

# Jesus and Numbers

By Mike Clarensau

“Don’t let  
**drawing  
a crowd**  
be your  
greatest  
measure  
of success.”

Are churches growing because they care about numbers or do they care about numbers because they’re growing?

It’s a difficult question. Numbers aren’t as clear an indicator of ministry success as we would like. Unlike the dollar bottom-line of business, chasing numbers in ministry isn’t an exact science. Bigger doesn’t always mean better. Large churches can be just as unhealthy as smaller ones.

Jesus didn’t always play the numbers game, either. It seems He brought out His most difficult teaching when the crowds were largest, and that usually caused the numbers to diminish. He also seemed untrusting of the crowd, asking if they were simply there for free bread or to see a sign.

Yet, His death was for the whole world, and the Bible speaks of multitudes around His future throne that are too numerous to count. So we can’t put Jesus in the anti-numbers crowd either. We just can’t get a clear read on where we should stand on numbers, but here are a few thoughts:

## **1. Numbers MATTER!**

No fair reading of Scripture can leave you thinking they don’t. Everything is counted in Scripture, from the altar response at Pentecost to the number of barrels of water Elijah poured on the evening sacrifice.

Numbers matter because people matter. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The shepherd analogy is clear. He leaves the 99 and goes searching for the one because every last lamb is important.

## **2. Numbers aren’t the only goal.**

When a church begins to focus too intently on numbers, other vital efforts are damaged. When a number is our goal, relationships struggle to deepen. Individual focus can give way to crowd efforts, and people begin slipping through the cracks. God’s shepherds can begin turning into ranchers, a neat church growth analogy but one that never shows up in Scripture.

Numbers have a way of changing the leader too. Jesus told us that our leadership wasn’t to be “Gentile-like.” We were called to be servants, not CEOs. While large numbers don’t guarantee such a loss of focus, it seems that the larger the group, the harder it is to keep out of this numbers trap. So where do we land? I don’t think there’s a comfortable middle here, but there are some places to avoid.

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**First**, don't land on the idea that numbers don't matter because your church isn't growing. If your church isn't doing everything in its power to reach lost people, insisting that numbers don't matter isn't fooling anyone—at least not anyone with a kingdom mind.

**Second**, don't let drawing a crowd be your greatest measure of success. Large numbers don't make for a successful church, but evidence of people choosing and living in life-changing paths do. Counting raised hands is great, but there's a difference between signing up for a trip and actually reaching the destination.

**Finally**, let your Bible and the examples it provides help you discover God's idea of success.

This article comes from Mike Clarensau, who is also the author of *From Belonging to Becoming*, available in paperback and eBook format. [Click here](#) to get your copy.

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