



The Senior Pastor's Guide to Breaking Barriers



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A Brief Introduction

Why don't churches grow?

That's a frustrating question to consider.

Maybe you're praying, preaching, leading, and building, only to feel tired and stuck. You watch other churches with similar programs and ministries explode with new people and wonder what you should do differently.

And while it can be tough, great pastors and leaders stop to consider the reasons churches never grow or stop growing.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH BARRIERS

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

Paul's words contain great church growth advice for pastors. It's important you plant and it's important someone waters, but in the end, it's God who makes

the church grow. A church is a spiritual organism. It's the body of Christ.

You can't push a button to control the Holy Spirit. You can't orchestrate the blessings of God.

Leadership, systems and strategies are important, and we're still called to plant and water. But church growth is a blessing from God. That's why spiritual renewal and prayer are foundational to leading a healthy church. No church growth technique or tactic will compensate for the hand of God.

CULTURAL GROWTH BARRIERS

Remember the parable of the sower and the seed from Matthew 13? Some seeds fell along the path, some fell on rocky soil, some fell among the thorns and some fell on good ground.

In the story, both the farmer and the seed were consistent. The difference in what grew and what didn't grow was the soil.





The culture in your church is like the soil in Jesus' parable.

You can do all the right things, but still not experience growth if the soil isn't prepared in the right way. Strategies, tactics, and ideas—no matter how valuable or helpful—won't work if your church isn't ready.

One of the biggest obstacles to church growth is members who are unable to leave their comfort zone for the sake of the gospel. C. Peter Wagner says church members often resist change because of the desire to:

- preserve social intimacy
- maintain control
- conserve memories
- protect turf
- remain comfortable

Churches that break barriers are often made up of members who are willing to set aside their own needs and preferences for the sake of the gospel. That's the kind of healthy culture where growth happens naturally.

STRUCTURAL GROWTH BARRIERS

Carey Nieuwhof says some churches operate like Mom and Pop corner stores. He writes:

In the corner store, Mom and Pop run everything, Want to talk to the CEO? She's stocking shelves. Want to see the Director of Marketing? He's at the cash register. Mom and Pop do everything, and they organize their business to stay small. Which is fine if your Mom and Pop and don't want to grow.

Supermarkets, he says, are different. They are organized differently. They are managed differently. In short, supermarkets are structured to be larger.

If your church is structured like a Mom and Pop business, where the pastor and a handful of leaders are responsible for everything from accounting to ministry, the church will likely struggle to grow.

In fact, it's likely your church is perfectly structured for your current size. If you want your church to grow, you certainly need to pay attention to the spiritual markers, but you also need to look at the structural issues that are keeping you from breaking the next growth barrier.

So those are the three types of obstacles that stand in the way of church growth. The good news is you can take action in each category.

Spiritual barriers can be broken with prayer and the Holy Spirit. Cultural barriers can be defeated with leadership and communication. Structural barriers can be fixed with healthy systems and processes.

Let's dive deeper into ten specific growth barriers churches face.

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The Growth Barriers

GROWTH BARRIER #1

A Lack of Prayer and Spiritual Devotion

A church is a business.

Chances are, your church is a non-profit organization, legally organized in your state and recognized by the federal government and, because of that, your church is empowered to hire staff, purchase facilities and purchase insurance. The business side of things doesn't always excite pastors and ministers who want to help people. But the church is a business and there's much we can learn from the business world.

Still, the local church is so much more than a business.

Though sound business principles can help us make good decisions and operate successful ministries, we can never leave out the supernatural and eternal nature of ministry.

Leadership matters. But it is spiritual leadership that the church needs most.

Policies are helpful. But there's no policy needed to love your neighbor as yourself and go into the world to make disciples.

A business plan can help you focus. But no business plan can compensate for the blessing of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul wrote at least two letters to his protégé, Timothy, with helpful advice for leading the local church. Paul told Timothy to make prayer his top priority.

He writes, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1)





Prayer is a spiritual work that results in spiritual blessings.

When your church is stuck, your first order of business should be to pray and seek a wisdom that can only come from God. You can implement all the strategies and ideas you want, but never forget that some barriers are spiritual and can only be broken through prayer.

What would God do in your church if all of your members began praying toward a specific goal? What would happen if your leadership team, no matter how big or small, prayed and fasted, along with seeking ideas from eBooks?

GROWTH BARRIER #2

A Vision that is not Clear and Compelling

Churches that break barriers work hard to clarify and communicate a compelling mission and vision. If you want to lead your church to growth, you've got to start by clarifying what that looks like.

Too many times, our destinations are blurry and our outcomes are fuzzy. What are we really about? Where are we really going? Those are mission and vision questions.

MISSION AND VISION ARE TWO DISTINCT THINGS

Pastors who lead growing churches must work hard to clarify and communicate a deep sense of purpose and also a very specific mission.

Your mission is why your church exists. It's your answer to the question "Why are we here?" It's your God-given reason for being. In a way, your mission is never really accomplished. It's something you will always strive toward, but you'll never truly check it off the list.

Vision, on the other hand, should be specific and concrete. It needs a deadline, and you should be able to accomplish it in a set amount of time. While your mission will be the same 100 years from now, your vision will change as your church grows.


COMMUNICATE BOTH

You need to communicate your mission and your vision using short, powerful statements.

Some people aren't motivated by the big picture; they need to know what's now and what's urgent. That's why communicating a big picture purpose, in addition to a shorter-term vision, can help you connect with the entire congregation.

"Clarity isn't everything, but it changes everything." —Will Mancini





Your church is much more than your church service, but your church service is the front door to your church.

Your mission might be to “lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.” That’s the ultimate reason you exist, but when you think about it, you’re always going to be striving for that. You’re not going to check it off the list and say, “What’s next?”

That’s why you need a crystal clear vision and a goal for the next two or three years.

Are you trying to reach young people, launch a second campus, connect everyone in community groups, or encourage everyone to live missionally? Your vision needs a clear and compelling goal, a rally cry that you can lead everyone to. It’s not generic like your mission . . . it’s super specific.

What is your mission? What is your vision?

And what are your goals?

GROWTH BARRIER #3

A Church Service that Lacks Purpose and Power

When people interact with your church for the first time, it’s probably on your website. But when they visit your church for the first time, it’s likely at your church service.

Now your church is much more than your church service, but your church service is the front door to your church. Like it or not, people judge your church by the quality and benefits they receive from your church service.

It wasn’t always this way. It might not be that way in other countries. But for those of us leading churches in North America, this is reality.





No matter how big your church service, you can plan great services that help people connect with God. Don't let a lack of resources keep you back. Evaluation, planning, and hard work are free. Loving people and creating a welcoming environment takes a lot of focus but little money. Growth has more to do with your mindset than your budget.

Here are some practical ways you can bring purpose and power to your church service.

PAY ATTENTION TO KEY MOMENTS

Most traffic accidents occur at intersections. Transitions in your service are one of the most important times to focus on quality.

Pay attention to what you say before you receive the offering, before you stand to worship, and how you begin and end the church service. Key moments in your service provide clarity and improve quality.

EVALUATE EVERYTHING

While small churches may not have the resources of larger churches, the things that often make the most difference are free (or at least very cheap). It's free to evaluate your welcome, offering, musicians, sermon, order of service, and invitation. Ask tough questions and give people a place to provide honest feedback.

When you get better, the church gets better.

INVOLVE OTHERS

Pastors, you don't have to do it all. You can involve others in the planning and review process. Try sending your message notes to people a few days before Sunday and ask for feedback in advance. Ask volunteers or creative people to give input on the service. When you involve other people, your church service will get better.

PRACTICE

Rehearsals, run through, and preaching to yourself are more free ways you can dramatically improve your service. There's nothing like practice to lead to improved performance.


PLAN AND PRAY

Someone once said, "The call to ministry is the call to prepare." Most problems, in fact, can be solved with proper planning. Plan your year in advance. Plan your service a few weeks ahead. Put everything on a simple spreadsheet.

Planning doesn't limit the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, it gives the Holy Spirit more time to get through to you. God can certainly speak whenever He wants, but I've found the more time I give Him, the more I tend to hear His voice.

No matter how big your church service, you can plan great services that help people connect with God.





You must do more than say you have a welcoming environment—you must intentionally craft the service with guests in mind.

GROWTH BARRIER #4

An Insider Mentality

Churches that grow maintain a healthy focus on reaching outsiders. You must do more than say you have a welcoming environment—you must intentionally craft the service with guests in mind. Create simple next steps that help people follow Jesus.

HOSPITALITY IS BIBLICAL

There's a biblical mandate to show hospitality. I Peter 4:9 says we should show hospitality to all people. Hebrews 13:2 says some of us have actually entertained angels without knowing.

A church that's friendly to guests is a church that takes the Bible seriously. Don't believe the lie that being friendly to outsiders means you have to water down the message. That's a cop out and an excuse to be selfish.

Fulfilling the Great Commission in the context of leading a local church means you have to design the church service with guests in mind.

Just like having a guest in your house, it means you have to be aware.



YOU HAVE AT LEAST FOUR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOW HOSPITALITY TO GUESTS

Your website should set expectations. Guests are going to visit your website before they visit your church, so make sure your site is designed with them in mind. Put your service times and location in a visible spot. Create a page that answers their questions and calms their fears.

Your first impressions team should say hello. Friendly people in key spots go a long way toward creating a friendly environment where guests can hear from God. If you're lacking in this area, make it a major point of emphasis.

Your church service should explain everything. You don't have to leave things out of your service to be relevant to new people; you just have to explain things with new people in mind. Every time you gather, imagine there's someone with zero knowledge of God, the Bible, or Church.

Your follow-up process should create conversations. When people visit your church, what happens next? Do you have a clear follow-up process that invites people to take one next step? Make sure you let people know where to go with questions and give them a personal point of contact.

DESIGN AN EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP PROCESS

Pastors who lead their church through the next growth barrier create intentional processes. What happens when someone visits? The best time to answer that question is now. Put a process in place and use the same steps every time.

Would phone calls, note cards, or text messages help people get connected? Could you provide a personal guide to help new people make friends? Are you leading people to one, super-clear next step? Have you written down or sketched out your process?

FIRST-TIME GUEST FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM

GUEST-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

- Website
- Parking Lot
- Front Door
- Kids' Check-In
- Welcome Center

1

GUEST-FRIENDLY WORSHIP SERVICE

- Handout
- Welcome
- Connection Card
- Free Gift

2

ENTER INFO INTO DATABASE

- Immediately respond to personal requests.*
- Prayer – Josh
 - Baptism – Josh
 - Spiritual Question – Chris
 - Volunteer – Sarah
 - Membership – Kelley

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HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU NOTE

4

EMAIL AUTO-RESPONDER SEQUENCE

- 1. Guest Survey
- 2. Pastor's Story
- 3. Church Story & Regular Programs
- 4. Five Ways to Grow in Your Faith
- 5. Do you have any questions?
- 6. Add to regular newsletter



GROWTH BARRIER #5

Church Members Who Don't Invite

It might sound overly simple, but if you want your church to grow, your people must invite their friends.

EQUIP YOUR CHURCH TO INVITE

It's not enough to ask your church to invite. You've got to give them the tools they need.

Print invite cards and make them available. Write a Facebook post and ask them to share on a specific day. Create graphics they can share with their friends and coworkers.

ALWAYS TALK TO GUESTS

If there are 27 people in your church service and you know all of them because they are related to you, still speak to first-time guests during your welcome, announcements, and service. You're setting the tone that Sunday morning is appropriate for guests and you're communicating an expectation that guests should be there.

CREATE AN EXPERIENCE WORTHY OF AN INVITE

Instead of asking people to invite others, some churches would do well to work on the overall experience. Make sure you've got a quality experience where people are hearing messages of hope and experiencing the love of Jesus and people will naturally invite their friends.

GROWTH BARRIER #6

Pastors Who Are Stuck

In *Mindset*, Carol Dweck writes about the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. She says a fixed mindset comes from the belief that your qualities are carved in stone—who you are is who you are, period. Characteristics such as intelligence, personality, and creativity are fixed traits, rather than something that can be developed.

On the other hand, a growth mindset comes from the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through effort. Yes, people differ greatly—in aptitude, talents, interests, or temperaments—but everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

People who adopt the fixed mindset say, "Smart people succeed, so if you succeed you must be smart." People who believe this tend to focus on easier problems so they don't fail.

People who adopt a growth mindset say, "People can get smarter—and they will—if they stretch themselves and take on challenges." People who believe this tend to try harder things.

A growth mindset comes from the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through effort.



I believe many pastors and church leaders have a fixed mindset when it comes to church growth. They stay away from tough things and play it safe, believing they can't move the needle, or simply "leaving it up to God." When pastors adopt a growth mindset, they open up to new possibilities, including new spiritual blessings.

It may sting to hear this, but you are the number one barrier to growth in your church.

Your mindset, your philosophy, your beliefs . . . they are naturally limiting. Without meaning to, you can let the fixed mindset become a stuck mindset. Consider this chart:

	STUCK MINDSET	GROWTH MINDSET
COACHING ▶	I don't see the value in expert opinions. Besides, I don't have the time or money.	I can and should learn from anyone.
CHANGE ▶	I'd rather keep things the way they are because what's known is better than what's unknown.	Embrace change and lead through it, because it can lead to growth.
CHALLENGES ▶	We avoid challenges.	We embrace challenges.
STAFF ▶	When we get the money to hire someone, things will get better.	Let's develop the people we have.
CRITICISM ▶	I tend to ignore critics completely or else I obsess over what people think.	I don't have to agree with critics to learn from them.
VOLUNTEERS ▶	Everybody who wants to do something and can do something is already busy.	We will cast a big vision and make sure everyone finds the right place to serve.
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ▶	There aren't enough high capacity leaders around me so I'm comfortable telling everyone what to do.	If there aren't leaders around me, it's my fault. Since I can't do this on my own, I'll be responsible for developing them.
GIVING ▶	Giving isn't great because of the economy, our area, or the kind of people we're reaching.	I'm going to be the best steward of what God has given me.



Pastors who want to lead well invite people into their lives to help them think, lead, and grow.

There is a reason that professional athletes, who are at the very top of their profession, pay big bucks to have coaches. And the best athletes do whatever it takes to get the best coaches.

Coaches see things you don't see and offer a different perspective from the one you have. That's why pastors who want to lead well invite people into their lives to help them think, lead, and grow. An outside opinion can help you move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

One other word on coaching . . .

The best coaches don't just focus on the church; they focus on the people in the church, starting with the leaders. A great coach is in *your* corner.

We all need coaches in our lives because we can't do this alone.

GROWTH BARRIER #7

Unfocused Leadership

WHAT GOT YOU HERE WON'T GET YOU THERE

Those are the words of Marshall Goldsmith. And, while his excellent book isn't about the church, all church leaders should take note. There's a good chance the leadership structure of your church will actually *hinder* growth and keep you stuck.

The systems and structure that help a church get to 200 are the very things that hinder a church growing to 500. A church running 2,000 regular attenders often struggles to grow beyond that because the principles they have been using are tried and true. Growth requires change, and those changes are often painful.





IN A GROWING CHURCH, THE PASTOR'S ROLE MUST CHANGE

One of the biggest structural changes churches must make in order to grow is the role of the pastor.

A pastor who leads every meeting, preaches every sermon, and makes every decision, can very easily be the lid on growth.

You must make the shift from the one who does the ministry and makes all the decisions to the one who leads a team of people who lead ministry at a high level. If you don't have enough leaders around you, make this a top priority.

INSTEAD OF A GENIUS WITH A DOZEN HELPERS, CREATE A LEADERSHIP TEAM

Pastors who break through often empower more people to lead and make decisions. Rather than overseeing all of the full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff, create a leadership team of three or four committed leaders to lead the church. You lead the leaders and let them lead the ministries. Leadership teams are not just effective for mega-churches. Normal-sized churches will benefit greatly.

YOU ARE THE CHIEF CLARITY OFFICER

Churches do not drift into clarity and people do not fight to stay in the place where they can do the most good. Senior pastors of growing churches must clarify roles and goals for each person on the team. You've got to clarify the win for the church but also for the people serving in the church. Help them stay focused on what is mission critical.

GROWTH BARRIER #8

Too Many Ministries

ALL MINISTRIES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

There are ministries in your church that need to be treated unfairly. They need an unfair amount of your time. They need an unfair amount of the budget. Because they are more important than others.

That's why you don't need to be fair across the board. You need to look at what is the most effective and move resources there.

For some, this means that an honest evaluation of all the regular programs and ministry is in order.

For others, it means you need to stop doing something that worked long ago, but doesn't work well anymore.

Churches do not drift into clarity and people do not fight to stay in the place where they can do the most good.



THE KEY WORD IN EVALUATION IS . . .

When you evaluate programs, ministries and special events, the key word is not “good” or “bad.” It’s effective.

Pastors and church leaders must ask, “How effective is this at helping us accomplish our mission and fulfill our vision?” There are a lot of good programs keeping us back from doing great ministry. Stewardship is about allocating time, money, and energy to what works best.

YOU MUST FIND YOUR MINISTRY HEDGEHOG

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins reintroduced the idea of the hedgehog concept. While the fox knows many things, the hedgehog is focused on one thing. Churches need to find their ministry hedgehog.

The key to growth might not be what you start, but what you stop.

GROWTH BARRIER #9

A Lack of Systems and Processes

For churches to grow beyond their current size, it’s absolutely imperative to put healthy systems, processes, and procedures in place. A system is simply something you do more than once. It’s a way that a repetitive but important task is accomplished without big decisions or lots of meetings.

There’s a reason pilots and surgeons go through the same steps every time they get ready to work.

Through our membership program and online courses, we help pastors create healthy systems. When we talk about these programs, we hear these comments over and over.

- “I’m just not a systems person.”
- “We’re more of a make-it-up, week-to-week kind of church.”
- “We don’t want to organize the Holy Spirit out of church.”

HERE ARE SOME SYSTEMS YOU NEED:

A PREACHING SYSTEM

to ensure you cover the most important topics at the right times.

A GIVING SYSTEM

to ensure you’re raising money throughout the year and tapping into key moments.

A VOLUNTEER SYSTEM

to ensure you’re recruiting, training, and leading volunteers.

AN ASSIMILATION SYSTEM

to ensure people don’t fall through the cracks or leave through the back door.

A LEADERSHIP SYSTEM

to ensure you’re intentionally developing leaders so everything doesn’t depend on you.

A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

so you know when to talk about what, and everyone knows what they need to know.

A FOLLOW-UP SYSTEM

so you can effectively thank guests for visiting, donors for giving, and inviters for inviting.





If you can relate, here are three things to consider:

1. You don't have to be good at something to value it.

Just because you're not good at something doesn't mean it's worthless. I don't have to be good at basketball to appreciate Michael Jordan. I don't have to be good at investment to appreciate Warren Buffet. I don't have to be a talented singer to value The Beatles.

There are lots of talents I do not possess that I admire and value. The same is true in your church. You don't have to be a process person to see the value of creating healthy systems.

Don't let your personality keep you from assigning value—that's a sign of immaturity. A great leader will recognize that his or her personality doesn't paint a complete picture of how the church should work.

2. Systems are in service of something greater.

Processes aren't about personality. They aren't even about organizing everything and making things go more smoothly.

Healthy systems are about the mission and vision of the church. Better systems lead to better disciples.

A proven process to move people into groups will accomplish far more than a passionate sermon on the topic. A simple and repeatable process to follow up with guests and help them take a first step will do more than casting vision for creating a welcoming church.

If you're not a process person, that's okay. Because there's something far more important at stake.

3. Someone in your church thinks this way.

If you're not a process-loving pastor, don't try to change your wiring. God didn't make you that way, and that's a good thing. But don't discount the fact that God wired other people differently. There are people, volunteers and leaders in your church, who think about systems first.

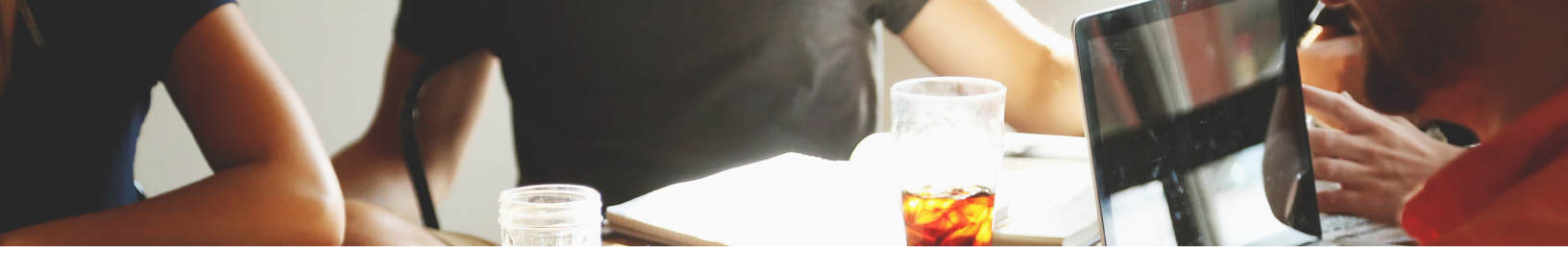
How people need *Wow* people. If you're a visionary leader who doesn't want to come down from the visionary mountain, that's okay. Your church needs you to be the *Wow* person.

But don't be shortsighted. All *Wow* with no *How* isn't going to lead anywhere. You'll actually just wear people out with ideas and vision. So get a few *How* people around you—people who know how to get things done. Don't diminish their contribution just because it's different from yours.

If you're not the type of pastor who loves systems and processes, you can still value them and see the benefits of them in your church.

A great leader will recognize that his or her personality doesn't paint a complete picture of how the church should work.





GROWTH BARRIER #10

Failure to Develop Leaders

If you want your church to have a greater ministry impact, focus on involving more people in ministry.

THE PASTOR IS NOT THE ONLY PASTOR

The structure of your church is perfectly designed to reach the people you are currently reaching. If you've got a top-down culture, where a select few groups of professional Christians do all the ministry, you're going to struggle to make maximum impact. When the pastor and staff have to do all the ministry, ministry is limited to a few people's time. Instead, develop leaders to lead ministry and release control at the appropriate pace.

THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A VOLUNTEER AND A LEADER

Your church needs both.

Your job as a pastor is to equip people to do the work of the ministry, not to do all the ministry yourself.

This requires a steadfast commitment and an intentional plan to recruit and invite people to participate.

Some people in your church want to be volunteers. They need to be given opportunities to serve.

Other people in your church are gifted to be leaders. They aren't going to sign up at a table and they aren't going to be engaged over the long-term by being given simple tasks. You must recruit and develop them personally and then give them the opportunity to lead and make decisions.

INSPIRE PEOPLE TO SERVE AND LEAD

Churches that break growth barriers inspire people to serve and lead in a way that also helps them follow Jesus. Use sermons and clear communication to invite a large group of people to serve at one time. Or, turn your existing volunteers into recruitment specialists by changing their job description.



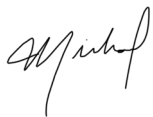
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Parting Shots

As pastors and church leaders, we will face growth barriers throughout different seasons of our ministry.

Growth barriers aren't intended to hinder us from moving forward but to help clarify how to break through to the next level.

Breaking a growth barrier for a church leader or ministry is a reflection of the sanctification process in our own lives. Don't run from the challenges that come with growth barriers, embrace them. They will refine you, your team, and your church into the people God created us to be.



Michael Lukaszewski
Founder and CEO of Church Fuel

