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Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)

# The Anatomy of a Church (33)

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 09/28/14)

## A PASTOR WHO ARRIVED AS A HOMELESS PERSON

Pastor Jeremiah Stepek (pictured below) transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the 10,000 member church that he was to be introduced as the head pastor at that morning. He walked around his soon to be church for 30 minutes while it was filling with people for service.... Only 3 people out of the 7-10,000 people said hello to him. He asked people for change to buy food. NO ONE in the church gave him change. He went into the sanctuary to sit down in the front of the church and was asked by the ushers if he would please sit in the back. He greeted people to be greeted back with stares and dirty looks, with people looking down on him and judging him.

As he sat in the back of the church, he listened to the church announcements and such. When all that was done, the elders went up and were excited to introduce the new pastor of the church to the congregation....“We would like to introduce to you Pastor Jeremiah Stepek.” The congregation looked around clapping with joy and anticipation....The homeless man sitting in the back stood up... and started walking down the aisle... The clapping stopped with ALL eyes on him....He walked up the altar and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this) and paused for a moment.... then he recited

[Matthew 25:34-40 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

<sup>35</sup> 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

<sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink?

<sup>38</sup> 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?

<sup>39</sup> 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

<sup>40</sup> "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'

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After he recited [Matthew 25:34-40](#), he looked towards the congregation and told them all what he had experienced that morning... Many began to cry and many heads were bowed in shame. He then said... “Today I see a **gathering of people... not a church of Jesus Christ.**” The world has enough people, but not enough disciples... when will YOU decide to become disciples? He then dismissed service until next week... Being a Christian is more than something you claim. It’s something you live by and share with others.

## The Biggest Reason People Resist Change

Understanding this reason can help navigate through change. Ignoring it makes the process of change miserable for everyone.

After years of leading change, I’ve discovered some things about the process. One of those discoveries is that change will face resistance. All change. Surprised by that revelation? Not if you’ve ever led change.

If the change has any value at all, someone will not agree—at least initially. There is something in all of us that initially resists change we didn’t initiate. And I’ve discovered the absolute most common reason change is resisted. I mean the biggest. Would that be helpful to know? I would say it is true the majority of the time when change is resisted.

Understanding this reason can help navigate through change. Ignoring it makes the process of change miserable for everyone. What’s the most common reason change is resisted? It’s an emotion they feel. They may not even be able to describe it, but it’s more powerful at the time than the excitement the change may bring.

What’s the emotion? You may think anger, or confusion, or fear. And while those are often true emotions of change, in my observation it isn’t the most common.

The most common emotion that causes resistance to change: **A sense of loss.**

People emotionally feel a sense of loss in the process of change. Have you ever felt like you were losing or had lost something? How did you react? Didn’t you try to hold on to whatever you were losing? It’s not a good-feeling emotion.

- Loss of power
- Loss of comfort
- Loss of control
- Loss of information
- Loss of familiarity
- Loss of tradition
- Loss of stability

They aren’t always rational emotions. They are often perceived as bigger than they really are. But they are real emotions to the person experiencing the emotion of loss. It doesn’t

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matter if people know the change is needed. They often feel they may be losing something in the change—and it causes them to resist the change. And because change is—well—change, their emotions are based on some truth. Things are changing.

I have found, as a leader that if I understand what people are struggling with, I'm better prepared to lead them through it. Some people are never going to get on board with the change, but many times people just need someone to at least acknowledge their sense of loss. It doesn't eliminate the emotion, but genuine empathy allows me to keep leading.

When a leader discounts a person's emotions—or ignores them—the resistance becomes more intense, because the emotions become more intense. That's when some of those other emotions—like anger—are often added. The process of change is stalled, sometimes even derailed.

Leader, are you paying attention to the emotions of change?

## Why Your Church Will Die (But That's Okay)

[John 12:20-26 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> Now there were some Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast;

<sup>21</sup> these then came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and *began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."*

<sup>22</sup> Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

<sup>24</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

<sup>25</sup> "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal."

<sup>26</sup> "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

The reality is that all churches have a life cycle. They go from birth to maturity to decline and eventually death. I think that your church will die.

I don't mean in the metaphysical die-to-self sense. I mean in the cease to exist, disappear from the planet, pushing up daisies sense. And not just your church; I think all churches will eventually die.

I don't think it is because church leaders are doing anything wrong. If that were the case, every church planter who lived before you did it wrong too. Check the records. Every local church planted in the last 2000 years has eventually died. (The building may still stand, but now tourists pay to see the corpse. A building is not a church.) The Apostle Paul was a master church planter, and yet none of his churches survived. There are remnants of dead churches all over the world, and your church will die, too; trust me on this.

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Here is the ironic part; I think God wants your church to die.

If he weren't ok with dying churches, it seems at least one would have pulled through. We'd get a flyer in the mail saying, "Come celebrate First Church's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary this weekend. Help us break the 10 million attendees barrier."

The reality is that churches, all churches, have a life cycle. They go from birth to maturity to decline and eventually death. We can live in denial, we can lament the reality, or we can embrace the truth. Churches die.

It is sad that we pour so much of our time and so many of resources into staving off the inevitable. We build new buildings, we hire new staff, we adopt every new growth strategy that comes along to keep the appearance that we are a vibrant, expanding congregation. We struggle to hang on while all evidence points to our eventual demise.

What if we accepted the inevitable and leaned into the life cycle of a church? What if we figured out how to make the death of a church something to celebrate?

If you knew from the day you planted a new church it would eventually die, how would that impact how you do ministry? What would be your long-term plan in light of mortality?

I have an idea, but I'd like to hear your thoughts. Do you think all churches eventually decline and die? Why does that happen? What should we do about it?

