



CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

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PART 6: HOW TO PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ **I pray** that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And **I pray** that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21 NIV)*

A. KEY POINTS

This passage is essentially a prayer for the believers in the church of Ephesus emphasizing four matters. The Apostle Paul prays that they may:

- have inner spiritual strength
- have the indwelling of Christ in their hearts
- be rooted and established in love
- know the magnitude of Christ's love for them

B. CENTRAL QUESTION

In light of the decline in church attendance¹ in America today, how can we best pray for the church?

C. SEVEN LIKELY REASONS WHY CHURCHES STOP GROWING

In a recent article by "Grow a Healthy Church" the following seven reasons are given why churches today stop growing.²

¹ Gallup Poll, "U.S. Church Attendance Still Lower Than Pre-Pandemic," <https://news.gallup.com/poll/507692/church-attendance-lower-pre-pandemic.aspx#:~:text=In%20the%20four%20years%20before,a%20May%201%2D24%20survey> > June 26, 2023.

1. An unhealthy focus on _____.

When churches focus on growth as an end in itself they begin to obsess about numbers and focus on stats.

2. Neglect of the primary mission to _____.

The primary mission that Jesus has given us is to make disciples in the context of communities of faith.

3. Churches stop growing when _____.

A primary reason churches decline into impotence is their almost legendary neglect of visitors.

4. Irrelevance to _____.

Relevance in outward non-essentials (fashion, music, style, furniture, colors) must be coupled with traditional biblical values if we are to remain relevant and continue to see churches grow.

5. Comfortable with the _____.

As God prospers churches, prosperity makes them comfortable with the status quo, so they are less likely to take risks to grow more.

6. Not optimized for _____.

Churches, like individuals, like companies, can reach their optimum size. Discovering the optimum size of your church is not an easy task because a church's size is determined by a complex range of factors. Space and leadership needs increase as churches grow.

7. Church _____.

Church leaders face the challenge of knowing how to reach a disinterested culture while at the same time nurturing regular attenders.

D. FIVE WAYS TO PRAY FOR THE CHURCH

1. Pray that there will be a balanced focus on growth and discipleship.
2. Pray that visitors will feel comfortable and welcome.
3. Pray that the church's core values (active worship, emphasis on knowing God's Word, and corporate prayer) will be upheld.
4. Like the men of Issachar, pray that church leaders will understand the times and know what to do (1 Chr. 12:32 NIV).
5. Pray that church expenses will be met, especially when the church is declining in number.

² Grow a Healthy Church, <https://growahealthychurch.com/churches-stop-growing/?gclid=CjwKCAjwvfm0BhAwEiwAG2tqzEN_jNf7KO8Uz-CkiU6tqzjSrf9lbK7i7IHUkrEfMHwWyWNqjGYIGhoChdwQAvD_BwE>. Accessed October 5, 2023.