

A Tipping Point or A Perfect Storm for A Church

Tipping Point:

The critical point in a situation beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place.

A Perfect Storm:

A critical or disastrous situation created by a powerful concurrence of factors.

A Crisis Becomes Apparent

Many churches can exist for years with the same attendance or only gradually getting smaller until several things happen that cause a crisis spiritually, financially and socially.

The Problems That Converge and Cause A Tipping Point or A Perfect Storm

1. **Declining Attendance.** Many churches have a smaller number of people attending now than they had in the past. A smaller attendance begins to discourage people in the church.
2. **Secular Culture.** People in the community are less likely to walk into a local church as a guest without being personally invited first. In our secular culture today, many families do not value church membership as important for their family.
3. **Age of Members.** The people who are still attending our church have gotten older and their age and declining health may affect whether they are able to teach at church, serve as volunteers, give financially, drive their car to church, or even attend as regularly as they used to. Our church may lose long-time members because they pass away or because they move out of town to be closer to their children.
4. **Giving Less.** As younger adults join your church, they may not be able to or don't have the desire to give 10% of their income like older adults are used to doing.
5. **Size and Age of Your Facilities.** Attendance may have declined but the size of your building is still the same and the cost of utilities is going up. As your buildings age, there will be expensive maintenance – roof, parking lot, carpet, hot water heaters, kitchen appliances, sound systems, cleaning, lawncare and air conditioning replacements.
6. **A Pastor Leaves.** When a pastor leaves, it may take up to a year to find another pastor and during that time several families may leave to join other churches.
7. **The Wrong Pastor.** Different pastors have different strengths and weaknesses. One pastor might be a wonderful speaker, but not be good at talking with people. Another pastor is great with administration and counseling, but people don't enjoy listening to him preach.
8. **A Split or Lack of Unity.** It is not unusual for any church to have occasional disagreements over the worship service, childrens' or student ministry, staff changes or something else. Sometimes several families who are unhappy will leave the church.

9. The Neighborhood Doesn't Match. As time goes by, the neighborhood may change around the church. Now the makeup of those attending doesn't match the neighborhood.

10. A Nearby Church is Attractive. A church's new staff or new programs have become a new draw to families in your neighborhood. Larger churches seem to have more to offer.

11. Lack of Engagement. Some churches only offer Sunday morning classes and don't offer home groups for Bible study. Some churches only offer lecture-style classes and not the discussion-style Bible study that younger adults prefer.

12. Lack of Meaningful Friendships. Sometimes real and meaningful friendships are the glue that keep a member attending a church. If a person attends a church for months or even years and feels lonely and may feel unwanted at a church, they may leave.

13. Economic Downturn. About every five years, America has an economic recession. During this recession, church families may lose jobs and be unable to give the same offerings or may feel emotionally threatened about their financial security and give less.

14. Financial Mismanagement. Sometimes, churches make choices to spend too much or are not careful to control expenses related to utilities, transportation, insurance, etc. They may pay for expenses like camps, VBS, mission trips, concerts and other events without asking those attending to help pay an appropriate amount. Sometimes, there is fraud and theft that may cost a church thousands of dollars.

15. Lack of Good Leadership. Sometimes pastors and staff members are good speakers and good with people, but the administration is a mess. Planning, preparing, execution, budgeting, communication, evaluation, staff relationships and leadership training skills are missing and the church fails to grow and thrive.

16. Burnout. Sometimes attendance and programs at the church seem to be going great but the pastor or the staff in general are getting burned out and losing their passion and enthusiasm for working at the church. They are having trouble managing their time and their balance between church and family. The pastor or staff member may leave to seek a less stressful position somewhere else.

17. Lack of Trained Leaders. The pastor and staff cannot do all the ministries of the church by themselves. Sometimes churches implode or fail to thrive because they cannot provide enough Sunday School teachers, small group leaders, and workers with the children and students.

18. Lack of Evangelism and Discipleship. A central purpose of the church is to share the gospel and help people grow spiritually. If members lose their ability and passion to do this, the church will begin to have an inward focus and stop reaching their community.

What Is the Answer? How Do We Prevent A Tipping Point or Perfect Storm?

There is no easy answer to this.

Things can fall apart quickly but churches grow stronger slowly and steadily.

Discipleship happens slowly. Spiritual growth takes time.

1. Strive for excellence.

- Leaders look for new and better ideas. They read, they interview other leaders, they attend workshops and training. They invite ideas from the GBMB and the local Association.
- Leaders value creativity, they avoid getting stuck in a rut.
- They find ways to take baby steps of progress.
- They evaluate worship, Sunday School, small groups and other ministries. They look for ways to improve every week.

2. Build great teams.

- Jesus built a team and sent them out to change the world.
- Good teams brainstorm, share the work and evaluate.
- Good teams build a relationship of trust. They don't compete or stab in the back.

3. Create a culture of leadership training.

- Continually train your leaders and volunteers on a regular basis, not once a year.

4. Be intentional to build meaningful relationships. Worship, small groups and all ministries can do things on purpose to help people develop good relationships with one another.

5. Understand which goals are your priorities for helping people grow spiritually.

- First, the foundation is a person's private spiritual growth and walk with God.
- Second, we are going to help everyone find a small group with both high expectations and high support.
- Third, we bring people together for worship, prayer, praise, the Word and celebration.
- Fourth, we help everyone find a way to serve others using their passion and gift.

6. Sound small group strategies.

- They constantly help people read the Bible on their own.
- Everyone talks about what they are learning when they come together.
- Everyone is prayed for when they meet each week.
- The group works together to serve others.
- Everyone in the group is learning to be a leader and taught how to start a new group.

7. Be wise financially.

- Protect against fraud. Teach about stewardship. Look for ways to add income by renting your facilities. Don't build large and expensive buildings that are hard to keep maintained and the utilities are stressful.