

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Best of 2023 - Pruning: How Do We Know What to Stop? (Replay) - Episode 325

Our Best Episodes of 2023

We're challenging churches to use this new year as an opportunity to get healthy again by embracing the Biblical principle of pruning. After all, **if we always add but never prune, we will get out of shape and our ministry will not be healthy.**

This week, Tony and Amy are getting practical on the steps churches must take in order to identify the programs and events they need to prune.

Why Do Churches Become Over-Programmed?

The research that's been done around discipleship and spiritual formation is clear: encouraging people to engage in more programs and church activity doesn't produce spiritual growth. If we're truly in the disciple-making business, then adding more ministry programs and events is actually working *against* church health.

Here are [four key reasons that churches become over-programmed](#):

1. Churches don't have a strategy.
2. Churches tend to become insider-focused over time.
3. It's easier for a church to add a program than it is to redefine its strategy.
4. Churches without a unified strategy and an aligned team develop ministry silos.

If that sounds like your church, it's time to try a different strategy. It's time to shed some of the extra programming and events that may be holding your ministry back from experiencing the Kingdom impact that God has for your church.

The Pre-Work to Pruning

So, how should pastors begin leading their ministry team through this crucial pruning process?

First, build consensus among your leadership. That may include lay leaders and/or staff leaders depending on the size and structure of your church. Begin by finding agreement with your leaders

that your ministry programming is complex and needs to become more focused. If your team isn't feeling the pain yet, it's going to be difficult to find consensus on this.

Then clarify what's at the foundation of your ministry:

- **Confirm your mission.** Your team needs to find agreement on *why* you exist as a church and where you are specifically trying to go in the future before you figure out *how* you intend to get there.
- **Determine who you are trying to reach.** It's impossible to confirm the right mix of programming if you don't have agreement on *who* it is you're trying to reach.
- **Establish your reach strategy and your spiritual formation path.** Many churches start over-programming because they've never clarified their strategy to reach new people and their strategy to help people become more like Jesus.

The Three Steps of the Pruning Process

Step #1: Let ministry teams recommend program/event reductions first.

First, have the ministry team list all their programming (ex. children's ministry might include children's church, Sunday school, Awana, VBS, etc.) **List everything**, then take that list and divide it in half based on the amount of life change you are seeing. (You should consider both the discipleship steps that people are taking, and the number of people who are being impacted).

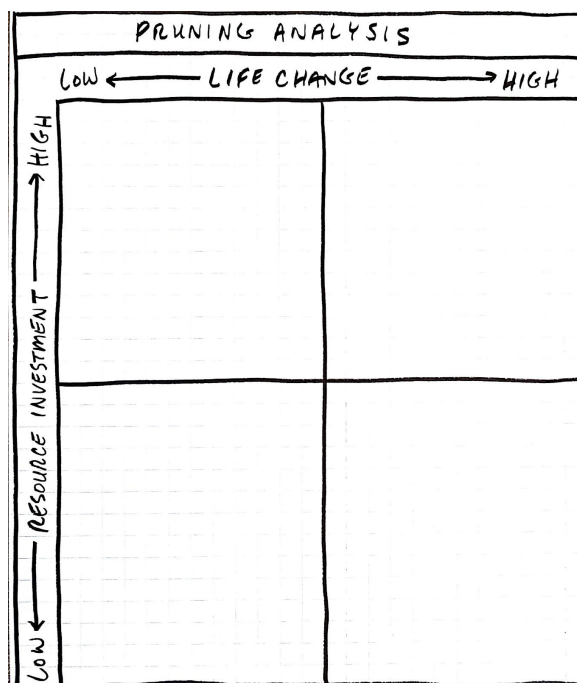
You'll have two lists. This time consider the investment required—including leadership investment, volunteers, money, space, promotions, etc. Split the two columns in half with the things that require more investment in half of each column and the things that require less investment in the other half.

Now you should have four equal lists, one of which includes ministry programs and events that are leading to less life change and require a higher investment of resources. Those are the first ministries that should be recommended for pruning—or the team needs to make a strong case for why that ministry still helps the church accomplish its mission.

Step #2: Evaluate the remaining programming and events from the perspective of the entire church.

Repeat the exercise and make the same four lists, but with **everything** you are doing across the entire church. Start by asking: Is the life change produced by this program higher or lower? Then ask: Does this program require a higher or lower level of resource investment? This time, you do not need to make each of the four lists equal—just take the remaining ministry programs and plot

them in each of the four lists: higher life change/lower investment, higher life change/higher investment, lower life change/lower investment, lower life change/higher investment.



Step #3: Prepare your pruning plan.

Place every program you identified at either the ministry level or the all-church level that is being considered for pruning into one of three categories: (1) stop immediately, (2) pause and reevaluate at a future date, and (3) pause and relaunch. (You will want to use the “pause and relaunch” category sparingly.) At a minimum, everything that lands in the lower life change and higher investment of resources list should be considered for pruning.

Final Thoughts

This isn't an easy process, and the priority of the steps is very important. More than anything, **doing this as a team is crucial**. Your leadership team needs to be unified in this effort. If you don't have people on your team to facilitate this process, let us know. [We may be able to help.](#)

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