

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

September 19, 2017

Today is a bit of potpourri. I've made you think pretty hard of late, so this week is a little bit less intense. For example, the pic to the right portrays a whimsical gathering of "superheroes" that must have been drawn before this year's *Wonder Woman* film. It does include one genuine Super Hero.



Second, your "new word" for today is "**antepenultimate**." (You may use this to amaze and astound your friends.) Thursday is the Jewish New Year's Day, or *Rosh Hashanah*, for their sacred year 5778. This means that Wednesday, the day before New Year's Day, is the "**penultimate**" day of the Jewish year (the next to the last day); and today is the "antepenultimate" day of the Jewish year (the day before the day before the last day). Find some way to use that in a sentence today 😊.

Today is also our daughter, Anna's 38th birthday, which means that Jill was involved in an auto accident 38 years ago today. She and Nathan were on the way to church in Ft. Worth, very pregnant, when an unlicensed driver made a left turn in the middle of the block, right into the driver's door of our car . . . and Anna was born a few hours later. THANK YOU for your faithful praying for the many physical challenges of her life. (The photo was taken this morning with a flower one of her children made for her birthday.)



Thanks, also, for your prayer for our APSC, or our Associate Pastor Search Committee. You may remember that the persons you elected for this purpose are Renee Christy, Jon Goldsmith, Nesa Herring, Felicia Turk, and Nancy Wisthoff. The group elected Jon as their team leader just last Sunday.

Along that line, a comment that I hear among us fairly often is that "we are an old/older church." While a look around the room on Sunday morning does lend credence to that conclusion, we are certainly not alone in this situation. Surveys indicate that the average age of church attenders across the country is older than 50, and watching folks come and go from the other congregations in our building suggests that we're about on par with everyone else in this respect.

Now before we start crying "Woe are We," I suggest to you that there's really nothing the matter with being "a senior adult church," if that's what God calls us to be. Senior adulthood is a growing demographic, and if we're doing a really good job reaching, teaching, winning, and developing Senior Disciples, then we're doing a really good thing.

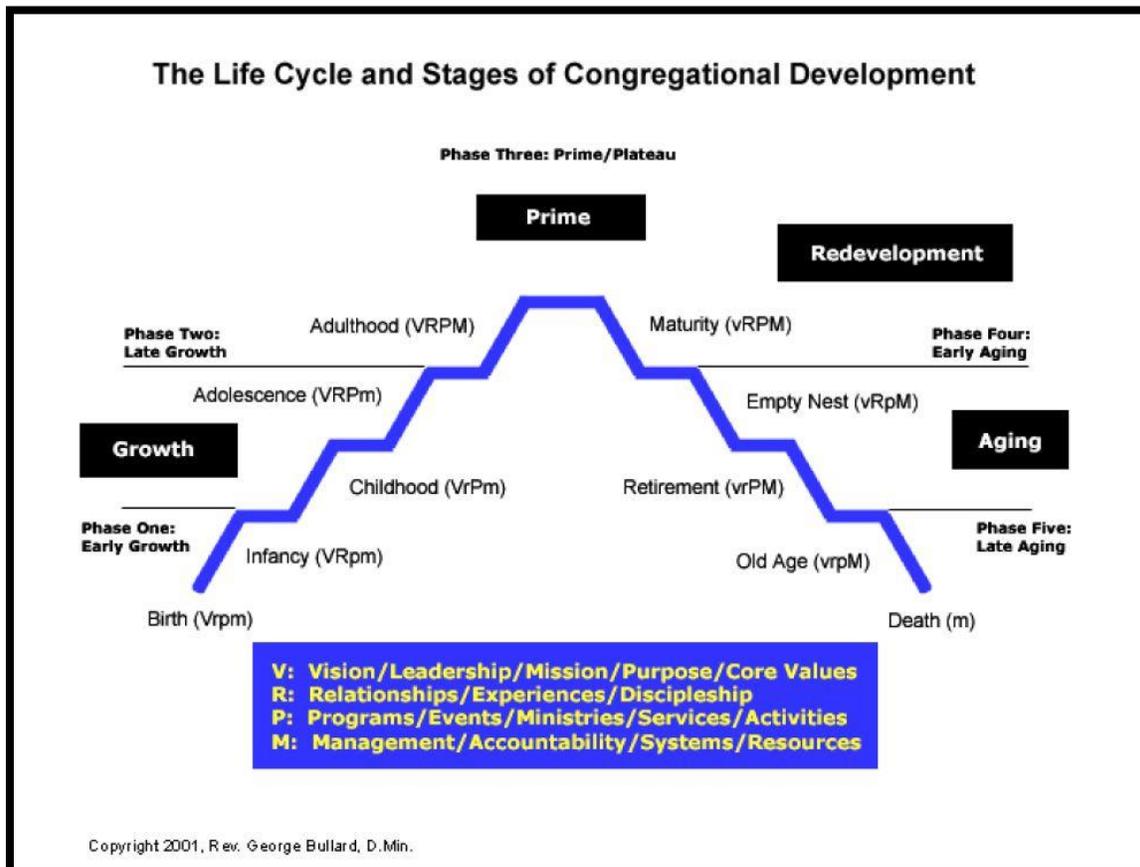
At the same time, churches that grow older without doing a really good job of reaching some demographic can expect that their corporate life





as an independent congregation will be predictably limited. I think that's probably the source of the anxiety underlying self-perceptions as "an older church."

There's a lot more to be said about the graphic below than I'm going to say here, but the fact of the matter is that congregations have life-cycles, and those life-cycles are quite predictable. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with living out a meaningful life-cycle and then ceasing to exist as a particular congregation . . . if such a path is faithful to God's call for that congregation.



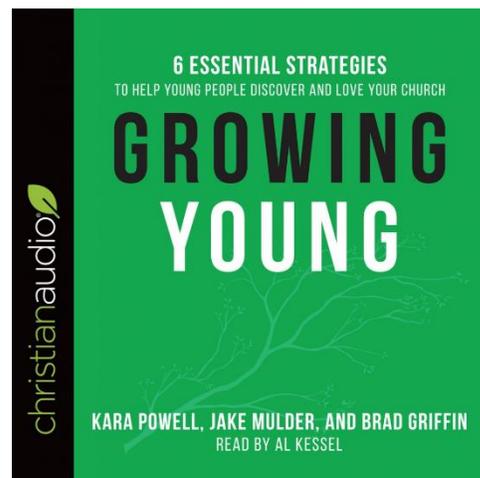
If a congregation finds itself on the “backside of the curve,” as a great many congregations find themselves these days, and if they wish to develop a new vision for the future that includes younger people, there are known ways to do this, and they do not require huge buildings, huge budgets, or even particular kinds of worship. Researchers at the Fuller Seminary Youth Institute have studied 250 congregations across denominations, ethnicities, and sizes and have identified six essential qualities that are necessary for reaching younger people; and these six things don't have a lot to do with buildings, budgets, or music.¹

¹ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Baker, 2016).

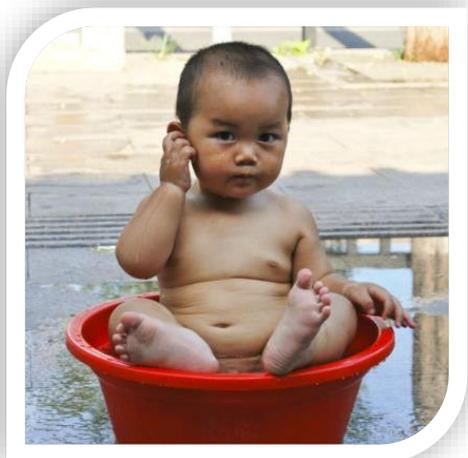
Here are their six things:

1. Share key leadership with younger adults;
2. Empathize with their life struggles;
3. Help them take Jesus' message seriously;
4. Create a culture of warmth in the fellowship;
5. Prioritize young people and their families;
6. Go outside the walls to be good neighbors.

Now it's a happy thing that in many ways we do these six things already 😊, though I'm sure we could do each of them more effectively. For many years, we prioritized "outside the walls" through Pastor Debbie's long ministry among us; and we are, even at this moment, seeking to prioritize "outside the walls" through Pastor Tim's ministry and our search for a new minister to "prioritize young people and their families."



You've probably heard the adage—and it's true enough—that **any system is perfectly designed to produce the results that it's currently producing**. The corollary to that adage is that in order to secure different results, the system must be changed. If we're not currently reaching a certain demographic and we wish to do so, this means that at least some things in the current system will have to be changed.



Hopeful as such an idea might be, there is in all of us a certain resistance to change. You've probably heard that *the only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper!* And the older we become, the less we generally like to change things.

Thus, by the commutative property of church growth (I made that up), we discover that **as churches grow older, they tend to become less and less inclined to do the things that reach new people.**

As I was told in this respect in a long-ago church, "There are going to have to be some funerals before that happens, preacher."

And, by this circuitous route, I have now arrived at the moment when I commend to you once more the little book, *Who Moved My Cheese?*² While you should really read the whole book (or read it again), the next page summarizes the thrust of the book. The book builds a parable in which "cheese" represents "life as I'd like it to be."

I invite you to have a ponder

Dave

² Spencer Johnson, M.D., *Who Moved My Cheese? An A-Mazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life* (Putnam's Sons, 1998, 2002).

Principles from:

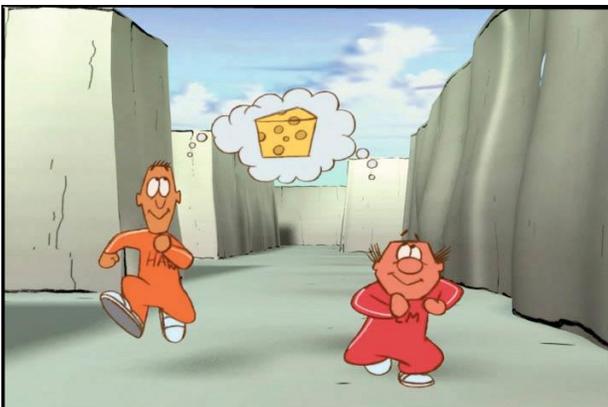
***Who Moved My Cheese?
An A-Mazing Way
to Deal with Change
in Your Work and in Your Life,***

by Spencer Johnson, M.D., foreword by Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D. (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1998, 2002).



Sniff & Scurry, Hem & Haw

1. Having Cheese Makes You Happy.
2. The More Important Your Cheese Is to You the More You Want to Hold on To It.
3. If You Do Not Change, You Can Become Extinct.
- 4. What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid?**
5. Smell the Cheese Often So You Know When It Is Getting Old.
6. Movement in A New Direction Helps You Find New Cheese.
7. When You Stop Being Afraid, You Feel Good!
8. Imagining Yourself Enjoying New Cheese Leads You to It.
9. The Quicker You Let Go of Old Cheese, The Sooner You Find New Cheese.
10. It Is Safer to Search in The Maze Than Remain in A Cheeseless Situation.
11. Old Beliefs Do Not Lead You to New Cheese.
12. When You See That You Can Find and Enjoy New Cheese, You Change Course.
13. Noticing Small Changes Early Helps You Adapt to The Bigger Changes That Are to Come.
14. Move with The Cheese and Enjoy It!



The Handwriting on The Wall (p. 74)

Change Happens: They Keep Moving the Cheese.

Anticipate Change: Get Ready for The Cheese to Move.

Monitor Change: Smell the Cheese Often So You Know When It Is Getting Old.

Adapt to Change Quickly:

The Quicker You Let Go of Old Cheese,
The Sooner You Can Enjoy New Cheese.

Change: Move with The Cheese

Enjoy Change! Savor The Adventure
And Enjoy The Taste Of New Cheese.

Be Ready to Change Quickly and Enjoy It Again

& Again: They Keep Moving the Cheese.

