Cut their grass, take them a meal, mend their clothes, clean their house, wash their car, fix their plumbing, visit them in the hospital or nursing home, etc. Whatever you can do for them, do it. You cannot do all of these things this week. But do at least one of them. Determine right now what you will do, for whom and when. Once you accomplish that, figure out what you will do the next week. Then the next and the next and the next, etc. When we each make this commitment, no one will be lost in the crowd and we will grow.