



# The Jerusalem Keys to Victorious Church Growth (Part 1)

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AM Assembly

## Introduction:

Do you want to know what the most common question I get asked when I go preach in other places is? “How big is the congregation you work with?” In Texas, the congregation was about 375. In Tennessee, they were both around 130. In Indiana, we were about 230. And of course, this congregation is at about 350. What is interesting is the response I have received just about every time, no matter my answer: “That’s a good size for a church.”

I’ve decided to change my response. Imagine the conversation: “Hey Edwin, how big is that congregation?” “About 350.” “That’s a good size.” “No it’s not.” “What do you mean?” “A good size is 351.” Of course, I hope you can imagine what I’ll say when they say 351 is a good size for a church. “No it’s not. 352 is.”

I don’t want to settle. I don’t want to be a keeper of the aquarium but a fisher of men who catch other fishers of men. I want to find others who will become disciple-making disciples. And I never want to get to a point that because of the way we do what we do, baptizing a person means losing someone else so we can keep up with each other. Let’s face it, the Jerusalem church started out at about 3000 and pretty quickly got up to 5000 and potentially 15,000 disciples. And when we get to be a congregation of 1000 and someone says, “That’s a good size for a congregation.” I’ll say, “No, 1001 is a good size.” And if a persecution comes and the church scatters and there are just 25 of us left and someone says, “That’s a good size for a church.” I’ll say, “I don’t think so. I’d rather have 26.”

Jerusalem had the “one more disciple” mentality. I want to be like that. Let’s look at them and see what their keys for victorious church growth were.

## Discussion:

I. Key #1: **Acts 2:42**—The Jerusalem church was continually devoted to God.

A. Luke illustrates the early church’s devotion to God in four ways.

1. *They were devoted to learning from God.* That is, they were devoted to the teaching of the apostles. This means they were present when the apostles revealed and taught God’s will, and they devoted their lives to what God said by surrendering to it.
2. *They were devoted to loving like God.* That is, they were devoted to fellowship. They were devoted to the community of God’s people. Having become God’s children, they recognized they were part of a new collective, a new family, a new community. They cared for each other because of their common connection to God. **Acts 2:44-45** shows this devotion to community and fellowship in action as they took care of each other sacrificing their own goods to serve the church community.
3. *They were devoted to God’s grace.* That is, they were devoted to the breaking of bread. In the context of spiritual things, this phrase refers to the Lord’s Supper as in **I Corinthians 10:16**. They were devoted to remembering what tied them together into the community, faith in Jesus and His death to save them.
4. *They were devoted to God’s power.* That is, they were devoted to prayer, congregationally and privately. Having come into Jesus Christ, they knew where their strength came from—not themselves, but God.

B. We see this devotion in **Acts 2:46-47**. They met in the temple daily as a congregation. But even as they met individually in one another’s homes, they praised God together. These Jerusalem Christians didn’t ask, “How often do I have to ‘go to church?’” You would not hear a Jerusalem saint say, “I don’t want to go to another singing or study; I’ve already had enough ‘church’ this week.” They were God’s. They were devoted to God. Their life was about God. God wasn’t just someone they checked in with on occasion. God was their life.

II. Key #2: **Acts 4:32**—The Jerusalem church was of one heart and one soul.

A. As Jesus had prayed in **John 17:20-21**, the church had unity.

B. “Considering the large number of persons in this congregation, and the variety of social relations from which they had been suddenly drawn together, it is truly remarkable, and well worthy of a place in the record, that they were ‘of one heart and soul.’ The unity for which the Saviour (*sic*) had prayed was now enjoyed by the church and witnessed by the world. The most surprising manifestation of it was seen in that complete subsidence of selfishness which led one and all to say that the things which he possessed were not his own, but the property of all. This was ... the spontaneous expression of the love of God and man which had taken possession of every heart” (McGarvey, J.W.; **New Commentary on Acts of The Apostles**; Gospel Light Publishing Company; Delight, AR; v I, p 79.).

- C. “Rich and poor, learned and simple...Levites and Jews, were so united in Christ that all other distinctions were lost. Selfishness was gone for each loved his brother as himself. What each man had he held it not as his own, but as a steward of Christ for the good of all. ... The ordinary worldly life seemed to have melted into the life of faith and godliness. Their wants were spiritual, their occupations were spiritual, their joys were spiritual. In this happy state, in the clear atmosphere of love, the great truths of the gospel shone out with marvellous [*sic*] brightness; the resurrection of Christ especially stood out in the lineaments of a distinct reality; and there was a rich glow of grace over the whole Church” (Hervey, A.C.; *Pulpit Commentary*; Eerdmans Publishing Co; Grand Rapids; 1950; v 18, p 128.).
- D. This unity did not mean everyone knew everyone else, did everything with everyone else, or had directly helped everyone else. It meant they were of the same mind and not divided (**I Corinthians 1:10**), no one thought more highly of himself than he ought (**Romans 12:3**), they regarded one another as more important than themselves (**Philippians 2:3-4**), no one sought preeminence in the group (**3 John 9**), and they loved one another despite gender, nationality, education, background, or socio-economic status (**I John 4:7**). They were one heart and one soul. As Lenski wrote, “As in a living body only one heart beats ... Its whole active life was one in thought, feeling and will” (*Acts*, p 186.).

III. Key #3: **Acts 4:18-20**—The Jerusalem church couldn’t help but point others to God.

- A. Peter and John were being charged by the leading Council of the Jews to stop telling people about Jesus. And Peter’s response was “We can’t.” “We can’t help but tell people what we have seen and heard.”
- B. No doubt, being arrested could have a sizeable impact on your motivation. So Peter and John immediately went to their friends and they prayed for God’s strength and courage (**Acts 4:23-31**). Why? Because they wanted to point others to God and they didn’t want any fear getting in the way.
- C. But this wasn’t just the apostles. This wasn’t just from the hired few. This was a congregation wide culture. In **Acts 8:1-4**, a persecution arose and scattered just about every one of those first Christians. Notice **vs. 4** especially. Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. Everyone in the Jerusalem church was busy pointing others to God.
- D. I don’t want to shame anyone or guilt anyone, but let me ask you a question. Have you pointed anyone to God in the last month? Disciples are people who point others to God, who make other disciples. The Jerusalem church was all about that.

IV. Key #4: **Acts 2:46**—The Jerusalem church lost no one in the crowd.

- A. This is one of the most important and yet overlooked keys to the success of the Jerusalem church. One of the biggest fears of growing churches is losing individuals in the crowd. Someone will need help in doctrine, but be overlooked in the sea of people. Another will be spiritually hurting, but her pain is unnoticed in the mass. Another may simply be absent, but because of the numbers he is not missed until it is too late.
- B. How did a handful of apostles give account for 10,000 souls? How did the Jerusalem church begin at nearly 3000 on the day of Pentecost and explode to nearly 10,000 in a short time without losing people in the crowd? Simply in this manner, the members of the Jerusalem church were not just associated with one another in the crowd. They also associated in smaller groups in one another’s homes (**Acts 2:46**). No doubt, these groups formed naturally through numerous ways and divisions, probably based on age, interests, backgrounds, etc. But, we can be equally assured that at times one of the leaders would connect a new convert with a group of Christians that were already close.
- C. The necessary practical dynamics of these groups could take up an entire lesson in and of itself. For now, suffice it to say that through this association with smaller groups, people’s spiritual needs were met. The spiritual growth of individuals was accomplished. The spreading of the gospel was multiplied. The grounding of new converts was made sure. No doubt, some fell through the cracks; after all Jesus said that some seed would be sown on shallow ground and the plant would spring up but quickly die out (**Luke 8:13-14**). But, you didn’t hear people saying, “I don’t want to be a member in a large church; I would get lost.” Because they weren’t lost in the crowd, they were connected with Christians.

**Conclusion:**

What’s a good size for a congregation? At least one more than what we’ve got right now. The Jerusalem church understood that. They did what was necessary to allow for that one more soul. Come back for our next lesson to learn the other three keys and what they did with those keys. I want to suggest that it is high time we adopted this Jerusalem vision and look forward to working in ways that allow that one more soul, no matter how many one more souls we point to the Lord.